

Chapter 18



Translation

When the great Dao falls into disuse,
humaneness and righteousness appear.
When cunning and cleverness emerge,
great hypocrisy arises.
When the six relations lose their harmony,
filial piety and parental devotion appear.
When the nation sinks into darkness and disorder,
loyal ministers emerge.

Word Notes

- 伪 — "**hypocrisy**": False, fake, pretense.

Chapter Explanation

It was only **after the great Dao fell into disuse** that humaneness and righteousness appeared. **When the great Dao prevailed**, humaneness and righteousness could not be seen — there was no contrast to make them visible. When **cunning and cleverness emerged**, people began to practice **great hypocrisy and deception**. In a state of primal simplicity and undifferentiation, there was no need for cunning and scheming. It was only when **the six relations were not in harmony** that filial sons and devoted parents became visible as such. When father and son are naturally harmonious, filial piety and parental devotion cannot be distinguished as such. It was only during **times of darkness and disorder in the state** that loyal ministers stood out. In times of good governance, loyal ministers cannot be distinguished as such.

Discourse

Mencius opens his mouth and it is always humaneness and righteousness. This chapter says humaneness and righteousness, that chapter says humaneness and righteousness — he expounds humaneness and righteousness with incisive clarity and promotes them with the greatest urgency. Yet Laozi flatly says “when the great Dao falls into disuse, humaneness and righteousness appear,” and even calls for severing humaneness and discarding righteousness. Without humaneness and righteousness, is one still a person? Not meeting even the standard of a person, what great Dao could there be? No wonder the Daoist school has been attacked and refuted by Confucian scholars

of earlier ages, who went so far as to say it was worse than Yang Zhu and Mo Di.

Yet what they do not realize is that, viewed from the outside, Laozi and Mencius appear to oppose each other. But when examined in their inner content, they are in fact **opposites that complete one another**, each with his own rationale.

Let this young student venture a reckless explanation of the great Dao and humaneness-and-righteousness, for the study of all under Heaven and all ages to come. Originally, the great Dao was utterly vacant and empty, possessing nothing whatsoever. At this stage it was provisionally named **the Ultimateless**. Then, as Dao was about to give birth to Heaven, Earth, and the myriad beings, it stirred with one movement into the great Dao, and there appeared the faintest trace of an incipient sign. At this stage it was named **the Supreme Ultimate**. The Supreme Ultimate divided into **the Two Modes**. These Two Modes, in Heaven's Dao, are named yin and yang, giving rise to the four images, the eight trigrams, the sixty-four hexagrams, and the three hundred eighty-four lines. In the human Dao, they are named humaneness and righteousness, giving rise to **the four beginnings and the eight virtues, the three hundred rules of ritual and the three thousand rules of deportment**.

When the great Dao differentiates, humaneness and righteousness appear — this too is natural. When Laozi says “when the great Dao falls into disuse, humaneness and righteousness appear,” this is the formulation of one giving rise to two. When he says “sever humaneness and discard righteousness,” this is the formulation of merging two back into one — returning to the root and restoring the source. He is by no means disparaging humaneness and righteousness. If one takes it as disparaging humaneness and righteousness, then in the Lower Volume he himself says “when Dao is lost, then comes De” — by that reading he would be disparaging even his own De. Would that not be contradicting himself?

It is simply that humaneness and righteousness are born from the great Dao. Laozi argues from the standpoint of Heaven's Dao, and therefore treats humaneness and righteousness as subordinate. Since the great Dao has already transformed into humaneness and righteousness, one must pass through humaneness and righteousness to regenerate the great Dao. Mencius argues from the standpoint of the human Dao, and therefore values humaneness and righteousness. Otherwise, consider: Mencius's overarching purpose was precisely to refute heterodox teachings and rectify the human heart. Yang Zhu and Mo Di were obstructing humaneness and righteousness, and Mencius regarded them as a flood of savage beasts. If Laozi were truly disparaging humaneness and righteousness, why did Mencius not utter a single word against him?

Moreover, although Mencius promoted humaneness and righteousness, he did not say outright “humaneness and righteousness” but rather “there is *also* humaneness and righteousness.” The word “also” already carries a sense of the extraordinary. In extraordinary times, humaneness and righteousness come to the fore. Valuing humaneness and righteousness was the remedy for the catastrophe of the Warring States. Otherwise, Confucius placed the highest value on humaneness yet spoke of righteousness only rarely. In the “Liyun” chapter's vision of the Great Unity, he speaks only of cultivating trust and fostering harmony, and does not say “humaneness, righteousness, ritual propriety, and wisdom.” Is this not to suggest that Confucius and Mencius are also at odds?

In truth, what the sages said had its specific purpose in each case. Mencius spoke of humaneness and righteousness to rescue the calamity of the age of chaos and advance it toward the age of rising peace. Confucius spoke of cultivating trust and fostering harmony to advance the age of rising peace toward the Great Unity. Laozi spoke of Dao and De to advance the Great Unity toward transformation through sincerity. This is why I am planning to establish the International Society of Dao and De: first annotating Mencius, then the “Liyun” chapter, and then the *Dao De Jing* — precisely for this reason.

Some may ask: whether this explanation is right or wrong need not be debated. But since we are using humaneness and righteousness to save the present-day calamity of war, we need only promote the teachings of Mencius — why bother annotating the *Dao De Jing* as well? What they fail to understand is that this is speaking in terms of the broad outline. If we examine the fine points, speaking of humaneness and righteousness also involves Dao and De, and speaking of Dao and De also involves humaneness and righteousness. Within Mencius there is also the *Dao De Jing*, and within the *Dao De Jing* there is also Mencius. Humaneness and righteousness are the broad outline of Dao and De; Dao and De are the destination toward which humaneness and righteousness return. Without Dao and De there can be no humaneness and righteousness. Apart from humaneness and righteousness there can be no Dao and De. Humaneness and righteousness are certainly important — but Dao and De are also important!

As for this Discourse of mine: established scholars and elder masters will certainly denounce it as fabrication. Yet the ruin of learning in our country is precisely caused by clinging rigidly to the established doctrines of our forebears without daring the slightest further inquiry. This is why I brave reproach and offer this reckless interpretation.

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