

On Ethics and History

ESSAYS AND LETTERS OF
ZHANG XUECHENG

Translated and with an Introduction by
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STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA

On the Dao¹

Section One

1. [Dong Zhongshu said,] "The great source of the *dao* came from Heaven."² [One might ask, though,] Did Heaven actually "ordain it explicitly and in detail?"³ My reply is that I am unable to know anything about how things were before there was Heaven and earth; when, however, Heaven and earth produced human beings, the *dao* existed but had not yet taken shape. As soon as there were three people living together in one house, the *dao* took shape but was not yet plainly manifested. When there came to be groups of five and ten and these grew to hundreds and thousands, one house could not possibly accommodate them all, and so they split into groups and separated into classes, and the *dao* became manifest. The concepts of benevolence and righteousness, loyalty and filial piety, and the institutions of penal

and administrative laws, ritual, and music were all things that could not but arise thereafter.

2. (*When human beings came into being, the dao existed*)* <When human beings arose, they had this *dao* [within themselves].> However, because they did not fully understand themselves, it did not yet take shape. When three people were living together in one house, then each morning and evening they had to open and shut the doors and gates and they had to gather firewood and draw water in order to prepare the morning and evening meals. Since they were not just one single person, there had to be a division of responsibilities. Sometimes each attended to his or her own work; sometimes work was alternated and each took a turn. This indeed was a situation that could not have been otherwise, and there developed the principles of equality, peace, structure, and order. Then, fearing that people would quarrel over the delegation of responsibilities, it became necessary to bring forward the one most advanced in years to keep the peace. This too was an inevitable state of affairs, and as a result the distinctions between old and young and between honored and humble took shape. When there came to be groups of five and ten and then hundreds and thousands and these split into groups and separated into classes, it became necessary for each elder to have charge of his own group of five or ten. When these groups accumulated to hundreds and thousands, such a large number of people required management and direction, and so it was necessary to advance the one most outstanding in talent to order the complex relationships among them. The situation became complicated, requiring leadership to employ the people effectively, and so it was necessary to advance the one greatest in Virtue to control the development of things. This too was an inevitable state of affairs; as a result, the idea of setting up a sovereign appeared, along with the ideas of establishing teachers, of marking off fields and dividing the country into provinces, as well as the notions of the well-field,⁴ feudal investiture, and schools. The *dao* thus is not something the wisdom of a sage can [simply] manufacture;

* When we compare the *Juyetang* 蕪業堂 edition of 1922 and the *Daliang* 大梁 edition of 1893, we find significant differences here and in three places in the concluding paragraphs of the first part of Zhang's essay. In each of these cases, I have included translations of both versions of the text. The *Daliang* version is used for the main body of the translation. Sections that differ from the *Juyetang* text are highlighted by italics and appear within parentheses. The *Juyetang* version follows immediately, inside pointed brackets.

it is in every particular instance gradually given shape and manifested and inevitably develops from the nature of the state of things. Therefore, it is said to be "of Heaven."⁵

3. The *Book of Changes* says, "The alternation of the *yin* and the *yang* is called the *dao*."⁶ This indicates that the *dao* already was present before human beings existed. The *Book of Changes* also says, "That which continues it is goodness, that which realizes it completely is human nature."⁷ This shows that Heaven is manifested in human beings and that principle (*li* 理) is attached to *qi* 氣.⁸ Therefore, those matters for which one can describe the form or name the name are all the detailed effects of the *dao* but they are not themselves the *dao*.⁹ For the *dao* is that by which all things and affairs are as they are (*suojiran* 所以然); it is not how they should be (*dangran* 當然).¹⁰ However, all that human beings are able to see is how things and affairs should be (the *dangran*). From the beginning of humankind, to groupings of five and ten, on to hundreds and thousands, and up to the creation of sovereigns and teachers and the distinguishing of provinces and the marking off of fields, it appears always that, "There was first some need and then the meeting of it, first some anxiety and then the expression of it, first some abuse and then the remedying of it."¹¹ The institutions of the sage-emperors Fuxi, Shennong, Xuanyuan, and Zhuanxu were, in their first conception, merely like this.¹² Their laws accumulated and [over time] became good and perfect, and with the reigns of Yao and Shun the goodness in them was brought forth fully.¹³ The Yin dynasty inherited the Xia's review of this tradition, and by the time of the Eastern Zhou, there was nothing to regret in [any detail] of it.¹⁴ It was like some water spilled from a goblet that gathers volume little by little and eventually becomes a great and mighty river, or like little mounds of earth that accumulate to form hills and mountains. This was simply due to the nature and logic of the situations these rulers were in. We cannot thereby conclude that the sageliness of Yao and Shun exceeded that of Fuxi and Xuanyuan, or that the spirit-like genius of Wen and Wu was superior to that of Yu and Tang.¹⁵ The later sages modeled themselves on the earlier sages, but they did not model the earlier sages themselves; rather, they modeled that about them through which the *dao* gradually took shape and was manifested. The Three Sovereigns "exerted no effort and the world was transformed of itself."¹⁶ The Five Emperors "explained things and accomplished undertakings."¹⁷ The Three Kings "established institutions and transmitted a model to their posterity."¹⁸

The differences in their ways of governing and in their transforming influence, which are apparent to men of later times, are only of this sort: When a sage at any given time created an institution, it was like wearing linen in the summer and fur in the winter. Their institutions are not instances of their giving rein to their fancy, saying, "I must do such-and-such in order to be different from men of former times," or "I must do such-and-such in order that I may make my fame equal to that of the former sages." These things were all necessary results of the alternation and revolution of the *yin* and the *yang*, but they themselves cannot be considered the *dao*, which is the alternation of the *yin* and *yang* itself. The alternation and revolution of the *yin* and the *yang* are like the wheels of a cart. The sage's fashioning of institutions, just like the wearing of linen in the summer and fur in the winter, is like the tracks of such wheels.

4. The *dao* is what it is of itself; sages do what they do of necessity. [One might ask:] Are these things the same? My reply is that they are not. *Dao* does not act and is so of itself; sages see what they see and cannot but do as they do. Therefore, one may say that sages embody the *dao*, but one may not say that sages and the *dao* are one in body.¹⁹ Sages see what they see, and hence they cannot but do as they do. The multitude sees nothing, and so do what they do without being aware of it. [One might ask:] Which is closer to the *dao*? My reply is that to do as one does without being aware of it is the *dao*. It is not [so much] that the multitude sees nothing, but rather that the thing cannot be seen. Doing as they do of necessity is how sages accord with the *dao*, but it is not the *dao* itself. Sages seek the *dao*, but the *dao* cannot be seen. And so the multitude's doing as it does without being aware of it is what sages rely upon to see the *dao*. Doing as one does without being aware of it is the trace of the alternation of the *yin* and the *yang*. Worthies learn from sages; superior people learn from worthies, but sages learn from the multitude. This does not mean that they study the multitude itself; rather, it means that the *dao* must be sought in the traces of the alternation of the *yin* and the *yang*. [In the period of time stretching] from the beginning of Heaven and earth down through the reigns of [emperors] Tang and Yu and the Xia and the Shang [dynasties], these traces were already numerous and in the course of historical adaptation, principles had become complete.²⁰ The Duke of Zhou, being a sage endowed by Heaven with pure knowing,²¹ and happening to live at a time when the accumu-

lated wisdom of antiquity had been transmitted and preserved and the Way and proper models²² were complete, was able to sum up, in his principles and policies, the "complete orchestra" of all past time.²³ This came to be simply as a result of his position in time; it was not that the Duke of Zhou's sagely wisdom caused this to be so. As I see it, all the sages of remote antiquity studied the self-conscious nature of the people, but the Duke of Zhou also had a comprehensive view of what the sages since antiquity had done of necessity and he *understood* their actions [as well]. The Duke of Zhou was of course a sage endowed by Heaven with pure knowing, but [his unique accomplishment] was not something that his wisdom could cause to be so. It was caused to be so by his position in time. It is comparable to when there was an officer in charge of each of the seasons, Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter, but the Director of Winter announced the results for the entire year.²⁴ This, too, was because of his position in time and does not mean that the Director of Winter was superior in rank to the directors of the other three seasons. And so, while various periods of antiquity have been alike in having creative and illustrious sages, the position of summing up the "complete orchestra" of the past is the Duke of Zhou's alone. This was so because his position in time happened to be what it was; not even the Duke of Zhou himself realized that this was the case.

5. Mengzi tells us, "Kongzi may be said to have summed up the 'complete orchestra.'"²⁵ Now I have said that it was the Duke of Zhou who summed up the "complete orchestra." Does this not seem to contradict Mengzi's claim? Well, the meaning of the expression "to sum up" is to collect together all of a group and unify it. From the beginning of Heaven and earth down to the emperors Yao and Shun and the Xia and Shang dynasties, sages always had attained the position of emperor; their government and their care of the people derived from the working out of the *dao* as required by circumstances. The Duke of Zhou, in fulfilling the Virtue of kings Wen and Wu, happened to live at a time when the work of emperors and kings was complete and when one dynasty had profited from the experience of another to the point where nothing further could be added. And so, he was able to rely on this past accumulation to form his own institutions and to "sum up" in the *dao* of the Zhou [dynasty] the "orchestra" of the ancient sages. This in fact is what is meant by "summing up the complete orchestra."

Kongzi had Virtue but lacked position.²⁶ In other words, there was no

one from whom he could acquire the power to create institutions. He could not even take his place as a single instrument, so how could he possibly sum up the complete orchestra? This does not mean that Kongzi's quality as a sage was in any way inferior to that of the Duke of Zhou; it is simply that the time in which he lived caused things to be like this. In saying that Kongzi "summed up the complete orchestra," Mengzi was actually comparing him to Bo Yi, Yi Yin, and Liuxia Hui.²⁷ Mengzi knew that these three men all were sages, but he feared that his disciples might wonder if Kongzi's status as a sage were the same as theirs. When Gongsun Chou²⁸ asked if Kongzi was like these men, Mengzi had no satisfactory way to express Kongzi's complete perfection, which distinguished him from the limited excellence of these three. And so he compared the situation to a musical orchestra. Therefore, the statement about Kongzi and the "complete orchestra" applies only in regard to these three sages; it is not a thorough or adequate description of Kongzi. To take it as a thorough or adequate description of Kongzi would actually belittle Kongzi. Why? Because the Duke of Zhou, in summing up the complete orchestra of Fuxi, Xuanyuan, Yao, Shun et al., had actually studied these successive sages. Had the Way and proper models of these sages not existed, he of course could not have come to be the Duke of Zhou, as he was. Kongzi did not "sum up the complete orchestra" of Bo Yi, Yi Yin, and Liuxia Hui [in this way], for he never studied Bo Yi, Yi Yin, and Liuxia Hui. Are we to say that had Bo Yi, Yi Yin, and Liuxia Hui not lived, Kongzi would not have come to be the sage that he was? Mengzi's words make sense only when taken in their proper context. We must not "let language injure meaning."²⁹

6. A man from the village of Daxiang once said, "Great indeed is the philosopher Kong! His learning is extensive and yet his fame does not depend upon any [particular] accomplishment."³⁰ Modern scholars all are scornful of the villager for not understanding Kongzi, but do they themselves understand the true basis of Kongzi's fame? They hold that a sage endowed by Heaven with pure knowing may not be appraised in word or thought or be conceived to have one definite sort of greatness. Thus they invoke the notions of "Heaven" and "divinity" and regard the sage as unknowable. How then does their view differ from that of the villager? [The *Doctrine of the Mean* says that,] "The greatness [even] of Heaven and earth may be expressed in one statement."³¹ Although Kongzi is great, he is not greater

than Heaven and earth. Is his greatness nonetheless not capable of being expressed completely in one sentence? Should someone ask [me], How may it be expressed in one statement? I would respond by saying, He simply studied the Duke of Zhou. [And were I further asked,] Did he study nothing else? I would say, There is no branch of learning in which Kongzi was not perfect. Since the Duke of Zhou summed up the "complete orchestra" of all the sages, it follows that outside of the Duke of Zhou there was no true learning [to be found]. The Duke of Zhou summed up the achievements of all the sages, and Kongzi studied and grasped completely the *dao* of the Duke of Zhou. This one statement is sufficient to describe Kongzi completely. "[He] venerated and transmitted the *dao* of Yao and Shun"—and this was the Duke of Zhou's goal.³² "[He] took as his paradigm kings Wen and Wu"—and this was the Duke of Zhou's life's work.³³

At one point Kongzi said, "Since the death of King Wen, has not true culture lodged here within me?"³⁴ On another occasion, he said, "Extreme is my decay! It has been a long time since I dreamed of seeing the Duke of Zhou."³⁵ [Kongzi] also said, "I study the rituals of Zhou that are now in use,"³⁶ and "How elegant a culture! I follow the Zhou!"³⁷ When Duke Ai asked about government, the master said, "The government of Wen and Wu is set forth on tablets of wood and bamboo."³⁸ Someone asked, "Under whom did Kongzi study?" [To which] Zigong replied, "The doctrines of Wen and Wu have not yet fallen to the ground."³⁹ The reference [for the lines,] "A transmitter and not a creator," is the ancient statues of the Duke of Zhou.⁴⁰ [In the line,] "I am one who is fond of antiquity and earnest in seeking knowledge therein," Kongzi refers to the records left behind by the Duke of Zhou.⁴¹

The villager [from Daxiang] was Kongzi's contemporary but did not understand him, and so he said that Kongzi had not won acclaim in any particular field of endeavor. Still, the villager was not completely without insight. Later scholars, who [are able to] read the writings [that Kongzi left behind] and still do not know what he studied, see less than the villager saw. And yet they ridicule the villager for his lack of understanding. How can those who flee a hundred paces laugh at those who flee fifty?⁴² I conclude that since earliest times, sages, though alike in being sages, are not necessarily completely alike in those things that make them sages, for this is something determined by time and circumstances. None but the Duke of Zhou and Kongzi lived at a time when proper models had so accumulated and the Way was so complete that neither could be further added to. The Duke of Zhou put together all of these achievements in order to put this

dao into practice, while Kongzi made a complete study of this *dao* in order to make his teachings shine forth clearly. Their two activities tally perfectly, as though they were the work of a single man. In no respect is there the slightest divergence between them. Why then do those who seek to honor Kongzi use the concepts of "Heaven" and "divinity" to propound vague theories that can never be substantiated?

7. Suppose that someone were to say, I grant that Kongzi and the Duke of Zhou share a common *dao*, but are we to suppose that the Duke of Zhou "sums up the complete orchestra" while Kongzi does not? (*I would reply by saying, Kongzi's "complete orchestra" is not that spoken of by Mengzi. As I see it, Mengzi, like the Duke of Zhou, summed up Fuxi, Shennong, Huangdi, Zhuangzi, Yao, Shun, and the Three Dynasties—not Bo Yi, Yi Yin, and Liuxia Hui*.)⁴³ <I would reply by saying, Kongzi's "complete orchestra" is neither that spoken of by Mengzi, merely with reference to Bo Yi, Shu Qi, Yi Yin, and Liuxia Hui, nor is it the same as the Duke of Zhou.⁴⁴ Mengzi said that the summing up of a complete orchestra means that the metal bell begins the piece and the musical stone completes it.⁴⁵ I venture to apply this idea to the Duke of Zhou and Kongzi. May we not say that the Duke of Zhou is the "summing up" of the musical stone and Kongzi the "summing up" of the bell? The Duke of Zhou sums up the Way and the proper models of Fuxi, Huangdi, Yao, Shun, and the later sages and assimilates the best parts of institutions as they had evolved from one sage to the next in the period before his own time. Thus he is the musical stone that concludes things at the end. Kongzi completely assimilated the Way and proper models of the Duke of Zhou, but as he was unable to put them into practice, he displayed them in his teachings. Even if a sage were to appear in later times, he would not be able to go beyond the scope of Kongzi's teachings. Thus Kongzi is the metal bell announcing things at the beginning.>

When the functions of ruler and teacher separated and it consequently became impossible to keep government and doctrine united, this was the result of Heaven's decreed destiny.⁴⁶ The Duke of Zhou "summed up the orchestra" of the tradition of government, while Kongzi displayed the highest excellence in regard to true teaching. The achievement of each was determined by the nature of things and in neither do we have (*a case of a sage [intentionally] differing from those who preceded him.*) <... a case of a sage intentionally acting in a certain way in order to be different from those who

preceded him.> This was the result of the Way and proper models deriving from Heaven. Hence, prior to the Song dynasty, in schools [throughout China], equal reverence was paid to the Duke of Zhou and to Kongzi. The Duke of Zhou was regarded as the foremost sage and Kongzi as the foremost teacher, presumably on the grounds that the fashioning of institutions is something characteristic of sages, while the establishing of teachings is something characteristic of teachers. This is why Mengzi says that the *dao* of the Duke of Zhou and Kongzi is one and the same.⁴⁷

However, if the Duke of Zhou and Kongzi were able to establish the epitome of government and teaching because of their times and circumstances, is it the case that sages in fact are dependent upon time and circumstance? Zaiwo held that Kongzi was more worthy than Yao or Shun. Zigong maintained that since humankind first arose there had never been anyone like Kongzi. Youyuo, in comparing Kongzi to the sages of antiquity, said that he stood out above all others.⁴⁸ (*These three philosophers all ignored the Duke of Zhou and paid honor only to Kongzi. This is explained by Zhu Xi's remark that "sages differ in respect to actions and achievements."*⁴⁹ Nevertheless, in government there is a display of actual deeds, whereas teachings only pass along empty words (*kongyan* 空言).⁵⁰ Persons of later times accepted the remarks of the three philosophers and vigorously extolled Kongzi as superior to Yao and Shun and on this basis placed great value on "nature" and "fate" while slighting action and achievement. From that point on, the political achievements of all the sages came to seem inferior to the academic discussions of Confucian scholars.

Cheng Yi, in discussing Yu, Houji, and Yan Hui, said that Yu and Houji were crude in comparison to Yan Hui, and Zhu Xi closely compared the good and bad points of the Cheng brothers with those of Mengzi and Yan Hui. It seems that:

[Even] a worthy cannot eschew,
[Presenting] a partisan point of view.⁵¹

Now there is no better way to honor Kongzi than to pay close attention to his character as a man. If people do not understand the reality of Kongzi and merely make it their business to revere and worship him, they will talk more and more vaguely and mysteriously about him until the term "sage" becomes simply an expression interchangeable with "divinity" and "Heaven." How will this add to our present understanding?

Therefore, we should not compare the relative merits of Kongzi and the Duke

only the disease that is infecting one's vital organs. The ideas of the Song scholars seem to regard the organs themselves as a disease and want to get rid of them entirely! In their search for "[human] nature" and "Heaven" they de-emphasized recitation of the classics and suppressed writing. What is there to choose between two such extreme views? Nevertheless, their great finesse in the analysis of principle and the sincerity of their practice far exceeded anything found in the scholars of the Han and Tang dynasties. Mengzi said, "Good order and right please my heart-mind just as the meat of grass- and grain-fed animals pleases my palate."¹¹⁷ Moral principles cannot be captured in empty words; they need extensive study to give them reality and literary embellishment to give them expression. When these three are combined together, then one is almost there!

Though the *dao* of the Duke of Zhou and Kongzi is far away, it is not conveyed merely by labored interpretations [of the classics]. In the present age, teachers of the classics hold deep animosity for one another, literary men have little regard for one another, and the various philosophers of "[human] nature" and "Heaven" are divided into the competing schools of Zhu Xi and Lu Jiyuan.¹¹⁸ The followers of Zhu Xi and Lu Jiyuan attack one another, while those who talk about "learning" and "literature" ape whatever fashion is in vogue without ever realizing their error. The [present] situation is just as Zhuangzi once said, "Each of the hundred schools goes off in its own direction without ever turning back. They can never be reconciled and brought together!"¹¹⁹ Is it not sad!

On Learning

Section One

The *Book of Changes* says, "The completed forms refers to *Qian* 乾; the realization of ideal models refers to Kun 坤."¹ Learning refers to the realization of ideal models; the *dao* refers to the completed forms. The master said, "I study what is below and understand what lies above."² This means that by studying real things and actual affairs, which lie within the physical realm, one understands for oneself the *dao*, which lies above the physical realm.³

[Zhou Dunyi said,] "Scholars emulate worthies, worthies emulate sages, and sages emulate Heaven."⁴ Emulating a worthy or a sage is something that can be done. [However,] "The workings of Heaven are without sound or scent."⁵ How can sages emulate Heaven? I would say that Heaven, in producing human beings, endowed each of them with a nature of benevolence, righteousness, ritual, and wisdom; these are the Heavenly Virtues. Heaven also situated human beings within the cardinal relationships of ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brother, and friend and friend; these are the Heavenly stations. If one uses the Heavenly Virtues to refine the Heavenly stations, then even before one interacts with things and affairs, on a hidden and subtle level, one already possesses the proper standard that "neither exceeds nor falls short."⁶ This is

what is known as “the completed forms.” If one realizes these forms in one’s everyday life and attends to all things and affairs according to this standard, this is what is known as “the realization of ideal models.” This is how sages “emulate Heaven.” This is how sages “study what is below and understand what lies above.”

Yi Yin said, “Heaven created people in such a way that those who are first to understand awaken those who are slow to understand, and those who are first to awaken, awaken those who are slow to awaken.”⁷ People are born with unequal innate endowments, and so inevitably there will be those who are unable to realize the proper standard for themselves.⁸ And so those who are first to understand and first to awaken point the standard out to them; this is called “teaching.” “Teaching” is to teach people to understand the proper standard for themselves; it is not to teach them to abandon themselves and follow one’s lead. And so, scholars who emulate worthies and worthies who emulate sages realize the ideal models based upon the completed forms, but in following [these models] they do not abandon what they have within themselves.

Given this, how can one be brought to understand the proper standard? How can one be brought to understand the completed forms and realize the ideal models [based upon them]? One must look to those who, in the course of human history, have completely perfected the Heavenly Virtues and developed to the utmost the Heavenly stations. [One must] seek to discover how their words and deeds fit into the process of historical adaptation and study them thoroughly. Then one will attain a personal understanding of the completed forms and become adept at realizing the ideal models.⁹ And so, the realization of ideal models must be manifested in the carrying out of affairs. Reading the *Book of Odes* or the *Book of History* is how one discovers the material for realizing the ideal models. However, this in itself cannot be taken as the realization of ideal models.

This being the case, why did the ancients not take learning [simply] to be the carrying out of affairs but instead took it to be reading and reciting the *Book of Odes* and the *Book of History*? I would say that if one does not extend one’s knowledge through the investigation of things, then one cannot possibly make one’s thoughts sincere.¹⁰ As for one’s actions, they proceed from what one already knows. And so, [the ancients] took reading and reciting [the *Book of Odes* and the *Book of History*] as learning so they could extend [their knowledge] further out, beyond the topics already touched upon by those who taught them. They did not say that aside from this there

was nothing to learn! Ziliu said, “There are the people and the altars to the spirits of soil and grain. Why must one read books in order to be considered learned?”¹¹ The reason the master rejected this as mere “glibness” is that it was not a sufficient explanation for Ziliu’s working to get Zigao appointed as governor.¹² Kongzi was not saying that learning must consist only of reading and reciting. To say that learning consists only of reading and reciting is but the ignorance of contemporary scholars.

Section Two

In their learning, the ancients never abandoned [actual] things and affairs. Since governing and teaching had not yet separated and the roles of official and teacher still were united, this was easier [for them] to achieve than it is [for people] in later times. The Minister of Education’s exposition of the Five Teachings, the Music Master’s lessons to the heir apparent, and even the instruction in regular schools—during the time of the Three Dynasties, all these were manifested in the institutions of government.¹³ As for the way learning was pursued, inside the classroom students would recite their lessons; outside the classroom they would see the teachings on government and law applied in the carrying out of [day-to-day] affairs.¹⁴ Therefore, they had complete trust in and evidence for the things they learned and did not have to pass down “empty words.” Nevertheless,

Although they easily knew;

Actions still proved difficult to do.¹⁵

This has been true since ancient times. Yao dismissed his minister of works saying, “At ease he talks well, but when put to the test he falls short.”¹⁶ Since he was able to “talk well” when at ease, he [clearly] was not an uneducated man. However, when put to the test in actual affairs, he fell short. In this respect, he differed from one who realizes the ideal models based upon the completed forms. Fu Yue explained to Gao Zong, “It is not knowing that is difficult; it is only acting that is difficult.”¹⁷ [Now] Gao Zong had studied with Gan Ban and had worked for a long time outside [in the wilds].¹⁸ How could he be considered uneducated? However, since his knowledge had not been tested in actual affairs, [Fu Yue] was afraid that his actions would prove unreliable. [Fu Yue] also said, “People must seek broad knowledge with the purpose of carrying out actual affairs. Only by studying the lessons of the ancients can one hope to succeed.”¹⁹ Although this explanation comes from the “old

text," still it must be from some [legitimate] source.²⁰ Since [in ancient times] broad knowledge was sought in order to be put into concrete practice, it is clear that what was referred to as "studying the lessons of the ancients" was not understood as mere recitation. When governing and teaching were united and the roles of official and teacher had not yet separated, knowledge was easy to acquire but concrete action still was difficult. How much more difficult is it to take concrete action now that the roles of official and teacher have separated and everything students work on is just the faded traces of earlier men!

The master said, "To learn without thinking is a waste. To think without learning is perilous!"²¹ He also said, "I once went an entire day without eating and an entire night without sleeping, engaged in thought. It did not benefit me at all. It is not as good as learning!"²² Now thinking surely is part of learning, but [when Kongzi] distinguished thinking from learning, his point was that [thinking] must be practiced in actual affairs before it can properly be called learning. This is how the master taught people the unity of knowledge and action.²³ The theories of the various philosophers arose when thinking was pursued in the absence of learning. Therefore, though they all have guiding principles that they passed on, they could not avoid having defects.

Liu Xin talked about the traditions of the various schools, saying they originated from the duties of different officials in ancient times.²⁴ The traditions they carried on became the learning of the various schools, but the loss [of the practice of serving as an official] resulted in the defect of specialization. The duties of the different officials were simply the regulations and in-situations of the former kings. When these became the learning of particular schools, they were separated from the practice of serving as an official, and each particular area of expertise became a separate tradition. When [the practice of serving as an official] was lost and gave rise to the defect of specialization, thinking became emphasized in the extreme, to the point that people no longer practiced [their specialty] in actual affairs. Though they "had reasons supporting their positions and logical arguments defending their views,"²⁵ they did not understand the difficulties involved in implementing their theories. This is why, so long as the Three Dynasties flourished, learning had only a single source, and what was called learning always referred to a person's actual work. In terms of the entire course of learning: when [a male child was] ten years old, he was called a boy and went off to school.²⁶ In terms of individual disciplines: at thirteen, one studied music, and at twenty, one studied the rites.²⁷ The learning institutions [of the state]

were named according to people's actual work. Thus there was the provincial college and the national college. The [governments of the] Three Dynasties all employed institutions with these names.²⁸ Learning had not yet been delegated to individuals and named as their private possession.

When the roles of official and teacher separated and the doctrines of the various philosophers arose, learning began to be named as the private possession of individuals. And so there was the so-called "learning of Mr. X's school" and the "learning of Mr. Y's school." When learning began to be distinguished according to individuals, it thereby was undone. This did not come about as the result of excessive action; it was the result of excessive thinking. The master talked about the errors of excessive and deficient learning and thinking and followed this by saying, "The study of heterodox doctrines is injurious indeed!"²⁹ When heterodox doctrines arise, it is the result of excessive thinking in the absence of practical application.

Section Three

The troubles with the philosophers of the hundred schools arose because they thought but did not learn. The problems with scholars today arise because they learn but do not think. It seems that when the roles of official and teacher separated, learning was no longer what it was for the ancients. The later kings, believing that the scholarly arts could not be abandoned, established professorships, lined up students, and set up the examination system to select scholars—all in order to encourage those who studied and emulated the former kings.³⁰ It seems that, at first, benefits and salaries encouraged the scholarly arts, but in the end the scholarly arts were used [simply] to pursue benefits and salaries. This truly is not worth discussing. However, the most learned teachers of the scholarly tradition have come out of this institution, and one cannot deny that they are products of this fashion of teaching, which has prevailed at court. Human emotions cannot but be attracted and moved [by desirable things] and once so inclined, one's thoughts and energies will be directed to realize these aims, and one will seek the fame that goes with it. These are things that anyone of average ability or more can, with effort, expect to achieve. However, the schools and examinations are flooded with vast numbers of highly talented individuals; surely [at least] one in ten should surpass those "of average ability or more."³¹ [However, scholars today] are far removed from the men of old and they cannot study what the men of old studied. Since the aim of learning now consists