

A Translation of Chapters 59 and 63 of the *Daodejing* 道德經 and their Annotations by Shi Deqing

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1. Original text and translation of chapter 59 of the *Daodejing* 道德經

1.1 Original text

治人、事天、莫若嗇。夫惟嗇，是謂早復。早復，謂之重積德。重積德，則無不克。無不克，則莫知其極。莫知其極，可以有國。有國之母，可以長久。是謂深根固蒂，長生久視之道。

1.2 Translation

Whether reducing one's desire for material wealth or pursuing for natural virtues are inferior to not using mind purposely. Only not using mind purposely can be called returning (from an error of no great extent) speedily. Returning speedily means to focus on doing good deeds. Hence, merit is accumulated and anything can be overcome. Thus, one's extreme limit is unknown and the world can be entrusted to that person. Therefore, what exists before the world can last permanently. And this is called the Dao, which has a firm foundation, unshakable, long-lived, and never-senile.

2. Original text and translation of Shi Deqing's 釋德清 annotation of chapter 59

2.1 Original text – Part A

此言聖人離欲復性，以為外王內聖之道也。嗇，有而不用之意。老子所言人天，莊子解之甚明。如曰，不以人害天，不以物傷性。蓋人，指物欲。天，指性德也。言治

人事天莫若嗇者。然嗇，即復性工夫也。調聖人在位，貴為天子，富有四海。其子女玉帛，聲色貨利，充盈於前。而聖人以道自守，視之若無，澹然無欲，雖有而不用。

2.2 Translation of Part A

This chapter states about the sages keeping away from desire and regaining their natural virtues, and thus, the sages take this as their ways of self-cultivation and dominance of the world. ‘嗇’ has the meaning of not using. Zhuangzi explained clearly what Laozi referred to as ‘人天’. As said, ‘不以人害天，不以物傷性’. ‘人’ refers to the desire for material enjoyment, and ‘天’ refers to the virtues of human nature. As for the ‘治人事天莫若嗇’, ‘嗇’ means the attainments of restoring one’s natural virtues. It says that the sages are in a dominant position, and their status is the destined governor who own the world. There are many treasures and beauties in front of them. However, the sages follow the Dao, and see those things as if they did not. Their minds are peaceful and without desire. Even though those things are readily available, the sages do not take them.

2.3 Original text – Part B

所謂堯舜有天下而不與，此以嗇治人也。聖人并包四海，智周萬物。不以私智勞慮，而傷其性真。所謂毋搖爾精，毋勞爾形，毋使汝思慮營營。蓋有智而不用其智，此以嗇事天也。復性工夫，莫速於此。故曰是謂之早復。此復字，是復卦不遠復之意。言其速也。又如一日克己復禮，天下歸仁之意。

2.4 Translation of Part B

It is said that Yao and Shun own the world but do not enjoy it, which is their way of governing people. The sages are omniscient and they bear the world in their minds. The sages will not harm their innocent nature by bothering to think for themselves. As said, ‘don’t waste

energy, don't get tired, don't think too much for yourself'.¹ Having wisdom but do not use it for oneself, this is called '以齋事天'. There is no quicker way to restore one's natural virtues than this. And thus, it is called '早復'. This character '復', which refers to Fu Gua, means returning from an error of no great extent. That is to say, the speed (of the restoring) is very fast. This is very similar to 'if one can for one day subdue oneself and return to propriety, all under heaven will have benevolent virtues'².

2.5 Original text – Part C

莊子曰，賊莫大於德有心。然有心之德施於外，故輕而不厚。復性之功，天德日全，不期復而自復，所謂復見天地之心。故曰早復謂之重積德。能重積德，則無不克矣。此克字，乃克敵之克。即顏子克己之克。以性德日厚，則物欲消融。而所過者化，無物與敵。則其德高明廣大，民無得而稱焉。

2.6 Translation of Part C

Zhuangzi said, 'Of all things that injure (men) there is none greater than the practising of virtue with the purpose of the mind'³. If having the virtue with the purpose of the mind when getting along with others, the relationship with others would be shallow and not deep. When devoting ourselves to restore our natural virtues, our virtues will become more fulfilled every day. It will restore naturally without expectation, and it is so called re-recognizing the mind of heaven and earth. Therefore Laozi said '早復' means to attach importance to doing good deeds and accumulating merit. If focusing on doing good things, there will be nothing which cannot be defeated. This character '克' means to conquer something (weaknesses). And it is

¹ Guo Xiang 郭象, *Yingyin Wenyuange Siku Quanshu: Zhuangzi Zhu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書:莊子註 (Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 1986), volume.1056, p.57. Trans. by myself.

² Trans. by myself with reference to James Legge, *The Chinese Classics I-Confucian Analects-The Great Learning-The Doctrine of The Mean* (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2011), p.250.

³ Guo Xiang 郭象, *Yingyin Wenyuange Siku Quanshu: Zhuangzi Zhu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書:莊子註 (Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 1986), volume.1056, p.159. Trans. by James Legge.

also the character which is used to describe Yan Yuan's subduing of himself. The natural virtues of one self's are thickened day by day, and thus, the desire for material wealth is gradually disappearing. And therefore, everyone who passes by will get educated and helped, and no one can be an enemy of the sages. Hence, the virtues of the sages are so brilliant and widespread that people cannot find suitable words to praise them.

2.7 Original text – Part D

故曰無不克，則莫知其極。極，至極，猶涯量也。此內聖之德既全，雖無心於天下，乃可以託於天下。故曰莫知其極，可以有國。此內聖之道，真以治身，其緒餘以為天下國家。故曰可以有國。此道先天地不為老，後天地不為終。故曰可以長久。古人所言深根固蒂長生久視之道者，如此而已。結句蓋古語。老子引證，以結其意耳。

2.8 Translation of Part D

Therefore, it says '無不克，則莫知其極'. '極' means extreme limits, and it can also be said as an edge. Now that one's inner virtues are complete like the sages, although having no desire to become the monarch of the world, the world can be entrusted to that person. And therefore, it says '莫知其極，可以有國'. This Dao of having the same virtues as the sages inside is real enough for self-cultivation, and those remaining (virtues) can be used to benefit the world. Therefore, it says '可以有國'. This 'Dao' exists before heaven and earth but is not old, and it exists after heaven and earth without an end. And therefore, it says '可以長久'. This is just what the ancients called the Dao, which has a firm foundation, unshakable, long-lived, and never-senile. The ending sentence is an archaism and Laozi quoted it to end his opinion.

3. Original text and translation of chapter 63 of the *Daodejing* 道德經

3.1 Original text

為無為。事無事。味無味。大，小。多，少。報怨以德。圖難於其易。為大於其細。
天下難事，必作於易。天下大事，必作於細。是以聖人終不為大，故能成其大。夫輕
諾必寡信。多易必多難。是以聖人猶難之。故終無難。

3.2 Translation

Cultivate oneself and let things take their own course. Do not think for oneself when doing things. Taste the deliciousness from the tastelessness. Regard the smallest as the biggest, and the least as the most. Return fairness for hatred. Consider the simple aspects when facing difficulties. Start with the small parts when encountering big affairs. Difficulties in the world should be started handling from the simple aspects. Major events of the world should be dealt with from the small parts. Never considering for the sake of their own reputation or status, so the sages can achieve their supreme states. People who promise casually often fail to keep them, and people who often take things too easily will surely encounter many difficulties. Therefore, things that are easy for the ordinary people to do will be taken much more seriously by the sages, so it is no more difficult in the end.

4. Original text and translation of Shi Deqing's 釋德清 annotation of chapter 63

4.1 Original text – Part A

此言聖人入道之要妙，示人以真切工夫也。凡有為，謂智巧。有事，謂功業。有味，謂功名利欲。此三者，皆世人之所尚。然道本至虛而無為。至靜而無事。至淡而無味。獨聖人以道為懷，去彼取此。故所為者無為。所事者無事。所味者無味。故世人皆以名位為大，以利祿為多而取之。然道至虛微淡泊無物，皆以為小少，故棄而不取。

4.2 Translation of Part A

This chapter states the wonder and important point of the sages' practising of achieving the Dao, and demonstrates their clear practising to people. All behaviours of people are related to strategy and skill. Things they bear in mind are meritorious deeds. What tasty for them is achievement, fame, self-interest and desire. These three are the favourite of ordinary people. However, the Dao itself is with no attachment and letting things take their own course. It is extremely quiet and not disturbed by mundane things, extremely watery and tasteless. Only the sages bear the Dao in their minds, they take what the Dao really is and let go of the things favoured by ordinary people. Hence, what the sages do are letting things take their own course, what they concern about have nothing to do with themselves, what they think tasty is actually tasteless. Ordinary people think that reputation and status are very important, and they are very eager for wealth and official post and strive to obtain them. However, the Dao is with no attachment and (the sages) regard all (favoured by ordinary people) as small and few. And thus, (they) discard and do not take them.

4.3 Original text – Part B

聖人去功與名，釋智遺形，而獨與道游。是去其大多，而取其小少。故以至小為至大，至少為至多。故大其小，而多其少也。試觀世人報怨以德，則可知矣。何也。且世之人，無論貴賤，事最大而難解者，怨也。然怨之始也，偶因一言之失，一事之差。遂相構結，以至殺身滅名，亡國敗家之禍。甚至有積怨深憤，父子子孫，累世相報而未已者。

4.4 Translation of Part B

The sages discard their meritorious deeds and reputation, and are no longer attached to their knowledge and bodies. They walk peacefully in the world with the Dao in their minds. They get rid of what favoured by ordinary people and take what looked down upon by them. Thus, the sages regard the smallest as the biggest, and the least as the most. Therefore, the

sages think highly of things that ordinary people ignore and treasure things that ordinary people consider to be worthless. It can be known by observing that people return good for hatred. Why is this so? No matter their status is high or low, the biggest and most difficult thing for ordinary people to get rid of is resentment. However, the beginning of resentment may be an accidental verbal mistake or a small error in one thing. And so, they may retaliate against each other, causing the disasters of losing lives and reputations, and the destruction of countries and families. There are even those who have deep accumulated rancour, which is passed from father to son and son to grandson, and they continue to retaliate against each other for generations.

4.5 Original text – Part C

此舉世古今之恆情也。豈非其事極大且多哉。惟聖人則不然。察其怨之未結也，本不有。始結也，事甚小。既結也，以為無與於己。故無固執不化之心，亦無有我以與物為匹敵。其既往也，事已消之，求其朕而不可得。以此觀之，則任彼之怨，在我了無報之之心矣。然彼且以為有怨，在我全無報復之心，彼必以我為德矣。

4.6 Translation of Part C

This is the unchanging emotion of the whole world from ancient to modern. It is because the things people are chasing for are huge and of a great amount. Only the sages are not like this. They can observe the possible causes of resentment and avoid them before it forms. When the resentment was just beginning to form, the matter was far from serious. If the resentment has formed, the sages will not bring their emotions into it. Therefore, the sages have neither a stubborn and inflexible mind, nor a self that is opposed to things. Now that the matter has passed and disappeared, I no longer exist at that moment. From this perspective, no matter how much the person resents me, I have no intention of revenge at all. When one

still thinks there is resentment between us, but I do not have a hint of revenge, that person will definitely be moved and admire my virtue.

4.7 Original text – Part D

是所謂報怨以德，非謂曲意將德以報怨也。孔子以直報怨，正謂此耳。斯則怨乃事之至大而多，人人必有難釋者。殊不知有至易者存焉。是所謂為無為，事無事，大其小，而多其少也。天下之事，何獨於怨，而事事皆然。

4.8 Translation of Part D

This so called ‘報怨以德’ does not mean returning good for hatred to flatter others against one’s own will. Confucius returns fairness for hatred, and that’s exactly what it states. The resentment is because people care about so many huge things, and everyone must have things that are hard to release. They scarcely realize that there exists the simplest way. That is letting things take their own course, doing things without thinking for oneself, discarding what favoured by ordinary people and taking what looked down upon by them. Everything in the world should be done like this, not just dealing with resentment.

4.9 Original text – Part E

故天下之事至難者，有至易存焉。至大者，有至細存焉。人不見其易與細，而於難處圖之，大處為之，必終無成。苟能圖之於易，而為之於細，鮮不濟者。以天下難事必作於易。天下大事必作於細，故也。作者，始起也。是以聖人虛心體道，退藏於密。跡愈隱而道愈光，澤流終古而與天地參。此所謂終不為大，故能成其大也。

4.10 Translation of Part E

Therefore, there is the simplest aspect for the most difficult thing in the world, and there is the smallest part for the largest thing as well. People ignore its simple and small parts, but

start from the difficult and big aspects, and they will achieve nothing in the end. If people can consider from the simple aspects, and start with the small parts, rarely of them will fail it. The reasons are that, difficulties in the world should be started handling from the simple aspects, and the major events of the world should be dealt with from the small parts. The ‘作’ means starting from. Therefore, the sages comprehend the Dao with a humble mind, and step back to live in unknown places. The more hidden the traces of the sages are, the more brilliant their Dao will be. Their education is eternally passed on and the sages can be integrated with heaven and earth. Never considering for the sake of their own reputation or status, so the sages can achieve their supreme states.

4.11 Original text – Part F

老子言及至此，抑恐世人把易字當作容易輕易字看。故誠之曰，夫輕諾必寡信，多易必多難。謂世人不可將事作容易看也。且容易許人，謂之輕諾。凡輕許者，必食言而寡信。見事之容易而輕為者，必有始而無終。是故易字，非容易也。世人之所難，而聖人之所易。世人之所易，而聖人之所難。

4.12 Translation of Part F

When speaking to this point, for fear of people regarding the character ‘易’ as easy, Laozi further warns that ‘夫輕諾必寡信，多易必多難’. It means people should not take things too easily. And ‘輕諾’ means easy to make promises to others. Anyone who promises casually often breaks their words and has few credibility. People who see things simple and act easily will not stick to the end. Therefore, the character ‘易’ does not mean easy. What ordinary people find difficult (such as keeping promises) is easy for the sages. What ordinary people find easy to do will make the sages think twice.

4.13 Original text – Part G

故曰聖人猶難之，故終無難。猶，應作尤。古字通用。更也。謂世人之所甚易者，而聖人更難之，故終不難耳。觀夫文王兢兢，周公業業，戒慎恐懼乎不睹不聞，皆聖人之所難也。余少誦圖難於易為大於細二語，只把作事看。及余入山學道，初為極難，苦心不可言。及得用心之訣，則見其甚易。然初之難，即今之易。今之易，即初之難。然治心如此，推之以及天下之事皆然。此聖人示人入道之真切工夫也。志道者勉之。

4.14 Translation of Part G

Therefore, it says ‘聖人猶難之，故終無難’. The character ‘猶’ should be regarded as ‘尤’. Some ancient Chinese characters can be used interchangeably. And that means more. Things that are easy for the ordinary people to do will be taken more seriously by the sages, so it is no more difficult in the end. We can observe the cautious of King Wen of Zhou and the conscientious of Duke of Zhou, and their more vigilant and cautious about themselves in places where no one sees them, and their fear of selfish thoughts that appear in their minds, and these are all the places that the sages pay special attention to. When I was young, I read the two sentences ‘圖難於易為大於細’, and I only focused on the method of doing things. When I later lived in seclusion to learn the Dao, it was extremely difficult at the beginning, and my painstaking efforts could not be explained in words. After I got the method to use my mind, the previous content became very easy. Those initial difficulties now seem to be easy. However, this ease has now become another problem to be overcome. Nevertheless, this is the way to cultivate one’s own ideology and morality, and it is also the same for other things in the world. This is the sages demonstrating the real practise of achieving the Dao to people. Those who are committed to the Dao should make great efforts on it.

5. Commentary

I tried literal translation, but it is difficult. Sometimes my literal translation seems strange and I worry that the reader will not understand it. But when I paraphrase, I worry that adding too much of my own understanding would lead to a deviation from the original text, which would limit or even misinterpret the meaning of the sages. And maybe I have done that already. The degree is difficult to control.

There are two places in the original text that I am confused about. One is the ‘有國之母’ in the original text of chapter 59 of the *Daodejing*. The other is the ‘事無事’ in the Part D of Shi Deqing’s 釋德清 annotation of chapter 63. I am not sure about the exact meaning of the two.

6. Reflection

Regarding the translation this time, the first thing I learned is the way of handling difficulties and big affairs taught by Laozi. In the past, I tended to start from the difficult points, hoping to relax a little later. However, as the original text says, it is easy for to lose confidence and enthusiasm, and sometimes I just give up halfway. It is indeed a more reasonable way to start from the simple parts while handling difficult things.

The second is the Venerable Master Hanshan's teaching on mind cultivation. I admire the great efforts the Venerable Master Hanshan made for learning the Dao when he was young. I am also in a totally primary learning stage, but my level of concentration is far from that of the master. I am ashamed that my endowment is far inferior to the ancients, and I am far less diligent than the ancients as well. What the master says about the changes in the mental state after achieving something also warns me. Regardless of whether the things I will face are big or small, difficult or easy, I will always maintain a sincere and respectful attitude like a beginner.

7. Bibliography

7.1 Books

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