

XUNZI

Chapter 21: REMOVING BLINDERS (*Jiebi* 解蔽)

A. Blinders and the Dao

Among the great concerns of mankind is the danger of becoming fully engaged on a side road of reality and blind to the great paths. If one corrects this obsession, then one may return to the main road; otherwise, one stands in confusion at every crossroad. In the world there do not exist two true Daos, in the mind of the sage there are never two contending alternatives.

In this opening passage, Xunzi outlines a simple portrait of the perfected mind. Such a mind will not see action moments in terms of competing alternative choices. Since it is always focused on the single, comprehensive path of goodness, it will never feel in doubt or need to contemplate choices. *Does this appear to be a realistic goal for human beings? If not, is it a productive ideal for us to aspire towards?*

B. Those who wear blinders today

Now the lords of the feudal states all have different methods of government, and the hundred schools of the various masters each has a different teaching — it must be that some are correct and others wrong, that some lead to order and others to chaos. The rulers of turbulent states and the followers of deranged teachings all truly seek to get things right so they can act in their best interests. But what happens to them is that they become possessive of their little *daos* and others encourage them in their most dangerous errors. They hoard up their storehouses of deranged study, fearful of any revelation of their errors. Dependent on their personal accomplishments, they fear seeing any fine points in the arts of others. Even if they find themselves walking beside someone who has got it right, they can only assert their own correctness again and again. Isn't this what it is to become blinded by some side road and lose sight of the true destination you are seeking to reach?

If your mind is not functioning, then though black and white lie before you, your eyes won't see them; though thunder crashes beside you, your ears won't hear it

— of course, the mind itself will remain utterly ignorant. So it is that those who have grasped the great Dao are denied by the rulers of turbulent states on their exalted thrones and by the teachers of deranged schools of thought in their humble stations. What a shame it is!

C. What things blind us?

Let us look at the things that become blinders to mankind. Desires create blinders; hatreds create blinders; we become obsessed by the beginnings of things; we become obsessed by the endings of things; we see only that things are far away or that they are near; we think only about whether things are broad and grand or shallow and narrow; we become obsessed with antiquity or with innovation. Among the myriad things of the world, none cannot be the basis for some obsession. This is the common threat to all arts of cultivating the mind.

Xunzi notes that people have a tendency to inflate the importance of one aspect of life and make all experience a function of that one theme. This obsession becomes analogous to the blinders that some horses are made to wear to keep them from being distracted from the path directly in their line of sight. Once the blinders are in place, everything outside a narrow tunnel of vision ceases to count, or even to exist from the perspective of the blindered individual. *Can you think of people you know or know of seem like Xunzi's "blindered" people? Would you agree with Xunzi that this tendency is a widespread and important human problem?*

D. Momentous historical examples

As in many early Chinese texts, a general claim about human behavior is followed by extended discussion of historical examples. Xunzi discusses next how the issue of blinders relates to the two evil kings who brought to an end the first two royal dynasties, the Xia and the Shang, and the two virtuous dynastic founders who followed them. *Naturally, we tend to find that these historical legends carry no authority; do you think it is likely that shared cultural narratives can ever offer much insight to philosophical inquiry?*

Let's consider the historical examples of two rulers who have become blinded by obsessions: Jie, the last king of the Xia Dynasty, and Zhòu, the last king of the Shang Dynasty.

Jie became obsessed with his beautiful concubine Moxi and his evil counselor Siguan, and could no longer recognize the merits of his loyal minister Guan Longfeng.

Because his mind had become deranged, his actions became chaotic.

Zhòu became obsessed with his beautiful concubine Daji and his evil counselor Feilian, and could no longer recognize the merits of his loyal minister Weizi Qi. Because his mind had become deranged, his actions became chaotic.

In the end, these rulers dismissed their loyal ministers and employed those who appealed to their private desires. They ignored the pleas of their distressed people. Worthy men retired from their courts and secretly fled from their states. Thus it was that they came to lose their states and leave desolate the temples of devotion to their ancestors. Jie was driven to his death on Tripod Mountain and Zhòu's head was hung beneath the red war pennant of his conqueror. They anticipated none of this themselves and none dared to alert them with criticism. This is the disaster of the ruler plunged in the darkness of blinders.

When Tang conquered the armies of the Xia and founded the Shang Dynasty, he looked at Jie's acts as one looks in a mirror. He examined his own mind and took care to order it correctly. This is why he was able to employ for many years the wise minister Yi Yin and to keep himself firmly on the Dao. This is why he was able to succeed to the throne of the Xia rulers and receive control of the nine provinces of the state. Later, when King Wen built the state that conquered the Shang armies and founded the Zhou Dynasty, he looked at the Shang king Zhòu's acts as one looks in a mirror. He examined his own mind and took care to order it correctly. This is why he was able to employ for many years Lü Wang and to keep himself firmly on the Dao. This is why he was able to succeed to the throne of the Shang rulers and receive control of the nine provinces of the state — to the most distant reaches of the earth, no tribes failed to send precious gifts to his court.

For King Wen, then, his eyes were filled with beautiful sights, his ears were filled with beautiful sounds, his mouth was filled with beautiful tastes, his body was provided with sumptuous palaces, the titles he was called by carried the ultimate of honors. In his life the world sang his praises; at his death there was wailing to the ends of the earth. One may truly call this the utmost fulfillment. Of him the *Book of Poetry* sings:

Oh, the phoenixes they danced and danced,
 Their wings outstretched like shields of war,
 Their cries like flutes,
 Males and their mates,
 Joy they brought the heart of their Lord.

Such is the good fortune of one without blinders.

I have omitted the next section, in which Xunzi lists further legendary and historical figures as examples of vision narrowed by obsessions, or of sages free from such blinders. He then turns to criticize his near contemporaries among philosophers.

E. Philosophical thinkers blinded by obsession

Mozi was obsessed with the value of utility, and so he failed to recognize the value of patterned behavior. Songzi was obsessed with the destructive potential of human desires, and so he failed to recognize the constructive potentials of the human search for satisfaction. The Shènzi was obsessed with the state's need for law codes, and so failed to recognize the key role played by worthy character. Shēnzi was obsessed with the importance of power relationships in planning political action, and so failed to recognize the necessity of wisdom. Huizi was obsessed with the way words worked in argument, and so failed to keep in touch with the substantive issues being argued. Zhuangzi was obsessed with the value of natural action, and so failed to recognize the value of human action.

About Songzi we know very little, apart from what Xunzi says here; he is reported by commentators to have been an ascetic. Shènzi is Shen Dao; Shēnzi is Shen Buhai: both were both fourth century thinkers who contributed to the growth of Legalist ideas through the concerns Xunzi identifies. Huizi is Hui Shi, identified with the tradition of logicians and associated with Mohist thought: we have read of his friendship with Zhuangzi, mentioned here immediately after.

Thus [Mozi] called utility the Dao, and everything became an issue of profit. [Songzi] called control of desire the Dao and everything became an issue of restraint. [Shen Dao] called designing laws the Dao and everything became an issue of code calculations. [Shen Buhai] called manipulating power relationships the Dao and everything became an issue of gaining the upper hand. [Huizi] called analyzing words the Dao and everything became an issue of valid argumentation. [Zhuangzi] called natural action the Dao and everything became an issue of following nature.

Each of these thinkers was complete in his own way, but each represented only a single facet of the Dao. The Dao embodies all enduring constants and exhausts all the changes of the world. It cannot be comprehended by viewing only a single facet. But these masters of the side roads looked from their perspectives upon only a

single facet of the Dao and had no way of realizing that they were seeing only a small part. So they took their single strand to be all sufficient and set upon embroidering it. And as they did so, they plunged into deeper chaos in their own minds, and brought confusion to the minds of others. Such people, when in a superior position, impose blinders on those below them; such people, when in an inferior position, induce those above them to put on their blinders. This is the disaster of obsession and a closed mind.

Confucius was different. He was humane and wise, and he was without blinders. He studied the arts of creating order until he was the equal of the great kings of old, and then created a school to teach the essentials of the Dao of the Zhou rulers. He taught their arts comprehensively, and was never obsessed by any one aspect that he had mastered. Thus in his character he was the equal of the great Duke of Zhou and his fame became the equal of the founders of the three great dynasties. Such is the good fortune of one without blinders.

Comparing the negative comments Xunzi makes about non-Confucians to those he make in praise of Confucius, do you find Xunzi more convincing?

F. The objectivity of the sage's mind

The sage knows the danger points in the cultivation of the mind and sees clearly the disaster of obsession and a closed mind. Thus for the sage, there is nothing that is desirable, nothing that is hateful, nothing that is a true beginning, nothing that is a true ending, nothing that is distant, nothing that is near, nothing that is broad or deep, nothing that is narrow or shallow, nothing that is ancient, and nothing that is new. He simply sees the world of things and affairs spread out before him and weighs every element in a perfect balance. Thus for the sage, the multiplicity of varied things in the world do not obscure one another from his view, and so disorder his perspective of their natural relationships.

And what is the perfect scale that the sage uses to balance things? The Dao. Therefore I say, the mind must not fail to be fully aware of the Dao. If the mind is not fully aware of the Dao, it will not approve of the Dao — it may even deny the Dao. And who, if given free rein, would choose to protect and preserve that which they deny in order to ward off what they approve of? So the person whose mind is not fully aware of the Dao will choose friends and associates in state of mind that does not approve the Dao, and will not associate with people who cleave to the Dao.

When people who do not approve the Dao in their minds gather with others like them to gossip about people of the Dao, there you have the true root of chaos. What sort of wisdom is this?

Therefore I say, a mind that is fully aware of the Dao will thereupon feel approval of the Dao, and the mind that approves the Dao will guard the Dao and ward off that which contravenes the Dao. A person with such a mind will choose friends and associates who cleave to the Dao, and will not gather with those who do not. When such a one joins in conversation with people of the Dao to discuss those who deny the Dao, there you have the root of order. Who could worry that wisdom will be lacking among them?

Thus the essentials of order lie in knowing the Dao.

As you read this section and the ones that follow, see if you can get clear on what the content of Xunzi's Dao is.

G. Xunzi's model of the mind

This section is one of the most famous in Xunzi's works.

What is the organ by means of which we can know the Dao? I answer, the mind! And what does the mind employ in order to know? I answer, emptiness, oneness, and tranquility.

The mind never for an instant fails to store up things, and yet it possesses a certain quality of emptiness. The mind never for an instant fails to be filled with a plenitude, and yet it possesses a certain quality of oneness. The mind never for an instant ceases its constant movement, and yet it possesses a certain tranquility.

With birth, people come into consciousness. Possessing consciousness, they come to have memory. Memory is the storehouse of the mind. And yet we say the mind retains an emptiness. Not allowing that which is stored up in the mind to interfere with what the mind newly receives — that is what we call “emptiness.”

With the birth of the mind, there is awareness. Being aware, the mind encounters multiplicity. By multiplicity I mean the mind being at once aware of different things. To be at once aware of different things is a plurality of awareness. And yet we say the mind retains a unity, a oneness. Not to allow one perceived thing to interfere with the perception of another thing — that is what we call “oneness.”

When the mind sleeps it dreams. When at leisure, it constantly steals off on its own track, and when sent on a mission in sets to making plans. Hence it is never

without some form of movement. And yet we say the mind retains a tranquility. Never to allow dreams or the play of the awakened mind to interfere with awareness — that is what we call “tranquility.”

Perhaps the sense of Chinese terms, which are closely rendered in English by the three terms *emptiness*, *oneness*, and *tranquility*, is better conveyed through the phrases, *sensitive receptivity*, *concentrated focus*, and *steady calm*. *Reflect on your own experience of mind for a moment and see whether you can find a basis for Xunzi’s idea in your own life. If you seem to recognize Xunzi’s model in your own experience, would you say that the aspects of mental life Xunzi has isolated are the most significant, or has he missed important basic structures of the mind?*

H. Perfecting the mind of the sage

Before one has grasped the Dao, the tools one uses to seek it are just these three: emptiness, oneness, and tranquility. When you set out to seek the Dao, if you wait for it with emptiness of mind, you will enter it; if you serve it with oneness of mind, you will exhaust it; if you ponder it with tranquility, you will comprehend it with acuity. When you comprehend the Dao with acuity you will know how to act by the Dao, and this is to embody the Dao in yourself.

Emptiness, oneness, tranquility: these together are called the great clarity of insight. None of the things of the world appears before you without its form being clearly visible to you; none is not clearly visible without manifesting its proper place in the world; none manifests its proper place and does not maintain that place. You may sit in your room, but you see to the ends of the earth; you may live in the present, but you can see far distant in time. You can glance at the things of the world and know their deepest natures; you can peer at order and chaos and take the measure of each. You can embrace heaven and earth in a web of understanding, put the myriad things to their proper tasks, slice the world in line with its natural grain and enclose the universe within.

A person like this is boundless and broad, who knows his limit? Vast beyond measure, who knows his power? Endlessly raveled, who can make out his form? Brilliant as the sun and moon, stretching to the ends of the cosmos — such a one is called the Great Man. And what blinders would he wear?!

Once again, it is useful to ask whether it is realistic to believe in a model of such total human perfection. *If it is not realistic, can there be any value or validity in such a portrait?*

I. The autonomy of the mind

The mind is the ruler of our physical form, and the host of the power of spirit-like insight. Every order it sends forth is received. It alone censors itself, dispatches itself, seizes from itself, appropriates from itself, moves of itself, stops by itself. You can bind up a person's mouth and keep him from speaking, you can bind up a person's body and keep him from stretching out or curling up, but you cannot bind up a person's mind and force him to change his ideas — what his mind believes to be so, he accepts; what his mind denies to be so, he rejects.

That is why I say that when your mind selects what it will take in within its space, never create obstacles to it. Let the things of the world appear to your mind spontaneously, in all their breadth and diversity — yet at the core of your mind, let there be no plurality. The *Book of Poetry* says:

Gathering the curling burr-weed,
My basket's not half full;
My heart longs for my lover, and oh!
It's off among the ranks of Zhou soldiers.

A basket is not hard to fill and the burr-weed is easy to gather — but not if your mind is half fixed on a lover in the ranks of the Zhou army! That is why I say that a diverted mind knows nothing; an unbalanced mind lacks acuity; a mind that follows two paths remains in doubt and confusion. But if your mind is employed in the attentive scrutiny of the things of the world, then you may grasp them all comprehensively, and in your person you may master in action the linkages among the affairs of the world.

In this section, Xunzi links two aspects of his portrait of mind that we might not feel are necessarily connected: the autonomy of the mind (the full independence of its function) and the relation of concentration and focus to acuity and accomplishment. *What is the effect of linking up these two aspects of mind? Do you feel there is truth in Xunzi's claims about autonomy and the power of focus?*

J. Different orders of understanding

In ordering things according to categories, one must never allow category distinctions to become unclear. Thus true knowledge begins by focusing on one thing. But one

must go on to seek a greater oneness through it. For example, a farmer may be skilled at fieldwork, but may not be equipped to become an administrator of agriculture. A merchant may be skilled at market dealings, but may not be equipped to serve as the supervisor of a market. A craftsman may be skilled at wielding his tools, but may not be equipped to supervise a manufactory. Yet there are people who, although unskilled in these occupations, may be placed in charge of the administration of all three. Why? Because they are skilled in the Dao, rather than being skilled in one particular matter. Those who are skilled in one matter understand things in isolation; one who is skilled in the Dao grasps a thing in relation to other things.

Hence a Prince finds a oneness through the Dao and by means of this he gains perspective on all things. Having found a oneness through the Dao, his actions are always on the mark; having gained perspective on all things, he understands them thoroughly. By according with appropriate dispositions in acting out his clear understanding, he is able to order the things of the world so they perform their proper roles.

In times gone by, when the sage emperor Shun brought order to the world, the world of things came to perfection without his issuing a single command. He dwelt in oneness and in full awareness of danger, and his radiance shone in all directions. He nurtured the most subtle seeds of this oneness and all his people burst into full bloom without even being aware of it. That is why the *Classic of the Dao* says, “The dangers of the human mind are the subtle seeds from which the Dao mind grows.” Only the brightest of Princes can comprehend the trigger points of this danger and this subtlety.

This passage seems to tell us that for Xunzi, the very aspects of our minds that threaten undermine our potential to become perfected human beings are those we must employ to create perfection. In light of other sections of Xunzi’s book, it seems likely that he is referring to common spontaneous desires. The tension between danger and subtle potential is discussed later in the chapter. (Note: The *Classic of the Dao* is an otherwise unknown text.)

K. Equilibrium and concentration

The human mind is like a pan of fresh water. If you place such a pan down and do not disturb it, dregs of sand will sink to the bottom and the water above will be clear and bright. You can look in the water and make out the hairs in your beard and eyebrows, the lines on your face. But should the slightest breeze pass over it, the sand

below will be disturbed and the clarity of the water above will be destroyed; you won't be able to make out even large forms with accuracy. The mind is like this. If you shape it according to the natural grain of the world, nurture it with clarity, and do not let things unbalance it, then the mind will be able to discern the line between what is so and what is not, what is good and what is bad. It will be able to resolve all issues of doubt. But if the smallest thing exerts an attraction upon it, then it will be drawn off center by outside forces. Once the mind is unbalanced within, then it will be unable to make out even the grossest features of the natural grain of the world.

There have been many who loved to write, but the forms created by Cang Jie, the creator of characters, have been passed on as outstanding — this is because Cang Jie achieved this oneness of mind. There have been many who loved planting things, but the methods of Prince Millet, the creator of agriculture, have been passed on as outstanding — this is because Prince Millet achieved this oneness. There have been many who loved playing music, but the musical forms of Kui, the creator of court music, have been passed on as outstanding — this is because Kui achieved this oneness. There have been many who have loved righteousness, but the conduct of the sage emperor Shun has been passed on as outstanding — this is because Shun achieved this oneness. Zhui invented the bow and Fuyou invented the arrow, but it was the legendary Archer Yi who mastered and so created the art of shooting. Xizhong invented the cart and Chengdu invented the harness, but it was the legendary Caofu who mastered and so created the art of charioteering. From antiquity to the present day, no one has ever achieved such skill with a divided mind. As Confucius's disciple Master Zeng put it, "How can a man sing in harmony with me if his mind is on swatting the rat on his mat?"

In the two paragraphs above, Xunzi seems to be linking the powers of a mind in equilibrium to the powers of a concentrated mind. *How are these linked in your own experience?*

L. Tranquility within and tranquility without

Deep in a cave there was a man named Ji, who was excellent at solving riddles because he loved deep contemplation. But if his eyes or ears encountered any desirable object it would disrupt his contemplation — even the buzzing of a gnat would destroy his concentration. So he would repress all sensory desires and retreat to this cave that no buzzing insects could reach. There he would dwell in idleness and

ponder in tranquility until he reached the answers he was looking for. But could we say that one had attained subtlety of mind if, when seeking the path to *ren* one acted in this way?

Xunzi is unimpressed with the fact that people can attain full concentration in an environment free of distractions. His final sentence points towards the Confucian goal of sagehood in ethical action, rather than in detached meditation. *In the various activities of your life, how closely linked are concentration and isolation?*

M. The ease of the sage

The Confucian thinker Mencius detested any flaw in virtue and so cast off his wife for her improprieties — we may say that he had self-denial, but not that he was thoughtful. Confucius’s disciple Master You was afraid of falling asleep over his study and burned his palm with candles to stay awake — we may say that he had self-restraint, but not that he was good. To repress all sensory desires may show self-denial, but not thoughtfulness. The escape the disturbance of concentration that a gnat may causes recognizes the danger points of the mind, but not its subtle potential.

One who develops the subtle potential of the mind is a perfect person. The perfect person — what self-denial does he need — what self-restraint — what fear of danger? Thus it is said, “Muddied water casts a shadow outside itself, but pure water is lit from within.” The sage can give free rein to his desires and embrace all his spontaneous feelings; the contours of his disciplined impulses will accord with the natural grain of the world. What self-denial does he need — what self-restraint — what fear of danger?

Thus when the humane person walks the Dao, he does so with no conscious striving; when the sage walks the Dao, he does so with no self-denial. The thoughts of the humane person are always reverent; the thoughts of the sage are always joyful. This is the Dao of an ordered mind.

“No conscious striving” (*wuwei*) is a Daoist ideal that Xunzi here appropriates for Confucian purposes.

N. Illusory knowledge

When a person observes a thing about which he harbors doubts, the core of his mind is unsettled and the thing is not clearly seen. If my thoughts are unclear, then I cannot

judge whether they are valid or not. It is as if I were walking in the dark. A boulder lying by the road may appear as a crouching tiger, a row of trees behind may become men chasing me. This is because darkness obscures my vision. Watch a drunkard try to cross a ravine a hundred paces across as if he stepping over a foot-wide drain. He will hunch down as he passes through the great gate of a city wall as if it were the threshold of a low roofed chamber door — wine has deranged the spirit-like power of mind. If you press an eyelid you'll see two things when you look at one; if you cup your hands over your ears, silence will sound like a roar — an outer force has deranged your sense organs. If you look at an ox from a rise in the land, it will seem small, like a lamb. But if you walk down to that lamb, you'll find no lamb to lead back home — distance has obscured its true size. From a mountain top, tall trees look small as chopsticks, but if you climb down to gather them, you won't be able to carry them away — height has obscured their true length. When a washbasin is disturbed, ripples distort the face reflected in it, but people do not set their standards of beauty by that — it is the motion of the water that distorts. When the blind look up they see no stars, but people do not take this as a standard for deciding whether stars exist — it is caused by an impairment of the body's essential powers. Only the world's greatest fool would define the world on the basis of experiences like these. That would be using confusion to settle doubts — he would never be on target; how could such a man fail to be plunged into error.

Having described general external sources of deception, Xunzi goes on to give an anecdotal account of false knowledge generated by intellectual confusion. The following paragraph is famous among Xunzi's rationalistic rejection of belief in the supernatural.

There was a man named Juan Shuliang who lived south of the mouth of the River Xia. He was a stupid man and easily frightened. One night he was out walking under a full moon and saw his shadow on the ground. He took it for a crouching ghost. Glancing up, he spotted his disheveled hair and thought it was a towering monster. He tore off and didn't stop till he reached his home, where, gasping for breath, he dropped down dead. A shame, isn't it? And all those who claim to have seen ghosts are like him — their claims all rest on some confusion of a startled moment. Such experiences are the basis for all who assert the non-existence of what is and the existence of what isn't. It's like the man who suffers from rheumatism and beats a drum and boils a hog. What's certain is that it will cost him one worn out

drum and a dead pig, but not that he'll be blessed with a cure. He may not live south of the mouth of the River Xia, but what's the difference?

O. The oneness of true learning

What we use to gain knowledge is the function of our human nature. What we can know is the natural principles of things — the natural grain of the things of the world. Now if you use the human nature that can allow us to know, and seek to know the natural principles of the things of the world without any limit, then though you may live to the end of the world your knowledge can never be complete. Though you may penetrate the principles of a billion things, this will be far from bringing into coherence the constant changes of the world of things — it's no different from ignorance. A man who studies until he's old and his sons are grown, who is no different from a fool and who has no idea what went wrong, that man is a reckless idiot.

True learning is precisely learning where to stop. You ask, where should one stop? I say, stop in complete sufficiency. What, you ask, do I mean by complete sufficiency? I reply, sagehood! True sagehood means having fully plumbed human relationships. And true kingship means having reached the ultimate of regulated order. To exhaust both of these is to become the ultimate standard of the world. So the true student takes the sage kings as his teachers and takes their model rules as his standards for order. He adopts their rules as his rules of conduct so as to penetrate their thematic unity, and so emulate the persons of the sage kings and become their image. One who directs his efforts in this way is a true knight. One who comes close to capturing the theme is a *junzi*. One who fully grasps it is a sage.

In these paragraphs, Xunzi highlights the difference between knowledge conceived as a string of memorized facts and knowledge conceived as holistic understanding of system or structure. *Do you think these two aspects of knowledge acquisition are distinct or related? What do you think of Xunzi's description of the difference?*

P. The pragmatic criterion of knowledge

Knowledge that is not employed in contemplation of the true and good is called cowardice; bravery that is not employed to uphold the true and good is called banditry; investigation not undertaken to discern the true and good is called

pretension; abundant talent not employed to cultivate and propagate the true and good is called craftiness; analytic discourse not intended to articulate the true and good is called prolixity. The teachings tell us: “There are but two things in the world — from what is false to discern what is true; from what is true to discern what is false.”

This means to distinguish what accords with the kingly regulations from what does not. If the world does not take this rule as a revered standard, will it be able to tell true from false and distinguish crooked from straight? Those who can’t tell true from false, crooked from straight, order from disorder, or set forth the Dao of mankind, contribute nothing to mankind if they are talented, and mankind suffers nothing if they are talentless. All such people do is construct bizarre theories, play with freakish ways of speech, and lead others into a muddle. They grab up all they can, but cover themselves with glib excuses. They are so thick skinned that nothing can shame them. They have no standards for behavior — they assume imperious attitudes and prattle on wildly as they search out private gain. They have no use for politeness in speech or courtesies of social interaction; what they enjoy is push and shove. Such people are the evil products of a turbulent age — and are not most of those who offer their theories to today’s world of this type? The teachings tell us: “To think of word-splitting as intelligence and discourses on affairs as discernment — the *junzi* disdains it. Broad learning and rote memorization that does not match the regulations of the kings — the *junzi* disdains it.” This characterizes the people I mean.

If an action does not contribute to success, if a search does not lead to discovery, if anxiety does not help solve a crisis, then these may be cast away altogether. Take on nothing to hinder yourself, don’t take such things to your breast for an instant! Don’t long for what’s gone by, don’t fret over what’s to come, don’t fill you mind with sniveling regrets. When the time is right, act; when things appear, respond; when affairs arise, discern their contours — in this way the distinctions between order and chaos, appropriateness and inappropriateness will be clear as day.

Q. Openness in government and enlightened rule

“Be secretive and succeed; disclose and fail.”

Never has an enlightened ruler followed such a motto.

“Be open and succeed; conceal and fail.”

Never has a benighted ruler followed such a motto.

In ruling, when one is secretive, slanderers flock to the court and honest ministers are turned away; the petty man will draw close, but the *junzi* will keep a distance. The *Poetry* says:

Take black for light
And night predators will fill the day.

This means that when the ruler is benighted, the people will be in danger. But if the ruler is open, then those who speak straightforwardly will come to court and the slanderers will be turned away; the *junzi* will draw close and the petty man will keep a distance. The *Poetry* says:

When those below shine brilliant,
Glorious is the one above!

This speaks of how those below are transformed when their ruler is enlightened.