

Chapter 46



Translation

When all under Heaven walks the Dao,
war-horses are turned to the fields to haul dung.
When all under Heaven has lost the Dao,
war-horses are bred on the open frontier.

No crime is greater than kindling desire in others.
No calamity is greater than not knowing when enough is enough.
No fault is greater than the hunger to take.

Therefore: to know that enough is enough — this is the only sufficiency that lasts.

Word Notes

- □ — "**war**": Military, pertaining to arms.
- □ — "**borderlands**": The open country beyond the walls, the wilds.
- □ — "**fault**": Blame, transgression.

Chapter Explanation

When all under Heaven possesses Dao and there is peace, war-horses are retired and used only to haul manure for the fields. When all under Heaven lacks Dao and there is disorder, war-horses are bred and mustered on the borderlands. Among the crimes that invite military calamity, none is greater than being unable to stand on one's own and thereby arousing the covetousness of others. Among the calamities of upheaval, none is greater than that wrought by the rapacious and greedy who do not know contentment. Among the faults that lead to war and slaughter, none is greater than the desire to seize the land and property of others. Therefore, only those who know contentment can have lasting contentment and cease to contend.

Discourse

I, this young student, once read *On Evolution* and encountered its doctrine that the superior triumph and the inferior fall, the strong devour the weak. I was deeply unconvinced. In my own

judgment, the superior ought to educate the inferior, teaching them until they too become superior. The strong ought to protect the weak, nurturing them until they too become strong. Granted, the inferior and weak are in a position where they may be defeated and devoured. But if one takes the larger view, all people under Heaven are brethren. If a brother is inferior, shall we defeat him? If a brother is weak, shall we devour him? Is this not utterly lacking in humane principle? Is it not exceedingly cruel?

Moreover, the people of the world cannot possibly be all alike. Even in the world's most civilized nations, the level of their citizens cannot be uniform. Not only can the citizens of an entire nation not be uniform — even within a single school, where the students are the same age, the geography and customs are the same, and the education they receive is the same, their levels will inevitably vary in superiority and inferiority, strength and weakness. If we follow this logic, must the superior expel the inferior? Must the strong devour the weak?

Some will say that the citizens of civilized nations practice civic virtue and patriotism, and would never massacre one another. If they indeed practice civic virtue, then why do they still annihilate and swallow up the nations of others? To love only one's own nation is still private virtue — it cannot count as civic virtue. Even if one concedes it as civic virtue, it is only a small civic virtue, not the great civic virtue of all under Heaven. Only loving all under Heaven counts as great civic virtue. Nor does this mean abandoning one's own nation to love others — one need only extend the heart that loves one's nation to love all under Heaven, and that suffices.

If one truly loves all under Heaven, one will not only refrain from annihilating and devouring the inferior and weak, but will actively enlighten and protect them. The superior and strong are like the elder and the advanced student; the inferior and weak are like the junior and the beginning student. The beginning student and the younger brother enjoy the good fortune of the advanced student and the elder brother; the advanced student and the elder brother receive the support of the beginning student and the younger brother. Loving all under Heaven is precisely the way to love one's own nation. And all under Heaven can then enjoy everlasting peace.

If, on the contrary, one follows that evolutionary doctrine, then at first the superior and strong compete against the inferior and weak, and naturally the inferior and weak are annihilated and devoured. But after the inferior and weak have been annihilated, the superior and strong must turn to competing against each other. In this competition, new divisions of superior and inferior, strong and weak, emerge, and once again some are annihilated and devoured. The competition never ceases; the annihilation never stops. Not only will nations be unable to endure, but humanity itself will be unable to survive — the evolution will have run its course until only a single person remains.

My Asia, from the beginning of the Zhou dynasty to the era of powerful Qin, provides the evidence of the past. At the beginning of the Zhou, the Central Land had some eight hundred states. During the Eastern Zhou, the various states competed against one another, and the inferior and weak were swallowed up by the superior and strong, gradually declining to several dozen states, then gradually to seven, and at last to powerful Qin alone. Yet the peoples of the swallowed states would not resign themselves to their fate. They rose up together and destroyed the house of Qin. Fortunately the Founder of the Han was magnanimous and broad-minded, treated others with generosity, and made a covenant with the people in three simple articles of law, abolishing all the

harsh statutes, and thereby brought the wars of all under Heaven to rest. Otherwise, had the competition continued without end, would my Central Land not have been emptied of people long ago?

My nation declined from the Han dynasty onward because of the dynastic system of private empire and the policy of keeping the people ignorant. This was not a consequence of failing to compete — it was a result of the abuses of autocratic governance. Therefore I have never agreed with the evolutionary theorists.

Now, as I annotate the *Dao De Jing* and come to this chapter, when I read the words "No crime is greater than kindling desire," I realize that Laozi in his day also had a theory of evolution — and moreover I come to understand that the ancient sages who originated the evolutionary theory did so to illuminate the stakes, to awaken the inferior and weak, to teach them to strive and advance, to stand strong on their own, so that they might ride abreast with the world's powers, that civilization might flourish, and that equality and freedom might prevail. This, too, was a hard-won aspiration of the evolutionary theorists. They were by no means reinforcing the arrogance of powerful nations or teaching monkeys to climb trees. Alas, the rapacious nations seized upon this doctrine. Without waiting for the inferior and weak to awaken and evolve, they swallowed them up at once. This was of course the brutality and inhumanity of the rapacious nations — but it was also because the evolutionary theorists, though well-intentioned, stated their case too partially, presenting only one side, and inevitably gave rise to great abuses.

The ancients said, "A single word can ruin a state." Has not this doctrine done more than ruin states?

Consider now how Laozi stated his case: from all four directions and all eight sides, covering every aspect without omission. He composed both a theory of evolution and a theory of heavenly principle. His theory of evolution rebukes the inferior and weak for their inability to stand on their own: having people yet not knowing to educate them, having land yet not knowing to defend it, having raw materials yet not knowing to extract and manufacture them — seductive adornment invites licentiousness, careless storage invites theft — kindling the covetousness of powerful neighbors and provoking military calamity is the gravest of crimes. His theory of heavenly principle rebukes the superior and strong for their rapacious insatiability, their ceaseless grasping and seizure, their fattening of themselves at others' expense, their destruction of the principles of justice — this is the gravest of faults. And finally he admonishes the strong nations to rid themselves of covetousness, to know when enough is enough and cease contention, so that all under Heaven may be at peace — so that soldiers need not stand perpetually on the frontier killing one another, and horses can be put to the peaceful work of hauling dung for the fields, and everyone may devote themselves to practical enterprise, and resources will naturally suffice.

I venture to ask the humane and worthy of the world to judge this impartially. Laozi's words are such that when pressed forward they are never excessive, and when held back they leave ample room. How supremely balanced and peaceful they are! How perfectly rounded and thorough!