

THE GREAT LEARNING

大學

AND

THE DOCTRINE OF THE MEAN

中庸

TRANSLATION, COMMENTARY, AND NOTES

ROBERT ENO
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PREFATORY NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

These translations of *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean* are revisions of versions that I used for many years in teaching classes at the college level. The commentary conveys ideas that I introduced in course lectures, with the addition of more detailed analyses of textual issues pertinent to these two small classics, particularly in the case of *The Great Learning*.

My principal goal in preparing these translations, in addition to saving students the cost of paying for copyrighted materials and eliminating the need to use class time to argue with other scholars' translations, was to find a way to convey the general coherence of these two texts, which, like many Confucian texts, often seem dull and preachy to students without background in Chinese thought, perhaps especially when read in English translation.

My base text for both *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean* is Zhu Xi's *Sishu zhangzhu* 四書章句. Although I rely on Zhu Xi's critical editions of the texts and have frequently benefited from his commentary, I do not adopt in my interpretations the Neo-Confucian metaphysical framework that is so important to Zhu's thinking. In a number of other respects, specified in the introductions to the texts and running comments, I have proposed modifications to Zhu's editing work. Moreover, I have made explicit, through a new section numbering scheme, the overall structure of *The Great Learning* entailed in Zhu's edition, and added to Zhu's chapter divisions of *The Doctrine of the Mean* an outline framework, intended to guide readers through the logic of that text.

The commentary and notes in this version are basically an expansion of lecture materials, rather than of scholarly work. Neither of these two texts was ever the focus of my own research, and there is a wealth of scholarship concerning them with which I am not familiar. But introducing the texts to undergraduates over several decades forced me to search for their coherence and importance, so that I could convey their central points clearly and concisely enough to pass along to students some of the interest and excitement I felt as I came to know the texts better and better. Since all the courses I taught on Chinese philosophy concerned the pre-Qin and early Han eras, part of this personal process of rediscovery involved distancing myself from my own earlier understanding of these texts, initially based on the interpretations of Wing-tsit Chan and later much enriched by the approach of Tu Wei-ming, scholars whose orientations towards the texts I felt were shaped by intellectual commitments to much later Neo-Confucian or New Confucian perspectives. While this type of orientation is entirely appropriate, given the seminal role of Neo-Confucianism in establishing the authority of the texts, it was not germane to the framework of my own field and the courses I taught. Part of the pleasure I found in seeking meaning in these texts lay in exploring their relation to late Warring States Confucian thought, free of meanings that animated medieval interpretations. An equal part, however, was thereafter discovering how insightful the great Neo-Confucian scholars had been, and how much they still had to teach me about the structure and content of the texts. The commentary and notes here are largely a record of that intellectual process, but as scholarship, my relative unfamiliarity with recent research by specialists in Asia and the West limits the value of what I can contribute.

An alternative version of this translation, intended for use by high school and college instructors, appears online as [*The Great Learning and The Doctrine of the Mean: An Online Teaching Translation*](#). The "teaching translation" is differently formatted and more lightly glossed, and does not include the commentary sections.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Great Learning (*Daxue* 大學) and *The Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong* 中庸) have been among the most influential texts in the intellectual history of China. Short, pithy overviews of early Confucian doctrine, for many centuries these two texts were memorized at an early stage by the male children of families with aspirations and means adequate to provide their sons with an education. Portions of the texts spread through popular culture on a broader scope. Although the prestige of other texts, such as the *Analects of Confucius* (*Lunyu*), *Mencius*, *Yijing*, and other classics may have been greater in some respects, the succinctness of *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean* gave them a special role in shaping the template of understanding through which the educated class understood traditional norms of ethical and political discourse and commitment.

It was not always so. Although these texts were composed in the ancient era, they were originally preserved not as independent documents, but as chapters of a large compendium of texts, many concerned with forms and interpretations of ritual, assembled during the second century BCE: the *Liji* 禮記, or *Book of Rites*. In that sprawling anthology, the tiny *Great Learning* was listed as chapter 42, the somewhat longer *Doctrine of the Mean* as chapter 31. While the *Liji* as a whole came to be regarded as authoritative canon during the Former Han era (202 BCE – 9 CE), these two chapters were not initially singled out for special note. The earliest extant commentary on the *Liji*, by the Latter Han scholar Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200 CE), accords them no special treatment, and Zheng's comments are, in general, routine. However, in the case of *The Doctrine of the Mean*, the historical text *Hanshu* 漢書 records in its bibliographical chapter the existence of an *Explanation of the Doctrine of the Mean*, now lost, under the category of "ritual texts." This tells us that by the first century CE, the particular interest of *The Doctrine of the Mean* had been noted. Nevertheless, it does not appear that either of the two texts was more broadly recognized as having special prestige for many centuries thereafter.

There is no indication in the *Liji* that these two texts were ascribed to any identified author. All other texts in the *Liji* are anonymous, as was the norm in early China, where even texts named for a specific thinker were generally composed by others. However, over time it came to be understood that *The Great Learning* had been written by Zeng Shen 曾參 (Zengzi, c. 505-436 BCE), a prominent junior disciple of Confucius, and that *The Doctrine of the Mean* was the work of Confucius's grandson, Zisi 子思 (c. 483-402 BCE). These two men were among the most revered masters honored by the Confucians of the pre-Imperial period, and in the *Mencius*, they are the Confucians whom Mencius (c. 390-305 BCE) most frequently cites as authorities, after Confucius himself. Although these authorial attributions were almost universally accepted in traditional China, scholars today generally view them as inventions devised to justify the prestige that the texts acquired.

The rise in attention to the texts parallels the decline of Han-style Confucianism, with its heavy reliance on esoteric cosmological models and arts of prognostication, and increasing attention to individual ethical commitment, often associated with the approach of Mencius. The best known Tang Dynasty innovators in Confucian doctrine were among the first to draw attention to these two *Liji* chapters: Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) cited *The Great Learning* as authoritative tradition, and 李翱 (774-836) wrote on *The Doctrine of the Mean*. But the status of the texts was most dramatically altered from the 11th century CE, when they were freshly interpreted by the founders of the Neo-Confucian movement.

The most important contributors to this reassessment were the brother philosophers Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032-1085) and Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107), the most influential of the “Five Masters of the Northern Song,” and the Southern Song era Neo-Confucian synthesizer, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200). As discussed in detail below, *The Great Learning*, in the form preserved in the *Liji*, was a problem text, truncated by lost fragments and distorted by editorial disarrangement. The Cheng brothers made initial attempts to restore the text through critical editing, showing elements of coherence where they had been missing before, with Cheng Yi’s editorial work being of particular importance. Zhu Xi built upon the Cheng brothers’ work with these texts, as he did in so many other respects. In particular, he significantly improved on Cheng Yi’s critical edition of *The Great Learning*, developing a theory of the text that brought out its internal logic and illuminated its ethical insights. Zhu also worked to bring out the coherence of *The Doctrine of the Mean*, providing it with chapter divisions still used today.

While the Cheng brothers and others had extracted the two *Liji* chapters for special treatment, Zhu went further. He incorporated them as parts of a set of unified commentaries on what he called “The Four Books,” combining them with the *Analects* and *Mencius* to create a new canonical core of the most authoritative works of early Confucianism. Zhu’s commentaries to these works, which particularly acknowledged his debts to Cheng Yi, reframed them in terms of Neo-Confucian ethical and metaphysical theory, enhancing the credibility of this approach with rigorous philological scholarship. When Zhu’s Neo-Confucian approach was endorsed by the Imperial Yuan Dynasty rulers as a new orthodoxy in the 14th century, his commentary editions of the Confucian canon became the standard basis of the civil service examinations, which formed the gateway to official position, wealth, and social status for the next half millennium. The Four Books became the gateway into that syllabus. In this way, *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean* came to be treated as seminal Confucian texts.

Intellectual context: ancient philosophical sources

The translations here owe a great debt to the Song Neo-Confucians. Zhu Xi’s critical edition of *The Great Learning* and his thirty-three chapter division of *The Doctrine of the Mean* are adopted as base texts here, though potential emendations are noted. However, the interpretations that govern translation choices often diverge from the philosophical orientation of Zhu’s

commentary, with its Neo-Confucian orientation, seeking reference points in other Confucian texts of the Warring States era (453-221 BCE), particularly the *Mencius* and the *Xunzi*.

The influence of the *Mencius* on these texts has never been in doubt. Both *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean* draw on the portrait of human nature that Mencius was famous for, one that held that all people are uniformly endowed with moral senses by Tian 天, the Zhou high divinity, generally portrayed with a mix of attributes appropriate for an anthropomorphic god and for a naturally operating cosmic force. *The Great Learning* places great emphasis on how individuals can reconnect with the spontaneous operation of these moral senses, while *The Doctrine of the Mean* stresses that these senses are held in common, and therefore serve as the key political connection between rulers and their people. Together, both texts enlarge on the idea, found throughout the *Mencius*, that self-cultivation and social leadership to create a perfect world order equally depend on responsiveness to the ethical dispositions that constitute the distinguishing characteristic of humankind. (The connection between the *Mencius* and *The Doctrine of the Mean* is also signaled in simple textual overlap: sections (d) and (e) of the *Doctrine's* Chapter 20 appear almost verbatim as *Mencius* 4A.12.)

Another text that has become significant in understanding the Mencian tradition is the *Wuxing* 五行, or “The Five Forms of Conduct,” a text that has been archaeologically recovered in two different versions in recent decades, one from a grave dated c. 300 BCE and the other from one closed in 168 BCE, the latter including an early commentary. Although “The Five Forms of Conduct” is not an exceptional text, its title is noted in the *Xunzi* as the characteristic doctrine of a Confucian faction he identifies as the school of Zisi and Mencius. Scholars therefore treat “The Five Forms of Conduct” as a newly available means of understanding the tradition we treat as Mencian, often referred to as the Si-Meng Tradition. As will be indicated in the commentaries to *The Great Learning* and, especially, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, resemblances exist between “The Five Forms of Conduct” and those texts.

Although it is clear that the dominant intellectual tradition for both these texts is the Mencian tradition, there are significant indications of elements characteristic of the school of Xunzi (c. 320-235 BCE) as well, particularly in *The Doctrine of the Mean*. Although during the third century BCE the Mencian and Xunzian schools of thought were in opposition on the issue of the moral nature (*xing* 性) of human beings, and the question of whether our ethical dispositions are innate or learned, in many other respects they were aligned or complementary, and *The Doctrine of the Mean*, in particular, seems to draw on both. Details concerning elements that bear on this issue are introduced in the notes, but one case is worthy of mention here. A shared feature of *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean* is the occurrence in each of the somewhat cryptic phrase, “the *junzi* is cautious of his solitude” (*junzi shen qi du* 君子慎其獨). This is a phrase we find also in “The Five Forms of Action,” which underscores the link with the Mencian tradition. However, the *Mencius* itself never employs this phrase. Yet it is found in the *Xunzi*, and there it appears in a context that resonates more closely than do any passages in “The Five Forms of Action” with the language of *The Doctrine of the Mean*. (A detailed discussion appears in the notes to the initial chapter of that text).

Thus the two texts here seem to reflect a confluence of Confucian themes that most clearly reflect the intellectual environment of the third century BCE, the years following the lifetime of Mencius, when the philosophy of Xunzi was coalescing.

Historical context: dating the texts

As mentioned above, *The Doctrine of the Mean* seems to draw upon elements of the Confucian tradition associated with the *Xunzi*, a text that is no earlier than the third century BCE. Although this does not mean that *The Doctrine of the Mean* postdates the *Xunzi*, it highlights a problem in the dating of the text, one that *The Great Learning* shares. Both these texts are highly sophisticated *summa* of Warring States era Confucian doctrine, reflecting the mature development of Confucian thought over those centuries, yet their authorship is traditionally ascribed to Confucian disciples of the fifth century BCE, when Confucianism was in its earliest phases.

It makes far better sense to recognize these texts as anonymous works, attributed to their supposed authors only centuries after their initial circulation. The third century BCE intellectual environment they seem to reflect is probably our best dating guide, and there are, in fact, strong arguments for viewing both these texts as products of the eras *following* the end of the Warring States period, either the Qin Dynasty era (221-208 BCE), the initial decades of the Han Dynasty, following its founding in 202 BCE, or the time of chaos in between. A Qin Dynasty date would have been rejected out of hand by traditional scholars, because it was understood that the Qin was an era of Confucian persecution and a time when no new textual production would have been tolerated. But contemporary scholarship has cast doubt on the accuracy of this celebrated portrait, which was based on a picture painted by Confucian sources composed after the fall of the discredited Qin, a picture that benefitted the Confucians of the early Han by portraying their school as a victim of the Qin.

This is not the place to enter into detailed examination of the Confucian role during the Qin and early Han (I have [posted elsewhere online](#) some extended, informal reflections on the evidence for these matters). The short summary is that Confucians were certainly active at the Qin court, and were probably employed in the state-directed creation of literary collections, created or compiled to preserve the teachings of the past for consultation by Qin rulers of the present, some of which likely survive to this day, portions of the *Liji*, perhaps, among them. It is entirely plausible to picture the current texts of *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean* as products of these efforts, and it is also possible that amidst the collapse of the Qin and the chaos that followed, the texts were composed to serve as guides for a successor ruling house.

While a reading of historical evidence unfiltered by the narrative of Confucians as Qin victims opens up the possibility of Confucian literary creation in the early years of the new empire, we also find in both *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean* internal evidence of composition after the establishment of the Qin. For example, by far the longest citation in *The Great Learning* comes from the “Oath of Qin,” the *Book of Documents* chapter that celebrates

the ruling tradition of the pre-Imperial Qin state, and it foregrounds an ideology of dramatic political change with its call for radical renewal: “Truly new each day; new each and every day; again, new each day,” a theme that echoes the revolutionary approach of the Qin after 221 BCE. *The Doctrine of the Mean* says, “In the world today, carts are built with axles of standard length, texts are written in script of standard style, conduct is performed in roles of standard form.” All these are policies imposed by the Qin Imperial state in its effort to erase the regional differences that had characterized the Eastern Zhou era, after the fall of the unified Zhou empire in 771 BCE. In the detailed notes to these translations, additional points that seem to reflect a post-Warring States era date of these texts are indicated.

Thus it seems most likely that these two texts were composed after the unification of China under the Qin in 221 BCE. This conforms with the evidence that the texts were composed in full awareness of the intellectual developments within Confucianism during the third century BCE.

Format of the translations

Both *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean* are short, tightly structured texts. In Chinese the texts taken together include just over 5000 characters (about the length of one of the seven books of the *Mencius*), *The Great Learning* including about 1750 and *The Doctrine of the Mean* about twice that total. Nevertheless, because much of the language is formulaic and English translation lacks the taut rhetoric of the Chinese, approximately doubling the word count, it is easy for readers to lose their way. For that reason, I have added structural indications throughout these translations, tracking the outline of the texts by inserting explanatory section titles in gray typeface. In the case of *The Great Learning*, although these section divisions track Zhu Xi’s chapter divisions, I have use a numbering system that is not standard in English translations in the hope of adding greater clarity than simple consecutive enumeration can provide. For *The Doctrine of the Mean*, I have superimposed my own understanding of the text outline in a set of nine section divisions that differ from the standard thirty-three chapter division that Zhu Xi devised. I have, however, retained Zhu Xi’s chapter numbering to allow easy comparison with the Chinese text and other translations.

Further discussion of general issues appears in the specific introductions to each text, below, and in the commentary and notes to individual sections.

THE GREAT LEARNING

INTRODUCTION TO *THE GREAT LEARNING*

The Great Learning is a beginner's handbook in how to perfect oneself ethically and become capable of transforming the world into a universal utopia. It shares with the thought of all early Confucianism a boundless optimism about the unlimited potential for human self-perfection and social transformation. The opening sentence of the text sets the standards for that transformation. It pictures perfect virtue in individual leaders of society as the engine that can rejuvenate human society, altering the behavior of others as though inhabiting the world with a fresh population, reaching a state unblemished by immorality. This vision is then broken down into eight stages of personal and political development that are the practical means to accomplish it. If the end goals seem excessively idealistic, the stages are thought through pragmatically, identifying a small number of key principles for self-cultivation and offering ways to think about them that are down to earth: ideas that can motivate sustained effort and that address key features of personal and social maturity in ways that can help people leverage personal discipline and become socially authoritative.

In this way, *The Great Learning* is not intended as ethical theory: it is a self-help manual for the aspiring ethical actor, or *junzi* 君子, the term that denotes persons of recognized moral authority and accomplishment. While the utopian goals of the text, expressed in its initial sections and portrayed again at its close, may seem unrealistic to us, the central portions of the text can and were used as a practical guide by generations of people in traditional China, and constitute moral exercises that any person can with profit consider. The theoretical basis of this training lies in the Mencian claim that all people share an innate sense of morality that is largely identical in all of us. Without debating this proposition in detail, it is probably not controversial to grant that for some range of dispositions and responses that we customarily view as ethical, such as a dependent attachment to parents and tendency to obey them, people, like other species of conscious organisms, share intrinsic characteristics that uniformly predispose them in certain directions. Nor are many of us likely to object to a modification of the Mencian claim that argues that within any culture, a more extended set of ethical dispositions may be acquired through early processes of socialization to such a degree that by the point that a child is ready for the type of formal education provided by *The Great Learning*, those dispositions may present to the individual as if they were spontaneous, universal to all people, and therefore innate.

This is the raw material on which *The Great Learning* seeks to build. The combination of dispositions to act towards others in certain ways that society conventionally judges to be good are pictured as innate characteristics of our cognitive minds and affective feelings, a combination that Confucian texts refer to as the "heart" (*xin* 心), and our hearts are understood to have been structured by a divine force, Tian 天 (often translated as "Heaven"), which endows us with these dispositions for a purpose: the creation of a perfectly ethical world. Given this theory, *The Great Learning's* basic message to those who use it as a self-help guide is simply this: *You already know how to be moral; all you need to learn is how to turn that knowledge into action.* That is what *The Great Learning* can teach you.

For Mencian Confucianism, the reason we are, in fact, not spontaneous moral actors is because our moral nature is not all we are. Other elements of our natural endowment draw us in other directions through tendencies that are self-regarding, rather than other-regarding. Our appetites, our fears, our individual biases, our distance from other people: all these obscure our moral dispositions or compete with them for our attention and obedience. *The Great Learning* is a primer in being aware of these impediments to realizing our innate moral potential and starting on the path to overcoming them. It is often observed that Confucianism is a Golden Rule philosophy, its cardinal virtue of “humanity” (*ren* 仁) resting on the formula of “reciprocity” (*shu* 恕): Do not do to others what you would not wish done to you, a formula we find in the *Analects*, *Mencius*, and in *The Great Learning* (II.B.6 and II.B.7-8). There are many Golden Rule philosophies in world history – who doesn’t approve of the Golden Rule? But who can follow it for long? *The Great Learning* may be viewed as a training regimen we can apply to turn us into firmly grounded Golden Rule actors, in accord with our innate nature, as the Mencian tradition of Confucianism sees it.

The text describes the path to self-perfection in a sequential way, each type of obstacle pictured as being overcome in an ever-broadening scope of social mastery, beginning with mastery over oneself, extending through mastery of the arts of being a family member and a social leader. If the reading of the text conveyed through this translation is correct, however, *The Great Learning* pictures these sequential steps as taking place through a process of self-transformation that is, from the start, fully engaged in social effort and action, each step being a focus of attention in the midst of our lives as they are, rather than a program that begins with withdrawal to a separate sphere, where we rehearse the person we wish to become outside of the confusion of everyday life. (This point rests on the reading of II.B.1-2 offered here.)

In this way, from the time *The Great Learning* became established as an elementary text in the Confucian canon, to be memorized at an early age and available for instant recall thereafter, it may have functioned as an extended mantra for those who internalized it when young, its pithy maxims constantly rising to mind in situations of ethical stress.

Structure of the Text

As noted in the General Introduction, during the 11th century CE the brothers Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi concluded that the text of *The Great Learning* was corrupt, and that portions had shifted from their original positions to other points in the text, where they made little sense. Both brothers made attempts to cut and paste, moving sections of text in an attempt to find a coherent order. But it was not until Zhu Xi undertook to revise their work a century later that a truly successful critical edition of *The Great Learning* emerged. This was because Zhu did more than rearrange the text: he developed a theory of the text that provided a powerful explanation for the revisions he proposed, and that brought out an intellectual coherence that had not previously been detected.

Zhu Xi saw *The Great Learning* as divided into two basic sections: a brief “Text” a brief “Text” (literally, “classic”: *jing* 經) followed by ten sections of “Commentary” (*zhuan* 傳) that sequentially enlarged upon the major ideas of the “Text.” This insight not only allowed Zhu to propose more satisfactory solutions to editorial problems, it provided a new and largely successful reading strategy. If *The Great Learning* is read without attention to a structure such as the one Zhu proposed, it can seem to be a series of empty platitudes. But when it is read as a careful interpretation of an initially vague set of maxims, it appears both tightly argued and imaginatively conceived. Although many other reworkings have been proposed, and some prominent later Confucian scholars, including Wang Yangming (1472-1529), rejected the claim the original text was defective, Zhu’s critical edition has been widely adopted. The translation here is based upon it, although at points, alternative editing choices are noted, and in one important case, Zhu’s interpretive strategy is not followed. (Zhu Xi’s editorial work can be understood by consulting the Appendix, which includes both the text and a translation of the original *Liji* version of *The Great Learning*.)

The “Text” portion of the work introduces eleven central notions upon which the “Commentary” enlarges: the first three are traditionally known as “Guidelines,” the remaining eight as “Stages.” *The Great Learning* is a portrait of a progression from ordinary human existence to Sagehood through the Eight Stages of practice, as governed by the principles of the Three Guidelines. Here is a list of the Guidelines:

The Three Guidelines:

- 1. Making one’s “bright virtue” brilliant**
- 2. Making the people new**
- 3. Coming to rest in the highest good**

These phrases are cryptic and largely meaningless in themselves, and when first encountered in the “Text” section of *The Great Learning* (Section I.A), the language that explains them, while intriguing, is also mysterious. Our understanding of the Three Guidelines is enhanced in the “Commentary” section (II.A), but even there, this portion of *The Great Learning* remains more inspirational than instructional.

The “Text” also provides a brief introduction to the “Eight Stages,” which are more clearly an ordered path of self-cultivation. Here is a list of the Stages:

The Eight Stages:

- 1. Aligning affairs**
- 2. Extending understanding**
- 3. Making intentions genuine**
- 4. Balancing the mind**
- 5. Refining one’s person**
- 6. Aligning one’s household**
- 7. Ordering the state**
- 8. Setting the world at peace**

The “Text” does little more than list these stages in forward and backward order, using a type of rhetoric that late Warring States texts were prone to employ, called, in classical rhetoric, *sorites*, or “chain syllogism,” which takes the form, “If A then B; if B then C; if C then D . . .” and so forth. It is a form supremely well suited for memorization, but as a reading experience, it is less than entirely enthralling.

It is in the “Commentary” discussion of the Eight Stages that the brilliance of *The Great Learning* emerges. Whether the “Commentary” was the product of the same author who composed the “Text” is unknown, but in Sections 3-6 of the “Commentary” on the Eight Stages (II.B.3 – II.B.6), we encounter a writer who seems thoroughly confident about the potential power of the Eight Stages as practical ethical lessons, and who is able to convey the grounds of that confidence with unusual literary clarity. Whether the interpretation was actually the one that the original author of the “Text’s” Eight Stages intended cannot be known, but that is not really material: the value of *The Great Learning*, what made it a seminal text in traditional Confucianism, lies in the interpretation we absorb from the “Commentary.”

It should be noted that this core of clarity does not extend throughout the entire “Commentary.” The commentary on Sections 1 and 2 of the Eight Stages is textually corrupt, and this is where it is most necessary to guess what the writer may have intended. Any solution is speculative – the textual gaps are simply too large to allow certainty. As for Sections 7 and 8 of the Eight Stages commentary, which seem to be combined in a single extended section, they clearly deal with levels of self-cultivation beyond the experience of the author (or the authors of source texts on which the author of *The Great Learning* drew), and the argument becomes more formulaic: a summary of authoritative teachings, rather than an expression of personal insight. The closing section of *The Great Learning* lacks the focus of the core sections of the text, and there are reasons to believe that the closing portions of the original text have been lost, explained below in comments on that section.

In this translation, the structure of Zhu Xi’s arrangement of the text is underscored through added headings that do not appear in the original text. The provisional nature of these divisions is signaled by the use of gray font. They also provide a numbering system for reference. Zhu Xi’s “Text” and “Commentary” are Sections I and II; the discussions related to the Guidelines and Stages are designated A and B, respectively, and the Three Guidelines and Eight Stages are numbered as subsections of the A and B portions of Section II. It should be noted that the section designated as II.B.1-2 (a combined Commentary on the first two Stages) is the portion of *The Great Learning* that is generally acknowledged to be defective. Zhu Xi interpreted these passages as commentary on a portion of the text that relates neither to a Guideline nor a Stage, believing that the Commentary to Stages 1 and 2 was entirely lost. I interpret this passage as part of the original Commentary to Stage 1, with a fragment of the lost Commentary to Stage 2 appended.

THE GREAT LEARNING

I. TEXT

I.A *The Three Guidelines*

The Dao of Great Learning lies in making bright virtue brilliant; in making the people new; in coming to rest at the limit of the good.

These are the Three Guidelines.

“Making the people new” is a contested reading. The Chinese text reads “*qin min*” 親民, which means “stay close to the people,” or “treat the people as family,” the word *qin* meaning “parent” or “father.” There is no inherent difficulty with this reading, and it can easily be understood as following from the conventional idea that the ruler should serve as “the father and mother of the people.” However, if one accepts Zhu Xi’s reordering of the text, the Commentary that corresponds to this Guideline does not use the word *qin*, but repeatedly uses the word *xin* 新: “new.” Moreover, it quotes the “Kang gao” chapter of the *Book of Documents*, which uses the phrase, *zuo xin min* 作新民: “make a new people.” (In the *Liji* version of the text, there is no obvious relation between the text string that embeds these instances of *xin* and the Guideline.) In ancient texts, the graphs 親 and 新 are frequently used interchangeably, the underlying words being near homophones (*tshin and *sin). Zhu Xi, accepting an argument by Cheng Yi, reasoned that in the case of the received text of the second Guideline, the graph 親 was used to represent the word *xin*. This interpretation so directly illuminates the passage that Zhu identified as the Commentary corresponding to second Guideline that most subsequent scholars have acknowledged it as correct. However, some scholars, such as the Ming Neo-Confucian Wang Yangming, have argued for reading the text in its original sense. In his influential English translation, Wing-tsit Chan followed Wang in rendering the phrase as “love the people.”

On the term Dao, see the Glossary.

Only after wisdom comes to rest does one possess certainty; only after one possesses certainty can one become tranquil; only after one becomes tranquil can one become secure; only after one becomes secure can one contemplate alternatives; only after one can contemplate alternatives can one comprehend.

This is the initial example of *sorites*, or the “chain syllogism” rhetoric that *The Great Learning* frequently employs: easy to memorize, and underscoring the importance of sequential order in the steps of this self-help manual.

Affairs have their roots and branches, situations have their ends and beginnings. To know what comes first and what comes after is to be near the Dao.

On one interpretation of these phrases, the point is to emphasize that to achieve any goal, one must find and begin from the proper first step – identify what comes first in time. Only if one plants the “root” will the end results, the “branches,” grow. On this reading, “ends and beginnings” (*zhongshi* 終始) is the same as to say, “beginnings and ends.” This reading makes good sense of the chain syllogism structure of what precedes and follows it. An alternative reading sees the issue of priorities in terms of comprehending the dynamic flow of events in the world. “Roots and branches” refers to the relatively essential and inessential points of affairs, a common meaning of the phrase, and action priorities should be set according to an

understanding of where the leverage lies in any situational array. “Ends and beginnings” has a meaning distinct from “beginnings and ends,” connoting the unceasing succession of world contexts, each affair leading to another, each end a new beginning. Conceptualizing situations as discrete is, on this view, a shortfall in wisdom. Wise engagement understands not only the leverage points of change, but the unending stream of future consequences that flow from present actions. It is not necessary to insist that the composers of *The Great Learning* distinguished these alternative pairs of meaning or meant to stipulate one to the exclusion of the other.

I.B *The Eight Stages*

In ancient times, those who wished to make bright virtue brilliant in the world first ordered their states; those who wished to order their states first aligned their households; those who wished to align their households first refined their persons; those who wished to refine their persons first balanced their minds; those who wished to balance their minds first perfected the genuineness of their intentions; those who wished to perfect the genuineness of their intentions first extended their understanding; extending one’s understanding lies in aligning affairs.

This presentation of the Eight Stages begins with the first of the Three Guidelines. However, in the reverse formulation below, the ultimate goal shifts from making bright virtue brilliant to setting the world at peace, and this is the final stage as it is understood in the Commentary.

The phrase translated as “aligning affairs” (*ge wu* 格物), is among the most contested in the text. Zheng Xuan’s Han period commentary interpreted the word *ge* as “to [cause to] come” (*lai* 來): “When one has immersed one’s knowledge deep in what is good, it will cause good affairs to come; when one has immersed one’s knowledge deep in what is bad, it will cause bad things to come. That is to say, things come about in accord with what the person loves.” Zhu Xi understood *ge wu* as entailing a type of apperception of the normative order of the cosmos, achieved through study and reflection. He glossed *ge* as “to reach”; that is, to arrive at something you wish to reach. He said, “The phrase means to exhaustively arrive at the principles of affairs, missing no point as one reaches the ultimate.” Zhu’s reading suggests a reflective process, with the ultimate objects one reaches conceived as “principles” (*li* 理) of things, primarily an object of understanding about the normative cosmos, rather than of action. The Ming Neo-Confucian Wang Yangming, who disputed many aspects of Zhu’s editing and interpretation of *The Great Learning*, glossed *ge* differently, as “to rectify” (*zheng* 正), noting this use of *ge* in the *Mencius*: “Only the great man can *ge* the flaws in a ruler’s heart” (4A.20). In that passage, Zhu Xi glosses *ge* as Wang does: *zheng*: “to correct.” Wang’s radical idealism, which viewed the processes of knowing and acting as identical, allows for no distinction between “contemplative” and “practical” dimensions. He saw “rectifying things” as simultaneously rectifying one’s mind as one rectified the world. The theory underlying the translation of “aligning affairs” that appears here does make such a distinction, but attributes to the composers of *The Great Learning* the notion that self-cultivation begins not in withdrawn contemplation but in attentive action, leaning more towards the perspective adopted by Wang than towards the more reflective one that Zhu’s reading tends to suggest. The understanding of the term *ge* that applied here draws on the meaning of the word as a noun: “a gridwork.” To “grid” an affair expresses the idea of “aligning” it according to normative contours. This issue is discussed further at II.B.1-2.

Only after affairs have been aligned may one’s understanding be fully extended. Only after one’s understanding is fully extended may one’s intentions be perfectly genuine. Only after one’s intentions are perfectly genuine may one’s mind be balanced. Only after one’s mind is balanced may one’s person be refined. Only after one’s person is refined may one’s household be aligned. Only after one’s household is aligned may one’s state be ordered. Only after one’s state is ordered may the world be set at peace.

From the Son of Heaven to the common person, for all alike, refining one's person is the root. That roots should be disordered yet branches ordered is not possible. That what should be thickened is thin yet what is thin becomes thick has never yet been so. **This is the meaning of "knowing the root."**

Comparing the metaphor of roots and branches here to its sense in the Three Guidelines section, both the dimensions of time (the root must be planted for the branches to grow) and leverage (the root is where the pivot always lies) seem to be operative. However, if we are literal in reading "refining one's person," the title of the fifth Stage, as the root, then the latter sense – leverage points, rather than temporal priority – would make greater sense. As we will see, the focus of the fifth Stage is eliminating all forms of partiality from one's evaluative thinking, without damage to the affective attachments that will otherwise give rise to partial judgments. While this Stage is important in the process of self-improvement outlined in *The Great Learning*, nowhere else is there a suggestion that it is more important than the other stages, and it would also make sense to interpret "refining one's person" (*xiushen* 脩身) here in the more generic sense of "self-cultivation" that is often given the term, which may embrace most of the initial Stages.

It is at the close of this passage that the portion of *The Great Learning* which Zhu Xi rearranged begins (it extends through section II.B.3). In the *Liji* version of the text, the highlighted phrase appears here, followed by the phrase: "This is the meaning of 'the extension of understanding.'" Zhu Xi moved both those phrases to the Commentary, following discussion of the initial Stages. The initial phrase concerning "knowing the root" would fit here; however, as Zhu noted, the identical phrase occurs a second time at the location to which he moved the text. Zhu reasonably concluded that two very different passages would not both likely be used as glosses to a single phrase, and he chose to delete the phrase here and retain it below, followed by the phrase concerning the extension of understanding, which he believed had migrated to this early point in the text along with the phrase about knowing the root. This translation departs from Zhu Xi's text by making the alternative choice. More discussion of this point appears below at II.B.1-2.

In the *Liji* text, section II.B.3 initially followed the phrases concerning knowing the root and the extension of understanding. Zhu Xi moved that passage to its current position below. A subsequent section that includes two citations from the *Book of Poetry* followed the current II.B.3 in its original location. Zhu relocated those citations to the latter part of II.A.3, as discussed there.

See the original text of the *Liji* version in the Appendix.

II. COMMENTARY

II.A *Commentary on the Three Guidelines*

II.A.1 *Commentary on "Making bright virtue brilliant"*

The "Announcement of Kang" says,

Able to make virtue brilliant.¹

The "Taijia" says,

Regard this bright Mandate of Tian.²

The "Canon of Di" says,

Able to make sheer virtue brilliant.³

In all of these, brilliance was spontaneous.

All three of the quoted passages and the comment at the close employ the term *ming* 明: “bright,” “brilliant,” justifying Zhu Xi’s analysis that they constitute commentary on the first Guideline, in which *ming* represents two of the maxim’s three words. The text of I.A.1 appears as a unit in the *Liji* version.

¹The “Announcement of Kang” (Kang gao 康誥) is a chapter of the *Book of Documents*, one of the earliest Confucian canonical texts. On the *Book of Documents*, see the Glossary.

²The “Taijia” was also a chapter in the *Book of Documents*. The original text is now lost. On the terms “Mandate” and Tian, see the Glossary.

³The “Canon of Di” appears to be an alternative name for the initial chapter of the *Book of Documents*, now titled the “Canon of Yao.”

II.A.2 Commentary on “Making the people new”

The *Basin Inscription of Tang* says,

Truly new each day.
New each and every day.
Again, new each day.¹

The “Announcement of Kang” says,

Make a new people.

The *Poetry* says:

Though the Zhou is an ancient country,
Its Mandate is new.²

For this reason, the *junzi*³ never fails to strive to the utmost.

Although the *Liji* text does not cast these three quotes as a gloss on the second Guideline, they do appear together within the larger cluster of quotations that form the Guideline commentaries here, and the coherence of the theme of unceasing renewal is not an artifact of Zhu Xi’s editing. This stress foregrounds an occasional Confucian interest often overshadowed by the Confucian attention to the past and its conservative adherence to purportedly antique ritual forms. In Warring States era discourse, those texts that suggest the theme of ongoing renewal, such as the *Xunzi*, generally use the terms “change” (*bian* 變) or “transform” (*hua* 化), and link these to the need to adapt to ever-changing times: an aspect of ideas comprising the multi-faceted Confucian “doctrine of Timeliness” (*shi* 時). The extreme formulation here is both unusual and radical, a contrast to the more moderate ideal of “breathing warmth into the old while understanding the new” (*Analects* 2.11). This way of thinking would fit best in a context that was experiencing, or had experienced, an era of radical transformation, which China encountered only with the revolution of the Qin era. This is one reason to view *The Great Learning* as potentially the product of that period of change.

¹The *Basin Inscription of Tang* is an unknown text. Tang was the founding king of the Shang Dynasty. Since Tang’s rule preceded the invention of writing by centuries, the “basin inscription” was certainly a text merely purporting to record the words of Tang.

²The *Poetry* is the *Book of Poetry*, an anthology of 305 poems, composed during the Western Zhou and early Spring and Autumn eras (1045-771 and 771-453 BCE, respectively) celebrated as a classic source of sage wisdom by Confucians. (See the Glossary.) The poem cited here is ode 235.

³The untranslated term “*junzi*” 君子 represents a Confucian ideal of moral excellence. Most literally, it means a “prince.” See the Glossary.

II.A.3 Commentary on “Coming to rest in the highest good”

The *Poetry* says,

The capital district a thousand *li* square,
Where the people came to rest.¹

The *Poetry* says,

Many the twittering orioles,
Coming to rest on the crest of the hill.²

Confucius commented: “‘Coming to rest’ – they know where to come to rest. Can we believe that human beings are not so good as birds?”

The *Poetry* says,

So awesome was King Wen,
Coming to rest in the unquenchable gleam of reverence.³

When acting as a ruler of men, come to rest in humanity. When acting as a subject of a ruler, come to rest in reverence. When acting as a man’s son, come to rest in filiality. When acting as a son’s father, come to rest in kindness. When interacting with men of your state, come to rest in faithfulness.

The three passages from the *Book of Poetry* cited thus far in this section all employ the term *zhi* 止, rendered as the phrase “come to rest” (more literally, it simply means “stop”), thus linking them to the third Guideline. Thus all of the text from II.A.1 to this point of II.A.3 signals by keywords (*ming*, *xin*, *zhi*) a direct resonance to the Three Guidelines, supporting Zhu Xi’s claim that they originate as commentary to the initial lines of the Text (assuming the emendation of *qin* to *xin*, discussed in the comment on I.A).

In the *Liji* version of the text, what follows is the quote from Confucius, located below as the Commentary on the first two Stages (II.B.1-2), a section that does not relate to the theme of “coming to rest.” Noting this break, Zhu Xi inserts the following two *Poetry* citations and comments at this point. In the *Liji* text, these come earlier, preceding the Commentary on the first Guideline (II.A.1), and following Commentary on the third stage (II.B.3), which Zhu moved to its present position below.

On the terms “humanity” (*ren* 仁) and “filiality” (*xiao* 孝), see the Glossary.

The *Poetry* says,

See the bend of the River Qi,
Thick bamboo so green;
A *junzi* there, so elegant,
As though cut and filed,
As though carved and polished.
Solemn – oh, exacting!
Formidable – oh, awesome!
A *junzi* there, so elegant,
Never can we forget him.⁴

As though cut and filed: learned in the Dao. *As though carved and polished*: he has refined his person. *Solemn – oh, exacting*: alert with apprehension. *Formidable – oh, awesome*: awe-inspiring in manner. *Never can we forget him*: this says that abundant virtue and greatest goodness are things that the people can never forget.

The *Poetry* says,

Oh! We do not forget the former kings!⁵

The *junzi* treats as wise those whom these kings would have treated as wise, and cleaves to those whom they would have cleaved to. The petty man delights in what they delighted in and takes as profit that which they took as profit. Thus until the end of the ages they shall never be forgotten.

The two sections above both celebrate the unforgettable character of sages, and do not seem to apply directly to the third Guideline of coming to rest in the highest good. As noted, Zhu Xi moved them here, as part of II.A.3, reasoning that they were misplaced in the original *Liji* text. Zhu was not wrong in seeing them as misplaced, but it is unclear that this is the best location to move them. It is possible that in the original text, they were located elsewhere, perhaps in the final section (II.B.7-8), where we might expect, but never actually see, a description of the final Stage of bringing peace to the world.

¹*Book of Poetry*, ode 303. A *li* is about one-third of a mile.

²*Book of Poetry*, ode 230.

³*Book of Poetry*, ode 235. King Wen (r. 1099-1050) was a Zhou leader prior to the Shang conquest. He was generally regarded as having culturally transformed the Zhou people into a moral force worthy of succeeding to the mandate to rule.

⁴*Book of Poetry*, ode 55.

⁵*Book of Poetry*, ode 269.

II.B *Commentary on the Eight Stages*

II.B.1-2 *Commentary on “Aligning affairs and extending one’s understanding”*

Confucius said,

In hearing lawsuits, I am no better than others. What is imperative is to make it so that there are no lawsuits!¹

Not permitting those whose claims have no substance to exhaust their explanations, acting in great awe of the will of the people: [this is the meaning of “knowing the root.” This is the meaning of “knowing the root.”] . . . This is the meaning of “the extension of understanding.”

All commentators, including Zhu Xi, recognize that there is a defect in the text at this point. The phrase “this is the meaning of ‘knowing the root’” originally appeared both after this comment on Confucius’s remark, and also at the end of the Text portion of *The Great Learning*, after a discussion of roots and branches. It would be unusual for *The Great Learning* to explain the phrase “knowing the root” with two glosses as different as the closing section of I.B and this comment on Confucius’s remark. In my view, it makes far greater sense to retain the phrase in the earlier section, where it clearly fits, rather than at a point where the Commentary is turning to the Eight Stages – “knowing the root” is not one of the Stages. (Cheng Yi, who was the first to propose rearranging the text, simply wished to move this section to the end of what Zhu Xi identified as the Text section, thus letting Confucius’s comment serve as an extension of the discussion of roots and branches, a plausible alternative.)

Zhu Xi, in moving the phrases concerning the second Stage, “the extension of understanding,” to this point, regarded the line as an orphan, the text of the substantive description of the extension of understanding having been lost. Naturally, this means that the entire Commentary on the first Stage, *ge wu*: “aligning affairs,” would also have been lost text.

The theory underlying the translation here is that the duplicated phrase concerning “knowing the root” belongs where it first appears, at the end of the Text section, and should be deleted here. The passage concerning Confucius is construed as the substantive Commentary discussion of one of the initial two Stages. If it describes “the extension of understanding,” then a block of text preceding it concerning “aligning affairs” has been lost. If it concerns “aligning affairs,” then a block of text that included the phrase, “this is the meaning of ‘aligning affairs,’” followed by a description of “the extension of understanding” has been lost. I have chosen the latter explanation because the duplication of the phrase concerning “knowing the root” occurs after the Confucius passage, indicating that the splice occurs at that point, rather than preceding Confucius’s remark.

Thus, in this translation, the key to understanding the starting point of self-cultivation and the meaning of the phrase *ge wu* lies in the quote from Confucius and the brief comment – probably interrupted – that follows it. What is most striking under this theory is that the first of the Eight Stages begins in the midst of action: adjudication in a court of law, where words are plentiful, but where sage wisdom, Confucius’s, has no added purchase in assessing them. Instead of listening to words, what the text begins to tell us is that we must cut them off and be guided instead by the “will” (*zhi* 志) that people possess. In a Mencian context, the “will” would refer to the moral intuitions that we all share in common. The first step in self-perfection, then, would be to turn away from trying to make things right by following assertions stated in words and instead deploy the spontaneous evaluative responses of the moral mind to make things right: to straighten things out, or “align affairs.” (It is, perhaps, worth noting that among the great variety of suggested emendations of *The Great Learning* that have been offered since the Song Dynasty, more than one has argued that Confucius’s comment on lawsuits is, indeed, a comment on the first Stage, *ge wu*; an early example would be the reconstruction of Dong Huai 董槐 [1187-1262]: *Daxue gengyi* 大學更義, which, however, differs from the suggestions here in other respects.)

This interpretation pictures the process of the Eight Stages beginning and continuing in ongoing engagement in everyday life, rather than through withdrawal into a state of reflection, which seems implicit in the way that both Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi shape their interpretations.

¹This quote is found in the *Analects* (12.13).

II.B.3 Commentary on “Making the intentions perfectly genuine”

Making the intentions perfectly genuine means being without self-deceit. It is the same as when we hate a bad odor or like a beautiful color. It describes a process of perfect inner correspondence.

The phrase “perfectly genuine” renders the single word *cheng* 誠, which, apart from its significant role here, is also a term of particular importance in *The Doctrine of the Mean*. *Cheng* is most often translated by the adjective “sincere” or by the noun “sincerity,” but “genuine” and “genuineness” are used here because in addition to the sense of correspondence between inner cognitive and affective experience and outward expression, *cheng* adds a warranted normative element to the content of the thoughts and feelings involved. One may be sincere harboring thoughts and feelings that are unethical, and it is common to speak of such cases; the less common term “genuine” is better suited to conveying the restrictive sense of morally positive dispositions. (“Authentic” is another good alternative, but tends to be associated with idiosyncratic traits of personality, irrelevant to the sense of *cheng*. The term “integrity” may be the ideal choice for translating the nominal form of *cheng*, but unfortunately cannot serve for adjectival usages. See the Glossary for additional discussion.)

The metaphors of hating a bad odor and loving a beautiful color are among the most vivid illustrations of the Mencian idea that people universally possess common moral senses that respond spontaneously in identical ways. If one grants the premise that we all experience odor and color identically, the notion that our minds make ethical judgments spontaneously and without additional agency could hardly be conveyed more economically.

Because the extant text for the commentary sections on “aligning affairs” and “extending one’s understanding” is corrupt, II.B.3 is our first clear glimpse of the process of self-cultivation. This initial stage concerns the detection of our subjective, spontaneous, affective responses, a sensitivity to internal

states of affect and disposition that the passage goes on to label as features of our “solitude”: our private sphere. Consequently, it is natural to picture the program of *The Great Learning* as beginning with a process of solitary introspection. However, if we bear in mind the full list of the Eight Stages in the initial section of the text and accept the basic outline of Zhu Xi’s restructuring, “making the intentions perfectly genuine” follows two prior stages: this is *not* the beginning of the program of self-perfection. The theory of this translation, explained in the commentary to II.B.1-2, is that the reflective structure of Stage Three describes features of ethical self-monitoring that the moral learner practices in everyday action. The beginning of the program of self-perfection lies in turning from the social world of words (the “explanations” – *ci* 辭: speeches – of “lawsuits”) to the social world of the “will” (the moral dispositions) that all people share. It is thus in the context of engaged action that the sensitization to the dictates of the heart, vividly elaborated here, proceeds.

For this reason, a *junzi* is inevitably cautious of his solitude. The small person will do bad things when at his ease; there is nothing he may not do. When he is observed by a *junzi*, however, he will cover up the bad things that he has done and exhibit any good ones. But the *junzi* casts upon him a glance that sees through as to his very lungs and liver – of what use is concealment? This is why it is said that when one is perfectly genuine within it may be seen externally. For this reason, a *junzi* is inevitably cautious of his solitude. Zengzi said, “Ten eyes see and ten hands point: how austere!”

The phrase, “The *junzi* is cautious of his solitude,” is somewhat elusive. It seems to refer to ethical self-monitoring when one is alone, or when one’s motives are concealed from others. In this sense, “solitude” concerns the heart or mind (the *xin* 心) experienced internally and unexpressed in the social world. The phrase appears in recovered Warring States text, “The Five Forms of Action” (*Wuxing* 五行), where it concerns a state of mind wherein the five ethical virtues governing action (humanity, righteousness, *li*, wisdom, and sagehood) are reduced to a single perspective: “‘Cautious in his solitude’ speaks of one’s being able to dispense with the five [forms of action] and be cautious of one’s heart.” The “internality” of this process is explicit: “‘Solitude’ is that which is ultimately interior and not exterior; solitude dispenses with the body.” (A more extensive analysis of this phrase appears in the translation of *The Doctrine of the Mean*, chapter 1, note 4.)

Wealth graces one’s home; virtue graces one’s person: when the mind is broad the body is full. Therefore the *junzi* inevitably makes his intentions perfectly genuine.

Despite the idea in “The Five Forms of Action” that solitude excludes the body, that text, like this one, associates sagehood with a visible form of physical flourishing.

NOTE: From this point on, the text is identical with the original Liji version.

II.B.4 Commentary on “Balancing one’s mind”

Concerning the phrase, “refining one’s person lies in balancing one’s mind”:

If one possesses anger and resentment one’s mind will not be fully balanced. If one is in fear one’s mind will not be balanced. If one takes pleasure in delights one’s mind will not be balanced. If one is anxious and fretful one’s mind will not be balanced.

When the mind is not focused one does not see what one is looking at, hear what one is listening to, or know the taste of the food one eats.

This is the meaning of the phrase, “refining one’s person lies in balancing one’s mind.”

While the discussion of making intentions genuine focused on the power of our moral senses to provide us the ethical information we need to evaluate things in the world, the discussion of balancing the mind and refining one’s person concern common impediments that divert us from responding to our moral senses with clarity. The mind is unbalanced when the passions dominate; the Commentary conveys this by identifying recognizable symptoms of this state in conditions that people are all accustomed to encountering: loss of focus that blocks our receptiveness to sensory data because of cognitive and affective turmoil. Like the choice of metaphors in II.B.3, this is a convincing literary strategy.

II.B.5 *Commentary on “Refining one’s person”*

Concerning the phrase, “aligning one’s household lies in refining one’s person”:

When people come to those for whom they hold kinlike affection they are partial. When they come to those whom they view as base and evil they are partial. When they come to those whom they revere with awe they are partial. When they come to those whom they pity and feel sorrow for they are partial. When they come to those whom they disdain and hold in contempt they are partial. Thus it is rare to find in the world one who can love, but know the bad points of those he loves, hate, but know the good points of those he hates. Thus the saying goes,

None knows his children’s faults; none knows when his seedlings have reached their limit.

This is the meaning of the phrase, “aligning one’s household lies in refining one’s person.”

There are points of overlap between the impartiality discussed in this section and the doctrine of the School of Mohism, which held that one should value all people equally as the basis of a utilitarian approach to ethics in action. However, they are essentially different ideas. While in this Stage the individual learns to perceive the value of each person objectively, free from the distorting lens of partiality, his underlying affective responses remain as they were: that is, he continues to love and hate, but without allowing this to affect his objective vision. This differs from the Mohist school, the followers of which were famous for their cultivation of Stoic indifference to those closest to them. The fifth Stage also does not add, as Mohism would, the imperative to treat everyone impartially. Confucians generally held that people should give preferential treatment to family members and those to whom they were bound by ties of loyalty and faith. The text here does not challenge that ethical vision or advocate a Mohist utilitarian calculus in making action choices. It does not prescribe any rule for action, other than to act in light of unbiased perception.

II.B.6 *Commentary on “Aligning one’s household”*

Concerning the phrase, “to order one’s state one must first align one’s household”:

There are none who cannot instruct their households but can instruct others. Hence the *junzi* perfects the teaching in his state without leaving his household. Filiality is what one takes to serve one’s ruler. The behavior of the younger brother is what one takes to serve one’s elders. Kindness is what one takes to preside over the masses. The “Announcement of Kang” says,

Be it like tending a newborn babe.

If one genuinely seeks the way to do so in one’s own mind, though one may miss the mark, one will not be far off. There has never been one who learned to raise a child before marrying.

The discussion of the sixth Stage moves through several themes, not all related to family leadership. These initial sections of the passage draw on the traditional notion that the state is the family writ large, and, therefore, the family serves as a training ground to develop the skills necessary for the greater realm of social politics. Filiality specifically concerns the skills of the child in relation to the parents. The term translated as “the behavior of the younger brother” (*ti* 弟 [悌]) concerns skills of all younger people towards their elders. “Kindness” translates *ci* 慈, a term generally denoting parental love. The broader theme is that social skill is based on experience, vividly conveyed through the proverb, “There has never been one who learned to raise a child before marrying.”

When a single family is humane, humanity arises throughout the state. When a single family practices deference, deference arises throughout the state. When a single man is greedy and vicious, the entire state is filled with chaos. Such are the triggers of things. As they say, a single phrase can ruin an affair, a single man can set a state right. Yao and Shun led the world with humanity and the people accorded with it. Jie and Zhòu led the world with violence and the people accorded with it. Those kings’ commands were counter to what they themselves loved to do and the people would not follow them.

The passage here moves to a different issue: the social influence of positive and negative models. This is loosely linked to the household theme through the assertion that families serve as exemplars, just as individuals do, but the text moves quickly to discussions of individual types and then to the standard exemplars of history, the sagely Yao and Shun, and the tyrannical last kings of the Xia and Shang dynasties, Jie and Zhòu. And in discussing the latter pair, the passage appeals to a source of knowledge different from practical experience: the moral senses, which these wicked rulers shared with their people but elected to ignore.

Thus the *junzi* seeks for things in others only once he possesses them within himself, and forbids things in others only once he has no trace of them in himself. Never has there been a person who has not stored up within himself the disposition to treat others with reciprocity, but who is able to persuade others to follow him.

Perhaps pivoting on the last paragraph, the text here turns to another issue, the inevitable link between personal virtue and social persuasiveness: only the person who has demanded of himself what he demands of others can be morally persuasive. Here, the Confucian notion of “reciprocity” (*shu* 恕) is invoked, the Golden Rule of never treating others as one would not wish to be treated, which goes a step further. The Golden Rule formula will be described in more detail in the concluding section of the text, and, indeed, the entire text may be viewed as guide to teaching us the practical path to becoming Golden Rule actors.

Therefore, ordering the state lies in aligning one’s household.

The anticipation here of the concluding maxim for this Stage suggests that the two paragraphs above, beginning with the phrase, “When a single family is humane,” may have been inserted in the text at some early point. The poem immediately below would logically follow after the phrase, “There has never been one who learned to raise a child before marrying.”

The *Poetry* says,

The cherry tree with blossoms fresh,
And leafy branches flourishing.
This lady is off to be married,
May she make a good mate.¹

Only after there is a good mate may one instruct the people of one’s state.

The *Poetry* says,

Elder and younger, fit brothers.²

Only after one's brothers are fit may one instruct the people of one's state.

The *Poetry* says,

With flawless aspect
Rectify the four states.³

Only after those who act as fathers, sons, elder and younger brothers are adequate to serve as exemplars will the people emulate them.

This is the meaning of the phrase, "to order one's state one must first align one's household."

The poems recap the theme of familial experience, familial leadership, and mastery of family virtues as prerequisites to broader social success.

¹*Book of Poetry*, ode 6.

²*Book of Poetry*, ode 173.

³*Book of Poetry*, ode 152.

II.B.7-8 *Commentary on "Ordering one's state and setting the world at peace"*

Concerning the phrase, "Setting the world at peace lies in ordering the state":

This final section of *The Great Learning* does not have the focus of the preceding sections. Although it comprises about thirty percent of the entire text, it actually addresses only the single Stage of "ordering one's state." Presumably, either the ultimate ideal of bringing peace to the world is implicit in it, or Commentary on the eighth and final Stage has been lost.

When the ruler treats the elderly as the elderly should be treated, the people rise up with filiality. When the ruler treats those senior to him as those senior to him should be treated the people rise up with behavior fitting those who are younger. When the ruler treats the orphaned with compassion the people do not turn their backs.

Its initial passages picture the ideal state ruler as one who exemplifies for the people the familial values of filial care for parents, respect for elders, and parental compassion for children. These ideas proceed logically from the sixth Stage.

Hence the ruler fulfills the Dao of the carpenter's square. That which you detest in your superior, do not employ upon your subordinates. That which you detest in your subordinates, do not employ to serve your superior. That which you detest in those who are before you, do not employ to lead those behind you. That which you detest in those who are behind you, do not employ to follow those before you. That which you detest in him on your right, do not employ when engaged with him on your left. That which you detest in him on your left, do not employ when engaged with him on your right. This is the Dao of the carpenter's square.

“The Dao of the carpenter’s square” is basically a detailed formulation of the rule of reciprocity (*shu*: not doing to others what one would not wish done to oneself). The theme of reciprocity echoes the language of the second thematic section of the sixth Stage. As that section appeared to be a possible insertion in the text, so it may be with this thematically parallel section in the discussion of the final Stages, particularly given that the poem appearing directly below returns to the initial motif of the family.

The *Poetry* says,

Happy the *junzi*!
Father and mother of the people.¹

To love what the people love and hate what the people hate – this is to be the “father and mother of the people.”

The family virtues of the sixth Stage are again raised to the level of political action, recreating the state on the model of the family, with the ruler playing the parental role.

The *Poetry* says,

How tall is South Mountain!
Its boulders tower high.
Awe-inspiring is Marshal Yin,
The people all gaze upon him.²

Those who rule a state cannot but be cautious; if they are partial, they will be destroyed by all the world.

It is unclear what element of the poem triggers the issue of partiality, but in making this link the text recalls the fifth Stage admonition to eliminate partiality.

The *Poetry* says,

Before the Yin lost its peoples
It was a worthy match for the Lord on High.
We should view ourselves in light of the Yin –
The great Mandate is not an easy thing!³

That is to say, if one gains the masses one gains the state; if one loses the masses one loses the state.

Therefore the *junzi* is first cautious concerning virtue. If one has virtue, one has men. If one has men, one has land. If one has land, one has goods. If one has goods, one has means. Virtue is the root, goods are the branches. If you take the root to be outer and the branches to be inner then you will contest with the people over distribution and expropriation. Thus it is that where goods are concentrated, the people disperse. Where goods are dispersed, the people concentrate. Thus it is that where words are proclaimed with hostility, hostile words will be returned. Where wares are expropriated with hostility, they will be seized back with hostility as well. The “Announcement of Kang” says,

The Mandate is not constant.

If one’s Dao is good one will receive it; if not, one will lose it.

Here the text returns to the theme of roots and branches that was introduced at the close of Section I.B, applying it, in the form of a *sortes* sequence, to the priority of richness in virtue over richness of treasure. This theme will carry through to the close of the text.

The *Book of Chu* says,

There is no treasure in Chu; goodness alone is its treasure.⁴

Jiu Fan said,

The exile has no treasure; his treasure lies in his humanity and bonds to others.⁵

The “Oath of Qin” says,

If there were only a minister who possessed this one ability and no other: to be all excellent in mind and yet to be accommodating of others – to view others’ abilities as though they were his own, to love the sage words of others with all his heart, almost as though they were uttered from his own mouth – truly accommodating – to have such a man to protect my descendants and my people – this would be of the greatest benefit indeed!

One who views abilities with hate born of envy, who discards the sage words of others and blocks them from the ruler – truly without accommodation of others – to have such a man to protect my descendants and my people – this would be danger indeed!⁶

Indeed, a man of humanity would banish such a one to the tribes of the four quarters and refuse to allow him to dwell with them in the central states. This is why it is said of the humane that only they can cherish others and hate others. That one may see a worthy man and be unable to raise him up, or raising him be unable to place him first: this is fate.⁷ But that one should see a bad man and be unable to make him retire, or having made him retire be unable to keep him at a distance: this is to err. To love what others hate and hate what others love is called acting counter to human nature: calamity shall inevitably reach such a person.

Through the quotations from Uncle Fan, and the “Oath of Qin,” the focus of virtue is broadened from the ruler to the men he appoints to his government.

On the term “human nature,” see the Glossary.

The great Dao to becoming a *junzi* is this: inevitably, one gains it by means of devotion and faithfulness, and loses it by means of arrogance and extravagance. The great Dao that gives birth to plenty is this: let the producers be many, let the consumers be few, let those who craft be eager, let those who employ be easy. In this way, goods will always be plentiful. The humane employ wealth so that the person will blossom; the inhumane employ the person so that wealth will blossom. Never has there been a ruler who loves humanity whose people do not love righteousness.⁸ Never has there been one who loves righteousness whose affairs have not come to completion. Never has there been one who could keep his storehouses filled with goods not his own. Meng Xianzi said,

He who possesses horses and chariots does not inquire into matters of raising chickens and pigs. The household that has stored ice to chip does not raise dogs and sheep. The household of a hundred chariots does not keep servants to collect taxes – rather than harbor tax collectors, better to harbor brigands.⁹

This is to say that a state does not take profit as profit; it takes righteousness as profit. One who leads a state and concentrates on goods is inevitably guided by small minded men and takes what

they do as a standard. If small men control a state in this way, calamities and disasters will come; though there may be good men, the ruler will not know how to use them. This is why it is said that a state does not take profit as profit; it takes righteousness as profit.

The Great Learning concludes with a series of passages that speak to the ruler's relation to the resources of his state. Their thrust is cautionary: the ruler who sees the creation of wealth in his state as a goal for his own benefit will inevitably fail. The economic goals of the state serve the interests of its people, and the ruler himself must maintain a disinterested stance.

We would expect *The Great Learning* to conclude with a section describing the ultimate utopian outcome of a world at peace, but if such an ending was composed, it is now lost. It is possible that the two poetic citations and comments that Zhu Xi moved from an early point in the text to the latter section of II.A.3 were originally part of such a conclusion, since they have no obvious home elsewhere in the text, but they could not have been the core of any final coda. Although *The Great Learning* may have been the single most influential text in Chinese education for many centuries, the original disorder of its text and the abruptness of its ending indicate that it is, ultimately, incomplete.

¹*Book of Poetry*, ode 172.

²*Book of Poetry*, ode 191. Marshal Yin was a general of the Western Zhou era.

³*Book of Poetry*, ode 235. "Yin" is an alternative name for the Shang Dynasty. (There is no connection with the Marshal Yin in the poem above.)

⁴No *Book of Chu* is known. The phrase may simply refer to "documents" from the southern state of Chu generically, rather than to a text known by this specific title.

⁵Jiu Fan (Uncle Fan) is a reference to Hu Yan, an uncle and consigliere to the second hegemon, Duke Wen of Jin (r. 636-628 BCE). The phrases uttered here relate to the period when the future duke was in exile, and are found in the *Liji* "Tan Gong II" chapter. They urge the duke to decline the advice of the most powerful ruler of the day, Duke Mu of Qin (r. 659-621 BCE).

⁶The "Oath of Qin" is the last chapter in the *Book of Documents*. It purports to be the words of Duke Mu of Qin, whom most sources consider one of the Five Hegemons. Duke Mu was the most illustrious ruler of the state of Qin prior to the conquests of the future First Emperor. However, it is an anomaly that such a figure should occupy a strategic position in a classic anthology such as the *Book of Documents*, which otherwise includes only texts predating the fall of the Western Zhou in 771 BCE. It is difficult to account for this unless the anthology was finalized under the aegis of the Qin Dynasty, and this citation from the final chapter is additional evidence that *The Great Learning* was composed at a time when the Qin conquest was complete. Moreover, the citation of the Duke's words in *The Great Learning* is equally anomalous. Duke Mu was not viewed as an ethical model by Confucians. Ode 131 in the *Book of Poetry* ("Huang niao": The Oriole) is a lament for three prominent warriors of Qin who were killed upon the Duke's death in order that they could be buried beside him and so protect him in the afterlife, a custom of grave sacrifice that the Zhou people had long since abandoned, but that the Qin people, in Duke Mu's time only recently recognized as members of the "central states," retained under the Duke. The inclusion of the citation to the Duke's oath here may reflect a Confucian accommodation to Qin history and culture required after the reunification of China under the Qin in 221 BCE.

⁷In using the term "fate" (*ming* 命), the text appears to signal that this former circumstance is beyond the control of the agent, in contrast to the latter case. It is unclear why this would be so. Perhaps for this reason, Zheng Xuan and Cheng Yi both believed that the character *ming* was a text error: Zheng Xuan holding that the word was a phonetic error for *man* 慢: "arrogance," and Cheng Yi seeing *ming* as a copyist's error for the visually similar *dai* 怠: "careless." Zhu Xi did not see any way to adjudicate this matter.

⁸On the term "righteousness" (*yi* 義), see the Glossary.

⁹Meng Xianzi (d. 554 BCE) was a grandee in the state of Lu. His connection to Confucianism and to moral teachings in general is tenuous, but in the historical text *Zuo zhuan*, he is portrayed commending Confucius's father as a man "whose strength is that of a tiger," and his great-grandson is said to have been the first man to entrust his sons' education to Confucius.

APPENDIX

THE ORIGINAL *Liji* TEXT OF *THE GREAT LEARNING*

In his editorial work on *The Great Learning*, Zhu Xi basically shifted the position of two large blocks of text that, in the original *Liji* version, occur directly after the opening section, the portion that Zhu labeled the “Text” (*jing* 經). He inserted these two blocks at separate points, surrounding the brief and fragmentary “Commentary” (*zhuan* 傳) section numbered II.B.1-2 in the translation here. The result is that in about one-quarter of the total text, containing four sections that Zhu treated as editorially distinct, the order of those four sections was shuffled. In the *Liji* version, if we number Zhu’s “Text” as Block 1, these four sections were rearranged from the order 2, 3, 4, and 5, to the order 5, 3, 2, 4. The remainder of the text (Block 6), comprising more than half the total text, was left unaltered.

In the original text, provided below, these “Blocks” appear in their original order, but Zhu Xi’s revised order is indicated by the number sequence. The Blocks that Zhu shuffled are highlighted in gray. A translation of the text in the original order follows. (Note that there is no particular significance to the Block divisions, apart from their editorial history.)

1 大學之道，在明明德，在親民，在止於至善。知止而后有定，定而后能靜，靜而后能安，安而后能慮，慮而后能得。物有本末，事有終始，知所先後，則近道矣。古之欲明明德於天下者，先治其國；欲治其國者，先齊其家；欲齊其家者，先脩其身；欲脩其身者，先正其心；欲正其心者，先誠其意；欲誠其意者，先致其知，致知在格物。物格而后知至，知至而后意誠，意誠而后心正，心正而后身脩，身脩而后家齊，家齊而后國治，國治而后天下平。自天子以至於庶人，壹是皆以脩身為本。其本亂而末治者否矣，其所厚者薄，而其所薄者厚，未之有也！ 5 此謂知本，此謂知之至也。所謂誠其意者，毋自欺也，如惡惡臭，如好好色，此之謂自謙，故君子必慎其獨也！小人閒居為不善，無所不至，見君子而后厭然，揜其不善，而著其善。人之視己，如見其肺肝然，則何益矣！此謂誠於中，形於外，故君子必慎其獨也。曾子曰：「十目所視，十手所指，其嚴乎！」富潤屋，德潤身，心廣體胖，故君子必誠其意。 3 《詩》云：「瞻彼淇澳，萋竹猗猗。有斐君子，如切如磋，如琢如磨。瑟兮僩兮，赫兮喧兮。有斐君子，終不可諠兮！」「如切如磋」者，道學也；「如琢如磨」者，自脩也；「瑟兮僩兮」者，恂慄也；「赫兮喧兮」者，威儀也；「有斐君子，終不可諠兮」者，道盛德至善，民之不能忘也。《詩》云：「於戲前王不忘！」君子賢其賢而親其親，小人樂其樂而利其利，此以沒世不忘也。 2 《康誥》曰：「克明德。」《太甲》曰：「顧諟天之明命。」《帝典》曰：「克明峻德。」皆自明也。湯之盤銘曰：「苟日新，日日新，又日新。」《康誥》曰：「作新民。」《詩》曰：「周雖舊邦，其命惟新。」是故君子無所不用其極。《詩》云：「邦畿千里，惟民所止。」《詩》云：「緡蠻黃鳥，止于丘隅。」子曰：「於止，知其

所止，可以人而不如鳥乎？」《詩》云：「穆穆文王，於緝熙敬止！」為人君，止於仁；為人臣，止於敬；為人子，止於孝；為人父，止於慈；與國人交，止於信。 [4] 子曰：「聽訟，吾猶人也，必也使無訟乎！」無情者不得盡其辭，大畏民志。此謂知本。 [6] 所謂脩身在正其心者，身有所忿懣，則不得其正；有所恐懼，則不得其正；有所好樂，則不得其正；有所憂患，則不得其正。心不在焉，視而不見，聽而不聞，食而不知其味。此謂脩身在正其心。所謂齊其家在脩其身者，人之其所親愛而辟焉，之其所賤惡而辟焉，之其所畏敬而辟焉，之其所哀矜而辟焉，之其所敖惰而辟焉。故好而知其惡，惡而知其美者，天下鮮矣！故諺有之曰：「人莫知其子之惡，莫知其苗之碩。」此謂身不脩不可以齊其家。所謂治國必先齊其家者，其家不可教而能教人者，無之。故君子不出家而成教於國：孝者，所以事君也；弟者，所以事長也；慈者，所以使眾也。《康誥》曰：「如保赤子」，心誠求之，雖不中不遠矣。未有學養子而后嫁者也！一家仁，一國興仁；一家讓，一國興讓；一人貪戾，一國作亂。其機如此。此謂一言僨事，一人定國。堯、舜率天下以仁，而民從之；桀、紂率天下以暴，而民從之。其所令反其所好，而民不從。是故君子有諸己而后求諸人，無諸己而后非諸人。所藏乎身不恕，而能喻諸人者，未之有也。故治國在齊其家。《詩》云：「桃之夭夭，其葉蓁蓁；之子于歸，宜其家人。」宜其家人，而后可以教國人。《詩》云：「宜兄宜弟。」宜兄宜弟，而后可以教國人。《詩》云：「其儀不忒，正是四國。」其為父子兄弟足法，而后民法之也。此謂治國在齊其家。所謂平天下在治其國者，上老老而民興孝，上長長而民興弟，上恤孤而民不倍，是以君子有絜矩之道也。所惡於上，毋以使下；所惡於下，毋以事上；所惡於前，毋以先後；所惡於後，毋以從前；所惡於右，毋以交於左；所惡於左，毋以交於右。此之謂絜矩之道。《詩》云：「樂只君子，民之父母。」民之所好好之，民之所惡惡之，此之謂民之父母。《詩》云：「節彼南山，維石巖巖。赫赫師尹，民具爾瞻。」有國者不可以不慎，辟則為天下戮矣。《詩》云：「殷之未喪師，克配上帝。儀監于殷，峻命不易。」道得眾則得國，失眾則失國。是故君子先慎乎德。有德此有人，有人此有土，有土此有財，有財此有用。德者本也，財者末也，外本內末，爭民施奪。是故財聚則民散，財散則民聚。是故言悖而出者，亦悖而入；貨悖而入者，亦悖而出。《康誥》曰：「惟命不于常！」道善則得之，不善則失之矣。楚書曰：「楚國無以為寶，惟善以為寶。」舅犯曰：「亡人無以為寶，仁親以為寶。」《秦誓》曰：「若有一介臣，斷斷兮無他技，其心休休焉，其如有容焉。人之有技，若己有之；人之彥聖，其心好之，不啻若自其口出。實能容之，以能保我子孫黎民，尚亦有利哉！人之有技，媚嫉以惡之；人之彥聖，而違之俾不通。實不能容，以不能保我子孫黎民，亦曰殆哉！」唯仁人放流之，迸諸四夷，不與同中國，此謂唯仁人為能愛人，能惡人。見賢而不能舉，舉而不能先，命也；見不善而不能退，退而不能遠，過也。好人之所惡，惡人之所好，是謂拂人之性，菑必逮夫身。是故君子有大道，必忠信以得之，驕泰以失之。生財有大道。生之者眾，食之者寡，為之者疾，用之者舒，則財恒足矣。仁者以財發身，不仁者以身發財。未有上好仁而下不好義者也，未有好義其事不終者也，未有府庫財非其財者也。孟獻子曰：「畜

馬乘，不察於雞豚；伐冰之家，不畜牛羊；百乘之家，不畜聚斂之臣。與其有聚斂之臣，寧有盜臣。」此謂國不以利為利，以義為利也。長國家而務財用者，必自小人矣。彼為善之，小人之使為國家，蓄害竝至。雖有善者，亦無如之何矣！此謂國不以利為利，以義為利也。

1

The Dao of Great Learning lies in making bright virtue brilliant; in making the people new; in coming to rest at the limit of the good. Only after wisdom comes to rest does one possess certainty; only after one possesses certainty can one become tranquil; only after one becomes tranquil can one become secure; only after one becomes secure can one contemplate alternatives; only after one can contemplate alternatives can one comprehend. Affairs have their roots and branches, situations have their ends and beginnings. To know what comes first and what comes after is to be near the Dao. In ancient times, those who wished to make bright virtue brilliant in the world first ordered their states; those who wished to order their states first aligned their households; those who wished to align their households first refined their persons; those who wished to refine their persons first balanced their minds; those who wished to balance their minds first perfected the genuineness of their intentions; those who wished to perfect the genuineness of their intentions first extended their understanding; extending one's understanding lies in aligning affairs. Only after affairs have been aligned out may one's understanding be fully extended. Only after one's understanding is fully extended may one's intentions be perfectly genuine. Only after one's intentions are perfectly genuine may one's mind be balanced. Only after one's mind is balanced may one's person be refined. Only after one's person is refined may one's household be aligned. Only after one's household is aligned may one's state be ordered. Only after one's state is ordered may the world be set at peace. From the Son of Heaven to the common person, for all alike, refining one's person is the root. That roots should be disordered yet branches ordered is not possible. That what should be thickened is thin yet what is thin becomes thick has never yet been so.

5

This is the meaning of “knowing the root.” This is the meaning of “knowing the root.” This is the meaning of “the extension of understanding.” Making the intentions perfectly genuine means being without self-deceit. It is the same as when we hate a bad odor or like a beautiful color. It describes a process of perfect inner correspondence. For this reason, a *junzi* is inevitably cautious of his solitude. The small person will do bad things when at his ease; there is nothing he may not do. When he is observed by a *junzi*, however, he will cover up the bad things that he has done and exhibit any good ones. But the *junzi* casts upon him a glance that sees through as to his very lungs and liver – of what use is concealment? This is why it is said that when one is perfectly genuine within it may be seen externally. For this reason, a *junzi* is inevitably cautious of his solitude. Zengzi said, “Ten eyes see and ten hands point: how austere!” Wealth graces one's home; virtue graces one's person: when the mind is broad the body is full. Therefore the *junzi* inevitably makes his intentions perfectly genuine.

3

The *Poetry* says,

See the bend of the River Qi,
Thick bamboo so green;
A *junzi* there, so elegant,
As though cut and filed,
As though carved and polished.
Solemn – oh, exacting!
Formidable – oh, awesome!
A *junzi* there, so elegant,
Never can we forget him.

As though cut and filed: learned in the Dao. *As though carved and polished*: he has refined his person. *Solemn – oh, exacting*: alert with apprehension. *Formidable – oh, awesome*: awe-inspiring in manner. *Never can we forget him*: this says that abundant virtue and greatest goodness are things that the people can never forget. The *Poetry* says,

Oh! We do not forget the former kings!

The *junzi* treats as wise those whom these kings would have treated as wise, and cleaves to those whom they would have cleaved to. The petty man delights in what they delighted in and takes as profit that which they took as profit. Thus until the end of the ages they shall never be forgotten.

2

The “Announcement of Kang” says, “Able to make virtue brilliant.” The “Taijia” says, “Regard this bright Mandate of Tian.” The “Canon of Di” says, “Able to make sheer virtue brilliant.” In all of these, brilliance was spontaneous. The *Basin Inscription of Tang* says, “Truly new each day. New each and every day. Again, new each day.” The “Announcement of Kang” says, “Make a new people.” The *Poetry* says:

Though the Zhou is an ancient country,
Its Mandate is new.

For this reason, the *junzi* never fails to strive to the utmost. The *Poetry* says,
The capital district a thousand *li* square,
Where the people came to rest.

The *Poetry* says,

Many the twittering orioles,
Coming to rest on the crest of the hill.

Confucius commented: “‘Coming to rest’ – they know where to come to rest. Can we believe that human beings are not so good as birds?” The *Poetry* says,

So awesome was King Wen,
Coming to rest in the unquenchable gleam of reverence.

When acting as a ruler of men, come to rest in humanity. When acting as a subject of a ruler, come to rest in reverence. When acting as a man’s son, come to rest in filiality. When acting as a son’s father, come to rest in kindness. When interacting with men of your state, come to rest in faithfulness.

4

Confucius said, “In hearing lawsuits, I am no better than others. What is imperative is to make it so that there are no lawsuits!” Not permitting those whose claims have no substance to exhaust their explanations, acting in great awe of the will of the people: this is the meaning of “knowing the root.”

6

Concerning the phrase, “refining one’s person lies in balancing one’s mind”: If one possesses anger and resentment one’s mind will not be fully balanced. If one is in fear one’s mind will not be balanced. If one takes pleasure in delights one’s mind will not be balanced. If one is anxious and fretful one’s mind will not be balanced. When the mind is not focused one does not see what one is looking at, hear what one is listening to, or know the taste of the food one eats. This is the meaning of the phrase, “refining one’s person lies in balancing one’s mind.” Concerning the phrase, “aligning one’s household lies in refining one’s person”: When people come to those for whom they hold kinlike affection they are partial. When they come to those whom they view as base and evil they are partial. When they come to those whom they revere with awe they are partial. When they come to those whom they pity and feel sorrow for they are partial. When they come to those whom they disdain and hold in contempt they are partial. Thus it is rare to find in the world one who can love, but know the bad points of those he loves, hate, but know the good points of those he hates. Thus the saying goes, “None knows his children’s faults; none knows when his seedlings have reached their limit.” This is the meaning of the phrase, “aligning one’s household lies in refining one’s person.” Concerning the phrase, “to order one’s state one must first align one’s household”: There are none who cannot instruct their households but can instruct others. Hence the *junzi* perfects the teaching in his state without leaving his household. Filiality is what one takes to serve one’s ruler. The behavior of the younger brother is what one takes to serve one’s elders. Kindness is what one takes to preside over the masses. The “Announcement of Kang” says, “Be it like tending a newborn babe.” If one genuinely seeks the way to do so in one’s own mind, though one may miss the mark, one will not be far off. There has never been one who learned to raise a child before marrying. When a single family is humane, humanity arises throughout the state. When a single family practices deference, deference arises throughout the state. When a single man is greedy and vicious, the entire state is filled with chaos. Such are the triggers of things. As they say, a single phrase can ruin an affair, a single man can set a state right. Yao and Shun led the world with humanity and the people accorded with it. Jie and Zhòu led the world with violence and the people accorded with it. Those kings’ commands were counter to what they themselves loved to do and the people would not follow them. Thus the *junzi* seeks for things in others only once he possesses them within himself, and forbids things in others only once he has no trace of them in himself. Never has there been a person who has not stored up within himself the disposition to treat others with reciprocity, but who is able to persuade others to follow him. Therefore, ordering the state lies in aligning one’s household. The *Poetry* says,

The cherry tree with blossoms fresh,
And leafy branches flourishing.
This lady is off to be married,
May she make a good mate.

Only after there is a good mate may one instruct the people of one's state. The *Poetry* says,

Elder and younger, fit brothers.

Only after one's brothers are fit may one instruct the people of one's state. The *Poetry* says,

With flawless aspect
Rectify the four states.

Only after those who act as fathers, sons, elder and younger brothers are adequate to serve as exemplars will the people emulate them. This is the meaning of the phrase, "to order one's state one must first align one's household." Concerning the phrase, "Setting the world at peace lies in ordering the state": When the ruler treats the elderly as the elderly should be treated, the people rise up with filiality. When the ruler treats those senior to him as those senior to him should be treated the people rise up with behavior fitting those who are younger. When the ruler treats the orphaned with compassion the people do not turn their backs. Hence the ruler fulfills the Dao of the carpenter's square. That which you detest in your superior, do not employ upon your subordinates. That which you detest in your subordinates, do not employ to serve your superior. That which you detest in those who are before you, do not employ to lead those behind you. That which you detest in those who are behind you, do not employ to follow those before you. That which you detest in him on your right, do not employ when engaged with him on your left. That which you detest in him on your left, do not employ when engaged with him on your right. This is the Dao of the carpenter's square. The *Poetry* says,

Happy the *junzi*!
Father and mother of the people.

To love what the people love and hate what the people hate – this is to be the "father and mother of the people." The *Poetry* says,

How tall is South Mountain!
Its boulders tower high.
Awe-inspiring is Marshal Yin,
The people all gaze upon him.

Those who rule a state cannot but be cautious; if they are partial, they will be destroyed by all the world. The *Poetry* says,

Before the Yin lost its peoples
It was a worthy match for the Lord on High.
We should view ourselves in light of the Yin –
The great Mandate is not an easy thing!

That is to say, if one gains the masses one gains the state; if one loses the masses one loses the state. Therefore the *junzi* is first cautious concerning virtue. If one has virtue, one has men. If one has men, one has land. If one has land, one has goods. If one has goods, one has means. Virtue is the root, goods are the branches. If you take the root to be outer and the branches to be inner then you will contest with the people over distribution and expropriation. Thus it is that where goods are concentrated, the people disperse. Where goods are dispersed, the people concentrate. Thus it is that where words are proclaimed with hostility, hostile words will be returned. Where wares are expropriated with hostility, they will be seized back with hostility as well. The "Announcement of Kang" says, "The Mandate is not constant." If one's Dao is good one will receive it; if not, one will lose it. The *Book of Chu* says, "There is no treasure in Chu; goodness alone is its treasure." Jiu Fan said, "The exile has no treasure; his treasure lies in his humanity

and bonds to others.” The “Oath of Qin” says, “If there were only a minister who possessed this one ability and no other: to be all excellent in mind and yet to be accommodating of others – to view others’ abilities as though they were his own, to love the sage words of others with all his heart, almost as though they were uttered from his own mouth – truly accommodating – to have such a man to protect my descendants and my people – this would be of the greatest benefit indeed! One who views abilities with hate born of envy, who discards the sage words of others and blocks them from the ruler – truly without accommodation of others – to have such a man to protect my descendants and my people – this would be danger indeed!” Indeed, a man of humanity would banish such a one to the tribes of the four quarters and refuse to allow him to dwell with them in the central states. This is why it is said of the humane that only they can cherish others and hate others. That one may see a worthy man and be unable to raise him up, or raising him be unable to place him first: this is fate. But that one should see a bad man and be unable to make him retire, or having made him retire be unable to keep him at a distance: this is to err. To love what others hate and hate what others love is called acting counter to human nature: calamity shall inevitably reach such a person. The great Dao to becoming a *junzi* is this: inevitably, one gains it by means of devotion and faithfulness, and loses it by means of arrogance and extravagance. The great Dao that gives birth to plenty is this: let the producers be many, let the consumers be few, let those who craft be eager, let those who employ be easy. In this way, goods will always be plentiful. The humane employ wealth so that the person will blossom; the inhumane employ the person so that wealth will blossom. Never has there been a ruler who loves humanity whose people do not love righteousness. Never has there been one who loves righteousness whose affairs have not come to completion. Never has there been one who could keep his storehouses filled with goods not his own. Meng Xianzi said, “He who possesses horses and chariots does not inquire into matters of raising chickens and pigs. The household that has stored ice to chip does not raise dogs and sheep. The household of a hundred chariots does not keep servants to collect taxes – rather than harbor tax collectors, better to harbor brigands.” This is to say that a state does not take profit as profit; it takes righteousness as profit. One who leads a state and concentrates on goods is inevitably guided by small minded men and takes what they do as a standard. If small men control a state in this way, calamities and disasters will come; though there may be good men, the ruler will not know how to use them. This is why it is said that a state does not take profit as profit; it takes righteousness as profit.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE MEAN

INTRODUCTION TO *THE DOCTRINE OF THE MEAN*

The Doctrine of the Mean is significantly longer and more complex than the *Great Learning*. Zhu Xi distinguished thirty-three chapters in the originally undivided text, and these have been preserved in this translation. However, Zhu's divisions do not clarify the overall structure of the text, and a set of section divisions have been added here in order to guide readers through the shifting topical areas that *The Doctrine of the Mean* engages. In the case of one particularly long chapter in Zhu's classification (Chapter 20), a mid-chapter topic pivot is obscured by Zhu's arrangement, and for that chapter subsections have been added.

The title of the text is not without problems. Literally, it may mean, "the central ordinary-practice," or, perhaps, "bring centered in ordinary practice," both somewhat puzzling ideas. The notion of "ordinariness" is important to the text. One of its key points is that morality is a characteristic feature of ordinary, everyday spontaneity, and that our ordinary experience, rather than any elusive or esoteric wisdom, is the raw substance of the Dao. Interestingly, the word glossed with the compound term "ordinary-practice" (*yong 庸*) is encountered in a related sense in a key passage of the *Zhuangzi* chapter, "Seeing Things as Equal," which reads, "Things cannot have any completeness or impairment – all are in the final analysis comprehended as one. Only the person of full attainment knows how to comprehend them as one. He affirms nothing as so. His affirmation is lodged in *ordinary practice*. Ordinary practice means use; use is comprehension; to comprehend is to grasp – once you grasp it you're nearly there!" The *Zhuangzi* claim is that by a readjustment of perspective, from one that seeks wisdom through truth statements about what is so to one that is immersed in action without attachment to assertions and denials of any kind, a person can both understand and act perfectly within the dynamic flow of affairs. I believe that there is, in fact, a significant area of convergence on this point between the Daoist ideas of the *Zhuangzi* and the very Confucian *Doctrine of the Mean*, which seeks to unite the person with the creative flow of Nature – "heaven and earth" – through an abiding sensitivity to the simple moral responses that pervade our daily lives, and that are the focus of *The Great Learning*.

Structure of the text

It can be difficult to keep track of *The Doctrine of the Mean*'s underlying unity of theme. The style of the text changes as it proceeds, moving from a form anchored around quotes from Confucius, which dominates the first half of the text, to a succession of poetic celebrations of the power of holistic wisdom to transform the human world and the cosmos. In providing a structural framework for this translation, I have tried to convey my personal sense of the musicality of the

text. I do not mean to claim that the text is dominated by rhymed or metrically regular passages that could have been set to music. I suggest music as a metaphor, drawing attention to the varied textures of the “Doctrine’s” prosody, starting from the almost oracular drama of the opening lines, and ending with the haunting calmness of its final section, which evokes its stated topic of soundlessness. If there is a unity of underlying intellectual theme, it is conveyed through a variety of prosodic dynamics that build towards a crescendo and then subside.

I have marked the opening chapter (that is, the text Zhu Xi identified as a unified initial statement, which he labeled Chapter 1) as the “Theme.” The theme introduces a cluster of key terms that play important roles throughout the text: Tian 天, our nature (*xing* 性), the Dao 道 (the path or “Way” we are meant to travel in ethical action), the ideal moral character of the *junzi* 君子, and “centrality” (*zhong* 中), or the mean. The message of the “Doctrine” concerns the way in which a person can become a Sage by maintaining the centrality characteristic of the Dao and of our Tian-endowed nature, and in so doing become the equal partner of heaven and earth. The initial chapter ties these ideas together with the image of something beyond sight and sound that we must search out. As we will discover at the end of the final chapter, which I have marked as the “Coda,” this invisible and inaudible quality is possessed by both the *junzi* and the cosmos. Commentators have tended to agree that the concept that corresponds to this elusive, linking quality is termed *cheng* 誠, a key term for the “Doctrine,” translated here by the awkward phrase, “perfect genuineness.”

The first half of *The Doctrine of the Mean* takes us towards this concept in stages. In Section I (Chapters 2-11), a string of quotes from Confucius tells us that the main obstacle to following the Dao – the pathway – is not learning what it is, but the enormous effort of staying on it. Its secret does not lie in “strange arts”; it lies in finding the persistence to walk it forever: to be “centered” in ordinary practice until death. In Section II (Chapters 12-16) we learn that so far from being a mystery, the Dao is actually present to ordinary people in ordinary practice. These chapters reinforce the Mencian notion that every person is an incipient sage, and that it is our common intuitions that we should seek guidance. Our journey on the Dao starts from common experience, but by the end of the section, we see the *junzi* following the Dao to exalted heights, and catch a glimpse of the invisible world of the spirits and the subtle quality of perfect genuineness, manifestations of the invisible thread that binds all that Tian has destined for human destiny. Section III (Chapters 17-19) reframes the greatness of the heroes of history – the sage kings celebrated in all early Confucian texts – in terms of the most fundamental framework of moral action: the ordinary practice of filiality, or obedient service to parents. Their world-shaping accomplishments are represented as no more than the ultimate extension of filial service, linking the moral life of every person to the unimaginable perfection of these sages.

Taken together, Sections I – III share a stress on the topic of the common root of all moral practice, from the most ordinary, everyday action to the grandest political achievements.

The common farmer and his wife practice the Dao without knowing it (Chapter 12), and the greatest sages are simply filial children, like all of us (Chapters 17-19). Section IV (Chapter 20, parts (a) and (b)) begins with a break in the flow of the text. For the only time in the text, we hear a personal voice other than the narrator's or Confucius's, that of Duke Ai of Lu, who asks about the practical issue of governance. Section IV (a) is Confucius's response, and his answer is that the key to governance lies in placing in positions of power people who have grasped the Dao: *junzis*. Giving virtue the lead is the way the world is set in order. A longer quotation from Confucius follows (Section IV (b)), spelling out "nine canons" of governance. These are something like a "Great Learning" for rulers, tracing the steps from self-perfection to perfecting one's relationship to an ever widening circle of people, until the entire world falls within your circle of concern.

Section V (Chapter 20, part (c) through Chapter 26) is, in many ways, the climax of the text as a whole. It begins with passages found in the *Mencius*, providing a transition from political relationships back to a focus on the individual, where the root of all success is found in the force perfect genuineness. Genuineness is the theme of the entire section. It is pictured not merely as a vector of moral understanding and action in people, endowed within them by Tian as their distinguishing nature and as their intended destiny, it is the creative force of the cosmos itself, a human expression of the teleological unfolding of the world of things and affairs. This is where the text most clearly links the ethics of Mencius to the metaphysics of Xunzi, who saw the birth of the human species as Tian's final creative act: the generation of an independent sage capacity which could complete the order of the cosmos and fulfill its destiny. Chapter 22 reads, "Only those in the world who are perfectly genuine to the utmost can exhaust their natures. Those who can exhaust their natures can exhaust others' natures. Those who can exhaust others' natures can exhaust the natures of things. Those who can exhaust the natures of things can participate in the nurturing transformations of Tian. Those who can participate in the nurturing transformations of Tian can form a triad with heaven and earth." The outcome of acting as a creative force on a par with Nature (forming a triad with heaven and earth: *yu tiandi can* 與天地參), a formula found repeatedly in the *Xunzi*, is rooted in Mencius's precept of exhausting one's nature (*jin qi xing* 盡其性).

Section VI (Chapters 27-29) translates this image of co-creation between heaven, earth, and human beings to the social world, where its emblem is *li* (禮: ritual), the networks of human convention that sage creators elaborated as the enduring social expressions of human nature. This too is a theme far more characteristic of Xunzi than Mencius. The *Xunzi* conveys a similar notion in this phrasing: "In the heavens, nothing shines more brightly than the sun and moon; on earth, nothing shines more brightly than water and fire; among objects, nothing shines more brightly than pearls and jade; amidst humanity, nothing shines more brightly than ritual and propriety."

Section VII (Chapters 30-32) celebrates the sage who brings the three realms of heaven, earth, and humankind together, praising first the former kings, whom Confucius took as models, and then the general character of the sage, who is described as the apotheosis of humanity, performing as a cosmic actor. The “Coda” (Chapter 33) closes the argument with a long string of poetic passages, interpreted as invoking the invisible, transformative power of this cosmic sage.

These sectional divisions, listed below with Zhu Xi’s corresponding chapter divisions indicated, are provisional and particular to this translation. They are not part of any commentarial tradition, and are provided solely as guides to readers in following what seem to be the general contours of the sustained argument of *The Doctrine of the Mean*.

Theme:	The source of the center (1)
Section I:	Cleaving to the central mean (2-11)
Section II:	The common basis of the Dao (12-16)
Section III:	Confucius on the sages and filial perfection (17-19)
Section IV:	On government (20 (a) and (b))
Section V:	Perfect genuineness (20 (c) – 26)
Section VI:	Ruling by the Dao of Nature and <i>li</i> (27-29)
Section VII:	The sage’s power of virtue (30-32)
Coda:	The invisibility of ultimate greatness (33)

Further discussion concerning this structural interpretation and the arguments of the text are provided in the commentary and notes.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE MEAN

Theme: The source of the center

The initial chapter of the text links human morality to a source, Tian, accessible to human beings through their moral dispositions, or their “nature,” which provides them direct access to the dictates of ethical action, expressed in the Dao.

[1] That which is ordained by Tian is called our nature;¹ to lead by our nature is called the Dao;² to cultivate the Dao is called the teaching.

One may not deviate from the Dao for so much as an instant; that from which one may deviate is not the Dao.

Thus the *junzi* is alert and cautious about what he does not see, is fearful about what he does not hear.³ Nothing is more visible than the obscure, nothing is plainer than the subtle.⁴ Hence, the *junzi* is cautious of his solitude.⁵

Pleasure and anger, sorrow and joy: before they emerge they are called centered; emerging by the proper rhythms they are called harmonious. *Centered*: this is the great root of the world. *Harmonious*: this is the ultimate Dao of the world.⁶ Reaching centered harmony, heaven and earth take their proper places and the things of the world are nurtured thereby.

¹The initial sentence tells us that this text was composed by authors familiar with the Mencian tradition, with its emphasis on human nature (*xing*) and on the “decree” of Tian – “fate” or “destiny” – all translating the term *ming* 命, rendered here as “that which is ordained.” For more on the term *ming*, see the Glossary.

²I have read the verb *shuai* 率 according to its basic verbal meaning: “to lead.” It is common to interpret the word according to the earliest extant commentary, that of the Han scholar Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, who glossed the term as “to follow” (*xun* 循). Literally, *shuai* implies a battle metaphor, and the alternatives, in English, can be more explicitly rendered as “treat as a general” (one follows a general) or “enact as a general” (one leads as a general); the distinction concerns whether the phrase envisions the person as separate from his or her nature or as embodying it. The Chinese text is neutral in this regard to these alternatives.

³The untranslated term “*junzi*” 君子 represents a Confucian ideal of moral excellence. Most literally, it means a “prince.” See the Glossary.

⁴Attention to the invisible is a theme that reemerges at the close of the text, in Chapter 33.

⁵The phrase, “The *junzi* is cautious of his solitude,” is somewhat elusive. In *The Great Learning*, which uses the phrase twice in its commentary on the third stage of self-cultivation, its sense seems clearer: it refers to ethical self-monitoring when one is alone, or when one’s motives are concealed from others. In this sense, “solitude” concerns the heart or mind (the *xin* 心) experienced internally and unexpressed in the social world. The phrase appears in “The Five Forms of Action” (*Wuxing* 五行), where it concerns a state of mind in which the five ethical virtues governing action (humanity, righteousness, *li*, wisdom, and sagehood) are reduced to a single perspective: “‘Cautious in his solitude’ speaks of his being able to dispense with the five [forms of action] and be cautious of one’s heart.” The “internality” of this process is explicit: “‘Solitude’ is that which is ultimately interior and not exterior; solitude dispenses with the body.”

Interestingly, although the *Mencius* nowhere includes the phrase, “the *junzi* is cautious of his solitude,” we do find such phrasing in the third chapter of the *Xunzi* (“Bugou” 不苟), a text that includes sections close in both ideas and rhetoric with *The Doctrine of the Mean*, as the following passage makes clear:

In nurturing the heart of a *junzi*, nothing is better than perfect genuineness (*cheng*). When one

is perfectly genuine, there is no other matter before one: there is only humanity to be preserved and right to be practiced. When one's heart is perfectly genuine in preserving humanity, it takes form; taking form, it is spirit-like; spirit-like, it can transform. When one practices right with a heart perfectly genuine, one accords with principle; principled, one is clear; clear, one can change. When change and transformation proceed in alternation, it is called the virtue of Tian. . . . The *junzi* who possesses ultimate virtue is understood, though silent, beloved, though yet to provide, held in awe, though yet to show anger. Such a one accords with what is ordained (*ming*) and is cautious in his solitude.

In this *Xunzi* passage, we can see a connection between caution in solitude and “perfect genuineness,” which we will see is perhaps the pivotal notion of *The Doctrine of the Mean*: a state of correspondence between internal and external moral orientation that elicits the awed response of others even when yet unexpressed externally.

⁶The final paragraph is structured as a text and commentary, with the initial sentence glossed in the one that follows. The discussion here is unusual in describing a state of human psychology that exists prior to the activities of life, which suggests a style of reification of the moral dispositions somewhat different from other early texts.

Section I: Cleaving to the central mean.

This section includes a string of ten short passages, all attributed to Confucius. The passages deal with two issues: finding the mean and being able to hold to it over time.

[2] Confucius said, “The *junzi* keeps to the mean in action; the small man reverses the mean in action. The mean of the *junzi* is such that he is always exact in his timeliness; the reversal of the mean of the small man is such that he will scruple at nothing.”

[3] The Master said, “The mean in action is the ultimate! Few among the people can long cleave to it.”¹

¹*Analects* 6.29: “The Master said, ‘The mean in action is where virtue reaches its pinnacle. Few among the people long cleave to it.’”

[4] The Master said, “That the Dao will not be put into practice, I know it. The wise go beyond it and the ignorant do not reach it. That the Dao will not be made brilliant, I know it. The worthy go beyond it and the unworthy do not reach it.
“No one does not eat, but few can know the taste.”¹

¹The final line here recalls a key passage from *The Great Learning*: “When the mind is not focused one does not see what one is looking at, hear what one is listening to, or know the taste of the food one eats” (Commentary on Stage 4).

[5] The Master said, “The Dao is not put into practice.”¹

¹In the *Analects* (5.7), Confucius says, “The Dao is not put into practice,” but in a rhetorically briefer formulation, and only to preface a mild joke about the disciple Zilu.

[6] The Master said, “How great was the wisdom of Shun!¹ Shun loved to ask questions and loved to inquire into teachings near at hand. He put evil in the shadow and raised up good. He

grasped both ends, but employed the center in ruling the people. Was this not Shun!”

¹Shun is a legendary sage emperor, often raised as an exemplar of pure goodness in the Mencian tradition.

[7] The Master said, “Men all say, ‘I am wise.’ Drive them into a net or catch them tumbling into a trap; none knows how to evade them!

“Men all say, ‘I am wise.’ But let them choose the mean in action and none can keep to it for a round month!”¹

¹This resonates with *Analects* 6.7 – especially in light of the following chapter: “The Master said, Hui would go three months without his heart ever departing from *ren*. As for the others, their hearts merely come upon *ren* from time to time.” (In the *Analects*, the term *ren* 仁 denotes a more comprehensive virtue than “humanity,” in the sense of benevolence, which is the role it plays in texts of the Mencian tradition and the translation provided for the term in this rendering of *The Doctrine of the Mean*.)

[8] The Master said, “Hui¹ was a man who, having chosen to cleave to the mean in action, would clutch any point of goodness tight in his fist, press it to his heart and never lose it.”

¹Yan Hui 顏回 was generally regarded as the Confucian disciple of highest moral attainment.

[9] The Master said, “One may level all the states of the world, decline high rank and salary, tread upon naked blades, and yet be unable to cleave to the mean in ordinary practice.”¹

¹The phrase, “cleave to the mean in ordinary practice” translates the two characters of the text’s title; *zhongyong* 中庸. Here, *zhong*, the mean (or center), is used as a verb, while *yong* is used as a verb complement, thus: “unable to ‘center’ in practice.”

[10] Zilu¹ asked about strength. The Master said, “The strength of the South or the strength of the North? Or do you mean your type of strength? Instructing through leniency, not responding in kind to unjust acts: such is the strength of the South: the *junzi* dwells in this. To sleep in one’s armor, to die unflinchingly: such is the strength of the North: your type of strong man dwells in this.

“The *junzi* acts harmoniously but does not join in vulgarity – the strength of the strong! He stands at the center and does not lean – the strength of the strong! When the state possesses the Dao, he is unchanged from when his way was blocked – the strength of the strong! When the state is without the Dao, he remains unchanged even though it means death – the strength of the strong!”

¹Zilu 子路 was Confucius’s senior disciple, known for impetuous valor.

[11] The Master said, “Those who seek to live in hiding and practice strange arts will still be spoken of in later ages, but I do not do these things.¹ A *junzi* may guide his way with respect to the Dao and fall by the wayside midway,² but I cannot cease. A *junzi* may cleave to the mean in action by fleeing from the world, but to live unknown and feel no regret is something only a sage can do.”³

¹Confucianism accommodated the idea of withdrawing from the world to live as a hermit, an idea promoted in early Daoist texts and exemplified in the legends of some historical figures celebrated in the early

Confucian tradition. But Confucians of the early period generally lived socially engaged lives, typically deploying their skills as ritualists to earn their living, and advocated only withdrawal from the dangers of political engagement. The final sentence of this chapter is likely an implicit criticism of those who claim moral authority on the basis of more extreme disengagement, linking them to practitioners of “strange arts,” noted in the first sentence, who also were marked by social withdrawal.

²This phrase resonates with *Analects* 6.11: “Ran Qiu said, ‘It is not that I do not delight in your dao, Master – my strength is insufficient.’ The Master said, ‘Those with insufficient strength fall by the path midway. You are simply drawing a line.’”

³In this passage, the term *junzi* seems to denote a lesser ideal, contrasted with the sage. See the Glossary for discussion of these terms. (The notion of the sage who gives up all social ambition without regret is a significant theme in the *Mencius*; e.g., 7A.35.)

Section II: The common basis of the Dao.

The passages in this section share the Mencian theme that all people have immediate access to the Dao, something that, for Mencius, is provided by the moral dispositions of their common nature. However, these passages may suggest, contrary to passages in the *Mencius*, that there is no possibility of reaching absolute perfection through the Dao: there is that which even the sage will not know about the Dao (Chapter 12).

[12] The Dao of the *junzi* is broad yet hidden. Any husband or wife¹ may partake in knowledge of it, yet reaching to its ultimate nature, there is that which even the sage does not know of it. Even an unworthy husband or wife may practice of it, yet reaching to its ultimate nature, there is that of it which even the sage cannot practice. Heaven and earth are great indeed, yet there are still those things which lead men to despair in them.

So it is that when the *junzi* speaks of what is great, there is nothing in the world that can bear it up; yet when he speaks of what is small, there is nothing in the world that can split it. The *Poetry* says:

The kite flies high, striking the heavens;
The fish leap in the abyssal depths.²

That is to say that both high and low are fully delved.

The Dao of the *junzi* forges its basis on the common husband and wife; yet reaching to its ultimate nature, it delves into heaven and earth.

¹The explicit inclusion of women in a discussion of moral potential is unusual in early China.

²The *Poetry* is the *Book of Poetry*, an anthology of 305 poems, composed during the Western Zhou and early Spring and Autumn eras (1045-771 and 771-453 BCE, respectively) celebrated as a classic source of sage wisdom by Confucians. (See the Glossary.) The lines cited here are from ode 239.

Most Confucian texts cite prolifically from both the *Poetry* and from the *Book of Documents*, another early classic text. *The Doctrine of the Mean* is unusual in citing the former text frequently, but never citing or mentioning the *Documents*.

[13] The Master said, “The Dao does not depart far from man. If a man creates a *dao* that departs far from others, it cannot be taken as the Dao. The *Poetry* says,

When cutting an axe handle,
The model is never far.¹

Say you hold an axe handle to cut an axe handle, but glance aside when looking at the handle in your grasp: that would be to treat it as a distant thing. The *junzi* governs humans by means of what is human, and once they are reformed, he stops. Devotion and reciprocity are not far from the Dao.² If you would be unwilling to have something done to you, do not do it to others.

“There are four aspects to the Dao of the *junzi*: not one am I able to fulfill. To serve my father with that which I seek from my son – I cannot do it! To serve my ruler with that seek from my subordinates – I cannot do it! To serve my elders with that which I seek from my juniors – I cannot do it! To first practice towards my friends what I seek from them – I cannot do it!”³

“In the practice of common virtue, in exercising care in normal speech, if you fall short, dare not fail to exert yourself; if you overstep, do not carry on to the end. In speaking, look to your action. In action, look towards your speech. How can a *junzi* fail to be ever alert?”

¹*Book of Poetry*, ode 158.

²Devotion and reciprocity (*zhong shu* 忠恕) are linked in the *Analects*: “Master Zeng said, ‘The Master’s Dao is nothing other than devotion and reciprocity’” (4.15). The Golden Rule formula that follows in the text here is, in the *Analects*, the definition of “reciprocity” (15.24). *Zhong* is commonly rendered “loyalty.”

³These phrases resonate closely with the initial portions of *The Great Learning* II.B.7-8.

[14] The *junzi* simply acts according to his position; he does not long for what is outside of it.¹ If he is naturally in a position of wealth and high status, he acts according to the norms of wealth and high status. If he is naturally in a position of poverty and low status, he acts according to the norms of poverty and low status. If he is naturally placed among the nomad tribes, he acts according to the norms of the nomad tribes. If he is naturally placed amidst confusion and trouble, he acts as is appropriate for times of confusion and trouble.

There is no situation in which the *junzi* is not fully self-possessed. When in high position, do not be arrogant towards those below. When in low position, do not prevail upon those above. Make yourself upright and do not seek what you wish in others, then you will encounter no resentments. Above, do not bear resentment towards Tian; below do not blame men.² Hence the *junzi* dwells in what is simple, awaiting his destiny. The small man engages in precipitous practices in search of a lucky fortune.

The Master said, “There is in archery that which resembles the *junzi*. Should one miss the target, he seeks for the cause within himself.”

¹These phrases resonate with *Analects* 14.26: “The Master said, ‘When one does not occupy the position, one does not plan its governance.’ Master Zeng said, ‘The thoughts of the *junzi* do not stray beyond his position.’”

²Cf. *Analects* 14.35: “The Master said, ‘I do not complain against Tian, nor do I blame men.’”

[15] The Dao of the *junzi* may be compared to the saying that a distant journey must begin from nearby, that a climb to great heights must begin from below. The *Poetry* says:

Wife and children in loving concert,
Like zither strings all thrummed.
Brothers all in unison –
In happy harmony and joy.
How sound, your household!
Take joy in wife and offspring.¹

The Master said, “How these parents have acted in accord!”

¹*Book of Poetry*, ode 164.

[16] The Master said, “How abundant is the virtue of ghosts and spirits! You look at them and do not see, listen to them and do not hear, yet they inhabit affairs without exception. They make all the people of the world fast and don ritual robes in offering up sacrifices. Thrilling, how they seem to hover above, how they seem to be at every side. The *Poetry* says,

The arrival of the spirits
Cannot be anticipated,
Much less may one be remiss.¹

The plain clarity of the subtle: in just this way perfect genuineness cannot be obscured.

¹*Book of Poetry*, ode 256.

Section III: Confucius on the sages and filial perfection.

The three passages in this section discuss exemplary sages, Shun and the revered three founders of the Zhou empire, in terms of the way that their accomplishments as political figures represent the fulfillment of filial responsibility.

[17] The Master said, “Did not Shun fulfill great filiality? His virtue was that of a sage; he was exalted as the Son of Heaven; his wealth was the possession of all within the four seas; his ancestors were feasted by him at the clan shrines; and his descendants protected them.¹

“Thus it is that great virtue inevitably gains its proper position, inevitably gains its proper stipend, inevitably gains its proper fame, inevitably gains its proper longevity. Thus it is that when Tian gives birth to a thing it treats it with generosity according to its potential. Hence when plants are cultivated they should be nurtured, but when they lean askance, they should be cut down. The *Poetry* says:

The *junzi* of great goodness,
How abundant his fine virtue!
Fit for the people, fit for all others,
He receives his stipend from Tian
Which protects and assists him with the Mandate
Extended from Tian.²

Thus great virtue inevitably receives the Mandate.”

¹Although the three chapters in this section (17-19) all concern filiality, among the sages discussed it is only Shun whose reputation was based on his filial conduct, based on his loving and obedient conduct to parents whose wickedness posed a continual test to filial perseverance. Here, however, these distinctive aspects of Shun’s filiality, which concern his conduct prior to being raised from commoner status, are not mentioned. Instead, it is his later status and conduct as a ruler – conduct which he shares with the exemplars mentioned below – that exemplifies perfect filiality. In a sense, Shun’s unique mythical features

are repurposed in order to align less distinctively filial sages beside him.

In the perspective of early China, where post-mortem existence as a spirit in need of physical support through the tangible act of food sacrifice was a broad cultural belief, the meaning of “longevity” went beyond the notion of long life to include sustenance after death. Thus when this passage asserts that great virtue inevitably gains its proper longevity, it is the protection provided by descendants feasting ancestors at clan shrines that is envisioned. It is only with this understanding that a sage such as King Wu, who died untimely in mid-life, could be accommodated within these claims.

²*Book of Poetry*, ode 249. On the Mandate, see the Glossary.

[18] The Master said, “Utterly without care: would this not characterize King Wen? His father was King Ji; his son was King Wu. His father initiated it; his son continued it.

“King Wu extended the thread from King Tai, King Ji, and King Wen.¹ As soon as he donned the clothes of war the world was his. His brilliant fame in the world was never diminished, he was exalted as the Son of Heaven, his wealth was the possession of all within the four seas, his ancestors were feasted by him at the clan shrines and his descendants protected them. In the end, King Wu received the Mandate.

“The Duke of Zhou perfected the virtue of Wen and Wu. He conferred posthumous royal titles on King Tai and King Ji, and in sacrifices to the former lords he employed the rituals for the Son of Heaven.

“This rule is then extended to the patrician lords, the grandees, and the common people. If the father is a grandee and the son a mere knight, bury the father as a grandee, sacrifice to him as a knight. If the father is a knight and the son a grandee, bury the father as a knight, sacrifice to him as a grandee. The mourning period of a year is extended to all grandees. The mourning period of three years applies to the Son of Heaven. But when mourning a parent, there are no distinctions of rank: all are the same.”

¹The figures in this passage are the founders of the Zhou dynastic house. King Tai, a 12th century BCE leader of the Zhou people, is credited with bringing the Zhou tribe from the northern steppe region of barbarian nomads to a new homeland in the Wei 渭 River valley. According to Zhou legend, his elder sons, recognizing the sage qualities of their nephew, the future King Wen, ceded their status as heirs to his father, their younger brother, who became King Ji. After King Wen assumed the throne in 1099 BCE, he adopted a policy of cultural transformation, leading the Zhou people, former nomadic barbarians now living at the western edge of the zone of Shang Dynasty (c. 1600-1045 BCE) political influence, to adopt the norms of Shang culture as their own. His son, King Wu (r. 1049-1043 BCE), overthrew the Shang rulers and established the Zhou royal house as the reigning dynastic line in the empire the Shang had controlled, which we generally consider as ancient China, though its territory extended over only a portion of that constituting the Chinese states of the imperial era. Upon King Wu’s death, his younger brother, known as the Duke of Zhou, acted as regent for the boy heir, consolidating the new dynastic order over a period of seven years.

Part of the Duke’s consolidation was to sanctify the predynastic Zhou kings, Kings Tai, Ji, and Wen, as men whose accomplishments warranted that their spirits be honored by the title “king” (*wang* 王), which they had not possessed during their lifetimes. This act is justified in this chapter as a rule, whereby the deceased father is honored by the title possessed by the son. (It is unclear that this was, in fact, a custom of the early Zhou.) In this way, the attainments of sons can be cast as filial service to their fathers, which is the theme of these chapters.

[19] The Master said, “King Wu and the Duke of Zhou, were they not of ultimate filiality! The filial son extends well the intentions of his father and carries on his father’s affairs. In spring and autumn he repairs the ancestral shrines, sets out the ancestral vessels, lays out the ancestral robes, and offers up the food of the season.

“The rituals of the ancestral shrines are the means of ordering the lines of descent, alternating the generations of *zhao* and *mu*.¹ The ordering of ritual ranks distinguishes the exalted from the humble. In ordering the ceremonial affairs, distinctions reflect degrees of worthiness. In the rituals of toasting, superiors toast inferiors, extending the rites to the humble. In the closing banquet the white-haired take the places of honor to represent ordering by age.

“To occupy his post, to carry out his rituals, to perform his music, to respect what he honored, to love what he cherished, to treat the dead as one treats the living, to treat the departed as one treats those who remain: this is the ultimate of filiality.

“The suburban rite of sacrifice ministers to the Lord on High;² the rituals of the ancestral shrines minister to one’s forbears. He who comprehends the rite of the suburban sacrifice or the meaning of the great spring and autumn sacrifices can rule a state as though it lay in his palm.”

¹Zhou lineages were organized according to a principle of alternating generations, called *zhao* and *mu*. The significance of this practice is not fully understood, but it organized the topography of Zhou ancestral shrines. Descending from a common first ancestor whose shrine was placed centrally, the subsidiary shrines for descendant family leaders, varying in number up to a limit of six for royal temple compounds, were located at the left-hand (*zhao*) or right-hand (*mu*) sides of the lineage founder’s shrine according to generational designation. Within the founder’s shrine, the altar tablets of senior descendants of the founder no longer provided with separate shrines were arrayed to the left and right of the founder’s central tablet, according with *zhao* and *mu* generational order.

²The suburban rite was an outdoor sacrifice offered to the high god, variously called the Lord on High (*shangdi* 上帝) and “Heaven,” or Tian 天. The former term was adapted from Shang Dynasty practice; the latter was a traditional Zhou term.

Section IV: On government

The section that Zhu Xi designated as Chapter 20 comprises about one-fifth of the entire text and covers a diverse range of subjects. Zhu claimed that its various elements all followed closely from one another, but acknowledged that the basic reason he designated this as a single chapter was simply because most of the text appears as a single speech given in reply to Duke Ai’s initial question in the *Kongzi jiyu* 孔子家語, a compendium of texts most likely brought together during the Han Dynasty. This is not a strong rationale. The chapter of the *Kongzi jiyu* where this text appears is brief, a composite of two excerpts, one being the *Doctrine of the Mean* section Zhu designates as Chapter 20 (minus its final section), the other a short excerpt that is likely an otherwise lost element from the *Da Dai Liji* 大戴禮記 compendium. As a stand-alone component, the Chapter 20 text is formatted in the *Kongzi jiyu* as a continuous discussion through the insertion of follow-up questions by Duke Ai. Zhu believed that Zisi edited an original record of a single extended conversation in multiple ways, with the fact of the conversation’s essential integrity preserved in the *Kongzi jiyu*. This is not a theory of the text that modern scholarship generally accepts, and there is no other reason to view Chapter 20 as a single passage.

Zhu’s Chapter 20 bridges two different thematic sections of *The Doctrine of the Mean*. Most of it constitutes a series of homilies on government, but beginning with an extended passage that appears almost verbatim in the *Mencius*, the topic shifts to the virtue of “genuineness,” which dominates the latter portions of *The Doctrine of the Mean*. I have, accordingly, broken Chapter 20 into five subsections (a-e), two belonging to the a discussion of governance (Section IV), and three belonging to a section (V) devoted to genuineness, which extends through Chapter 26.

[20](a) Duke Ai of Lu inquired about governing. The Master said, “The governance of Kings Wen and Wu is laid out in the bound records. When men such as these live, such governance is implemented; after they die it withers away. It is the Dao of humankind to be quick at government as the Dao of earth is to be quick at growing things. Governments grow like rushes.

“The success of a government thus lies in the men it chooses. In selecting men, judge by your own person. Refine your person by means of the Dao. Refine the Dao by means of humanity.

“‘Humanity’ means ‘human’:¹ cleaving to one’s kin is its foremost element. ‘Right’ means ‘appropriate’:² honoring the worthy is its foremost element. The degrees that govern cleaving to one’s kin and the ranks that govern honoring the worthy are the things that give birth to ritual.

“Hence the *junzi* cannot fail to refine his person: intending to refine his person, he cannot fail to minister to his parents; intending to minister to his parents, he cannot fail to understand others; intending to understand others, he cannot fail to understand Tian.

“There are five things that extend throughout the world and three means of practicing them: ruler and minister; father and son; husband and wife; elder and younger brother; friend meeting friend. These five form a universal Dao for the world. Wisdom, humanity, valor: these three form the universal virtues for the world. There is but a single means of putting them into practice.

“Some are born understanding it, some study to understand it, some come to understand it only in circumstances of duress.³ But once they understand it, they are all one. Some practice it through natural ease, some practice it to benefit thereby, some practice it by forcing themselves. But once they succeed by means of it, they are all one.”

¹The words “humanity”/“humane” and “human”/“person” are etymologically linked (like the words “humane” and “human” in English). The words are, and were in Zhou times, pronounced identically, *ren* (*nin), and their graphs are closely related. The graph 人, denoting “person,” appears as the component 亻 in the graph for “humane”: 仁, the right-hand component 二 signifying the number two. These forms are likely the basis for the common mutual gloss of “human” and “person,” although during the Warring States era, we know that the graph for “humane” was often written differently: 𠄎, a form consisting of *shen* 身 (“body”/“self”: here also a phonetic element: *lhin) and *xin* 心: “heart.”

²“Right” / “righteous” / “righteousness” (*yi* 義; *ɲaiɦ) and “appropriate” (*yi* 宜; *ɲai) were virtual homonyms, and this is a frequent gloss. On the term “right,” see the Glossary.

³See *Analects* 16.9: “Confucius said, ‘Those who are born understanding it are the best; next are those who study and come to understand it; next are those who study it only in circumstances of duress.’”

(b) The Master said, “Loving learning is close to wisdom. Assiduous practice is close to humanity. Knowing shame is close to valor.¹ He who knows these three things knows how to refine his person. He who knows how to refine his person knows how to rule others. He who knows how to rule others knows how to rule the states of the world.

“There are nine canons for ruling the states of the world: refine your person, honor the worthy, cleave to your kin, respect high ministers, empathize with all officers, treat the common people as your children, attract the skilled craftsmen, treat those distant from you with gentleness, cherish the patrician lords.²

“When your person is refined the Dao is established; when you honor the worthy, you become free from confusion; when you cleave to your kin, your father, uncles, and brothers will

have no complaint against you; when you respect high ministers, you will not be deceived; when you empathize with all your officers, gentlemen will respond with great ritual courtesies; when you treat the common people as your children, the people will be exhort one another; when you attract the skilled craftsmen, you will have a sufficiency of goods; when you treat those distant from you with gentleness, the four quarters will flock to you; when you cherish the patrician lords, then the world will be in awe of you.

“Fasting and purification, the ritual robes, no movement not in accord with *li*: this is the means to purify your person. Ridding yourself of flatterers and keeping sexual attractions at a distance, treating goods as cheap and virtue as dear: this is the means to encourage the worthy. Exalting their positions and providing generous emoluments, loving and hating as they love and hate: this is the means to encourage your kin. Well staffed offices with adequate responsibilities: this is the means to encourage high ministers. Devotion and trustworthiness, generous emoluments: this is the means to encourage gentlemen. Seasonable labor service and light taxation: this is the means to encourage the common people. Daily supervision and monthly reviews, provisions corresponding to works, this is the means to encourage skilled craftsmen. Welcoming them when they come and sending them off well when they depart, with praise for their accomplishments and compassion for their inabilities: this is the means to be gentle with those distant. Restoring lines of broken succession and reviving abolished states, ordering chaos and supporting those in danger, setting regular times for their visits to court, asking they bring little when they come and sending them off with much: this is the means of cherishing the patrician lords.

“These are all the nine canons for ruling the states of the world. There is but a single means of putting them all into practice. In all things, when plans are well laid, stand by them; when they are not, discard them. When words are settled in advance there is no stumbling. When affairs are settled in advance there are no tight straits. When actions are settled in advance there is no flaw. When the Dao is settled in advance it is inexhaustible.”

¹Note that this sentence discusses the three “universal virtues” identified in the previous passage.

²This is a formula for unified rule over China. If the text is the product of the pre-Imperial Warring States era, then “cherish the patrician lords” may be a prospective prescript, looking forward to a future unifier. However, the phrase reads more naturally as an advisory comment to one of the initial Imperial era ruling houses, composed after the Qin reunification. Under the Qin (221-208 BCE), Confucians advocated, unsuccessfully, for a policy of restoration for the patrician houses that had been extinguished under the new empire. Their formula was adopted, in part, by the Han founder.

Section V: Perfect genuineness

No term is more central to *The Doctrine of the Mean* than *cheng* 誠, which is translated here as “perfect genuineness,” when used as a noun, and “perfectly genuine,” when used as an adjective. This is not an ideal English rendering. In its nominal usage, *cheng* is probably best rendered as “integrity,” reflecting here an underlying notion that what it denotes concerns a perfect and stable alignment between innately given moral dispositions, a guiding cognitive and affective perspective on the world, discernment of appropriate action responses to the affairs in which one is engaged, and flawless execution of action in accord with that discernment. However, although this alignment of awareness, affect, assessment, and action may be best conveyed by the noun “integrity,” because there is no corresponding adjective form, the translation is not ideal.

It is quite common to use the words “sincerity” and “sincere” to render *cheng*. Unfortunately, “sincerity” stresses conformity between external expression and inner feelings, irrespective of the ethical force of those feelings; only the spontaneity or honesty of their expression is germane. In Confucianism, the inner states denoted by *cheng* are normatively configured. In the Mencian tradition, they are a function of innate moral senses, in the tradition of the *Xunzi*, which also uses the term *cheng*, they are the product of internalized learning of social norms. But it is, in either case, possible to state of a person that she is sincere, but not *cheng*, as, for example, one might say of people who asserted a sincere desire to injure or kill an innocent person towards whom they felt anger. Because the English term “perfect genuineness” is not so clearly limited by conventional usage, it is less subject to this type of misconstruction in the context of *The Doctrine of the Mean*. (Another option sometimes chosen is “authenticity.”)

In this text, *cheng* denotes more than a commonly encountered state of mind, in that it is both attributed to Nature (or Tian, discussed in ways that involve agency beyond intention) and applied to human beings as a term denoting a perfection of virtue (as suggested by the phonetic-semantic component of its graph, *cheng* 成: “complete”).

(c) If those in inferior positions do not gain the trust of their superiors, the people cannot be ruled. There is a Dao to gaining the trust of superiors: if you are not faithful to friends, you will not gain the trust of your superiors. There is a Dao to being faithful to friends: if you are not obedient to your parents, you will not be faithful to friends. There is a Dao to being obedient to your parents: if in reflecting upon yourself you are not perfectly genuine, you will not be obedient to your parents. There is a Dao to perfecting your genuineness: if you are not clear about the good, you will not perfect your genuineness.¹

¹The discussion of perfect genuineness begins by identifying its root in the individual. In the manner of *The Great Learning* (as interpreted in the translation here), the text works from the dimension of social engagement inwards, tracing the source of social success to the integrity of the individual, which is itself based on clarity of the moral sense. The foundation of interacting with others is being attuned to the spontaneous ethical messages that our natures guarantee will be delivered to us by our moral senses.

This entire section is found almost verbatim in *Mencius* 4A.12, which also includes a close parallel to the next section.

(d) Perfect genuineness is the Dao of Tian. Making things perfectly genuine is the Dao of humankind.¹

One who is perfectly genuine hits the mark without effort, succeeds without forethought. To keep to the center of the Dao at perfect ease is to be a sage.

One who makes things perfectly genuine is one who chooses the good and invariably grasps it tight.

¹Compare to the formula found in *Mencius* 4A.12: “Thus perfect genuineness is the Dao of Tian and aspiring to perfect genuineness is the Dao of humankind.”

This passage as a whole may be best understood in light of *Mencius* 6A.6, which caps its discussion of the four innate moral senses by citing a *Poetry* verse that, in context, means that every species of thing is endowed by Tian with a characteristic principle: in humans, this principle is the spontaneous love of virtue. Here, the “Dao of Tian,” as opposed to “the Dao of man” seems to refer to the Tian-endowed operation of the moral instinct; it is work that Tian has done in giving birth to us as we are. Realizing that endowment in the world through action is the work that people must do. Given that the moral compass of the intuitions is unerring, the person who accomplishes this work through unfiltered sensitivity to the moral senses operates spontaneously, without planning or effort.

(e) Study broadly, inquire probingly, contemplate carefully, distinguish clearly, practice sincerely.

If there remain things unstudied, do not act upon what you have not mastered. If there remain things unprobed, do not act upon what you do not understand. If there remain things un contemplated, do not act upon what you have not grasped. If there remain aspects indistinct, do not act upon what is not clear to you. If there remain aspects unpracticed, do not act upon what you cannot sincerely do.

When others can do one, demand that you do one hundred; when others can do ten, demand that you do one thousand.

He who fully masters this Dao, though ignorant, shall surely become enlightened, though weak, shall surely become strong.

[21] Spontaneously genuine in clarity: it is this that we refer to as our nature. Spontaneously clarifying genuineness: it is this that we refer to as the teaching. If one is perfectly genuine one will have clarity. If one has clarity then one will be perfectly genuine.¹

¹In Chapter 20 (d), “clarity” (*ming* 明) is provided through the moral senses, which unerringly detect the good. However, Chapter 20 (a) asserted that, “Some are born understanding it, some study to understand it, some come to understand it only in circumstances of duress.” For all but the first class, moral clarity has been dimmed (a fact of ordinary living that the *Mencius* discusses frequently), and a vehicle for restoring moral clarity is needed. That is the teaching (*jiao* 教).

[22] Only those in the world who are perfectly genuine to the utmost can exhaust their natures.¹ Those who can exhaust their natures can exhaust others’ natures. Those who can exhaust others’ natures can exhaust the natures of things.² Those who can exhaust the natures of things can participate in the nurturing transformations of Tian. Those who can participate in the nurturing transformations of Tian can form a triad with heaven and earth.³

¹Here, the term “exhaust” (*jin* 盡) carries, as it may in English, the sense of “fulfill.”

²This chapter opens a teleological dimension: by instilling a moral sense in human beings, Tian has created an instrument that can actively realize in the world the intrinsic purposes of other people and things in the world. As elsewhere in both *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean*, “thing” (*wu* 物) may refer either to a physical object or objects or to a situational array: an affair in the social world.

³The concept of forming a triad with heaven and earth (*yu tiandi can* 與天地參) is one that is characteristic of the *Xunzi*, where it appears in eight separate chapters. (In the *Mencius*, only 7A.13 seems to come close to such a concept.)

[23] The next best is to master a single aspect.¹ If one can perfect genuineness in one aspect, that genuineness will appear in one’s form; appearing in one’s form it will become plain; becoming plain it will shine forth; shining forth it will move; moving it will responsively change; responsively changing it will transform things. Only those in the world who are perfectly genuine to the utmost can transform things.²

¹In the midst of this highly idealistic string of passages, Chapter 23 provides a moment of pragmatism, acknowledging that perfection of morality and wisdom is not directly attainable to the ordinary person. The notion of addressing this problem by narrowing the task at hand to perfection in a single respect resonates with a tradition of approaching emulation of the comprehensive sage, Confucius, through the more

particular virtues associated with individual disciples. Similarly in this passage, success in a lesser project seems to provide the tools that permit one to attain the more comprehensive sagehood denoted by perfect genuineness.

²The chapter bears much in common with *Mencius* 7A.21: “What the *junzi* takes as his nature are humanity, righteousness, ritual, and wisdom. Rooted in his heart, they bloom richly in his visage, course down his back and through his four limbs – he moves unspeaking and is understood.” There is a direct link between moral perfection and transformation of the physical body, which in turn serves as a visible token eliciting the response of change in those who observe and interact with the sage in the world. However, the notion of the sage’s transformative powers is more systematically developed in the *Xunzi*. See, for example, the passage cited above: Chapter 1, note 4.

[24] Through the Dao of being perfectly genuine one may possess foreknowledge.¹ When a state is about to flourish, there must be auspicious omens. When a state is about to perish, there must be omens of its demise. Just as these omens become manifest through milfoil and turtle shell,² so for such a one they course through his four limbs. When blessings or disasters are about to arrive, if it is good, he will surely know it first; if it is bad, he will surely know it first. Hence one of utmost genuineness resembles the spirits.

¹The notion that sage insight allows the person to become a full participant in the teleologically conceived creative process of Nature is prominent in Confucian interpretive traditions regarding the *Yijing*. For example, the “Wenyan” 文言 commentary to the initial hexagram, Qian 乾, reads: “The great man joins his virtue to heaven and earth, joins his clarity to the sun and moon, joins his orderliness to the four seasons, and joins his auspiciousness to the spirits. Where he precedes Tian, Tian does not contravene him; where he follows Tian, he accords with the timing of Tian.” The underlying idea seems to be that the extended clarity of vision that accompanies perfect moral sensitivity perceives not only the array of things and affairs as they are, but also as they are trending, in this sense pulling back the curtain on the future.

²Divination with turtle shell was a practice dating back to the Shang Dynasty. *Yijing* divination was performed using milfoil.

[25] Perfect genuineness spontaneously completes things; the Dao spontaneously guides them.¹ Perfect genuineness is the cycle of things ending and beginning anew.² Without genuineness there would be no things.

For this reason the *junzi* treats perfect genuineness as of greatest value. Perfect genuineness is not merely the perfection of oneself; it is the means of perfecting all things. Perfecting oneself is humanity. Perfecting things is wisdom. It is the virtue of our nature to conjoin the Dao of inner and outer; hence it is applied with the appropriateness of timeliness.

¹The initial phrase is a play on two etymologically related words: “genuine” (*cheng* 誠) and “complete” (*cheng* 成).

²The term used here, *zhongshi* 終始, “end and begin anew,” is interpreted by many commentators as identical with *shizhong* 始終, or “start and finish,” but the reading here seems to fit more directly with the essential role of cosmic genuineness in the ceaseless production of things (Chapter 26), and it has been preferred by some scholars (for example, Hu Wei 胡渭 [1633-1714]). On this view, *zhongshi* points to the fact that although things appear discrete in space and affairs are conceived as being discrete in time, boundaries are provisional and the world is an unceasing and holistic process. If it were not so, there could be no world. It is this vision of the world of affairs as a continuous flow, rather than as a series of discrete episodes, that underlies the powers of foreknowledge discussed in Chapter 24.

[26] Hence the utmost of perfect genuineness never ceases. Never ceasing, it endures. Enduring, it is manifest. Manifest, it reaches distant. Reaching distant, it is broad and deep.

Broad and deep, it is high and bright. Broad and deep is that which bears all things. High and bright is that which covers all things. Distant and enduring is that which completes things. Broad and deep, complementing earth. High and bright, complementing heaven. Distant and enduring: without end.

One who is like this glimmers though unseen, changes though unmoving, achieves though taking no action.¹

The Dao of heaven and earth may be thoroughly described in a single phrase: As a thing, it possesses no duality, hence the way it gives birth to things cannot be fathomed. The Dao of heaven and earth is broad, is deep, is high, is bright, is distant, is enduring.

Now, heaven is but the composite of many tiny lights, but when it extends to its endlessness, it suspends the sun, moon, planets, and stars, and the world of things covered by it. Earth is but the composite of many pinches of soil, but when it extends to its breadth and depth, it carries the peaks of Hua and Yue² upon it without their being heavy, it bears the rivers and seas upon it without their leaking away, and all the world of things is borne upon it. A mountain is but the composite of many round stones, but as it grows to its breadth and greatness, grasses and trees are born upon it, birds and beasts dwell upon it, and precious jewels arise within it. A river is but the composite of many dipperfuls of water, but as it reaches its unfathomable depths, turtles and lizards, dragons and fish are born within it, and goods are increased by sailing above it.

The *Poetry* says,

The Mandate of Tian,
Oh, how endless!³

Surely speaking of the manner in which Tian is heavenly (*tian*).

Oh, glimmering!
The purity of King Wen's virtue!

Surely meaning that the manner in which King Wen was patterned⁴ lay in endless purity.

¹"Taking no action" renders the phrase *wu wei* 無為, closely associated with Daoist texts, such as the *Dao de jing*. It appears once in the *Analects* (15.5) to denote the action of the perfect ruler, Shun, and it seems both there and here to represent a targeted cooptation of Daoist rhetoric.

²Hua and Yue are mountains in central China.

³*Book of Poetry*, ode 267. The lines that follow are from the same ode.

⁴The posthumous name of the king, *wen* 文, denoted the patterns of culture and civilization underlying the ritual codes of the Zhou, which he was viewed as having inspired through his transformative leadership. In this way, these closing phrases serve as a pivot to the three chapters which follow.

Section VII: Ruling by the Dao of Nature and li

Developing the theme ending Chapter 26, which linked Tian to the patterns of civilization, the focus now shifts to the linkage of nature and ritual. The pervasive engagement of Confucians in the ritual codes of the Zhou and (they imagined) prior eras surely governs the interest reflected here in aligning the general moral virtues celebrated in "perfect genuineness" with the practical program that Confucians recommended for both self-perfection and political transformation: *li*.

[27] How great is the Dao of the sage! Brimming, it nurtures the things of the world, and towering, reaches the pole of heaven. Enormous in its hugeness!

The ceremonies of *li* number three hundred and the ceremonies of etiquette number three thousand: all await the right man before they can be put into practice.¹ Thus it is said, if one does not extend virtue, the ultimate Dao will not coalesce therein.

Hence the *junzi* honors his virtuous nature and takes learning as his Dao. He extends to the broadest expanse and exhausts the essence of the minute. He reaches to the pole of the high and bright and takes the mean in action as his Dao. He breathes warmth into the old and understands the new,² and is deeply sincere in his exaltation of *li*. Thus when he occupies the superior role he is not arrogant, and in the inferior role he is not insubordinate. When the state possesses the Dao, his counsel can raise it up high. When the state does not possess the Dao, his silence can accommodate it. The *Poetry* says:

Both bright and shining,
So guarding his person.³

Does it not mean precisely this?

¹On the term *li* 禮 (ritual), see the Glossary.

²Compare *Analects* 2.11: “A person who breathes warmth into the old while understanding the new is worthy to take as a teacher.”

³*Book of Poetry*, ode 260.

[28] The Master said, “Ignorant yet fond of acting by his own lights; of low station yet fond of relying only on himself; born in this generation and returning to the Dao of old: disaster will surely reach such as these.”

If one is not the Son of Heaven, one does not discuss matters of *li*, one does not delineate a system of rules and measures, one does not make assessments of patterns of culture.¹

In the world today, carts are built with axles of standard length, texts are written in script of standard style, conduct is performed in roles of standard form.²

Though one occupies the office, if one lacks the virtue, one must not presume to innovate *li* and music. Though one possesses the virtue, if one lacks the office, one must also not presume to innovate *li* and music.³

The Master said, “I can describe the *li* of the Xia, but the state of Qǐ is insufficient to confirm them. I have studied the *li* of the Yin, the state of Song preserves them. I have studied the *li* of the Zhou, we now use them. And we follow the Zhou.”⁴

¹“Discussing” matters of *li* appears to mean considering changes to *li*. According to the *Analects*, Confucians took the position that *li* required periodic adjustments to remain responsive to the needs of an ever-changing society (9.3), but these changes did not concern major matters of ritual structure.

²This passage suggests strongly that this section of the text, and perhaps the entire text, dates from the days of the short-lived Qin Dynasty (221-208 BCE), just after the close of the Classical period, when standard measures and scripts had been newly imposed.

³At the time of the founding of the Qin and Han dynasties, whether and how Confucians should contribute to the elaboration of new forms of *li* was an issue of debate.

⁴Compare *Analects* 3.9: “I can describe the *li* of the Xia Dynasty, but my description can’t be verified by its

descendants in the state of Qi. I can describe the *li* of the Yin Dynasty, but my description can't be verified by its descendants in the state of Song. Not enough documents survive; if they did, I could verify what I say." The Xia and Yin (Shang) are the two predecessor dynasties of the Zhou, all together being referred to below as the "Three Eras." The descendants of the ruling houses of the Xia and Shang were given control of the areas of Qi 杞 (distinguish from the great state of Qi 齊) and Song.

[29] In ruling the world, if one attends to the three weighty matters, one's errors will be few.¹ If what has gone before, though good, lacks confirmation, then lacking confirmation, it will not be trusted, and not being trusted, the people will not follow it. If what is to come after, though good, is not honored, then in not being honored, it will not be trusted, and in not being trusted, the people will not follow it.²

Thus the Dao of the *junzi* is rooted in his own person, confirmed in the common people, assessed against the kings of the Three Eras, all without flaw. When established within heaven and earth it is not rejected. When put to examination by the ghosts and spirits it is not doubted. If one could await its employment by a sage a hundred generations hence, he could apply it and be without confusion. "When put to examination by the ghosts and spirits it is not doubted": such is its understanding of Tian. "If one could await its employment by a sage a hundred generations hence, he could apply it and be without confusion": such is its understanding of man.

Thus the motion of a *junzi* can be the Dao of the world for every generation; his actions can be the model of the world for every generation; his words can be the standard of the world for every generation. Those from whom he is distant will gaze towards him; those towards whom he draws near will never grow tired of him. The *Poetry* says,

Over there none hate him,
over here none weary of him,
unceasing day and night,
ever praising him to the end.³

Never has there been a *junzi* who has failed to be like this, yet has early earned praise in the world.

¹It is not entirely clear what the "three weighty matters" are. Zhu Xi took them to be discussing (that is, setting) matters of ritual, delineating a system of rules and measures, and making assessments of patterns of culture, three items mentioned in Chapter 28.

²Here, too, there is lack of clarity in the text, though the general topic seems clearly to concern criteria for determining the acceptability of innovative institutions, such as novel *li*.

"What has gone before" and "what is to come after" render phrases that mean, literally, "what is above" and "what is below." Zhu Xi interpreted the former as referring to the ritual norms of previous eras, past time being denoted through the spatial metaphor of "above." "Below," however, he took to refer not to time, but to social position, and specifically to point to Confucius and his ritual teaching. Zhu's reading makes good sense of the differing words "confirmation" and "honor." The translation here treats both phrases as metaphors of time, but the institutions that are to come "after" may still be seen as a reference to those associated with Confucius.

³*Book of Poetry*, ode 278.

Section VII: The Tian-like virtue of the sage

The chapters of Section VI drew a parallel between the ritual form of the ideal state and Tian. In the following chapters, the parallel is extended to the sage himself.

[30] Confucius recounted Yao and Shun as ancestral, he emblazoned Wen and Wu as regulating models.¹ Above, they took the seasons of heaven as rule; below, they accorded with the flow of the waters and lands.

This may be compared to heaven and earth, nothing do they fail to bear or to cover. This may be compared to the succession of the four seasons, or the alternating brilliance of the sun and moon, or the things of the world, which are nourished side by side and do not harm one another.

Their Daos were walked side by side and were not contradictory.

The powers of lesser virtue flow as in the current of a river; the powers of great virtue deeply transform. This is the way in which heaven and earth are great.

¹Yao and Shun are, in Warring States era Confucian legend, civilization's initial kings. Kings Wen and Wu were credited with delineating the institutions of the Zhou state. Yao and Shun are particularly germane to the chapter, as Yao is credited with creating the framework of an agricultural state by devising a calendar to track the "seasons of heaven (Tian)" (which we see reflected in *Analecets* 8.19 and 20.1), and both Yao and Shun are actors in myths of the flood-tamer Yu, their successor, whose father failed to "accord with the flow of the waters and lands" under Yao, but who himself, appointed by Shun, did precisely that in draining the flood (e.g., *Mencius* 4B.26). (The classical source for these legendary figures is the "Canon of Yao," the initial chapter of the *Book of Documents*.)

The phrasing characterizing Confucius's veneration of Kings Wen and Wu in terms of "emblazoning" them as models (*xianzhang* 憲章) suggests written codes and emblems, which calls to mind the institutional forms that the Zhou founders are famous for elaborating, including the ordinances of *li*.

[31] Only the greatest sage in the world possesses the keen powers of listening and seeing, penetration and wisdom that fit him to approach men as a ruler; the magnanimity, generosity, gentleness, and flexibility that fit him to accommodate others; the vigor, strength, firmness, and resolution that fit him to take a firm grip; the focus, seriousness, balance, and uprightness that fit him to be reverent; the pattern, order, concentration, and incisiveness that fit him to discriminate among different things. As arching vastness, as depthless springs, he brings forth all this according to the times. *As arching vastness*: he is like the heavens. *As depthless springs*: he is like the deep.¹ When he appears, none fail to respect him; when he speaks, none fail to have faith in him; when he acts, none fail to be content.

For this reason, his singing fame overflows the central states and is carried forth even to the tribes of north and south.² Wherever boats or carts travel or human labor reaches, whatever heaven covers or earth supports, wherever the sun and moon shine or frosts and dews descend, none of blood and breath do not revere and cleave to him. Hence, he is said to be the match of Tian.

¹This sentence appears to be inserted commentary, since a text will rarely gloss itself, although it is also possible that the previous sentence is an undesignated quotation. The metaphors of heaven and the abyss are repeated in the following chapter.

²Like the phrasing in Chapter 28, this sentence, too, may be read as making best sense in the context of the expansionist Qin and early Han states.

[32] Only the most perfectly genuine man in all the world can thread together all the great constant norms of the world, plant the great roots of the world, and understand the nurturing transformations of heaven and earth. How would he rely on any other than himself? How sincere

he is in his humanity! Depthless – like the abyss! Vast – like Tian!

Apart from one who is keen of hearing and sight, sage in wisdom, and fulfilled in Tian-like virtue, who could understand this?

Coda: The invisibility of ultimate virtue

This concluding section of *The Doctrine of the Mean* differs in form from other sections, consisting of eight quotes from the *Book of Poetry*, linked by short interpretive passages. In pre-imperial China, the verses of the *Poetry* were intoned with musical accompaniment, and this final chapter may be understood as a semi-musical conclusion of chant and comment, singing the praises of the sage as a force of virtue beyond the power of sound or sight to grasp.

The theme of invisibility is signaled in the initial chapter of the text: “Nothing is more visible than the obscure, nothing is plainer than the subtle.” It is reinforced through a related idea in Chapter 24, where the sage is said to possess foreknowledge because he is able to see what is not visible to others, and so perceive the way that events will unfold in the future.

[33] The *Poetry* says,

Over the brocaded robes,
A plain dress.¹

She disliked displaying the patterns. Thus the Dao of the *junzi* is hidden dark and grows brighter every day. The Dao of the small man strikes the eye but fades every day. The Dao of the *junzi* is limpid, and one never tires of it; simple yet patterned, gentle yet ordered.

He who knows that the distant shall be near, he who knows that moral influence has a source, he who knows that subtle shall be manifest – with such a one, you may enter into virtue. The *Poetry* says,

Though they be submerged in concealment,
They are yet so plain to see.²

Hence the *junzi* examines himself and is without flaw, with no evil in his will. The manner in which the *junzi* surpasses others lies in what others cannot see. The *Poetry* says,

Looking into your chambers,
Let there be nothing shameful even in the inmost corner.³

Hence men respect the *junzi* though he does not act, have faith in him though he has not spoken. The *Poetry* says,

Approaching without words,
And so without strife.⁴

Hence the *junzi* persuades the people without issuing rewards; is without anger, yet the people are awed as if by an axe. The *Poetry* says,

Brilliant his virtue!
The many lords emulate him.⁵

Hence the *junzi* is profoundly reverent, and the world is at peace. The *Poetry* says,

I cherish bright virtue,
With no great sound or appearance.⁶

The Master said, “Sound and appearance having nothing to do with transforming the people.”
The *Poetry* says,

Virtue light as a hair.⁷

Yet there remain things comparable to a hair.

The revolutions of heaven above
Possess neither sound nor smell.⁸

That is the ultimate!

¹ *Book of Poetry*, ode 57.

² *Book of Poetry*, ode 192.

³ *Book of Poetry*, ode 256.

⁴ *Book of Poetry*, ode 302.

⁵ *Book of Poetry*, ode 269.

⁶ *Book of Poetry*, ode 241.

⁷ *Book of Poetry*, ode 260.

⁸ *Book of Poetry*, ode 235.

GLOSSARY

Book of Documents (Shu 書). The *Book of Documents* (*Shang shu* 尚書) one of the “Five Confucian Classics,” along with the *Book of Poetry* (below). The *Documents* includes speeches and narratives, all in archaic, difficult language, chronologically arranged, from tales of the legendary kings Yao and Shun through the Zhou era, with one final text, the “Oath of Qin,” purporting to date from the Spring and Autumn era (771-453 BCE). A small number of these chapters seem to be records of statements by early Zhou leaders that were recorded as texts not long after the time of their purported authorship, but most of the chapters seem to be much later in date, probably from the Warring States or shortly after.

Book of Poetry (Shi 詩). The *Book of Poetry*, is an anthology of 305 poems dating from approximately the time of the Zhou conquest in the eleventh century to the seventh century BCE. Unlike the *Book of Documents*, the *Book of Poetry* was essentially complete by, the late Spring and Autumn era, the time of Confucius. Although the poems are varied in authorship and nature, the anthology was understood to have been compiled by sagely men, including Confucius, who was believed to have ordered the poems. The odes of the *Book of Poetry* were part of the education of young elite men, who memorized them and learned how to chant them (they were all as much songs as poems), and who were taught that they even the lighthearted love songs among them were pregnant with meaning that led the sage anthologists to include them.

Dao (dao 道). The term “Dao” (often translated as “Way”) denotes the ideal moral path for individuals, rulers, and states to follow in order to realize a perfection of character and life that is destined for humankind, if only humankind summons the will to follow its natural calling. The basic meaning of the term *dao* is “path,” and it often is used metaphorically in this sense: the Dao can be “walked” or “traveled,” just as a path can be. However, there is also a secondary meaning of “method” or “formula.” Many different schools of Warring States era thought called their central teachings “the Dao,” most famously the school of Daoism, which used the term in a cosmological sense so distinctive that it was later applied as the name of the school. The Confucian Dao focuses on various forms of ethical conduct on the personal, social, and political levels, associated with sage rulers of the past.

Destiny. See *Ming* 命.

Filiality (xiao 孝). Filiality pertains specifically to the relationship that a child (for early Confucians, a son) bears towards his parents, usually conceived in terms of the father. Mencian theory lays great emphasis on innate moral dispositions, and in the *Mencius* it is explicitly presumed that every person possesses at birth an unqualified disposition to love his or her parents. The preservation and extension of this love are the building blocks of adult morality. Filiality was a pervasive value in early Chinese folk ethics. Confucianism was conservative in promoting it as a cardinal virtue, but radical in both the degree of stress placed on it and the ethical generalizations that it drew from filiality. Both *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean* view adult morality as unthinkable without filiality. *The Great Learning* emphasizes the necessity to cultivate and expand filial dispositions so as to master familial dynamics and become capable of social leadership. *The Doctrine of the Mean* analyzes the most exalted political achievements as expressions of filial devotion.

Human Nature (*xing* 性). The phrase “human nature” renders the single word *xing*. *Xing* is actually the nature of any living thing, and sometimes texts preface the term with *ren* 人 (person) to clarify that it is human, rather than, say, an animal’s nature that is under discussion, though this is never at issue in *The Great Learning* or *The Doctrine of the Mean*. Both those texts adopt the Mencian view that human nature is innately endowed with moral dispositions, and is thus the seat of goodness. The schools of Mencius and Xunzi debated this point – the *Xunzi* includes a chapter arguing that human nature is bad, defining *xing* in terms of our innate self-regarding appetites – but *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean* do not argue the issues: the Mencian position is axiomatic for both texts.

Humanity (*ren* 仁). The term “humanity” or *ren*, was a Confucian keyword, the meaning of which was much affected by context. Its employment as an ethical term may well have been an innovation of Confucius. In the *Analects*, *ren* is treated as a mysterious term; disciples repeatedly ask Confucius what he means by it, and in most cases in that text *ren* seems to denote a comprehensive moral disposition, embracing all others. In other Confucian texts, however, the meaning of the terms seems more restricted, corresponding to a disposition towards care and concern for others, rooted strongly in family love, but extending towards others in varying degrees of strength, which may be increased through a regimen of ethical self-cultivation. It is often discussed as one in a set of cardinal virtues, among which righteousness (*yi*; discussed below) is its most regular partner.

Genuineness (*cheng* 誠). A difficult term to translate, *cheng* is, perhaps, the central concept of the *The Doctrine of the Mean*, and some scholars believe that it is equally the pivot of the *The Great Learning* (this was the position of the Ming Neo-Confucian Wang Yangming). Its basic meaning is probably best described in *The Great Learning*, II.B.3: “It describes a process of perfect inner correspondence.” The correspondence is between the innate moral dispositions, our awareness of them, our judgments about the thing or affair that has triggered that disposition, and our expression of all these in action. The person who proceeds from genuineness responds to the world with feelings that stem directly from a spontaneous moral sense of liking or disliking, approving or disapproving, and that response takes the form of action appropriate to affect the world in a way that will effectively express that response. The life of the perfectly genuine person is an ongoing iterative flow of such spontaneous responses and actions, naturally good and naturally perfect in the same manner as the natural creative flow of cosmic creation and action. This notion, embryonic in the *Mencius* and *The Great Learning*, but expressed more clearly in *The Doctrine of the Mean*, became a foundational notion in Neo-Confucian thought from the eleventh century CE onwards, and accounts for the Neo-Confucian promotion of *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean* as core Confucian canon. For more on specific issues associated with the translation of the term *cheng*, see the headnote to *The Doctrine of the Mean*, Section V.

***Junzi* 君子.** The term *junzi* translates literally as “ruler’s son,” or “prince.” It originally referred to members of the hereditary nobility, but came to be associated more with their superior manners than with their birth. In this sense, the term is parallel to “gentleman,” and it commonly translated in that way. However, although *junzi* sometimes simply refers to an ordinary ruler or a member of the elite class, it more often denotes an ideal of human excellence that was at the center of Confucian ethics. Some texts employ the term as part of a lexical set denoting

ascending levels of moral perfection, with *junzi* denoting a relatively modest attainment. Other texts allow the term to denote much higher levels of ethical perfection, and in *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean*, it can serve as an equivalent for the term “sage,” which refers to the most celebrated type of moral exemplar. Because the term is used with such a broad range of applications, some translators render it with relatively unfamiliar phrasing, such as, “noble person,” or “authoritative person.” It is left in transcription here to indicate its relatively indeterminate force.

Li 禮 (ritual, rites). The term *li*, poorly rendered as “ritual,” denotes a vast formal and informal code of stereotyped conduct that ranges from ordinary etiquette to intricately choreographed ceremonies of court and religion. The reason that “ritual” is a poor translation is that in the modern West, ritual sometimes signifies triviality – “mere ritual” – whereas for most of the educated elite in ancient China, *li* was an essential component of good human conduct. What unites the various categories of *li* is the common feature of form: action according to *li* exhibits respect for others and for oneself by marking it with the syntax of civilization; those who act without *li* are behaving like the non-Chinese barbarian tribes – speaking a foreign language of interpersonal conduct that has not yet been touched, in the Chinese view, by the influence of ethics and virtue. Confucians were invested in *li* beyond ethical commitment. They were trained as masters of *li*, arbiters of ordinary etiquette and expert directors of formal ceremonial events. Many ordinary Confucians made their way in the world by serving as masters of court and religious ceremony, or as experts in family rituals, such as coming of age rites, community feasts, marriages, and funerals, for which they were available for hire. It is not surprising, therefore, that in Confucian thought, *li* is viewed as the principal means of self-cultivation and the perfection of ethical sensibilities and skills. *The Doctrine of the Mean* integrates *li* into its portrait of the ideal society designed through sage wisdom. *The Great Learning*, however, never uses the term *li*, an unusual feature in a Confucian text, even more surprising since the text was originally anthologized in the *Liji* 禮記 (Book of Rites).

Mandate. See *ming* 命.

Ming 命 (mandate; ordained; fate; destiny). One of the more complex concepts in Confucianism, *ming* is translated flexibly here because of its many different shades of meaning. Readers of the Chinese text, however, would always react with attention to any of these uses because of its important philosophical force. The most famous use of this term is in the phrase “Tian *ming*” 天命, or “The Mandate of Heaven,” which, according to Zhou era belief, was a license to occupy the throne of universal ruler that was bestowed by divine fiat. Although the term *ming* is used in that sense in *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean*, the term “Tian *ming*” also refers to that which Tian ordains as our moral endowment (“That which is ordained by Tian is called our nature,” *The Doctrine of the Mean*, Chapter 1; “Regard this bright mandate of Tian,” *The Great Learning*, II.A.2, read as a comment on “Making bright virtue brilliant”). Additionally, although the term *ming* may refer to outcomes that cannot be influenced by effort, or “fate,” and we see that usage in *The Great Learning* (“That one may see a worthy man and be unable to raise him up, or raising him be unable to place him first: this is fate,” II.B.7-8), it also may refer to our “destiny,” a role intended by Tian that requires our effort to fulfill when the opportunity to do so presents itself (“Hence the *junzi* dwells in what is simple, awaiting his destiny,” *The Doctrine of the Mean*, Chapter 14).

Ordained. See *Ming* 命.

Perfect Genuineness. See *Genuineness*.

Right; Righteousness (*yi* 義). Mencian theory holds that among the dispositions human beings innately possess, there is a sense of right, or *yi*, by which Mencius means righteousness: a sense of moral right and wrong. Even though Xunzi disputes Mencius's portrait of human nature, he claims that humans do, indeed, possess a sense of *yi*, but he does not mean by this a moral sense; he means a sense of appropriateness, or fit, as when we may say that a painting crookedly hung is not "right." Although the term *yi* does not play a major role in *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean* we do find in the latter text that it is paired with "humanity," glossed by the term "appropriate," and, in Mencian fashion, linked to a moral framework: specifically, honoring the worthy (Chapter 20 (a)).

Ritual. See *Li* 禮.

Sage (*sheng* 聖). The term "sage" denotes a supreme level of both moral perfection and wisdom in a hierarchy of terms that includes *junzi* 君子. When applied to individuals, "sage" generally denotes an exemplary person of historical importance. Yao and Shun, the great legendary founders of civilization, according to Confucian myth, are models of sages: they pair moral perfection with the highest levels of political accomplishment.

Tian 天. Tian was the high deity of Zhou state religion. Originally, Tian was solely worshipped by the small ethnic group of the Zhou, who, prior to the conquest of the Shang in 1045, were located on the outskirts of the region united, to greater and lesser degrees, but the Shang royal house. The state religion of the Shang included a pantheon, at the apex of which resided a different high deity, Di 帝. After the conquest, texts suggest that the Zhou chose to identify Tian and Di, treating these as alternative names for a single deity. During the Warring States period, certain texts, both Confucian and otherwise, include instances where Tian seems stripped of any character of conscious agency, and in those cases, it more closely corresponds to Western concepts of "Nature," in the sense of a cosmic order. The *Xunzi* sometimes uses the term in this explicit sense, and this accords well with some instances in *Doctrine of the Mean*. The word *tian* means "sky," and the word is often translated "Heaven." It is left untranslated here except in cases where it seems to carry the meaning of "sky," as in the phrase *tiandi* 天地: "heaven and earth," which, as a compound term, is itself close to the sense of "Nature."