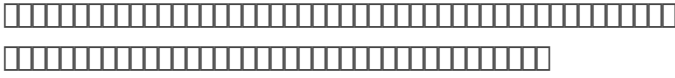


Chapter 58



Translation

When governance is broad and unhurried,
the people grow pure and generous.
When governance is sharp and prying,
the people grow mean and wanting.

Misfortune — fortune leans upon it.
Fortune — misfortune lurks within it.
Who knows where this turning will end?
Is there no fixed standard of right?

The upright reverts to the strange,
the good reverts to the monstrous.
Humanity's bewilderment before this
has gone on for a very long time indeed.

Therefore the Sage is
square but does not cut,
edged but does not wound,
straight but does not impose,
bright but does not dazzle.

Word Notes

- □ — "**pure and generous**": thick, rich; honest and generous in nature.
- □ — "**leans upon**": rests against, depends on; because of, by reason of.
- □ — "**lurks within**": hidden, concealed; lies hidden within.
- □ — "**monstrous**": a harmful prodigy; a monstrous aberration.
- □ — "**wound**": to cut, to injure.
- □ — "**impose**": unrestrained, presumptuous; impudent, unbridled.
- □ — "**dazzle**": to flaunt, to show off; to boast, to make a display.

Chapter Explanation

When the state's governance is **broad and unhurried**, the people are naturally pure and generous. When the state's governance is **sharp and prying**, the people naturally become mean and wanting. When things reach their extreme, they reverse: **misfortune is what fortune leans upon; fortune is where misfortune lies hidden**. Fortune and misfortune cycle endlessly — who can know where this turning ends? It is not that there is no fixed standard of right. But what appears upright turns again to the strange, and what appears good turns again to the monstrous. The people's bewilderment over where right and wrong, good and evil truly lie has indeed lasted a very long time. Therefore the Sage, though **square**, does not cut sharply with those corners. Though **edged**, the Sage does not wound with that severity. Though **following the straight way**, the Sage does not push it to the point of presumptuousness. Though **possessed of radiance**, the Sage does not make a dazzling display.

Discourse

The value of governance lies in grasping the guiding thread and holding fast to the essentials — not in sharp and prying scrutiny, not in burdensome and exacting decrees. When governance becomes exacting and burdensome, not only will water too clear fail to sustain fish, but moreover, whatever those above favor, those below will pursue to excess — breeding customs of harshness, calculation, and deceit.

Consider the principle of all things in this world: they cycle in alternation. When one pushes discernment to its extreme, it reverses into confusion. Take the analogy of a person with good eyesight, which we call "keen sight." If they strain to gaze at something extremely distant, exhausting their power of vision, they end up seeing flowers in empty space. They would have been better off as someone with less keen sight, who simply sees blue sky and bright sun.

Therefore in all matters, it is better to hold something in reserve and not exhaust things completely. Yet holding in reserve merely slows the exhaustion — in the end, exhaustion still comes. One must transcend the alternating cycles of light and darkness, fortune and misfortune, right and wrong, good and evil — step entirely outside the loop — before one can find a true resting place. Otherwise, day after day one is lost in the turning wheel, coming and going: what one took for upright reverts to the strange, what one took for good reverts to the monstrous. Where then will one find direction?

Revision #2

Created 2026-03-10 22:37:02 UTC by Phil

Updated 2026-03-13 01:43:32 UTC by Phil