

UNIT 03: CLASS. CIVIL - DOC. ANALYSIS

ROMAN ANTIQUITY

A.

Source 3.4

Governing a Chinese Empire

As the Roman Empire was taking shape in the Mediterranean basin, a powerful Chinese empire emerged in East Asia. More than in the Roman world, the political ideas and practices of imperial China drew on the past. The notion of China as a unified state ruled by a single sage/emperor who mediated between Heaven and the human realm had an ancient pedigree. After a long period of political fragmentation, known as the era of warring states, such a unified Chinese state took shape once again during the short-lived Qin dynasty (221-206 B.C.E.), led by its formidable ruler Shihuangdi. That state operated under a version of Legalism, a political philosophy that found expression in the writings of Han Fei (280-233 B.C.E.) and that in large measure guided the practices of Shihuangdi and the Qin dynasty. Han Fei's Legalist thinking was discredited by the brutality and excesses of Shihuangdi's reign, and the Han dynasty that followed was sharply critical of his ideas, favoring instead the "government by morality" approach of Confucianism. Nonetheless, Han Fei's emphasis on the importance of laws and the need to enforce them influenced all succeeding Chinese dynasties.

Questions to consider as you examine the source:

- Why is Han Fei's approach to governing China referred to as Legalism? According to him, what is required for effective government?
- What are the "two handles"?
- What view of human nature underpins Han Fei's argument?

The Writings of Master Han Fei

Third Century B.C.E.

No state is forever strong or forever weak. If those who would uphold the law are strong, the state will be strong; if they are weak, the state will be weak....

In the present age, he who can put an end to private scheming and make men uphold the public law will see his people secure and his state well ordered; he who can block selfish pursuits and enforce the public law will see his army growing stronger and his enemies weakening. Find men who have a clear understanding of what is beneficial to the nation and a feeling for the system of laws and regulations, and place them in charge.

minister cannot escape; when good is to be rewarded, the lowest peasant must not be passed over. Hence, for correcting the faults of superiors, chastising the misdeeds of subordinates, restoring order, exposing error, checking excesses, remedying evil, and unifying the standards of the people, nothing can compare to law.... If penalties are heavy, men dare not use high position to abuse the humble; if laws are clearly defined, superiors will be honored and their rights will not be invaded.... Were the ruler of men to discard law and follow his private whim, then all distinction between high and low would cease to exist.

The enlightened ruler controls his ministers by means of two handles alone. The two handles are punishment and favor. What do I mean by punishment and favor? To inflict mutilation and death on men is called punishment; to bestow honor and reward is called favor. Those who act as ministers fear the penalties and hope to profit by the rewards. Hence if the ruler wields his

of the lesser officials; then the ruler can never be deceived by lies and falsehoods....

A truly enlightened ruler uses the law to select men for him; he does not choose them himself. He uses the law to weigh their merits; he does not attempt to judge them for himself. Hence men of true worth will not be able to hide their talents, nor spoliators to gloss over their faults. Men cannot advance on the basis of praise alone, nor be driven from court by calumny [false charges]....

What the law has decreed the wise man cannot dispute: nor the brave man venture to contest. When faults are to be punished, the highest

punishments and favors, the ministers will fear his sternness and flock to receive his benefits. But the evil ministers of the age are different. They cajole the ruler into letting them inflict punishments themselves on men they hate and bestow rewards on men they like. Now if the ruler of men does not insist on reserving to himself the right to dispense profit in the form of rewards and show his sternness in punishments, but instead hands them out on the advice of his ministers, then the people of the state will all fear the ministers and hold the ruler in contempt, will flock to the ministers and desert the ruler. This is the danger that arises when the ruler loses control of punishments and favors.

Source: *Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsin Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu* by Mo, Di et al., translated by Burton Watson. Copyright © 1963, 1964 Columbia University Press. Reprinted with permission of the publisher.

## THINKING THROUGH SOURCES

### B. The "Good Life" in Asian Cultural Traditions

Many of the wisdom traditions of the second-wave era were fundamentally religious, focusing on human interaction with an unseen realm. Sometimes they expressed this realm as a world of divine beings, God or gods, as in Judaism, Christianity, and some forms of Hinduism and Buddhism. Alternatively, the more mystical expressions of these faiths, as well as Chinese Daoism, at times articulated the unseen realm in less personal ways, as a sustaining or pervasive Presence, located variously above, beyond, beneath, or within the human and visible realm. Some of these traditions, Chinese Confucianism and Greek rationalism, for example, were less overtly religious, expressed in more philosophical, humanistic, or rational terms. But what they all shared was an impulse to address the moral and social implications of their understandings of the cosmos, probing the nature of a "good life" for an individual person or a "good society" for a community of people. How should we live in this world? This was among the central questions that have occupied human beings since the beginning of conscious thought. And that question certainly played a major role in the emerging cultural traditions of the second-wave civilizations all across Eurasia. The sources that follow present a sample of this thinking drawn from Chinese, Indian, and Middle Eastern traditions.

#### Source 4.1 Reflections from Confucius

No one was more central to the making of Chinese civilization than Confucius (551–479 B.C.E.). In the several generations following their master's death, his disciples recalled his teachings and his conversations, recording them in a small book called the *Analects*. This text became a touchstone for all educated people in China and across much of East Asia as well. Over the centuries, extensive commentaries and interpretations of Confucius's teachings gave rise to a body of literature known generally as Confucianism, though these ideas encompassed the thinking of many others as well.

In the translation from the *Analects* that follows, the word "virtue" refers to the qualities of a complete or realized human being, sometimes rendered in Confucian literature as a "gentleman" or a "virtuous man." The terms "propriety" and "rites of propriety" point to an elaborate set of rituals or expectations that defined appropriate behavior in virtually every circumstance of life, depending on one's gender, age, or class.

Questions to consider as you examine the source:

- How would Confucius characterize such a fully developed person? How might one become this kind of person?
- What is "filial piety," and why is it so important in Confucius's understanding of a good society?
- How do "virtue," "filial piety," and "learning" relate to the larger task of creating good government and a harmonious society? What is Confucius's understanding of the "good life" and how it might be generated?

## CONFUCIUS

### The Analects

ca. 479–221 B.C.E.

The philosopher Yu said, "They are few who, being filial and fraternal, are fond of offending against their superiors. There have been none, who, not liking to offend against their superiors, have been fond of stirring up confusion. . . ."

The Master said, "To rule a country of a thousand chariots, there must be reverent attention to business, and sincerity; economy in expenditure, and love for men; and the employment of the people at the proper seasons."

The Master said, "A youth, when at home, should be filial, and, abroad, respectful to his elders. He should be earnest and truthful. He should overflow in love to all, and cultivate the friendship of the good. When he has time and opportunity, after the performance of these things, he should employ them in polite studies."

Tze-iaia said, "If a man withdraws his mind from the love of [beautiful women], and applies it as sincerely to the love of the virtuous; if, in serving his parents, he can exert his utmost strength;

if, in serving his prince, he can devote his life; if, in his intercourse with his friends, his words are sincere; although men say that he has not learned, I will certainly say that he has."

The philosopher Tsang said, "Let there be a careful attention to perform the funeral rites to parents, and let them be followed when long gone with the ceremonies of sacrifice; then the virtue of the people will resume its proper excellence."

The Master said, "He who exercises government by means of his virtue may be compared to the north polar star, which keeps its place and all the stars turn toward it."

The Master said, "If the people be led by laws, and uniformity sought to be given them by punishments, they will try to avoid the punishment, but have no sense of shame. If they be led by virtue, and uniformity sought to be given them by the rules of propriety, they will have the sense of shame, and moreover will become good."

The Duke Ai asked, saying, "What should be done in order to secure the submission of the people?" Confucius replied, "Advance the upright and set aside the crooked, then the people will submit. Advance the crooked and set aside the upright, then the people will not submit."

Chi K'ang asked how to cause the people to reverence their ruler, to be faithful to him. . . . The Master said, "Let him preside over them with gravity; then they will reverence him. Let him be filial and kind to all; then they will be faithful to him. Let him advance the good and teach the incompetent; then they will eagerly seek to be virtuous."

The Master said, "If the will be set on virtue, there will be no practice of wickedness."

The Master said, "Riches and honors are what men desire. If they cannot be obtained in the proper way, they should not be held. Poverty and meanness are what men dislike. If they cannot be avoided in the proper way, they should not be avoided."

The Master said, "In serving his parents, a son may remonstrate with them, but gently; when he sees that they do not incline to follow his advice, he shows an increased degree of reverence, but does not abandon his purpose; and should they punish him, he does not allow himself to murmur."

Fan Ch'ih asked what constituted wisdom. The Master said, "To give one's self earnestly to the duties due to men, and, while respecting spiritual beings, to keep aloof from them, may be called wisdom."

The Master said, "The superior man, extensively studying all learning, and keeping himself under the restraint of the rules of propriety, may thus likewise not overstep what is right."

The Master's frequent themes of discourse were the Odes, the History, and the maintenance

of the Rules of Propriety. On all these he frequently discoursed.

The Master was wishing to go and live among the nine wild tribes of the east. Some one said, "They are rude. How can you do such a thing?" The Master said, "If a superior man dwell among them, what rudeness would there be?"

Chi Lu asked about serving the spirits of the dead. The Master said, "While you are not able to serve men, how can you serve their spirits?" Chi Lu added, "I venture to ask about death." He was answered, "While you do not know life, how can you know about death?"

Yen Yuan asked about perfect virtue. The Master said, "To subdue one's self and return to propriety, is perfect virtue. If a man can for one day subdue himself and return to propriety, all under heaven will ascribe perfect virtue to him."

Chung-kung asked about perfect virtue. The Master said, "It is, when you go abroad, to behave to every one as if you were receiving a great guest; to employ the people as if you were assisting at a great sacrifice; not to do to others as you would not wish done to yourself; to have no murmuring against you in the country, and none in the family."

Chi K'ang asked Confucius about government. Confucius replied, "To govern means to rectify. If you lead on the people with correctness, who will dare not to be correct?"

Truly, if the ruler is not a ruler, the subject not a subject, the father not a father, the son not a son, then even if there be grain, would I get to eat it?

The Master said, "Of all people, girls and ser-vants are the most difficult to behave to. If you are familiar with them, they lose their humility. If you maintain a reserve toward them, they are discontented."

Source: Confucius, *The Analects*, translated by James Legge (1893).

2

## Source 4.2 Filial Piety Illustrated

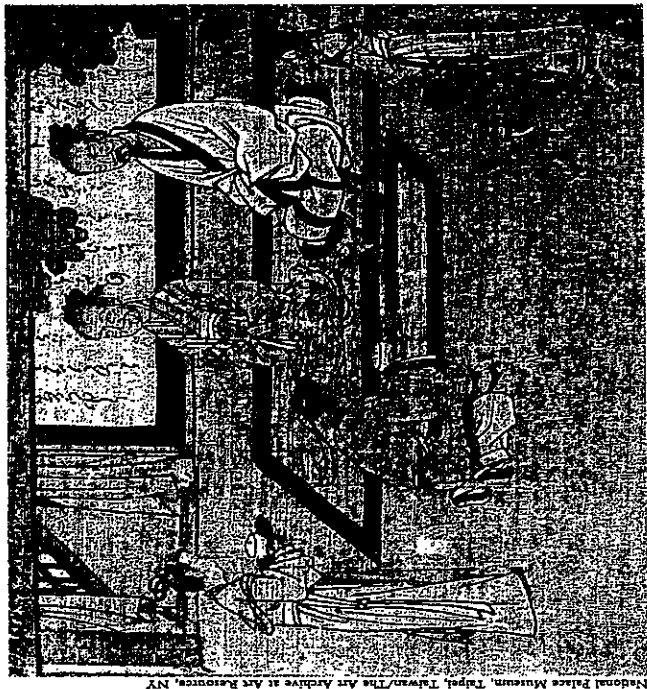
Central to the Confucian understanding of a good life and a good society was the notion of "filial piety." It was a concept that defined relationships between social inferiors and superiors, beginning in the family and extending to the larger arena of state and society. *The Classic of Filial Piety*, composed around 200 B.C.E., gave this fundamental Chinese value an enduring expression. "Our body, skin, and hair are all received from our parents," the text declared. "We dare not injure them. This is the first priority in filial duty. To establish oneself in the world and practice the Way; to uphold one's good name for posterity and give glory to one's father and mother — this is the completion of filial duty. Thus filiality begins with service to parents, continues in service to the ruler, and ends with establishing oneself in the world [and becoming an exemplary person]."<sup>1</sup> Reissued many times over many centuries, this text was accompanied by images illustrating the concept. Source 4.2 is an example of one such image, showing a good son and his wife honoring the son's parents, while two children at the bottom right observe the scene.

Questions to consider as you examine the source:

- How is the son expressing filial piety?
- What is the small child on the bottom right learning from this experience?
- How might you interpret the demeanor of the seated parents?

3

Filial Piety



National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan/The Art Archive at Art Resources, NY

3 Source 4.3 A Daoist Perspective on the Good Life

Chinese thinking about the good life was not limited to the Confucian tradition. An alternative to it took shape in the writings of the mysterious figure of Laozi, who, it is said, chose to pursue the Way (*dao*) beyond the confines of Chinese civilization. The tradition that arose from Laozi and those who expanded on his ideas became known as Daoism. Here are brief selections from Laozi's famous work, the *Daodejing* (*The Way and Its Power*), which emerged around 500 B.C.E.

- Questions to consider as you examine the source:
- How does Laozi's prescription for a good life differ from that of Confucius?
  - How do you understand the concept of *wu-wei* or non-action?
  - To what does the concept of *dao* refer? What role does it play in Laozi's understanding of a good life?

LAOZI  
Daodejing  
500 B.C.E.

1. The Dao that can be told of is not the eternal Dao. The name that can be named is not the eternal name. The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth. The Named is the mother of all things.

2. [T]he sage manages affairs without action [*wu-wei*] and spreads doctrines without words. All things arise, and he does not turn away from them. He produces them, but does not take possession of them. He acts, but does not rely on his own ability. He accomplishes his task, but does not claim credit for it. It is precisely because he does not claim credit that his accomplishment remains with him.

3. Do not exalt the worthy, so that the people shall not compete. Do not value goods that are hard to get, so that the people shall not steal. Do not display objects of desire, so that the people's hearts shall not be disturbed. Therefore in the government of the sage, he keeps their hearts vacant, fills their bellies, weakens their ambitions, and strengthens their bones. He always causes his people to be without knowledge or desire, and the crafty to be afraid to act. By acting without action, all things will be in order.

8. The best man is like water. Water is good; it benefits all things and does not compete with them. It dwells in lowly places that all disdain. This is why it is so near to the Dao. The best man in his dwelling loves the earth. In his heart, he loves what is profound. In his associations, he loves humanity. In his words, he loves faithfulness. In government, he loves order. In handling affairs, he loves competence. In his activities, he loves timeliness.

11. Thirty spokes are united around the hub to make a wheel, but it is on its non-being [emptiness, absence] that the utility of the carriage depends. Clay is molded to form a utensil, but it is on its non-being that the utility of the utensil depends. Doors and windows are cut out to make

a room, but it is on its non-being that the utility of the room depends. Therefore turn being into advantage, and turn non-being into utility.

17. The best rulers are those whose existence is merely known by the people. The next best are those who are loved and praised. The next are those who are feared. And the next are those who are despised. It is only when one does not have enough faith in others that others will have no faith in him.

18. When the great Dao declined, the doctrines of humanity and righteousness arose. When knowledge and wisdom appeared, there emerged great hypocrisy. When the six family relationships are not in harmony, there will be the advocacy of filial piety and deep love to children. When a country is in disorder, there will be praise of loyal ministers.

48. The pursuit of learning is to increase day after day. The pursuit of the Dao is to decrease day after day. It is to decrease and further decrease until one reaches the point of taking no action. No action is undertaken, and yet nothing is left undone. An empire is often brought to order by having no activity. If one likes to undertake activity, he is not qualified to govern the empire.

80. Let there be a small country with few people. Let there be ten times and a hundred times as many utensils, but let them not be used. Let the people value their lives highly and not migrate far. Even if there are ships and carriages, none will ride in them. Even if there are armor and weapons, none will display them. Let the people again knot cords and use them [in place of writing]. Let them relish their food, beautify their clothing, be content with their homes, and delight in their customs. Though neighboring communities overlook one another, and the crowing of cocks and barking of dogs can be heard, yet the people there may grow old and die without ever visiting one another.

4