

XUNZI

Xun Kuang or Xun Qing, better known as Xunzi, or Master Xun, was born about 310 B.C.E. He lived a very long life, during which he may have witnessed the final demise of the Zhou dynasty, which Mencius had anticipated but had not lived to see. In all probability, he was still alive in 219 B.C.E., and perhaps for several years thereafter, which would mean that he endured through not only the final conquest in 221 B.C.E. by the state of Qin of all of the surviving feudal states but also through at least the initial stages of the formation under the Qin dynasty (221–207 B.C.E.) of the first unified empire. The wars leading up to this conquest in the late third century were almost indescribably brutal, and the intrigues surrounding them often intensely bitter. Xunzi was not only aware of many of these events but personally involved in some of them. It is hardly surprising, then, that he held views of society, government, education, and especially of human nature that contrasted with those of Mencius. His view of the world was darker than that of Mencius, and the remedies he advocated for its troubles were more cautious and complex.

The differences between Mencius and Xunzi have often been explained in terms of these momentous changes that were under way in the Chinese world between the fourth and third centuries. Still, Xunzi's thought cannot be reduced to an inevitable or predictable reaction to the troubling political situation in the waning years of the Zhou, nor can it be understood simply as a repudiation of a lofty and expansive Mencian optimism in favor of a cramped and pervasive pessimism. Xunzi was sober, even somber, when it came to his assessment of the basic nature of human beings—their original disposition—and he explicitly challenged Mencius's positive conception of human nature as fundamentally good. At the same time he reaffirmed certain shared and enduring Confucian values, above all the devotion to learning, culture, and the possibility of human perfectibility—all the more remarkable an affirmation in light of his personal experience of what must sometimes have seemed an almost limitless human capacity for violence, treachery, and self-aggrandizement.

The aspects of the Confucian inheritance that Xunzi was apparently inclined, both by personal temperament and intellectual disposition, to emphasize were the commitment to order and hierarchy and the highly formalistic mode of personal cultivation and community organization associated with ritual. In these commitments he was firmly grounded in the earlier tradition associated with the *ru* or ritualists, in ideas and values that were, in a sense, Confucian bedrock. At the same time he involved himself with great intellectual fervor and, evidently without temperamental reluctance, in contemporary intellectual debates. Many of his most distinctive ideas, particularly those having to do with government, education, and the relation of the human world to Heaven or the natural order, seem to have been articulated in the

course of these debates, not only with Mohists and Daoists, but also with adherents of the school that later became known as Legalism, or the School of Law.

Xunzi began his scholarly career at the Jixia Academy in the feudal state of Qi, an academy long famous as a gathering place for scholars of virtually every school or filiation of thought current at the time. In a time marked by contention among the so-called hundred schools of thought and in a place where lively and serious controversies among scholars were actively encouraged, Xunzi seems to have encountered and become engaged with some of the outstanding thinkers and most of the leading ideas and teachings of his day. After Qi became engulfed in political crisis around 284 B.C.E., Xunzi departed for the state of Chu, only to return some years later to Qi and to a restored Jixia Academy, apparently becoming its leading figure. But though he spent altogether well over twenty years of his life in the role of an academician, Xunzi was by no means cut off from the major political events of the third century. In the mid-260s he traveled to the state of Qin, where he had the opportunity to observe firsthand its highly authoritarian form of government and its relentless rise to military prominence. Later, during a stay in his native state of Zhao, then menaced by Qin, he had further occasion to reflect on the implications of Qin's Legalist policies and offensive strategies and on the prospect of its conquest of the empire. The closing years of Xunzi's life were spent in Lanling, in southern Shandong, where he was employed for several extended periods as a magistrate, yet always simultaneously engaged as a teacher. His students included Han Fei and Li Si, who would become leading figures in the Legalist school and in the state of Qin, as well as several Confucian scholars who would assume an extremely influential role in the intellectual life of the ensuing Han dynasty.

The work that bears Xunzi's name, having been compiled and edited more than a century after his time, has not come down to us in its original form. Whatever the interventions of the first-century compiler of the text may have entailed, however, the basic form of the work was probably not significantly altered. As the selections that follow will indicate, Xunzi's work is distinguished from the *Analects* and the *Mencius* by the fact that it is not a record of conversations but a work composed primarily of essays. Unlike the relatively fragmentary form of the Confucian or Mencian conversations, reconstructed after the fact, these essays by Xunzi seem to involve his sustained reflections on topics of particular concern to him—including learning, self-cultivation, government, military affairs, Heaven or Nature, ritual, language, and human nature. In the selections presented here we encounter a powerful intellect arguing, often eloquently and always strenuously, for values and views that, for him, were essential to the cultivation of the individual as well as the preservation of civilization in a world where its survival must have seemed by no means assured.

Selections from the Xunzi

CHAPTER 1: ENCOURAGING LEARNING

Xunzi is known as a scholar of highly refined intelligence and powerful intellect. Though Mencius personally valued and publicly promoted learning, one does not find in his conversations and pronouncements the self-conscious sense of intellectuality that is everywhere present in the writing of Xunzi. It is noteworthy, however, that in this opening chapter of his work Xunzi, deeply concerned with finding accessible models and promoting learning that is relevant to the present, makes a strong case for the value of *personal* association with a teacher and of *personal* involvement in ritual practice as against a bookish or antiquarian absorption in the past.

The noble person says: Learning must never cease. Blue comes from the indigo plant, yet it is bluer than indigo. Ice is made from water, yet it is colder than water. Wood as straight as a plumb line may be bent into a wheel that is as round as if it were drawn with a compass, and, even after the wood has dried, it will not straighten out again because this is the way it has been bent. Thus wood marked by the plumb line will become straight, and metal that is put to the whetstone will become sharp. The noble person who studies widely and examines himself each day will become clear in his knowing and faultless in his conduct.

Therefore if you do not climb a high mountain, you will not know the height of Heaven; if you do not look down into a deep valley, you will not know the depth of the earth; and if you do not hear the words handed down from the ancient kings, you will not know the greatness of learning and inquiry. The children of Han and Yue and of the Yi and the Mo⁵³ all make the same sounds at birth, but as they grow up they have different customs because this is the way they have been educated. The Ode says,

O you noble men,
Do not be constantly at ease and at rest.
Be thoughtful in your official positions.
Love those who are upright and correct.
And the spirits will heed you,
And will increase your blessings.⁵⁴

Of spirits there is none greater than being transformed through the Way; of blessings there is none more lasting than being without misfortune.

53. Han and Yue were ancient Chinese states; the Yi and the Mo were non-Chinese tribes.

54. Ode 207.

Once I spent an entire day in thought, but it was not as good as a moment of study. Once I stood on tiptoe to gaze into the distance, but it was not as good as climbing to a high place to get a broad view. Climbing to a high place and waving will not make your arm any longer, but you can be seen from farther away. Shouting down the wind will give your voice no added urgency, but you can be heard more distinctly. By borrowing a horse and carriage you will not improve your feet, but you can cover a thousand *li*. By borrowing a boat and paddles you will not improve your ability in water, but you can cross rivers and seas. The noble person is by birth no different from others, but he is good at borrowing from external things.

In the southern regions there is a bird called the *meng* dove. It makes its nest out of feathers woven together with hair and suspends it from the tips of the reeds. When the wind comes, the reeds break, the eggs are smashed, and the young are killed. This is not because the nest is wanting but, rather, because of the way it is attached. In the west there is a tree called the *yegan*. Its trunk is four inches tall, and it grows on top of high mountains, looking down into chasms a hundred fathoms deep. This is not because the tree's trunk is able to grow but, rather, because of the place where it stands. If raspberry vines grow in the midst of hemp, they will stand up straight without being staked; if white sand is mixed with mud, it too will turn black. If the root of the orchid and the rhizome of the valerian are soaked in the water used to wash rice,⁵⁵ the noble person will not go near them, and the commoner will not wear them—not because their substance is not beautiful but because of what they have been soaked in. Therefore the noble person will choose with care the place where he will reside, and will be accompanied by scholars when he travels. In this way he avoids depravity and meanness and approaches centrality and correctness.

Accumulate earth to make a mountain, and wind and rain will flourish there. Accumulate water to make a deep pool, and dragons will be born from it. Accumulate goodness to create virtue, and spiritual clarity will naturally be acquired; there the mind of the sage will be fully realized. Thus if you do not accumulate little steps, you will not have the means to journey a thousand *li*, and if you do not pile up small streams, you will have no way to fill a river or a sea. Though a thoroughbred like Qiji cannot cover ten paces in one leap, the sorriest nag can do it in ten yokings. Achievement consists of never giving up.

If you start carving, and then give up, you cannot even cut through a piece of rotten wood; but if you persist without stopping, you can carve and inlay metal or stone. Earthworms lack the power of sharp claws or teeth, or strong muscles or bones, yet above ground they feast on the mud, and below they drink

55. Following the reconstruction proposed by John Knoblock in *Xunzi—A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, vol. 1, pp. 137, 268–69.

at the yellow springs. This is because they keep their minds on one thing. Crabs have six legs and two pincers, but unless they can find an empty hole dug by a snake or a water serpent, they have no place to lodge. This is because they allow their minds to go off in all directions. Thus if there is no dark and dogged will, there will be no bright and shining clarity; if there is no dull and determined effort, there will be no brilliant and glorious achievement. One who travels two roads at once will arrive nowhere; one who serves two masters will please neither. . . .

The learning of the noble person enters his ear, is stored in his mind, spreads through his four limbs, and is made visible in his activity and his tranquillity. In his smallest word, in his slightest movement, in everything, he may be taken as a model and a standard. The learning of the lesser man enters his ear and comes out his mouth. With only four inches between ear and mouth, how can he possess it long enough to beautify a seven-foot body? In antiquity learning was carried on for the sake of one's self; today learning is carried on for the sake of others.⁵⁶ The learning of the noble person is for the sake of beautifying himself; the learning of the lesser man is offering bird and beast [to win attention from others]. Thus to proffer information when you have not been asked for it is called officiousness; to proffer information on two questions when you have only been asked about one is garrulity. Officiousness is to be condemned, so too is garrulity. The noble person is like an echo.

In learning nothing works so well as to be near a person of learning. The *Rites* and the "Music" provide models but no explanations. The *Odes* and the *Documents* are devoted to antiquity and lack immediacy. The *Spring and Autumn Annals* is laconic and not readily accessible. But following alongside a person of learning and repeating the explanations of the noble person bring one honor everywhere and allow one comprehensive knowledge of the world. Therefore it is said that "In learning nothing works so well as to be near a person of learning."

In the course of learning there is nothing more expedient than to devote yourself to a person of learning, and next to this is to pay homage to the rites. If you can neither devote yourself to a person of learning nor pay homage to the rites, how will you do anything more than learn randomly or passively follow the *Odes* and the *Documents*? In this case you will never to the end of your days escape from being merely a vulgar scholar. If you would take the ancient kings as your source and humaneness and rightness as your foundation, then rites are the means of correctly ordering warp and woof, pathways and byways. . . .

One who misses one shot in a hundred does not deserve to be called a good

56. Quoting *Analec*s 14:25. A similar idea is found in *Mencius* 4B:14. The idea is that learning is properly dedicated to self-improvement but often distorted in the interests of impressing others.

archer; one who does not take the last half step in a journey of a thousand *li* does not deserve to be called a good carriage driver; one who does not comprehend moral relationships and categories and does not become one with humaneness and rightness does not deserve to be called good in learning. Surely learning is learning to unify oneself. Someone who on departing does one thing and on entering does another is a person of the roads and alleys; one who does a small amount of good and much that is not good is a Jie or Zhou or Robber Zhi. Complete it, realize it to the fullest — only then will you be learned.

The noble person knows that what is not complete or what is not pure is unworthy to be called beautiful. Therefore he recites and reiterates so as to integrate it, reflects and ponders so as to comprehend it, determines his associations so that he may dwell in it, and eliminates what is harmful in order to preserve and nourish it. He causes his eyes to be devoid of any desire to see what is not right, his ears to be devoid of any desire to hear what is not right, his mouth to be devoid of any desire to say what is not right, and his mind to be devoid of any desire to think what is not right. Having arrived at this, he takes utmost pleasure in it. His eyes will take greater pleasure in it than in the five colors; his ears will take greater pleasure in it than in the five sounds; his mouth will take greater pleasure in it than in the five flavors; and his mind will benefit more from it than from possession of the world.⁵⁷ Therefore he cannot be subverted by power or profit, nor swayed by the masses and multitudes, nor unsettled by the whole world. He follows this in life; he follows it in death — this is what is called holding firm to inner power. He who holds firm to inner power is able to order himself; being able to order himself, he can then respond to others. He who is able to order himself and respond to others is called the complete man. Heaven manifests itself in its brightness; earth manifests itself in its breadth; the noble person values his completeness.

[“*Quanxue*,” *Xunzi yinde*, 1–2 — IB]

CHAPTER 2: CULTIVATING ONESELF

Much of early Chinese thought focused on finding the most appropriate method of personal cultivation, and differences concerning the practice as well as the ultimate purpose of self-cultivation became a focus of controversy among contending schools of thought. In this chapter *Xunzi* dwells on the contrast between the openness and seriousness of the noble person and the shallowness and defensiveness of the inferior person, emphasizing the need to be receptive to constructive criticism. Self-cultivation, for him, is part of a social process, something one works on in the course of interaction with others. He makes a similar point in the passages in which he defends the impor-

57. John Knoblock reads this, alternatively, to mean, “his mind benefits from possessing all that is in the world” (*Xunzi*, vol. 1, p. 142).

tance of following the guidance of a teacher and remaining committed to the practice of ritual. In this, Xunzi places himself at a considerable remove from the Daoists. Whereas Mencius spoke of cultivating his "vast, flowing *qi*," and connected this with "accumulated acts of rightness" through which the individual was to become connected with Heaven and Earth, Xunzi, more explicit in his psychology, offers detailed suggestions about ways to "regulate the *qi* and cultivate the mind" in order to achieve a balanced and harmonious personality.

Seeing what is good and cultivating it, one is sure to preserve it within oneself. Seeing what is not good and sorrowing over it, one is sure to search within oneself. Finding good within one's own person and devoting oneself to it, one is sure to love it within oneself; finding what is not good in one's person and despising it, one is sure to hate it within oneself. Therefore those who have good reason to find fault with me are my teachers; those who have good reason to find me praiseworthy are my friends; and those who flatter me do me injury.⁵⁸

Therefore the noble person honors his teachers, feels affection for his friends, but hates those who do him injury. Being untiring in his love of the good, he accepts criticism and is able to take warning from it. Even if he were not prompted by the desire to advance, how could he do otherwise?

The lesser man is just the opposite. He is utterly chaotic, yet hates others to find him in the wrong; he is altogether worthless, yet desires others to find him worthy. With a heart like that of tigers and wolves and conduct like that of birds and beasts, he nonetheless hates those who do him injury. He is affectionate toward flatterers but aloof from those who would admonish and reprove him. He finds cultivating uprightness to be laughable and the utmost loyalty to be injurious. Although he may desire to avoid ruin and destruction, how can he do so? . . .

The proper way to regulate the *qi* and cultivate the mind: With a temperament that is too strong and vigorous, soften it with balance and harmony. With an intellect that is too penetrating and deep, unify it with mildness and geniality. Given courage and daring that are too violent and fierce, be guided by obedience to the Way. Given a mind that is too quick and speech that is too glib, regulate them through activity and repose. What has become narrow and constrained, broaden with liberality and magnanimity. What has become base and low due to greed for gain, raise up with high resolve. What has become ordinary, common, enervated, and unfocused, relieve with the help of teachers and friends. Respond to negligence, lassitude, levity, and heedlessness with the prospect of imminent disaster. Complement simpleminded loyalty and sober correctness with rites and music. . . . Of all the ways to regulate the *qi* and cultivate the mind, none is more direct than to follow ritual, none more essential than

58. Literally, "play the thief toward me." Mencius uses the same image; see *Mencius* 2A:6, 4A:1, 6A:1, etc.

to find a teacher, none more spiritual than to love one thing alone. This is what is called the method of regulating the *qi* and cultivating the mind.

If one's will and intentions are cultivated, one may feel pride before wealth and eminence; if one has respect for the Way and rightness, one may have small regard for kings and dukes. Search within yourself, and you may look lightly on external things. A tradition has it, "The noble person uses things; the lesser man is used by things." Though it means labor for the body, if the mind finds peace in it, do it. Though the profit in it may be small, if there is much rightness in it, do it. Finding success in the service of a chaotic ruler is not as good as following the right in the service of an impoverished one. Therefore a good farmer does not stop plowing because of flood or drought; a good merchant does not give up going to market because of occasional losses; the scholar and the noble person do not neglect the Way because of hardship and poverty. . . .

Ritual is the means by which one's person is rectified; the teacher is the means by which ritual is rectified. Without ritual, how can you rectify yourself? Without a teacher, how can you know which ritual is correct? By behaving according to ritual, your emotions will find peace in ritual. By speaking as your teacher speaks, your understanding becomes like that of your teacher. When your emotions find peace in ritual and your understanding is like that of your teacher, then you have become a sage. Therefore, to reject ritual is to be without a guide, and to renounce one's teacher is to be without a teacher. Not to approve of a teacher and a guide, preferring to do everything your own way, is like relying on a blind man trying to distinguish colors or a deaf man, tones. There is no way to put aside chaos and confusion. Therefore learning means regarding ritual as your guide. The teacher takes his own person as the standard of proper conduct and values that in himself which is at peace.

[*"Xiushen," Xunzi yinde*, 3-5 — IB]

CHAPTER 9: THE REGULATIONS OF THE KING

The following selection reveals several of the characteristic features of Xunzi's political thought, including his concern with ranks and social distinctions and with what in modern parlance might be called the management of human resources. In a sense he may be described as a realist in politics. Whereas Mencius refused to talk about a lord-protector or hegemon, being willing only to talk about the ideal way of a true king, Xunzi undertakes to describe the different styles of government suitable to a "man who understands force," a lord-protector, and a true king. At the same time it is clear that he, no less than Mencius, believes that the humaneness and rightness of the true king give him an unassailable authority and an ability to compel the allegiance of others. In the final passage in this selection Xunzi speaks of the noble person "providing the patterns for Heaven and Earth" and "forming a triad with Heaven and Earth," a theme he takes up again in his chapter "A Discussion of Heaven."

Someone inquired about the conduct of government. I replied: In the case of the worthy and capable, promote them without regard to the established order. In the case of the inept and incompetent, dismiss them without hesitation. In the case of the fundamentally evil, punish them without trying to instruct them.⁵⁹ In the case of ordinary people, transform them without waiting to rectify them.

Even before social distinctions have been fixed, there will still be [such basic distinctions as] the one between the left and the right ancestors in the mortuary temple.⁶⁰ Although they may be descendants of kings, dukes, men of service, or grand officers, if they are unable to adhere to the rites and to moral principles, they should be consigned to the ranks of the commoners. Although they may be the descendants of commoners, if they have acquired culture and learning, are upright in their personal conduct, and are able to adhere to the rites and moral principles, they should be assigned to the ranks of prime minister, men of service, or high court officials. Therefore, with those whose words are wanton, whose theories are wanton, or whose undertakings are wanton, and whose talents are wanton, with people given to avoidance and evasion, employ them and teach them. Wait for a while, encouraging them with rewards and disciplining them with punishments. If they perform their work with ease, then accept them as subjects; if they do not perform their work with ease, cast them out. In the case of those who have one of the Five Defects,⁶¹ raise them up, gather them together, nurture them, and give them work according to their capacities. Employ them, provide them with clothing and food, and take care to see that none are left out. If anyone is found acting or using his talents to work against the good of the time, condemn him to death without mercy. This is what is called the power of Heaven and the government of a king. . . .

Where ranks in society are equal, there will not be proper distinctions; where power is equally distributed, there will be no unity; when the masses are on the

59. There has been discussion of whether Xunzi is actually referring here to incorrigible evil. As Burton Watson observes, this "seems to contradict the rest of Xunzi's philosophy and is rare in early Confucian thought as a whole" (*Hsin Tzu: Basic Writings*, p. 33). Still, as Watson notes, Xunzi does refer to this elsewhere, as in section 18 ("Rectifying Theses"), "where he argues that the existence of a very few such perverse and unteachable men even in the time of a sage ruler is not to be taken as evidence that the ruler himself is at fault."

60. The mortuary temple of the founder of a noble family occupied the central position, with the temples of his descendants in the second, fourth, and sixth generations arranged to the left and called *zhao*, and those of descendants in the third, fifth, and seventh generations arranged to the right and called *mu*. Here Xunzi refers to the kind of distinction that, to him, seems prior to other social arrangements.

61. The category is defined differently by different commentators. One list includes those who are mute, deaf, crippled, missing an arm or leg, or dwarfed. Another includes the blind rather than the mute.

same level, it will be impossible to employ them. That there is Heaven and there is Earth shows that there are differences of higher and lower, but it is only after an enlightened king is established that the state is managed on the basis of regulations. Two men of equal eminence cannot serve one other; two men of equally humble station cannot employ one other. This is the rule of Heaven. When power and position are equally distributed, likes and dislikes are the same, and there are not enough goods to allow satisfaction, there will inevitably be contention. Contention must lead to chaos, and chaos to impoverishment. The former kings abhorred chaos, and therefore they established rites and morality so as to bring about ranks. They created sufficient distinctions between rich and poor, eminent and humble, such that it was possible to bring people together and supervise them. This is the basis on which the people of the world are nourished. It says in the *Classic of Documents*, "There can be equality only where there is inequality!" . . .⁶²

One who understands the way to use force does not rely upon force. Rather, he considers how to utilize the king's mandate in order to perfect his strength and consolidate his inner power. When his strength is perfected, the several lords cannot weaken him; with his inner power consolidated, the lords cannot remove him. If there should be no true king or lord-protector in the world, he will always be victorious. This is the way of one who understands the way to use force.

The lord-protector is not like this. He opens up wilderness lands for cultivation, fills the granaries and storehouses, and makes provision for necessities. He is careful in recruiting and selecting officials, employing scholars of talent and ability and thereafter gradually bestowing rewards and commendation in order to encourage them or strictly applying penalties and punishments in order to correct them. He preserves those faced with destruction and sustains those threatened with extinction; he protects the weak and prohibits aggression. If he is not minded to annex the territories of his neighbors, then the several lords will draw close to him. If he follows a way of treating them as friends and equals and is respectful in his dealings with them, the lords will be pleased with him. He becomes intimate with them by not attempting to annex their territory, but if he shows any inclination to annex their territory, they will turn away from him. He causes them to be pleased by treating them as friends and equals, but if he should treat them as subjects, they will depart from him. Therefore he makes clear through his actions that he does not intend to annex their territories, and he inspires confidence in them through his way of treating them as friends

62. Xunzi's intent here is not entirely clear; however, it does seem to differ from the purport of his source, the *Lǐxíng* or "The Code of Marquis Lü," in the *Classic of Documents*, where the phrase has a quite different meaning.

and equals. If there is no true king in the world, he will always be victorious. This is the way of one who understands how to be a lord-protector. . . .

A true king is not like this. His humaneness is the loftiest in the world, his rightness is the loftiest in the world, and his authority is the loftiest in the world. Since his humaneness is the loftiest in the world, there is no one in the world who does not draw close to him. Since his rightness is the loftiest in the world, there is no one who does not respect him. Since his authority is the loftiest in the world, there is no one who dares to oppose him. With an authority that cannot be opposed and a way that compels the allegiance of others, he gains victory without battle and attains his objectives without attack. Without his wearing out his arms and men, the whole world submits to him. This is the way of one who understands how to be a king. One who understands all three of these ways may, if he wishes to be a king, become a king; if he wishes to be a lord-protector, become a lord-protector; or, if he wishes to be a man of force, become a man of force. . . .

On the model of a king: He fixes the several rates of taxation, regulates affairs, and utilizes the myriad things in order to nourish the myriad people. From the product of the fields, the tax rate is one part in ten. At the barriers and in the marketplaces, goods are inspected, but no tax is imposed. The mountains and forests, marshes and weirs, are closed or opened according to the season, but taxes are not levied. Land is inspected for its quality, and taxes are differentially assessed. The distance over which goods must be transported is taken into account in fixing tribute payments. The circulation of resources and grain is unimpeded, allowing them to be offered and exchanged so that "all within the four seas are like one family." Therefore those who are close do not hide their abilities, and those who are distant do not resent their labors. Nowhere in the state, in however secluded or remote a place, are there any who do not hasten to serve him or who do not find peace and joy in him. This is called being a leader of the people. This is the model of a king. . . .

From general categories one moves to the particular; from unity one moves to multiplicity. In beginnings there are endings; in endings there are beginnings; it is like a circle with no starting point. Lose hold of this, and the empire will fall into decline. Heaven and Earth are the beginning of life; rites and rightness are the beginning of order; and the noble person is the beginning of rites and rightness. Enacting them, practicing them, accumulating them, and loving them more than anything else — this is the beginning of the noble person. Therefore Heaven and Earth produce the noble person, and the noble person provides the patterns for Heaven and Earth. The noble person forms a triad with Heaven and Earth: he is the agent of the myriad things, father and mother of the people. Without the noble person, there would be no patterns in Heaven and Earth, no continuity in the rites and rightness, no ruler or leader above, no father or son below. This is what is called utmost chaos.

The relationships between ruler and subject, father and son, elder and younger brother, and husband and wife begin and are carried through to the end; in ending they begin again. They share the same pattern as Heaven and Earth and endure in the same way for ten thousand generations. This is what is called the great basis.

[“Wangzhi,” *Xunzi yinde*, 25–28 — IB]

CHAPTER 17: A DISCUSSION OF HEAVEN

In translating this selection we have in most instances retained the translation “Heaven” for the Chinese word *tian*, even while recognizing that at many points we would come much closer to Xunzi’s understanding of the concept were we to render it as “Nature.” Actually neither “Heaven” nor “Nature” fully expresses the meaning of *tian*, which has a variety of senses, including the sky, weather, the natural order, and also a moral order. Uses of the word also varied over time and among different filiations or schools of thought. From at least as far back as the early Zhou period, when the idea of the Mandate of Heaven assumed such powerful political and moral significance, the relation of the human world to Heaven or the natural order was a central concern of Chinese thought. Over the course of centuries a number of crucial issues arose, including how *tian* should be conceptualized, how it might intervene in human affairs, and how its imperative or will might be discovered.

Here Xunzi represents *tian* as a natural order, operating according to unchanging principles, not intervening in extraordinary ways in human affairs but, rather, providing the context within which all living things exist. Against those, like Zhuangzi, who seemed to overemphasize the natural order and deemphasize the role of the human, Xunzi reverses the argument: Heaven, Earth, and human beings exist in a relationship of complementarity; human beings should neither encroach on the work of Heaven nor neglect their own. Against believers in a variety of superstitions that depicted unusual events as signs or portents indicating intervention by Heaven in the human sphere, he makes a similar point: human beings must recognize that they themselves are in control of their own affairs. Heaven’s ways, being constant, do not vary in accordance with changes in human government, so that what matters in ensuring human prosperity and well-being is human effort. Xunzi’s assertion that in recognizing the complementary relationship among the three spheres human beings are able to “form a triad with Heaven and Earth” became one of the seminal ideas in Confucian cosmological and ethical thought.

The processes of Heaven are constant, neither prevailing because of Yao nor perishing because of Jie. Respond to them with order, and good fortune will result; respond to them with chaos, and misfortune will result. If you strengthen what is basic and are frugal in your expenditures, then Heaven cannot make you poor. If you nourish and provide for the people, acting in accordance with

the seasons, then Heaven cannot cause you to be ill. If you practice the Way and are not of two minds, then Heaven cannot visit calamities on you. Thus flood or drought cannot bring about starvation, heat or cold cannot produce illness, and strange or preternatural events cannot result in misfortune. But if you neglect the basis and are extravagant in your expenditures, then Heaven cannot make you rich. If you are deficient in nourishing and dilatory in your actions, then Heaven cannot make you whole. If you turn your back on the Way and behave recklessly, then Heaven cannot bestow good fortune on you. Thus even before floods or droughts have arrived you starve; even before heat or cold has set in, you grow ill; even when no strange or preternatural events have occurred, you suffer misfortune. The seasons come just as they do in a well-ordered age, but the disasters and calamities that occur show the difference between a well-ordered age and this one. You should not blame Heaven; it is a matter of the way you have followed. Therefore if you can distinguish between the natural and the human you deserve to be called a perfect man.

To bring to completion without acting, to obtain without seeking — this is called the working of Heaven. Thus, although one is profound, he does not contemplate it; although great, he adds nothing to its ability; although clever, he does not attempt to search it out. Hence it is said that he does not contend with Heaven for its work. Heaven has its seasons; Earth has its resources; man has his government. For this reason it is said that they may form a triad. If one abandons that which allows him to form a triad, yet longs for the triad, he is deluded.

The constellations revolve in an orderly procession, the sun and the moon shine by turns, the four seasons succeed each other, the yin and the yang enact the great transformations, the wind and the rain pass over everything. It is through attaining harmony with Heaven that each of the myriad living things grows, and through obtaining its nourishment that each one comes to completion. Not seeing its operations, yet seeing their result, we call it "spiritual." Everyone realizes how completion has come about, yet no one understands its formlessness, and so we call it "natural" (or "heavenly"). Only the sage acts without seeking to understand Heaven.

When the work of Heaven has been established and the achievements of Heaven brought to completion, the form is made whole, and the spirit is born. The love and hate, delight and anger, sorrow and joy that are stored there are called Heaven-endowed (or natural) feelings. Ears, eyes, nose, mouth, and body each have perceptions that do not share the same competencies, and these are called Heaven-endowed (or natural) faculties. The mind-and-heart dwells in the vacuity at the center and governs the five faculties, and thus it is called the Heavenly (or natural) lord. Material resources that are not of the same species are used to nourish the [human] species, and these are called Heaven's nourishment. Acting in accord with what is proper to the species is called felicitous, while acting in defiance of what is proper to the species is called calamitous,

and this is called Heaven's rule. To darken the Heavenly lord, disorder the Heavenly faculties, abandon Heaven's nourishment, contravene Heaven's rule, repudiate the Heavenly feelings, and thereby destroy Heaven's accomplishments is called great misfortune. The sage, by purifying the Heavenly lord, rectifying the Heavenly faculties, cherishing Heaven's nourishment, acting in accord with Heaven's rule, and nourishing the Heavenly feelings, perfects the accomplishments of Heaven. In this way he understands what is to be done and what is not to be done, so that Heaven and the Earth hold office and all things are made to serve him. His actions are wholly ordered; his nourishing is wholly appropriate; his life is free from injury. This is called understanding Heaven. Thus the greatest skill lies in what is not done, the greatest wisdom in what is not pondered.

In regard to Heaven, his thoughts are fixed solely on what the images he has perceived enable him to anticipate. In regard to Earth, his thoughts are fixed solely on what the rightness he has recognized allows him to utilize. In regard to the four seasons, his thoughts are fixed solely on how the measurements he has made enable him to carry out his undertakings. In regard to yin and yang, his thoughts are fixed solely on how what he has understood permits him to bring about order. The experts concern themselves with Heaven; he concerns himself with the Way.

Are order and chaos determined by Heaven? I say, the sun and moon, the stars and constellations revolved in the same way in the time of Yu and in the time of Jie. Yu achieved order thereby; Jie brought disorder. Order and chaos are not determined by Heaven. Are they determined by the seasons? I reply, the crops sprout and grow in spring and summer and are harvested and stored away in autumn and winter. This was also the same under both Yu and Jie. Yu achieved order thereby; Jie brought disorder. Order and disorder are not determined by the seasons. Are they determined by the land? I reply, by acquiring land, one lives; in losing it, one dies. This was the same in the time of Yu and in the time of Jie. Yu achieved order thereby; Jie brought disorder. Order and disorder are not due to the land. This is what the Ode means when it says:

Heaven made a high mountain
King Tai opened it up.
He began the work.
King Wen dwelt there in peace.⁶³

Heaven does not revoke the winter because people dislike cold; the earth does not reduce its expanse because people dislike great distances; the noble person does not refrain from acting because lesser persons create clamor and

⁶³. Ode 270. The point here is that it is human effort, and not the intervention of Heaven, that has made the difference.

tumult. Heaven has its constant Way; Earth has its constant measurements; the noble person has his constant substance. The noble person follows what is constant; the petty person calculates his achievements. . . .

The king of Chu has a retinue of a thousand chariots, but this is not because he is wise. The noble person eats pulse and drinks water, but this is not because he is foolish. Both are due to the rhythms of circumstance.⁶⁴ To be refined in purpose, rich in virtuous action, and clear in understanding; to live in the present and be intent on the past—these are the things that are within my power. Therefore the noble person cherishes what is within his competence and does not long for what is within the competence of Heaven alone. The lesser person neglects what is within his competence and longs for what is within the competence of Heaven. Because the noble person cherishes what is within his competence and does not long for what is within the competence of Heaven, he goes forward day by day. Because the lesser person sets aside what is within his competence and longs for what is within the competence of Heaven, he goes backward day by day. Therefore what causes the noble person to go forward day by day and the lesser person to go backward is the same; what sets the two apart lies in this alone.

When stars fall or trees groan, all the people in the state are frightened and ask, What does this mean? I reply, There is no meaning. It is just that, with the changes in Heaven and Earth and the transformations of yin and yang, such things occur from time to time. While it is all right to wonder about them, it is wrong to be frightened by them. Eclipses of the sun or the moon, the untimely coming of wind or rain, the appearance of strange stars—there has never been an age when such events have not occurred. If the one above is enlightened, and his government is just, then even if such events occur simultaneously, no harm will come of it. If the ruler is benighted and his government is reckless, then even if no such event occurs, no good will come of it. Now stars falling and trees groaning are the changes of Heaven and Earth and the transformations of yin and yang. Such things occur from time to time. While it is all right to wonder about them, it is wrong to be frightened of them.

When such events do occur, the ones to be feared are human portents. When the plowing is poorly done so that the crops suffer, when the weeding is badly done so that the harvest fails; when the government is reckless and the people are lost; when the fields are neglected and the crops badly tended; when grain is sold dear and the people are starving; when there are people dying on the roads—these are what is called human portents. When the orders of the government are unenlightened, when population levies are undertaken at the wrong season, and the basic matter⁶⁵ is not properly ordered—these are called

64. Following the reading of Robert Eno in *The Confucian Creation of Heaven*, p. 167.

65. I.e., agriculture.

human portents. When ritual and rightness are not cultivated, private and public affairs are not properly distinguished, and men and women mingle wantonly, so that fathers and sons doubt each other; when superior and inferior are opposed, and bandits and thieves arrive at once — these are called human portents. Portents such as these are born from chaos, and if all three types occur at once the state will know no peace. The explanation for their occurrence may be found close by; the injury they cause is most grievous. . . .

If you perform the sacrifice for rain, and it rains, what does that mean? I reply, there is no meaning. It is as though the sacrifice for rain had not been performed and yet it rained anyway. The sun or the moon is eclipsed, and one "saves" it; a drought occurs, and the rain sacrifice is performed; only after divination has been carried out is a decision taken on a matter of great consequence. These actions are performed not as a means of achieving some result but as a means of ornament. Therefore the noble person regards them as ornaments, while the common people regard them as supernatural. To consider them as ornaments is fortunate; to consider them as supernatural is unfortunate. . . .

Exalt Heaven and contemplate it?
 Better to nourish its creatures and regulate them.
 Follow Heaven and sing hymns to it?
 Better to determine Heaven's mandate and utilize it.
 Look forward to the seasons and attend them?
 Better to respond to the seasons and employ them.
 Follow along with things and cause them to multiply?
 Better to quicken their capacities and transform them.
 Contemplate things but regard them as external to you?
 Better to provide a pattern for things and not lose them.
 Long for the source from which things are born?
 Better to have the means to bring them to completion.

Therefore if you set aside what belongs to the human and contemplate what belongs to Heaven, you miss the genuine realities of all things.

[*"Luntian, Xunzi yinde, 62-64 — IB*]

CHAPTER 19: A DISCUSSION OF RITES

Ritual is at the heart of Xunzi's version of Confucian thought. The following selection affords an illustration of how his highly practical orientation and his aesthetic concerns are blended.

What is the origin of rites? I reply, human beings are born with desires, and when they do not achieve their desires, they cannot but seek the means to do so. If their seeking knows no limit or degree, they cannot but contend with

one another. With contention comes chaos, and with chaos comes exhaustion. The ancient kings hated chaos and therefore established rites and rightness in order to limit it, to nurture people's desires, and to give them a means of satisfaction. They saw to it that desires did not exhaust material things and that material things did not fall short of desires. Thus both desires and things were supported and satisfied, and this was the origin of rites. . . .

Rites have three roots. Heaven and Earth are the root of life, the ancestors are the root of the human species, and rulers and teachers are the root of order. If there were no Heaven and Earth, how could there be life? If there were no ancestors, how could there be begetting? If there were no rulers and teachers, how could there be order? If even one of these were lacking, human beings would have no peace. Thus rites serve Heaven above and Earth below; they honor ancestors; they exalt rulers and teachers. These are the three roots of rites. . . .

Rites always begin in coarseness, are completed in forms, and end in joy. Thus in their most perfected state both emotion and the forms are fully realized; in the next state, emotions and forms prevail by turns; and in the lowest state, everything returns to emotion and reverts to a great unity.

Heaven and Earth find harmony,
The sun and moon become bright,
The four seasons follow in order,
The stars and constellations move,
The rivers and streams flow,
And all things flourish.
Likes and dislikes are regulated;
Joys and hates are made appropriate.

Those below are compliant; those above are enlightened; the myriad things change but do not become chaotic. One who turns his back upon rites will be lost. Are rites not perfect? When they have been properly established and brought to the ultimate point, no one in the world can add to or subtract from them. Root and branch are put in proper order; beginning and end are correlated; distinctions are expressed through the most elegant forms; explanations derive from the utmost discernment. Those in the world who follow the rites will be orderly; those who do not follow them will be chaotic. Those who follow them will be at peace; those who do not follow them will be in danger. Those who follow them will be preserved; those who turn against them will perish. This is something that the lesser person cannot comprehend.

The principle of the rites is truly deep. Discriminations of hard and white, same and different,⁶⁶ enter there and drown. The principle of the rites is truly

66. Referring to the Mohist logicians and to the dialecticians such as Hui Shi and Gongsun Long.

great. Crass and vulgar theories on wielding authority and exerting control enter there and perish. The principle of the rites is truly lofty. Contumelious arrogance, haughty disdain, and the contempt for common customs that presumes one's own superiority to ordinary people⁶⁷ enter there and are brought low. . . .

Rites are most strict in the ordering of birth and death. Birth is the beginning of a human being; death is his end. When both beginning and end are good, the human way is complete. Therefore the noble person is reverential toward the beginning and watchful over the end, so that beginning and end are as one. This is the way of the noble person; this is the refinement of rites and rightness. To be generous in the treatment of the living but miserly in the treatment of the dead is to show reverence for a being who has consciousness and contempt for one who lacks consciousness. This is the way of an evil person and an offense against the heart. The noble person would be ashamed to treat a bondservant in a way that offends the heart; how much more ashamed would he be to treat those whom he honors and loves in such a way!

Because the rites of the dead can be performed only once for each individual, and never again, they provide the final occasion at which the subject may express the utmost respect for his ruler, and the son may express the utmost respect for his parents. Therefore to serve the living without loyalty and generosity, or without reverence and good form, is called rudeness, and to send off the dead without loyalty and generosity, or without reverence and good form, is called miserliness. The noble person disdains rudeness and is ashamed of miserliness. . . .

Rites contract what is too long and expand what is too short, reducing excesses and repairing deficiencies, pervading the forms of love and reverence and enlivening the beauties of right conduct. Therefore, while refined beauty and coarse ugliness, joyful music and mournful weeping, calm contentment and anxious grief are opposites, rites bring them together and make use of them, eliciting and employing each in due course. Therefore, refined beauty, joyful music, and calm contentment serve to induce an attitude of tranquillity and are employed on auspicious occasions. Coarse ugliness, mournful weeping, and anxious grief induce an attitude of inquietude and are employed on inauspicious occasions. Therefore when refined beauty is utilized, it should never reach the point of shallowness or sensuality, and when coarse ugliness is utilized, it should never lead to the point of starvation or self-abandonment. When joyful music and calm contentment are utilized, they should never lead to profligacy or indolence, and though mournful weeping and anxious grief are utilized, they should never lead to faintheartedness or injury to life. If this is done, then rites will achieve the middle state. . . .

67. Possibly referring to the followers of Prince Mou of Wei, a contemporary of Xunzi's known for his hedonism.

It is always true that rites, when they serve the living, are an adornment to joy, and when they serve the dead, an adornment to grief. In sacrifices they are an adornment to reverence, and in military affairs, an adornment to authority. This was the same for the rites of the hundred kings; it is what unites antiquity and the present. The source for this we do not know. . . .

Sacrificial rites give expression to the feelings of remembrance and longing for the dead. There inevitably come times when one is overwhelmed by emotions of grief and loss, and a loyal minister or a filial son finds that, even while others are given to the enjoyment of congenial company, these sorrowful emotions arrive. If when they come to him, and he is greatly moved, he nonetheless represses them, his feelings of remembrance and longing will be thwarted and unfulfilled, and his ritual practice will be deficient and incomplete. Therefore the ancient kings established certain forms so that the duty of honoring those who deserve honor and demonstrating affection for those who deserve affection might be fulfilled. Therefore I say that the sacrificial rites give expression to the feelings of remembrance and longing. They are the perfection of loyalty, good faith, love, and reverence, and the flourishing of ritual deportment and refined demeanor. Only the sage can understand them. The sage understands them clearly; the man of service and the noble person are content to carry them out; the officials are careful to maintain them; and the hundred names accept them as established custom. The noble person understands them as the human way; the hundred names think of them as matters having to do with spirits.

[*"Lilun," Xunzi yinde*, 70-75 — IB]

CHAPTER 21: DISPELLING OBSCURATION

The following selection illustrates the thorough integration — or perhaps more aptly, the nonseparation — of psychological, ethical, spiritual, and political elements in Xunzi's thought.

A common human defect is to be in the dark about great principles because one's mind is obscured by a single detail. If one can control this, one can return to correct standards, but if one continues to be of two minds, one will become deluded. There are no two Ways in the world, nor is the sage of two minds.

At present the several lords have different theories of government and the hundred schools of thought have different doctrines. Inevitably some will be right and others, wrong; some will be conducive to order and others, to chaos. Even the ruler of a chaotic state or the follower of a chaotic school is bound with a sincere mind to seek what is proper and to try to better his condition. But he is jealous and misguided about the Way and deflected from his course by other people. He is partial to his own familiar ways and only fears to hear some ill spoken of them; he relies on what is familiar to him, and when he

encounters a different theory, he only fears to hear it praised. This is how he moves further away from an ordered state, without ceasing to think that he is in the right. Isn't this what it means to be blinded by a partial truth and to fail in the search for what is right? . . .

What are the causes of obscurity? Desires may cause obscurity; so too may hates. Obscurity may be brought about by the beginnings of things or by the ends, by those far away or by those close by, by breadth or by shallowness, by the past or by the present. Whenever one dwells on the differences among the myriad things, all such differences become causes of obscurity. This is a common failing in the exercise of the mind. . . .

How does one understand the Way? I reply, through the mind. And how can the mind understand it? I reply, because it is empty, unified, and still. The mind is always storing things, and yet it is said to be empty. The mind is always marked by diversity, and yet it is said to be unified. The mind is always moving, and yet it is said to be still. Human beings are born with awareness, and when there is awareness there is memory. To remember is to store, and yet the mind is said to be empty because what has already been stored in it does not impede what is about to be received. From birth the mind has awareness, and where there is awareness there is consciousness of differences. Consciousness of differences means that one is aware of different things simultaneously, and when one is aware of different things simultaneously, there is duality. Yet the mind is said to be unified. Because it does not allow one thing to interfere with another it is said to be unified. When the mind is asleep, one dreams; when it is unoccupied, it moves on its own and, if one allows it to do so, it will make plans. Thus the mind is constantly moving, and yet it is said to be still because it does not allow these dreams and imaginings to disorder its understanding. Therefore it is said to be still. . . . Being empty, unified, and still is called great and pure enlightenment.

Of the myriad beings, there are none that have form and yet are not seen, none that are seen and yet are not understood, none that are understood and yet not accorded their proper place. One may sit in a room and see everything within the four seas; one may dwell in the present and discuss the most remote ages. One has a trenchant view of the myriad beings and knows their genuine tendencies; one inquires into the phenomena of order and disorder and has insight into the rules that govern them. One perceives the warp and woof of Heaven and Earth, exerts mastery and authority over the myriad things, regulates and controls the great principle and all that is in the universe. Broad, vast — who knows his limits? Expansive, magnanimous — who knows his inner power? Permutable and prolific — who knows his form? His brightness matches the sun and moon; his greatness fills the eight directions. He is called the great person. How could he have any obscurity?

The mind is the ruler of the body and the master of its spiritual intelligence. It gives commands, but does not receive them. Of itself it prevents or enables,

seizes or selects, moves or stops. Thus the mouth can be compelled to be silent or to speak; the body can be compelled to contract or to extend itself, but the mind cannot be made to change its intentions. What it considers right it will accept; what it considers wrong it will reject. Therefore we say of the mind that its choices are subject to no prohibitions. And though, inevitably, the things it sees for itself are numerous and diverse, the feelings that come to it will not be divided. . . .

Something of a given category can admit no duality. Thus the wise person chooses one thing and finds unity in it. The farmer is skilled in the work of the fields, but he cannot become a director of agriculture. The merchant is skilled in the ways of the market, but he cannot become a director of commerce. The artisan is skilled in the use of tools, but he cannot become a director of crafts. There are those who are able to do none of these three things, yet they may control these three offices. Therefore one says that they are skilled in the Way. He who is skilled with things will treat each thing as a particular thing. He who is skilled in the Way will consider things together. Therefore the noble person, having found unity in the Way, examines things and compares them. Through having found unity in the Way, he becomes correct. Through examining things and comparing them, he becomes clear. Through carrying out investigations based upon correct intentions, he is able to be the director of all things. In ancient times when Shun governed the world he did not issue proclamations concerning each matter, and yet all things were brought to completion. He dwelt in a single attitude of fearful caution, and his glory became complete. He nourished an attitude of subtle watchfulness and achieved a glory that was not understood. Hence the *Classic of the Way*⁶⁸ says, "The human mind is fearful; the mind of Dao is subtle." Only a noble person possessed of enlightenment can know the hidden power of fearfulness and subtlety.

[*"Jiebi," Xunzi yinde*, 78, 80-81 — IB]

CHAPTER 23: HUMAN NATURE IS EVIL

Human nature is evil; its goodness derives from conscious activity. Now it is human nature to be born with a fondness for profit. Indulging this leads to contention and strife, and the sense of modesty and yielding with which one was born disappears. One is born with feelings of envy and hate, and, by indulging these, one is led into banditry and theft, so that the sense of loyalty and good faith with which he was born disappears. One is born with the desires of the ears and eyes and with a fondness for beautiful sights and sounds, and, by indulging these, one is led to licentiousness and chaos, so that the sense of

68. This work is unknown. A similar phrase is found in the "Plan of the Great Yu" in the *Classic of Documents*.

ritual, rightness, refinement, and principle with which one was born is lost. Hence, following human nature and indulging human emotions will inevitably lead to contention and strife, causing one to rebel against one's proper duty, reduce principle to chaos, and revert to violence. Therefore one must be transformed by the example of a teacher and guided by the way of ritual and rightness before one will attain modesty and yielding, accord with refinement and ritual, and return to order. From this perspective it is apparent that human nature is evil and that its goodness is the result of conscious activity.

Thus warped wood must be laid against a straightening board, steamed, and bent into shape before it can become straight; blunt metal must be ground on a whetstone before it can become sharp. And in that human nature is evil, it must wait for the example of a teacher before it can become upright, and for ritual and rightness before it can become orderly. Now, if people lack the example of teachers they will be partial and narrow rather than upright; if they lack ritual and rightness they will be rebellious and chaotic rather than orderly. In ancient times the sage kings, recognizing that the nature of human beings is evil — that they incline toward evil and are not upright, that they are disposed toward chaos and are not orderly — created ritual and rightness and established models and limits in order to reform and improve the human emotional nature and make it upright, in order to train and transform the human emotional nature and provide it with a guide. They caused them to attain order and to conform to the Way. And so today a person who is transformed by the instructions of a teacher, devotes himself to study, and abides by ritual and rightness may become a noble person, while one who follows his nature and emotions, is content to give free play to his passions, and abandons ritual and rightness is a lesser person. It is obvious from this, therefore, that human nature is evil, and that its goodness results from conscious activity.

Mencius said, The fact that human beings learn shows that their nature is good. I say this is not so; this comes of his having neither understood human nature nor perceived the distinction between the nature and conscious activity. The nature is what is given by Heaven: one cannot learn it; one cannot acquire it by effort. Ritual and rightness are created by sages: people learn them and are capable, through effort, of bringing them to completion. What cannot be learned or acquired by effort but is within us is called the nature. What can be learned and, through effort, brought to completion is called conscious activity. This is the distinction between the nature and conscious activity. That the eyes can see and the ears can hear is human nature. But the faculty of clear sight does not exist apart from the eye, nor does the faculty of keen hearing exist apart from the ear. It is apparent that the eye's clear vision and the ear's acute hearing cannot be learned.

Mencius said, Now, human nature is good, and [when it is not] this is always a result of having lost or destroyed one's nature. I say that he was mistaken to take such a view. Now, it is human nature that, as soon as a person is born, he

departs from his original substance⁶⁹ and from his natural disposition, so that he must inevitably lose and destroy them. Seen in this way, it is apparent that human nature is evil. Those who say that the nature is good find beauty in what does not depart from the original substance and value in what does not diverge from the natural disposition. They consider that the beauty of the natural disposition and the original substance and the goodness of the mind's intentions are [inseparable from the nature] in the same way that clear sight is inseparable from the eye and keen hearing is inseparable from the ear. Hence they maintain that [the nature possesses goodness] in the same way that the eye possesses clear vision or the ear possesses keenness of hearing.

Now, it is human nature that when one is hungry he will desire satisfaction, when he is cold he will desire warmth, and when he is weary he will desire rest. This is the emotional nature of human beings. Yet, even if a person is hungry, he will not dare to be the first to eat if he is in the presence of his elders because he knows that he should yield to them. Although he is weary, he will not dare to seek rest because he knows that he should work on behalf of others. For a son to yield to his father and a younger brother to yield to his elder brother, or for a son to work on behalf of his father and a younger brother to work on behalf of his elder brother — these two acts are contrary to the nature and counter to the emotions, and yet they represent the way of filial devotion and the refinement and principle that are associated with ritual and rightness. Hence, to follow the emotional nature would mean that there would be no courtesy or humility; courtesy and humility run counter to the emotional nature. From this perspective it is apparent that human nature is evil, and that goodness is the result of conscious activity. A questioner asks: If human nature is evil, then where do ritual and rightness come from? I reply: ritual and rightness are always created by the conscious activity of the sages; essentially they are not created by human nature. Thus a potter molds clay and makes a vessel, but the vessel is created by the conscious activity of the potter and is not created by his human nature. In the same way a carpenter carves a piece of wood and makes a utensil, but the utensil is created through the conscious activity of the carpenter and is not created by his human nature. A sage gathers his thoughts and reflections, engages in conscious activity, and thus creates ritual and rightness and produces models and regulations. Hence ritual, rightness, models, and limits are created by the conscious activity of the sage and not by his human nature. . . .

When a person desires to do good he always does so because his nature is evil. A person who is shallow aspires to depth; one who is ugly aspires to beauty; one who is narrow aspires to breadth; one who is poor aspires to wealth; one who is humble aspires to esteem. Whatever one lacks in oneself he must seek

69. The word Xunzi uses here is *pu*, a term that occurs frequently in the *Daodejing* and is often translated in that context as "the uncarved block."

outside. Therefore if a person is rich, he will not aspire to wealth, and if he is esteemed, he will not long for power. What a person possesses in himself he need not seek outside. One can see from this that the reason human beings desire to do good is that their nature is evil. Now human nature is definitely devoid of ritual and rightness. Therefore, they compel themselves to study and to seek to possess them. The nature knows nothing of ritual and rightness, and therefore they reflect and ponder and seek to understand them. Thus the nature is inborn, that is all, and human beings neither possess ritual and rightness, nor do they understand them. . . .

If human nature were good, we could dispense with the sage kings and desist from the practice of ritual and rightness. Since human nature is evil, we must elevate the sages and esteem ritual and rightness. Therefore the straightening board was created because of warped wood, and the plumb line came into being because of things that are not straight. Rulers are established and ritual and rightness are illuminated because the nature is evil. From this perspective it is clear that human nature is evil and that goodness is the result of conscious activity. Wood that is straight need not wait for the straightening board to become straight; it is straight by nature. But a warped piece of wood must be laid against a straightening board, steamed, and bent into shape before it can become straight because its nature is not straight. Now since human nature is evil, people must await ordering by the sage kings and transformation through ritual and rightness, and only then do they attain order and accord with goodness. From this perspective, it is clear that human nature is evil and that goodness is the result of conscious activity. . . .

Someone may ask whether ritual and rightness and sustained conscious activity are not themselves human nature, which would explain why the sage is able to create them. I reply that this is not the case. A potter may mold clay and produce an earthen pot, but how could molding pots out of clay be the potter's nature? A carpenter may carve wood and produce utensils, but how could carving utensils out of wood be the carpenter's nature? The sage stands in the same relation to ritual and rightness as the potter to the things he molds and produces. How then could ritual and rightness and sustained conscious activity be the original human nature?

In their human nature, Yao and Shun were one with Jie and Zhi, just as the noble person and the lesser person are, by nature, one. How could it be that ritual and rightness and sustained conscious activity are human nature? If this were the case, what reason would there be to honor Yao or Yu or to honor the noble person? People honor Yao, Yu, and the noble person because of their ability to transform their nature, to generate conscious activity, and, through this conscious activity, to create ritual and rightness. Thus the sage necessarily stands in the same relation to ritual and rightness and conscious activity as does the potter to the things he molds and produces. From this perspective, how could it be that ritual and rightness and sustained conscious activity are human nature? The reason people despise Jie, or the lesser person, is that they follow

their nature, indulge their emotions, and are content to give free rein to their passions, so that their conduct is marked by greed and contentiousness. Therefore it is clear that human nature is evil and that goodness is the result of conscious activity. . . .

"The man in the street can become a Yu."⁷⁰ What does this mean? I reply, What made the sage emperor Yu a Yu was the fact that he practiced humaneness and rightness and took uprightness as his standard. This being so, humaneness, rightness, and proper standards must be based upon principles that can be known and practiced. Any man in the street has the natural endowment needed to understand humaneness, rightness, proper standards, and uprightness and the ability to practice humaneness, rightness, proper standards, and uprightness. Therefore it is clear that he can become a Yu.

Is one to suppose that humaneness, rightness, proper standards, and uprightness are not based upon principles that can be known and practiced? If that were so, then even a Yu could not have understood and practiced them. Is one to suppose that the man in the street does not have the natural endowment needed to understand them or the ability to put them into practice? If that were so, then the man in the street, within his family, could not understand the rightness that pertains between father and son and, without, could not comprehend the correctness that pertains between ruler and subject. But this is not the case. The man in the street, within, can understand the rightness that pertains between father and son and, without, can understand the correctness between ruler and subject. Thus it is clear that he has in him the natural endowment needed to understand and the talent to put them into practice. Now if the man in the street takes this endowment that enables him to know and this talent that enables him to act and applies them to the principles of humaneness and rightness, which are knowable, and the practice of humaneness and rightness, which is practicable, then it is clear that he can become a Yu. If the man in the street applies himself to training and study, concentrates his mind, unifies his will, and pondering and examining things carefully, continues his efforts over a long period of time, accumulating good acts without stop, then he can penetrate to a spiritual understanding and form a triad with Heaven and Earth. The sage is a person who has arrived where he has through the accumulation of good acts.

["Xing'e," *Xunzi yinde*, 86-89 — IB]

THE ZUOZHUAN

There are many mysteries surrounding the text of the *Zuozhuan*, including its authorship and its original form. *Zuozhuan* or *Zuoshi zhuan* means "The Commentary

70. This was apparently an old saying. Cf. *Mencius* 6B:2: "Cao Jiao asked, 'Is it true that all human beings are capable of becoming a Yao or a Shun?' Mencius said, 'It is true.'"