

## 25 Background to China, and Confucius

This chapter and the next two form a group. This chapter gives background material and then describes and assesses Confucianism. The next chapters do the same for Taoism and Zen.

Confucianism, Taoism, and Zen are all stances from China. They are distinct but they are also similar because they are Chinese in the same way American Protestant sects are distinct but are also similar because they are American. I don't know enough about China to comment on this kind of distinction and similarity.

Confucianism is a noble way with high ideals fully comparable to Christianity. Yet Confucianism also shows what happens when we have high ideals but do not have a solid set of principles, analysis, rules, specific values, and specific institutions, such as developed in the West for governing, and as described in Chapters One and Two in this book. High ideals alone are not enough to make effective government, democracy, self-government, and beneficial capitalism.

The Romanized spelling of Chinese words has gone through several phases. I do what I can. "Tzu" is a title. Tzu means: "adult man who merits respect because he knows important ideas, does important acts, is an excellent teacher, an excellent example, and acts in accord with Heaven, nature, and virtue". I think it can be used for a woman. As a student, I learned that "tzu" is spoken like "dze" in the word "adze"; but now it is written "zi" and apparently spoken "zee" or "dzee" as in "knee". "Tao" means "way". The "t" is like "d" and the "ao" like "ow" as in "dowel", or "down". Written "c" and written "ch" are spoken like American "j", "z" jh", or "zh". "Ch" is not as in "change" but like "jh" in "jack". "Ching" is "important book". "Ching" is spoken "jhing" or "zhing". "Chan" comes out "jhan" or "zhan". "Lao" means "old man" and is spoken as in "loud". "Lao Tzu" is a personal title meaning "wise old man"; traditionally it refers to the reputed author of the important book the "Tao Te Ching" ("dow deh jhing"); see chapter on Taoism.

### **PART 1: Background**

From about 700 BCE to 100 AD, China went through political ferment and religious invention, as at the same time in: Classical Greece; the Upanishads, Buddhism, and Jainism in India; and the rise and fall of Israel. Self-appointed wise people in China promoted stances and promised to cure all ills if rulers would listen to them above others. Some particular stances persisted and have influenced China ever since. This part of the chapter gives background to Chinese thought, describes two important stances but lesser than Confucianism, and describes Confucianism. This chapter sets the stage for two more big stances, each in its own chapter, Taoism and Ch'an (Zen). Confucius was one of those self-appointed advisors; like Socrates, Plato, and the Buddha, he had lasting value.

Most of that era in China is called the "Period of Warring States" or the "Period of the Three Kingdoms" because, at first, many small warring states fought for advantage, and, then later, three major kingdoms fought for control. The name "China" comes from the victor, "Chin" ("Qin"). The first Dynasty to rule all of China was the Han Dynasty from about 206 BCE (BC) to 220 CE (AD). Chinese called themselves "the

Han” for most of their history as Greeks called themselves “Hellas”. During the “Warring States” and “Three Kingdoms” period, banditry and warlords prevailed. Chinese martial arts movies often take that time as their setting, as cowboy movies take the American West of around 1870. The movies “Hero” with Jet Li and “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon” get across the Chinese romantic idealization of the situation. “Hero” gets across Chinese ideas about national unity and strong central leadership.

### **Synopsis.**

Confucius clearly knew key points of morality that the West also considers important such as the Golden Rule and the idea that individual people have dignity and integrity. However, he did not base his ideas of how to govern on those insights.

Confucius saw that a state could not run well on the basis alone of rules, inspiration, regard for the humanity of others, good will, or fear. The state needs something more, something that can tie together various human propensities. We will see in the chapter on Taoists that Taoists disagreed with Confucius and felt that life could be run on the basis of spontaneous action alone.

Confucius saw that rulers use laws, management skills, regard for others, and fear, as tools, but, in the end, what adept good rulers use is judgment. Westerners really think the same but look at judgment in a different context. We don’t want rulers with mere “book learning” or “street cunning” but leaders who know well the human heart and human situation, and can figure out the right thing to do in real situations.

According to Confucius, the ability to judge can be trained but it can be trained only in people of the right character. People with the right character pick it up quickly. People with the wrong character can’t pick it up at all.

Westerners also look for the right combination of character and judgment. Americans have made John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan into myths by believing this is exactly what they had. Americans looked to Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Hillary Clinton for the same.

For Confucius and his followers, the task was to find people of the right potential character, train them to use good judgment, and put them in charge of the state. The task of philosophers such as Confucius was not to rule the state directly but to find people of the right character and train them.

Selection-and-training is done through correct education. A good program sorts people by their character and skill level, advances people of correct skill and character, and teaches them judgment, all at once. The best education program is not directly in law, administration, fear, regard for other people, or many of the skills that Westerners might hold useful. Rather, the correct education is in the classics of literature, religion, art, and history. This idea is not so different from what Greeks and Romans taught, and from what the English, French, and Germans taught until recently.

Part of the education program was teaching high regard for the family. Virtuous families could produce candidates of high character, who would, in turn, take care of their families and the state. Present rulers would take care of families in general as sources of future leaders. This attitude toward the family is like the present (2016) American near-worship of the family.

This approach to leadership neglected several aspects of the state that the West found important and that are important. Confucius understood the need for particular rules for some particular situations but he did not really see the key importance of the general rule of law. In his view, a leader with good character and judgment is above the law. His-her judgment-and-example is the law. So much power to the leader is good because, due to proper training, the leader almost cannot do wrong and must do right. The entire success of the state flows from the character of the leader. The state is entirely “top down”. Confucius did not develop ideas of institutions such as the American ideas of three parts of government, checks and balances, or American style bureaucracy. He did not know how to integrate technical experts, business people, and the military in governing. We would not expect, in his time, ideas of equality, democracy, or representation for the people, but there was no regular voice for the people at all. So, when the people had a grievance or need, they could not express it and they had to resort to extreme measures. There was nothing like the Western Christian Church apparatus, with priests and bishops, to serve as liaison between the people and the state. Government at each smaller level such as the province mimicked the central state, so a provincial governor was like a lesser emperor. Although Confucius valued individual people, he could not blend the idea of personal value into how the state works and how laws work. Full democracy is not possible in a Confucian-like state although some limited form of democracy might be.

The Confucian idea of leaders inadvertently supported the cult of the leader. When the leader is actually good most of the time, this cult can help him-her get things done, as with good kings in Europe. This is the idea of a King in “good King Frodo” and “good King Wenceslas”, and in the novel “Return of the King” by J.R.R. Tolkien. But the Confucian idea can also be bad as with the cult of Mao at his worst, North Korean leaders, and cults of the Emperor and Shogun in Japan. The cult of the leader in Confucianism is more extreme than most instances the Western idea of the Divine Right of Kings.

The important role of the family easily leads to a cult of the family, especially when the state does not work well, as often it did not under Confucianism. People fall back on the family and then the strong emphasis on the family prevents the people from making a better overall state. This is what the movie series “The Godfather” warns us against. It is what is happening in America with near-worship of the family as American government has floundered since the middle 1970s.

Particular Chinese scholars made great advances in astronomy, mathematics, physics, chemistry, and other scientific fields but there was no systematic training in these fields, no system of knowledge, and no process for selecting and advancing people of ability.

China did not overcome the bad aspects of Confucianism when Confucianism failed and the state faced hardship. Rather, the bad aspects of Confucianism got reinforced in ways that I can't describe in detail here. For example, when prolonged drought or banditry caused collapse, nothing better reformed. After a time, someone else took power, and the same ideas repeated. So, once a state-society-culture enters a Confucian pattern, it tends to stay there for a long time despite the fact that this way of governing is not adequate to many tasks.

When Americans think of character-plus-judgment, they think of leaders as the source of decisive action; they think of Kirk and Picard, Obiwan Kenobe, John Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, Master and Commander, and Batman. The Chinese also extol people of decisive judgment and action more than they like to admit

– think of Chinese action films – but that is not the ideal. The ideal leader is plugged directly into Heaven; that is why he (usually a man) has such a good potential character. After he learns, the ideal leader sometimes does command openly but more often he leads by example, suggestion, innuendo, hints, and vague allusions to past events and leaders. He pulls rather than pushes and guides rather than shows. Often he does this not by referring directly to the matter at hand but by referring to art or stories of the past. He is more like the ceremonial queens and kings of Europe and Japan now than like their prime ministers or like the old Shogun. This view of the ideal leader added to the failures of Confucianism, and added to intrigue in the palace and provinces.

This idea of the “ruler” stymies the idea of rule of law. The ideal ruler did not give any laws as Americans think of laws. His subordinates, such as the prime minister, gave commands, supposedly based on hints and examples from the ideal ruler but really based on needs of the subordinates. They took real power, based on the military, taxes, and appointments of their own people. Commands of subordinates could have force only while subordinates had power. When a subordinate is in power more than a few years, he becomes the real ruler of China, a province, or the military. China was often ruled by opportunists. When a ruler takes real power for him-herself, he-she often becomes a cruel tyrant as with the mother of the Emperor during the 1800s Ching (Qing) Dynasty. The Confucian view of ruler and ruling buffered the office and the ideal of highest heavenly ruler in case events turned bad – it was always the fault of the subordinate and never the fault of the ideal ruler - but also undermined the idea of law. There was no rule of law and system of law as in the West; and there could be no developed idea of those under this view of the ideal ruler and his-her relation to subordinates.

All societies have an ideal and a real. The real never lives up to the ideal, not in any Christian church, not in America, England, or China. Still, the ideal does affect the real. The relation of Chinese ideal to the Chinese reality reveals much about Chinese character and Confucianism but it is a long study in itself that I cannot take up here.

### **Some Early Assessment: Confucius and the Golden Rule.**

Please see Chapter Two. As I mention below, Confucius understood the Golden Rule and expected that a well-educated person in China should act according to the Golden Rule as Confucius understood it. Unlike Confucius, the Chinese in general have not paid much attention to the Golden Rule. The thought of Confucians after Confucius on the Golden Rule easily supports social divisions and power politics.

Beforehand, we need to get clear about the Golden Rule and about its close cousin “make all rules as if you apply them equally to everybody”, or “applies equally”, from Immanuel Kant. The Golden Rule does not mean to treat everybody exactly equally regardless of age, gender, power, family status, government status, or social rule. Yet it does tend toward treating people equally regardless of situation. We have to find how to treat people as we wish to be treated, fairly equally, while accepting good social relations that include differences, and without reinforcing bad distinctions. We have to find how to treat everybody almost equally without cutting down all categories, especially useful ones. We have to find how to act in accord with useful social distinctions while still treating everyone as we wish to be treated, as a person like us, without always treating people exactly the same. The West has been lucky in being able to find this right balance often. China did not find this right balance even though Confucius clearly felt the sense of giving everybody respect and of not infringing on people’s innate dignity and humanity.

A teacher does not treat students the same way he-she treats other teachers, and students do not treat the teacher the same way they treat other students, and this is all correct. When we get to be teachers, we want to be treated as teachers should be treated, not as students are treated now. Jesus himself did not expect his disciples to treat him as they treated other disciples and as he treated them. Jesus did not treat his disciples as he treated God and as he expected God to treat him. We have to take relations and circumstances into account.

Taking relations and circumstances into account does not mean we use the Golden Rule as an excuse to reinforce bad unfair harmful relations and positions, such as a social order founded on fear. The Golden Rule has an inherent push to equality. It forces us to think of other persons as persons like us, and so to treat everybody on that basis. When we treat everybody on that basis, we tend to treat them equally with little regard to station. Jesus reinforced this tendency when he washed the feet of his followers, hung around with tax collectors and prostitutes, ate dinner with Roman soldiers, and respected poor people. Jesus pushed the Rule to its limits. Jesus pushed the limits of society by using the Golden Rule. (The Buddha Siddhartha Gautama did much the same.)

Taking relations and circumstances into account does not mean to respect every way that everybody wants to be treated and every social distinction. Some social relations and social positions are bad, and should not be treated with respect, even when we can imagine that we might be in those positions some day. When haughty people wish to be admired, we don't have to do that. When rich-and-powerful people wish to be obeyed, we might have to obey from fear but not because we act like we know how rich-and-powerful people wish to be treated and respect that as part of our common humanity.

This is why we stress the idea of "applies equally", "equality under the law", and "rule of law". "Applies equally" etc. are the institutional expressions of the fact that the Golden Rule is based on persons and it pushes toward equality. The West has been lucky in that we have been able to put the Golden Rule and its institutional expressions of "applies equally" etc. into our political life. Democracy would not have been possible without Jesus' idea of the Golden Rule, not even using only Greek ideas. It was only possible with Jesus' idea of the Golden Rule combined with Greek ideas about "applies equally" etc.

Confucius understood all this but not well, and his feeling did not spread among Confucians or to Chinese society. Confucius applied the rule within social categories and expected the rule to be used within social categories to reinforce social relations. The idea that he, Confucius, would wash the feet of students or consort with riff-raff would be abhorrent. He treated everyone politely and with respect but did not treat people equally and with deep respect as did Jesus. The idea that a true leader (Son of Heaven) would be treated like a peasant is silly. The idea that a peasant could expect the same reverence as a true leader is fit only for a puppet show. Confucius had a deep feel for respecting others as persons but he did not know how to apply that feeling in daily life and in statecraft. He could not institutionalize the Golden Rule. He could not see the inherent push toward equality. He could not see how the Golden Rule and the push toward equality imply "applies equally" etc., and how "applies equally" etc. must shape political institutions such as representative government, fair taxation, and democracy.

We cannot be harsh on Confucius if we look at our own practice. Although Western people know of the Golden Rule and "applies equally" they don't often live by them, and they don't often see the link between

them and our political institutions. Mostly, Westerners apply the Rule within situations to reinforce social roles. A bishop is a bishop, and God forbid that we should treat a bishop like a barber or a barber like a bishop. Trades people treat other trades people as they wish to be treated, and lords treat other lords as lords wish to be treated; but trades people don't treat trades people and lords equally as simple people, and lords don't treat lords and trades people equally as simple people. One foundation idea of our legal system, the jury, says people are to be judge by their "peers", and originally a "peer" meant someone of the same aristocratic class and-or same socio-economic class, it did mean simply a fellow American or fellow human. Americans pretend to treat all people equally, make a stink when a politician or rich person does not, gasp in heart-warming amazement when a movie star hobnobs with fans, and think the boss is hip for wearing jeans on Friday; but mostly Americans respect class, power, and wealth as much as everyone. We are not much better than Confucians. Americans are hypocrites, and so worse, because officially we know the Golden Rule in its full extended glory, know "applies equally", know better, and pretend we do better, when really we do not. We are lucky we had a better start in Jesus and the Greeks, and we have preserved enough of that heritage in our thinkers and institutions so we still actually can do better sometimes. (Just as followers of Jesus lapsed in applying the Golden Rule, so did followers of Siddhartha Gautama lapse in treating other people equally as children of the Dharma. It is a human hazard.)

### **Character, Discipline, Rules, and Principles.**

What I say here is not limited to Chinese people but I don't have space to distinguish between what is typical of the Chinese as opposed to similar ideas among other people.

The Chinese respect people who can control themselves and have discipline. They look down on people who do not have self-control; people without self-control are not fully human (in the novel "Dune", only when the hero, Paul Atreides, passed tests of self-control was he thought fully human). More basically than meaning "fighting arts", "kung fu" means "beneficial practices" in the sense of "beneficial discipline". It is not unlike Arabic "jihad". There is no progress in society, family, state craft, business, martial arts, or religion, without first gaining discipline. Discipline should not be extreme, extremes are not productive and usually are harmful, but you must have discipline for a base. Once you have discipline, then you can, and likely will, achieve other goals. In his "kung fu" movies, Bruce Lee stressed the control that Chinese martial artists have in their technique compared to all other people and styles, and Lee used that control as evidence of general Chinese superiority. Lee was wrong about the lack of control in other arts but accurate in his statement of Chinese values. In Lee's defense, he made a strong case for China because he needed to bolster the Chinese sense of worth after a long period of decline.

People vary in how they internalize discipline and in the quality of any discipline that they internalize. The highest best discipline cannot be internalized through rules, as a soldier should internalize rules for acting while in town. The highest discipline is unified with virtue, ideals, principles, and attitudes. Particular rules have to flow out of virtue and basic principles. People who feel virtue-and-principles seek discipline and live by it. This Chinese idea is similar to the Greek and Roman ideas of *arête*, prudence, and virtue.

If people cannot see why they need discipline including virtue and principles, and do not internalize discipline including virtue and principles, they must have rules. But rules can work only as long as they are enforced, and rules cannot be enforced everywhere all the time forever. It takes resources to enforce

rules, both personal and economic. It is much better to internalize some discipline. Once discipline is internalized, you use resources to achieve other goals. People who have internal discipline rather than external rules will overcome people who need detailed external rules. Virtuous people will overcome rule-governed people in politics, war, and family life.

Some unusual people are born with a feel for virtue-principles and a propensity for internal discipline. They do not need rules but they understand the general need for rules and they can use rules. Some people are born with the ability to see virtue-principles and with a propensity for discipline, but they need rules for order and so that they can get along with other people who live by rules. They go quickly from ideals to particular rules and vice versa. Some people can learn virtue-principles and discipline by first learning rules and then seeing how rules require virtue-principles and discipline, and come from them. Some people who learn from rules can sense virtue-principles clearly while others only sense only dimly. People who feel virtue-principles clearly can rise beyond rules to live by virtue-principles alone but people who feel virtue-principles only dimly always still need rules. Some people never see virtue-principles and so have to live by rules always. Still, they understand that rules are for general good and rules represent connection to a higher order. Their discipline is only barely worthy of the name but they are still valuable in society. Some people follow rules only if compelled, either physically or through having to earn a living and raise a family. They have no true discipline. They are valuable only in an order that constrains them.

Among people who have to learn virtue-principles through rules, for some but not for all, once the virtue-principles are learned, then the rules can be taken with a grain of salt. This attitude does not imply laxity, overlooking rules, breaking rules, or excuses. It is not an excuse for bad acts but the other way around. People who know virtue-principles must behave better than people who merely follow rules. People who know virtue-principles have to exemplify principles and have to be able to show (explain) how rules follow from virtue-principles.

This vision of character and discipline is true not only among the Chinese but also among other peoples such as the Japanese. How it is distinct among the Chinese, I cannot say.

In case this description leads you to think of Chinese as robots, the Chinese have perhaps the best sense of humor I have ever seen, even if often "low". Western people do not know this side of Chinese. A good accessible example is the movie "Kung Fu Hustle". I also think the English, Germans, Japanese, and French have a big sense of humor, and they too admire discipline, virtue, and principles.

### **Heaven, Success, Power, and Virtue.**

Chinese thinkers were not much concerned with paradise, hell, and salvation as in the Christian-Muslim tradition and in some versions of Buddhism and Hinduism. Chinese thinkers used "Heaven" much as Westerners used "the Heavens" to mean "the world and the intelligence that lies behind it" (French "sacre bleu" or "sacred blue" and German "Gott in Himmel" or "God in the Heavens"). As far as I know, Chinese thinkers did not start with an idea like Christian "salvation so as to live in Heaven" although they knew the idea from Middle Eastern and Indian thinkers. I take the Chinese idea of Heaven as close to my idea of God. The Chinese Heaven is less personal than my idea of God but more personal and less mechanical than a grand unified theory in physics or even than the dharma in Buddhism and Hinduism. Heaven is moral, has opinions, and acts on the world.

For Chinese thinkers, people had to be right with Heaven while on Earth. People had to work as Heaven works or do as an agent of Heaven would do while here on Earth. This is not the same as the Christian-Muslim idea of doing the Will of God. If the reader prefers to think in terms of “salvation”, then salvation in Chinese terms is being right with Heaven while still on Earth. If you are right with Heaven, everything else takes care of itself; automatically you receive the grace of Heaven. Living in the grace of Heaven here on Earth is salvation enough. Usually having the grace of Heaven implies other kinds of success, in particular economic and-or political success, but need not. For Taoists, the idea that being right with Heaven gives political success was wrong and harmful; see the chapter on Taoism. I do not know how the Chinese idea of being right with Heaven compares with traditional Jewish ideas about being right with God while still on Earth.

In the Jewish-Christian-Muslim tradition, prophets not only are “right with God” but have power as a result; they are in touch with the Holy Spirit; and sometimes they can do miracles. Much the same can be said of Hindu holy people and avatars. The situation is fuzzier in China. People who know the way of Heaven are more effective than other people but this is not necessarily the result of power as in other traditions. It is more like technical ability, adept dancing, leading by example, or leading by suggestion. People who are in touch with Heaven know how the world really works, and get things done as a result. Especially they can get other people to go along, get along, and act well as Heaven wishes. This seems like power to common people just as our technology seems like magic to “stone age” people or extra-terrestrial technology would seem like magic to us. Heaven does not need to give extra power to people who know its ways, and so Heaven rarely does so. Still, in stories, it seems as if some people do have power from their relation with Heaven, much as in the Jewish-Christian-Muslim and Hindu traditions. Great sages and great rulers of China not only knew, they also seemed to have power from Heaven.

In China, a virtuous person is “right with Heaven” and anybody who is right with Heaven is a virtuous person. The idea of virtue is the central idea in being right with Heaven and the central idea in character, morality, conduct, right order as in the right order of the state. Virtue seems to have power, just as, in the Christian-Muslim and Hindu traditions, virtue has power. I am not sure about the relation of virtue and power in Jewish thought; some spiritual people such as Hasidim seemed to have power as a result of their virtue; prophets sometimes had power as a result of being in touch with God but not necessarily because of any virtue on their part; Pharisees might have felt they had more power (“sway” with God) as a result of their purity.

In China, virtuous power is not power in the sense of the ability to compel but in the sense of being able to get things done; people with virtue can get things done. People with great virtue can accomplish great things. Yet the story is not clear-cut. Some people who had great virtue were stymied by petty people and by circumstances. In the end, virtue is not like magic. Virtue is like knowing how to ride a bicycle. People with virtue are in touch with Heaven, and have the ability to get things done as a result.

People with virtue can display power through advanced technique. Virtue and technique go together. Suggestion and example are as much advanced technique as engineering or swordplay. It is not clear if the efficacy lies in virtue itself or if virtue gives technique which leads to efficacy. It probably does not matter as long as we keep in mind that people with virtue get things done, and, if a person wishes to get

things done, the best path is to cultivate virtue first. More virtue means better technique - not necessarily more "moves" but more effective, if fewer, moves.

Technique is taken as a sign of advanced virtue but not necessarily of good virtue. Somewhat like "the Force", virtue can be both good and bad. In kung fu movies, technique is a sign of both good and bad virtue. Good and bad masters both can have advanced virtue and advanced technique. Good masters have wit while bad masters have guile. Good virtue can confer wit but not guile; bad virtue always gives guile but not true wit. Good masters win not always through their technical prowess but as a result of wit, just as Superman often defeats his enemies not through his greater physical skill but through his greater wit. Goodness should ally with spiritual virtue, technique, and wit, to win in the end. This is the theme of a Chinese classic called "Three Heroes" about three virtuous and powerful heroes at the time China was forming, about the time of Jesus. It was made into a TV series. Although not originally one of the three heroes, the man who really defeated China's enemies and united China had little physical prowess but had great virtue and legendary wit, "Khong Beng". When Khong Beng misused his virtue and technique, he suffered a shorter life. Confucius expected goodness to win because of its close alliance with effective virtue; see below.

Some very few special beings, often human, but not always, such as dragons and big fish, were so "right with Heaven" that they lived a very long time, and did not worry about worldly problems such as food and military power (see the movie "Big Fish" and think of the great worms in "Dune"). Some humans could become immortal. This idea might be like the idea of salvation in other traditions. Immortals lived in this plane and had physical-but-ethereal bodies, but, even if they started as humans, they were not interested in human affairs and not much bound by physics. Chinese people ideally wished to become an immortal but few people thought they could achieve it, in contrast to Christian, Muslim, and some Hindu ideas of salvation. The idea of an immortal served as a reference for an ideal being, perhaps as Christians think about archangels such as Michael or Muslims think of Gabriel. The idea of an immortal plays little role in what I say here. Stories of interactions between immortals and humans can be fun, like Celtic stories of fairies and humans.

An ideal leader is "right with Heaven"; has natural discipline and virtue; knows principles; knows that other people need rules but is not bound by rules himself (rarely herself); leads by example and not by any use of force; never does anything bad; does not allow badness even as a tool to goodness; sees the correct people and puts them into office when official work is needed; teaches other people the discipline, virtue, principles, and rules proper to them and their station; and teaches through ritual, music, and traditional arts. People of lesser ability, including officials, fall into their appropriate positions with their appropriate abilities for virtue, discipline, principles, rules, and force. When the state has a true virtuous high leader, it hardly needs officials, soldiers, or police. It is naturally prosperous to the right extent but is not obsessed with wealth or money. Other states dare not attack it. There is little crime. This is not only the Confucian ideal but, in slightly different forms, the ideal of most Chinese, and the ideal in many places other than China and the Far East.

When a state does not have an ideal leader and so is not in full Heavenly grace, it must resort to other means, in particular to laws, dogma, and force. Such a state need not be bad as long as the other means are derived from traditional contact with Heaven and are taught through traditional ritual and arts. If the leaders have some discipline and virtue, see the connection of principles to rules, and learn through the

traditional arts, then the state can do fairly well. This was the goal of most dynasties in Chinese history. If a state does not have even this, then it must resort to laws, dogma, and brute force. Even here, there are grades of goodness and badness, but I don't go into them.

### **Legalists.**

“Legalism” was one of the lesser means for hard times.

In times of social change and stress, people want order, much as conservative Muslims and Christians want social order in the face of modernization now. The “Legalists” were a school during the time of social change, about 500 to 200 BCE. As with Confucianism, they never go away, and arise again when people are exasperated and when times call for them. Legalists wanted social order. The term “legalist” is stuck in the literature on China but it is an unfortunate term because it carries the feeling of many little fussy rules pushed for their own sake, as in Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and American legalism. Yet Chinese legalists wanted order and responsibility more than rules, and Chinese society has never been as legalistic as Western society. Chinese Legalists said human nature needs discipline so people could live together. Guiding principles and good wishes alone are not enough. The discipline has to be spelled out in a set of clear consistent systematic rules. The rules do not have to specify every small aspect of human behavior but they do have to make clear what is needed to get along and they have to make clear what will happen if people disobey. Once set up, rules have to be objectively enforced. Legalists offered both sets of rules in general and tailor-made for particular states.

Chinese Legalists were more like “law and order” advocates in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, or more like conservative Jewish rabbis and Muslim imams, than like the tendentious fussy legal codes that we see in TV shows such as “Law and Order”. I doubt they would let off a “bad guy” because of a technicality. Legalists took the same attitude toward human nature as did “law and order” advocates in the United States, especially the attitude that “law and order” advocates took toward the character of drug users, protesters, “hippies”, “social deviants”, and ethnic groups other than their own. Human nature has to be controlled. The state has to be powerful enough to control human nature and to preserve itself against onslaught by other states. Once human nature is controlled, and the state is secure, then you can talk about general welfare. Until human nature is under control and the state is secure, it makes no sense to talk about social goals, social justice, and being right with Heaven, because you can't achieve them and you simply waste time, resources, and people.

Rulers understood the need for discipline, and they quickly adopted terrible laws when that suited them. But rulers did not adopt the Legalist solution, and Legalism generally failed. Rulers prefer deciding according to particular situations so as to gain the most they can from particular situations. Rulers do not like being bound by rules, not even their own, and especially not by anybody else's, not even the laws of their respected and wise predecessors. Legalism returns whenever China experiences turmoil but it never lasts long.

As with rulers everywhere, rulers in China did not like applying the rules to themselves. “The rule of law even for rulers” has rarely been accepted outside the West and was not accepted in China. This is one of the differences between China and the West, and one reason why China did not evolve self-government and economic development as did the West.

## **Mo-ism.**

“Mo-ism” was one of the lesser means for hard times.

“Mo Ti” was the name of a particular thinker, (family name “Mo”, personal name “Ti”) (about 500 BCE). “Mo-ism” is the school he founded, and “Mo-ists” (sometimes “Mohists”) are its followers. Mo-ism is called a philosophy of “universal love” but that short description goes way overboard. In contrast to Legalists, Mo-ists believed basic human nature is good. If one person appeals to the innate goodness and dignity of another person, the other person usually responds well unless the other person previously was warped. Even damaged people often respond to goodness. People change character in response to goodness. The normal response to goodness is enough on which to base government as long as state policies do not make people worse. The response to goodness can lead a state to excel if the rulers understand goodness-virtue and enact policies to encourage it. Goodness is the basic guiding principle out of which rules come. We don’t need detailed rules. State policies should encourage the better nature of people. When everybody feels secure in the good response of neighbors and in good state policies, then people are yet more likely to act well and the state is even more likely to succeed. Goodness creates a self-reinforcing situation. We cannot do away with the state but we can use the state to bring out the goodness in human nature, and then rely on that. Jesus intended his advice to end bad relations, to substitute good relations for bad relations, and thus to minimize our reliance on the secular state. People who act this way are like citizens of the Kingdom of God, and will help bring the Kingdom of God. For Mo-ists, people who act this way are living in accord with Heaven (God). Mo-ists are often compared to Christians.

Mo-ists were more like hopeful optimistic American liberals than like stereotyped (but not real) pie-in-the-sky pacifist-socialist-liberals who give all to anyone. Mo-ists did not think human nature was always all good, or that people never did anything bad. Mo-ists did not blame everything bad on “circumstances”. They did not excuse “victimization” and enabling. They insisted on shaping human nature through proper institutions, including family, education, the state, and local village relations. If people were not shaped that way properly, then it is no surprise if they turn out badly. If they were shaped that way properly, then overwhelmingly they will turn out well. This attitude should be completely familiar to Americans. When a person turns out badly, Americans always expect to find a troubled past, and they are unhappy if they do not find a trouble past because then badness cannot be explained and goodness cannot be taught. When a person turns out well, Americans hope the person has benefitted from good parents, schools, friends, and institutions such as the Scouts. “Behind every great man stands a great woman”.

The issue is whether human nature is good enough, and can be made good enough, without too much effort, and without horrible totalitarian regimes, to serve as the bases for good government. The answer of Mo-ists was “yes”. Legalists said “no”, except for a few exceptional people who know the principles, and make rules for everybody else. Confucians say “no” too but Confucians use other means other than laws to mold and constrain people.

Mo-ists differ from Jesus in that Jesus expected our nature to change in the Kingdom of Heaven, and he likely expected God to take a hand in helping our nature to change. Our nature was good enough on which to start the Kingdom and good enough to respond to the overtures of God and people who already

were good. Enough people already were good enough to begin the Kingdom of God, and enough more people would get good enough to sustain the Kingdom. Human nature could change enough to sustain the Kingdom of God. I think Mo-ists would say we have to continually work to make people good enough. Once we reach a certain level in which good people and a good state were nearly mutually reinforcing, the job would be easier, but we still have to keep at it. I am not sure these differences between Jesus and Mo-ists are very important. Both Jesus and Mo-ists had a strong positive hope for human nature, and for the society that could be built on inspired human nature.

I differ from Mo-ists and Jesus because I think we need firm institutions for most people so they can be good citizens of a good state. Once we have institutions in place for a long time, and the proper attitudes have become part of character, then we can usually rely on good learned national character. Mo-ism and Legalism cannot give us the good institutions. Human nature has goodness in it, and it is moldable, but it is not as innately good as Mo-ists thought, and it is not as easily moldable as Mo-ists thought. Institutions have to mold human character first, and then people with the right character can contribute to the further molding of people and the state. We can put people and the state into a self-supporting system, and that condition will make the job easier, but not as easy as Jesus or Mo-ists hoped.

Mutual support between good institutions, state, and character is not common, hard to make, precious, and too easily lost. Usually historical accident has to make institutions first, and then institutions mold human character to continue the institutions, and so on. This historical accident has happened only in a few places in the world: some nations in Western Europe, and sometimes in Japan, China, and India. In other nations, history pushed institutions and national character almost to be able to make a good state, but history did not pass the threshold. These nations passed the threshold when they met other nations that could help them: other parts of Europe, Korea, Thailand, the United States, and some parts of Latin America.

Whether Mo-ists were correct about human nature and the state in general, they did see a part of East and Southeast Asian character that Westerners overlook. Asians respond well to an appeal to human warmth and human need, or, among the Thai, when they “see the hearts of other people and respond with the water of their own hearts”. East and Southeast Asians understand a bad personal situation and are willing to help a person who is likely to help him-herself and to get better. They help a person who is down-and-out even if the other person cannot help him-herself and might not get better. They are more forgiving than Americans.

Although Asians can be generous personally and sporadically, they do not institutionalize feelings of warmth-and-humanity because they do not trust institutions; and they offer help only in brief episodes because they refuse to enable bad character. They do not support organized charities unless charities have a sterling record, and, even then, Asians contribute less than Americans. They do not give support long enough for individuals to change character; their giving is incident-by-incident. This difference in attitude toward institutions of charity shows a difference in attitude toward institutions in general. Asians “keep it in the family”. When presented with modern institutions for education, wealth, and the state, Asians can adopt the institutions even when they did not develop the institutions themselves. When Asians move into modern capitalism and do have wealth, usually their empathy is strong enough to serve as the basis for schools, medicine, hospitals, democracy, and labor unions, as long as the institutions do not undermine the success of their own family and do not contradict the state.

Contrary to what I just said, and under the influence of the West, modern Japan has developed a great attitude for giving, and has developed the institutions to go along. Their version of the “Peace Corps” is well known around the world. That change might happen in other developed countries of Asia unless the countries are locked into a system of highly competitive world capitalism in which people feel they cannot spare anything for charity.

## **PART 2: Confucius**

Confucius (about 551 to about 479 BCE) lived about five hundred years after King David, about the same time as the Buddha, Socrates, and Plato, before Aristotle, and about five hundred years before Jesus. Confucius had a similar deep long effect on East Asia as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Jesus had on the West. He was more like Aristotle than Plato, with similar ideas of virtue and goodness. He was like Aristotle and the Buddha in seeking a middle way of reason and in distrusting mystic ideologies. The word “Confucius” likely is not a name. It might be a Western “scrunching” of a Chinese title, “Kung Fu Tzu”. In this case, “kung fu” does not mean “fighting” or “beneficial practices” but “adept at getting things done the right way through virtue-principles and ties to Heaven”. So “kung fu Tzu” means “respected adult man who has skill in getting things done properly with principles, virtue, and discipline”. Confucius exemplified productive discipline in virtue-principles, especially for the state. He was not the ideal leader himself, and never said he was, but he knew what an ideal leader was like and could seek an ideal leader for the state. He could find people of lesser quality than the ideal but enough quality so the state could be governed by discipline, virtue-principles, and connection to heaven rather than by laws or dogmas.

Disclaimer: Scholarly explanations of Confucianism often focus on Chinese terms that mean “humanity”, “humanism”, and “grace”. One key term is “Li” (“lee”). “Grace in humanity” is what makes us best as humans. I avoid this topic because we don’t need it here. We can rely on intuition about good, graceful, and humanistic. You do need to know it if you read more.

Americans have an odd idea of Confucianism. They think it means silly empty ceremony, pretentious long-winded empty flattery, hypocrisy, prudishness, putting up a screen behind which to maneuver for advantage, clinging to institutions for the sake of institutions without regard to the good and harm that they do, and family worship. Confucianism can degenerate into that behavior, but that behavior is found in all societies, not just in East Asian societies, and it does not explain why Confucianism has had such a long strong appeal in Asia. Confucianism still is the dominant stance there, and so is the dominant stance in the largest single block of humans on Earth.

Confucius prevailed because he saw the important role of virtue and integrity in human life, and the role that virtuous integrated people could play in good government. He saw that upbringing could mold young people into more virtuous integrated adults with character, what I call “good citizens”, and these people were needed for a good state and good life. He tied a good family life to a good state. He arranged ideas about discipline, virtue, character, government, principles, rules, types of people, family, and teaching through ritual and tradition. His way allows for flexibility in how particular regimes find their order and their style of governing.

Confucius held almost all the values that Americans hold high, and no values that Americans dislike. He believed in Heaven (God), family, honor, duty, service to your country, respect for other people, harmony in society, the Golden Rule, and affection toward other people. He disparaged any kind of cruelty. He did not allow badness in the name of goodness. He supported the military but did not extol the military. He was genuine, not fake. He held these values not only because they worked well in the state and suited a citizen but for themselves. He held these values not as would a martinet soldier, bureaucrat, politician, preacher, superficial teacher, or person who teaches them as part of a role. He held them because he believed in them. He held them as would a true soldier or citizen. With all this going for him, it is easy to overlook what he overlooked and easy to overlook where he came up short. Although he did come up short, we should not hold that much against him or against East Asia; and we should assess him as we would a good solid American.

### **Chinese Ideas in Confucian Terms.**

Below I restate in terms of Confucian thought ideas that I first stated above as Chinese. My version is not exactly as you find in a Confucian text or Western account of Confucius. I give the gist of what he meant rather than follow specific accounts. I have read followers of Confucians such as Mencius and have read documents from the Confucian revivals in China, Japan, and Korea; I don't mention them here; their ideas are important in the history of Asian thought and politics but do not change the main ideas here.

"Skill" means "moral skill" or "virtue"; virtue includes the political skill that a good person would have in a decent political state. Virtue includes principles but I do not stress principles because Westerners tend to think of principles as rules such as the Golden Rule while the principles that go along with virtue come more from a feeling for integrity. The Golden Rule is a principle that goes along with virtue as long as we don't try to really make it into a rule and so argue about it. The more adept a person is, the more he-she has discipline, knows principles, and is able to use principles to guide the behavior of other people.

### **A Question for Perspective.**

People know they should do what is best in general but often they can't do it. They can't stop from doing what is fun or what helps them show off. People know they should drive small fuel-efficient cars but they don't. Instead, Americans, at least, buy large "gas guzzlers", especially SUVs. Americans have all kinds of excuses such as about safety, excuses that don't hold up. Really, what Americans want to do is show off. The same is true of cell phones and condos. In modern life, the Chinese are not so different. There is a gap between what people want to want versus what they really want and really do. (Social scientists might think about what is really the "general will" a la Rousseau.)

If people already know what they should want, and people officially subscribe to what they should want, but people won't do it, and instead do something else, how does the state get them to really want what they should want and really do that? If the state can't get people to really want what is good, how can the state at least get people to do what is good regardless of their mixed motives? This is not an idle issue. It is a key issue in modern life. Think of global climate change and the obesity epidemic.

"You can't legislate morality". The state can try to force people but that doesn't usually work well. Often the enforcement causes more harm than the original bad behavior. Think of Prohibition and the "War on

Drugs” in America. In modern China, problems like this have included keeping track of people, keeping them where they should live and work, and keeping the number of children down to one or two. Mao tried truly drastic and sometimes horrible ways to change China, worse than American Prohibition and the War on Drugs, and Mao’s ways didn’t work.

The West and China have attacked this issue differently. The Chinese way, stated well by Confucius, is to provide a good example based on past events and past leaders. Among other attempted solutions, the West often does the same even if Westerners don’t think of it as Confucian. Confucius did not solve this question, and this question has always plagued China. In reading about Confucius, think of his ideas as attempts to solve this question.

### **Kinds of People.**

Briefly, people come in five kinds:

(1) People with great virtue, discipline, and skill. Very few people are like this. These people lived mostly in the past. We can learn from them. To describe them and their actions is a chief goal of history. Great sages, great rulers, and “immortals” were of this kind. Confucius cared mostly about great rulers. He did not expect rulers of his time to be like great rulers of the past but he did expect that they could learn from great rulers of the past, enough to govern well now.

(2) People with enough skill to run the state if they are trained properly. Even these people are a small minority. Even people with natural potential have to develop their potential before they are able to run a state. Some people who might have potential ability to run a state do not develop the skill through proper training and so do not really have the skill even if they have the office. Confucius differs from other Chinese thinkers in how he trains these people. He trains by example and by participation in traditional culture, in particular ritual.

(3) People who can learn to run the state from the example of number (2) and under the control of people from number (2). This group includes most rulers, officials, soldiers, etc. These people should not be in control themselves. They should be under the control of people who have an internal natural sense of Heaven, virtue, and principles. When they are in the correct place, they can do much good. When they are not in the correct place, they do much bad.

(4) The vast majority of people. The common people are not intrinsically very good or bad. Usually they are good enough unless situations lead them to act badly. They can be made better through correct government. The common people do not have the ability to run a state on their own and cannot be taught to run a state. Like Plato and Aristotle, Confucius would not have supported Western style populist democracy. The common people can learn to follow people of ability. Without people of ability to follow, the common people cause minor mischief. The common people usually do not have the ability to choose a skillful person to run the state. Sometimes the common people can recognize a good leader or a bad leader once he-she is in office.

(5) People who are effectively bad. They might not be naturally wicked but they lack self discipline and they cannot learn to internalize discipline. They have to be controlled from the outside. Not many people

are so bad that they can't learn to be good enough. Any well-run state can find ways to deal with the few really bad people. Badly run states cannot control these people and they cause much harm.

Goodness alone is not enough for everybody. Laws are useful but laws alone are not enough. Rulers need to know the reason for laws, how laws work, and why laws work. They need to know principles on a deep level. Common people need to see that their rulers have confidence and laws, and that laws work.

If the rulers understand virtue including principles, then there is no need for specific laws. Example is enough. Success depends on the example, the situation, and the person.

### **Finding Good Rulers.**

How do rulers come to the fore? How do rulers learn how to rule? What example do rulers learn from? How do rulers set an example for others to learn from? How do leaders learn virtue?

The best sources for rulers to learn virtue are history and ritual. When ritual encodes history, then ritual is the best teacher, and sometimes ritual is the only needed teacher. Present rulers learn from great rulers of the past. In particular present rulers learn from successful semi-mystical rulers of the past who relied primarily on ritual and example to govern, rather than through a proliferation of laws. Adept present rulers have a duty to train and to choose competent successors.

Ritual does not mean empty formalism. The category "ritual" includes what you do to make life work. Ritual must be based on virtue. Life only works properly when it is based on virtue. All ritual, including formal ritual, ultimately came from what we do to make life work according to virtue. This is the idea behind the Japanese tea ceremony. It is the idea behind good manners in Western society, and teachers of manners stress that good manners are ways to make life work well. Ritual is the idea behind being polite and of being considerate of neighbors. Decent people are predictable as a way to get along with neighbors, and ritual helps people to be predictable. Ritual is what people do at baseball games and football games. So ritual is often fun. People teach ritual to children without knowing it is ritual. Ritual is what people do on the Internet to make sure everybody gets along. Ritual is how to conduct a barbecue so that it works. Ritual is the rules for a knife fight or a gun fight. Ritual is what happens at the annual workplace holiday dinners. Ritual is how fathers teach children how to hunt. Without ritual there could be no military. Confucius considered music to be ritual. Confucius would want people to listen to Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Bizet, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Bix Beiderbecke, Robert Johnson, Jimmy Rodgers, and the Beatles. Ritual does not stifle creativity any more than learning musical scales or how to maneuver on Facebook stifles creativity. Ritual represents the best in human character externalized and made obvious so that everybody can follow along.

Confucius used ritual as a means to an end, and did not use ritual as an end in itself. He saw the best behavior that people could aspire to. He saw the principles that govern a successful state and successful life. He saw that ritual embodied this. His idea of ritual was a merging of spiritual and material so that we become more spiritual and better, much like the Christian idea of a sacrament.

### **Confucian Character and Principles.**

Confucius clearly stated the Golden Rule of “do unto others” as a high goal of human action and politics. The Golden Rule was a focal point of his teachings, at least until Confucianism became the state religion in China. Even then, the Golden Rule was not forgotten but it was not pursued. The outstanding movie “Ip Man” is about one Chinese man’s resistance during the Japanese occupation of China in the 1930s. The hero is a Confucian-Taoist gentleman. Against his will, he is forced to fight back against foreigners, and he is forced to organize the townspeople to fight back against bandits and foreigners. The movie makes a point of the Confucian use of the Golden Rule and for harmony among the Chinese; and of the Confucian basis for self-defense, especially in contrast to legalism and militarism. The movie is wrong about the Confucian roots of martial arts – the roots are more Taoist than Confucian. But the movie is right about the importance of Confucianism, the importance of the Golden Rule, and the role of Heaven-like grace in human relations. A good state was a state in which the rulers inspired people to act by the Golden Rule and to defend themselves, as did the hero. In a tyranny, and in chaos brought by tyranny, people forget the Golden Rule and need to be reminded by a Confucian.

Confucius was not a formalist “stick in the mud” or “stuffed shirt”. He had a sense of humor. He would fit in with similar rabbis, priests, monks, and even politicians. Confucius and Jesus would have gotten along well. They would have liked each other, as Jesus liked big-hearted Jewish rabbis of his time. Confucius would have thought Jesus was naïve and impetuous but on the right track.

Confucius wanted an education that built what the British and Americans call “character”. Before about 1950, if Confucius was in the West and trained future leaders, he would have given them a Classical education that insisted on understanding rather than rote learning. Besides standard thinkers of the Classical world such as Cicero, Confucius would include great writers before modern times, such as Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, and John Donne. Confucius would include accessible versions of science including evolution and the Big Bang. Confucius would have hoped great leaders were more than merely military men (and women); but he also would have known that military people need a good education too, and well-educated military people can render great service. He would approve of most of the life of Winston Churchill, and approve of the idea that “Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton”.

In the modern world, to build the right character, Confucius would have young future leaders read all the “modern classics” such as you might find in the Penguin collection, including Jane Austen, Anthony Trollope, and Thomas Hardy. He would have young future leaders watch the great movies such as “Citizen Kane” and “African Queen”, and especially watch movies that show good and bad families such as “To Kill a Mockingbird” and “The Godfather”. He would enjoy Frank Capra. Confucius would have people join in the great rituals of secular religion such as the Fourth of July, Labor Day, and Christmas. He would make sure people feel the lessons of ritual in modern life, and that leaders could use the lessons from literature and rituals to decide modern problems such as universal health care. He would assume that any leader who had this training would be in tune with Heaven, get help from Heaven, and have the virtue and power of Heaven.

Confucius represents the effective mean (center) between reason and emotion, innovation and tradition, rote and spontaneity, intuition and rules, force and example, intervention and letting go, leader and led, and state and individual. In this respect, he is like the shift from Plato to Aristotle. Confucius tried to find the most effective mean in the context of Chinese culture and society. That mean in that context did not

lead to the same institutions as Western democracy and capitalism but it did prepare the Chinese for capitalism and some democracy 2500 years later. It could serve as a base for greater democracy, as it has in Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. The Confucian attitude toward tradition, leadership, human nature, followership, and the state is not so different from the attitudes of moderate Republicans and “centrist” Democrats in the United States.

When Asians seek to return to a balance after change, or seek to find the best out of a present situation, they return to Confucius. What makes better sense than to return to virtuous character? We can look at Chinese history after World War Two as (1) a brief rising of Mo-ism (“Let a hundred flowers bloom”); (2) a longer period of Legalism with accusations, trials, the Red Guard, and forced labor; and (3) then a return to basic Confucianism as China successfully humanized the Party and modernized its economy. Growth of the Chinese economy since about 1985 is a Confucian success.

### **The Victory of Virtue and Goodness.**

Confucius knew that virtue did not always win in each particular person but he hoped that virtue could win for the state and people as a whole. Like Socrates, Jesus, Tolstoy, and Gandhi, he thought goodness-virtue would win in the end. Somehow leaders would come to understand virtue-goodness, understand the correct principles that support virtue-goodness, and would act on correct principles to order the state. The leaders would serve as examples of virtue-goodness to immediate followers, who would administer the state as its officials. Leaders and their close followers the officials would serve as examples of virtue-goodness to the common people, who would follow them in building a good state. Confucius knew that officials had to use force. Even so, he did not want force as the main binder of the state – that is wasteful and is contrary to virtue and principles. He wanted people to act well because they understood acting well. Leaders and officials learned virtue through study of history, ritual, and art while common people learned how to act well through example from leaders and officials.

Despite having read Confucius several times, still I am not sure if he expected virtue-goodness to win just because it is good-and-virtuous, as did Gandhi and Jesus, and, likely, Socrates. I think so. If goodness-virtue won primarily because leaders used force to impose virtue-goodness, then that is not truest virtue-goodness. Truest virtue-goodness should win in the end, so it must be virtue-goodness-for-goodness'-sake alone. Virtue-goodness should use minimal force. Yet, at the same time, Confucius did know that too many people do not understand virtue-goodness-for-goodness'-sake so that the triumph of goodness is not assured without some force.

Western people should see easily the dilemma of our own leaders and officials. Officials want the people to follow goodness for its own sake, yet officials know we must use force, and that using force ultimately subverts goodness. Officials everywhere seek basic principles to instill in hearts so people will be good citizens without many detailed laws and without much force.

### **The State as the Kingdom of Heaven.**

As much as Jesus, Confucius wanted a Kingdom of Heaven; and, like Jesus building the Kingdom of God first in Israel, Confucius would build the Kingdom of Heaven in China first. Confucius wanted a Kingdom in accord with the virtue of Heaven, sustained by Heavenly people, and a Kingdom that leads people to

change their nature to be more Heavenly. If we think of Western “Good” as “Heaven”, then all standard Western thinkers after Plato have wanted the same thing. It is not an odd desire. It is a noble and good-hearted vision when not forced on us, and when it can be generalized to include everybody regardless of nation. It is one of the most powerful ideas contributing to the rise of democracy.

How does the Chinese version of the Kingdom-of-Heaven-on-this-Earth differs from the Western version of the Kingdom of Heaven (God), and how realistic is the Chinese version? Through most of Chinese history, most Chinese did not have the ideal of a Kingdom of Heaven as did most Christians, at least in theory. When Chinese thought of a Kingdom of Heaven, it was limited to “China”; it did not include anybody in the world who went along with the same ideals and wished to be members. Even for the national image of a Kingdom of Heaven, and despite inspiring patriots, Chinese people in general did not work for the Kingdom of Heaven (ideal China) as did Christians. Chinese began to think more of working for the ideal China as the Kingdom of Heaven after the Communist revolution. That is one point of the movie “Hero”. I am not sure how much the image of a great China in accord with Heaven drives Chinese people now, and if that image is enough to overcome their need to provide for their family regardless of the state. Hopefully China is aiming for something grander than reviving glory and power, control of the Pacific shipping lanes, and dominating international capitalism.

### **Confucian American Presidents.**

I think the original idea of democracy in America was more Confucian and less populist than the idea of democracy now. We wanted our leaders to be able to run the state, and we wanted our people to be able to select people who could select good leaders, but we did not expect the people directly to run the state, and in some cases, not even to directly select the leaders. The Electoral College is a Confucian idea while direct election of all officials is not. The original idea of an American President was more like the idea of a Confucian leader than like the populist near-demagogue leader of today. Americans still want a Confucian President. Americans want Presidents to be effective leaders but Americans also want them to lead more by moral example than force. This is why the American people get upset at sexual mistakes of politicians, and more upset by lies and cover up than by a few small moral indiscretions. Force is what the military uses when the President tells them. George Washington was a great Confucian President. In good moments, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Abraham Lincoln were Confucian Presidents except as events forced them use force or guile.

When moral example fails, then Americans revert to support for a populist demagogue. Because moral example never works well enough or long enough, people always turn to populist demagogues. Good compromise while upholding the virtue, ideals, and best interests of the country is a Confucian ideal. A minimal use of law, using existing laws to best advantage, and passing new laws seldom, are Confucian ideas. “You can’t legislate morality” is a Confucian idea when the phrase is not used as a slogan to cover racism and agendas.

In his first year in office, and by temperament, Barack Obama was a Confucian President. He tried to use moral argument and moral example to unite factions that had been separated for a long time by fighting and conniving. He was open to compromise. He referred to principles and precedent. In the end, he was undermined by Congressional leaders, mostly Republican but some Democrat, and the Tea Party, so he had to change tactics. That is what often happens to Confucians. Then they become Legalists, Mo-

ists, Maoists, or flounder. In America, most failed Confucians become nasty Legalists. The Republican Party began as Confucians and ended as Legalists obsessed with power. Liberals start as Mo-ists and end up as much obsessed with power as Republicans. Confucius sought to avoid all this. He correctly saw that Legalism is only a short run strategy, and, no matter how much it hurt your own career, for the best interests of the nation, ultimately virtue-goodness has to lead by example.

### **PART 3: Assessment.**

#### **Governing by Being in Touch with Heaven.**

Confucians want the highest leaders not to lead through laws or force but through example. The highest leaders are in touch with Heaven. By being in touch with Heaven, they know what to do, and what they do succeeds. Ritual and the arts tie everybody together and teach everybody.

This ideal was known not only in China and among Confucians but, in slightly different forms, all over the world in many cultures-and-societies at many times. The Egyptians, Babylonians, Jews, Greeks, Romans, Mayans, Aztecs, Incas, Buddhists, Hindus, and Shinto followers in Japan, all had this idea of how leaders, states, and peoples should run. European kings from Charlemagne in 800 CE (AD) through the modern age had this ideal of the king and the state. Americans have this idea when they think of the President as a moral example and great statesperson. People like the idea of “charisma” (“mana” or “The Force”) flowing down from heaven to ethereal leaders to officials to the people. When this flow is correct, the country prospers. When this flow is wrong, the country struggles. Republicans and traditional religionists still think this way about America when they think of it as the “New Israel” and the example for all godly countries. I think traditional Christians would like to see this relation in which their Church plays a key role in advising the President. Billy Graham did play a role something like this. Even “godless liberals” think this way when they see America as the avatar of Liberty and when they want leaders to be truly moral by showing a few small blemishes but no large ones – a little “pot” or cocaine, a few Cuban cigars, a fortune teller, or a few girls on the Internet are good but bondage porn is horrible.

What makes the Chinese version distinct, if it is distinct? What makes the Chinese version different from the Western version? Why did the Western version lead to self-government, science, development and the best modern way of life while the Chinese version did not? To answer would require a lot space, and I am not sure I could give a good answer. Academics spend their careers on these questions.

Focusing on the ideal alone, China differed from most non-Western versions in adding virtue, principles, character, and morality to the idea that leaders connect to spiritual power. Leaders do not have power just because they connect to Heaven. They might not have power in the simple sense at all. Leaders have virtue, principles, and character because they connect to Heaven, and connect to Heaven because they have virtue, principles, and character. Chinese leaders have morality based on ideas like the Golden Rule because they connect to Heaven, and they connect to Heaven because they have morality. The only power that mattered was closely tied to morality, virtue, integrity, principles, and character. This was much like the Jewish, Greek, and Roman ideals.

#### **A Brief Answer.**

Unlike the West, China never developed a solid rationale based on theory and experience that linked the charisma of the state and high leaders to ideas of the state, the relation of people to the state, and how to administer power on all levels. China never had the ideas of citizenship and the state that I described in Chapter Two. China never had a logical scientific theory of social relations and the state. The ideas would not have to be phrased in Christian terms, and could have been developed in Confucian terms, but were not. You can't teach what you don't have. You can't use what you don't have as the basis for good leadership and the state.

The Confucian idea was simply that Heaven gave virtue, virtue gave leaders, leaders chose officials, officials used power when they had to, and people went along. China never had a developed analysis of divine order, the state, officials, power, and the people as we find in the West after Plato, Aristotle, and the absorption of Jewish thought. China never had anything like the informal British constitution or the formal American Constitution. China did not have a set framework of laws and a large stock of legal tradition. It had little "philosophy of law". It did not have, and could not have, the "rule of law" even for high officials. Officials always had to "wing it". For convenience, call this whole stock a "middle level" of ideas, analyses, principles, and institutions.

Without a middle level set of institutions for using power apart from particular leaders, China had to blow up the idea of the graceful heavenly leader beyond anything realistic and had to denigrate the daily use of power into mere expediency and conniving. Not in Confucius himself, but in writers after him, the proper response of a high leader to a crisis was to retire to the inner palace and hold a ceremony or play music. Without a regular constitution based on a solid logical theory of social and political affairs, China fell too often into confusion and warlords often took local regions. While governments rarely out-and-out failed, they also never out-and-out succeeded, and they never gave the general cohesion and prosperity that the best Western states could sometimes give. China never developed self-government, science, and capitalism.

Ideas of connecting to heaven, cultivating discipline, cultivating virtue, leading by example, and teaching by traditional arts, are good but they need to be supplemented by a coherent set of principles and rules based on sound principles and practicality. That is what China did not evolve and the West did.

### **Chinese Bureaucracy and Education.**

China and the West shared the idea that leaders had to be moral and have character but differed in how morality and character came to reality in the state.

The Chinese were famous for their bureaucracy. The entire country was divided into areas about the size of an American county. The central government appointed at least one official to take charge of every unit, and kept garrisons of soldiers-police all over the land. The Chinese civil service did provide regular channels for the limited use of power, regularity within a regime, and continuity between regimes. Simply the fact of having regular officials kept regimes from falling apart. But Chinese bureaucracy did not give enough. Each official had to carve out his (rarely her) own niche, often by dealing with local criminals, and always without offending a higher official no matter how much the lower official was correct. As long as all the taxes demanded by the center were given, bandits did not cause too many complaints, and the military did not have to intervene to restore order often, the official was doing his job. This is the sort of

arrangement that people used to find regularly in the “Third World” despite what was formally written in the laws of a particular country, and still do find often enough. It is the order that prevails in the parts of Mexico and Columbia controlled by drug lords.

The bureaucracy was never really trained in the use of power and the administration of particular offices but instead was trained in mythical examples of ethereal past leaders who led by connection to heaven, ritual, and virtue alone. Chinese education did teach history and what can loosely be called “liberal arts” but not in the Western sense of liberal arts. Chinese education might more accurately compare to a long, elaborate, grueling “finishing school”. It was not even like a “prep” school. The Chinese felt that studying mythical classics instilled virtue and character, and that was enough. Students learned about mythical leaders but not much about real leaders and events. They learned calligraphy, ceremonies, and music. They did not have realistic studies of how the state works and how it fails. They did not have an analysis of the state, or an analytic comparison of several types of states. They did not have clear ideas of “what is this situation?”, “how did we get in this?”, “how does this situation compare to other situations?”, and “what might be the best move to get out of this situation into a better situation?” They did not know what to do in an office when they were appointed to that office. They did not learn about the ideas of Chinese analysts in the sense that Western school children learned the ideas of Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson. Of course, the majority of training in any service in any country is done “on the job”. But, without the background that Western civil servants had, “on the job” in China did not mean to sift through ideas of previous people who were practical and theoretical (Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Burke, and Adams) for what worked best in today’s practical world but instead a crash course in conniving and survival.

### **Family First.**

The role of the family has been a two-edged sword in Chinese history and in the failure of China to grow middle level effective institutions for government. Like education and the civil service, family provided continuity and a base level. On the other hand, it also provided a refuge when government did not work, resisted government for its own benefit, and so promoted government not working.

Since World War Two, America has seen the importance of family wax and wane several times. I have been most impressed by the waxing. Despite Conservative fears, almost all Americans consider family quite important. Look at movies about family starring liberal actors such as several done by Steve Martin. Soldiers list what is important in their lives as God, Family, and Country. Family is an integral part of grace coming down from heaven, into leaders, officials, and the common people. The family is a small version of grace coming into this world. Grace comes into parents, who teach children by example, and administer rules. The family is an important teacher of civic virtues. I know from personal experience that public schools, including universities, rarely work unless families have the right attitudes toward education and institutions, and families participate in education. Confucius would quickly understand all these ideas and approve of them. The family is the first teacher of Heaven and the most important. If the family fails to set an example of Heaven, then only a great sage leader could make up for family failure. Not even a great king or great President can make up for family failure.

I am not entirely sure why, but I found that Asians do not think American families are like this. I am not sure what Asians think American families are and I don’t repeat the mistakes here. I think the mistakes

have to do with how the modern world has changed families all over, not only in America, but the change happened first in America.

In any case, what matters is that Confucian and American ideas of the family are not so different that they cannot understand each other.

To some extent, in almost all state societies, family organization and state organization mirror each other. To me, a funny example occurs in Western weddings where the bride and groom dress up like imitations of aristocrats from the middle 1800s. The Chinese family was supposed to be a bit like the kingdom, at least in public. The eldest male was like an ethereal leader who led by virtue. Often his mother, wife, or eldest son was “the enforcer”. Children were not expected to have the ethereal virtue of the patriarch but were expected to show discipline and to internalize rules, like good civil servants. The family could be a “little kingdom” that ran along the lines of the big kingdom. The family was expected to teach Confucian views of the state and Confucian values. It was to teach its children ritual, music, painting, calligraphy, and the basics of mythical history. It was expected to teach good manners. Hopefully all this added up to the character and virtue needed for family success and state success.

When government is not well-ordered, does not often succeed well, and flounders often, people rely on the family instead. They fall back on the family. Eventually the family becomes not only first but first by a long way. Then the family does not play a role in the state as it does in the successful West. Families give little support to the state and all support themselves. When families give no support to the state and all support to themselves, then the state cannot succeed as it should. Then families give little support to the government, only to families, and so on.

When families do this, they do not operate “calmly”. They get entrenched and serious. Families operate according to dogmas of the family. They become little dogma machines. This is the caricature of the family that the West thinks is true of the Chinese family in general and was true when the family had to survive on its own.

The same thing happened in the West when the state was not reliable enough. Where the pattern got entrenched, it was as hard to get out of as in East Asia. The strong isolated family prevented the rise of a strong reliable state, and the lack of a strong reliable state supported the strong isolated family. Cases that come to my mind are Italy, southern France, Greece, and the Balkans.

Chinese people certainly had ideas of patriotism, and some Chinese sacrificed their lives for the nation. But Chinese in general did not have the idea of putting the state first sometimes. They did not have the idea of noble Greeks and Romans who sacrificed even their families. They did not have the idea of Jews who sacrificed family members for God, as when Jacob nearly sacrificed Isaac and King David had to accept the death of his children because they lived immorally. Without this idea, and with the constant failure of government, the Chinese fell back always on the family as little kingdom.

Confucianism makes it easy to entrench on the family this way because Confucius emphasized the role of family in ritual life and devotional life. I want to be clear: I don't think Confucius supported the stereotype idea of the family that we see in Western movies and TV, and which seems to prevail even among East Asians. I think Confucius' idea of the family was like the idea in Rome or Israel: strong families but with

the family in the context of Heaven and the state. If Heaven and the state are inseparable, and Heaven and the family are inseparable, then state and family are inseparable, and the family has to be seen in the context of the state. But when the state does not work well for hundreds of years, Confucian ideas of the family easily become the stereotype of “family first” that we see now. Once the pattern sets it, it is hard to escape. Confucian ideas have been used to support stereotyped ideas of the Chinese family for so long that those ideas of the family are now inseparable from Confucianism. This result is as if ideas of the family from media versions of the mafia, as in “The Godfather”, had been used so long in conjunction with the American Constitution and Christianity that they had become inseparable from the idea of Americans or Christianity.

An indication of the right balance between “family first” versus “loyalty to the state” comes in the fact that Americans actually pay a high rate of the taxes that they owe and do so voluntarily. Americans do cheat on their taxes and evade their taxes, and the American tax system is so screwed up that it promotes not complying; but still Americans pay their taxes more than any other major people. Perhaps the British and Germans are about as compliant, and they too have good ideas about the relation of family and state. In contrast, the Chinese, at least until Mao, paid taxes primarily at the point of a pike.

The original Confucian ideas of the family are not wrong any more than ideas of American soldiers about the family are wrong. Original Confucian ideas of the family are quite good, and Westerners are correct to praise moderate Confucian ideas of the family just as Americans praise English, French, and German moderate ideas of the family. Confucian ideas of the family are misused because they have been in the wrong context for 2500 years.

Once the family became the “little kingdom” while the state was relevant primarily as an irritant, this kind of autonomous family reinforced the drift of the school system and civil service not to produce institutions and officials for middle level power, officials who had ideas based in theory-from-experience on how to run the state, and carried out their offices well as offices. Families did not have an interest in promoting good scholarship and a good education system as in the Western countries such as France, England, and Germany. They had an interest in training their children for civil service posts that could provide another income and source of security. They did not care if their children did well or ill toward the job and the state as long as their children brought in revenue and kept moving up the career ladder. When the main goal is to get a government post for security, then it is best if the post is not assessed according to its contribution to a well run state in the Western sense, and it is best if the education system is mostly about ethereal ideas and mythical virtuous examples. It is better to train a child in etiquette that can be mastered and so lead to a position than in real administration.

The modern world is changing Confucian ideas of the family, and, I hope, returning them to what I think Confucius originally had in mind. What happens depends on the quality of government that prevails in East Asia. I think moderate Confucian ideas of the family can easily fuse with ideas of citizenship, the state, and self-government.

I admire how Americans, as with all people, love family. But I have seen the bad results of “family first” in America and elsewhere. Sometimes goodness and right are more important than family. Sometimes the nation is more important than family. Sometimes a family member does such wrong that we have to turn him-or-her over to authorities, not just to protect the reputation of the family, but because it is right and

better. I get nervous when Americans say “family first”, especially because populist democracy is failing and America is not dealing well with the world economy and world politics. “Family first” describes rich people and the class of rich people looking after themselves first even while their particular nations “go down the tubes”. That is not what we want. If we give up on the state, and start putting our eggs in the family basket, then we will make everything worse, and make a bad self-fulfilling prophecy. We have to find the right balance and hold it.

### **How to Find and Train Officials.**

Much as in England, candidates for officials in the Confucian civil service were recruited from aristocratic or successful families. People who were obviously stupid or inferior did not last long in the training but that is not any assurance that the people who did last were intelligent and would be competent at their future jobs. Just as going to “prep” school or a similar other “good” school in the United States reinforces the chance that your children and grandchildren will go, and so forms a closed circle of privileged people, so it did in China as well. The people who succeed at getting into a school, and staying in a school, in this system are skilled mostly at making and using social connections. This way of recruitment-through-privileged-self-reinforcing-society excludes people of ability and it focuses on people who have a set of skills that does not serve the country best. The state can get along with this system and these people, and sometimes this system produces great people – that depends on the content of education once in the schools. But this system does not find all the able people that the state really needs and too often it offers to the state people of inferior ability. (For a while, the American system did better. The American system now suffers terribly because schools aim almost entirely at giving a piece of paper for a job rather than at education.)

Suppose we had the right principles, people of native ability were out there, and we had a fairly reliable way to find them. Now we have to consider how to train them. No matter how complete and profound, ritual alone is not an effective way to teach leaders. The expanded idea of ritual that I have described – something like deep participation in the proper culture – would help. It would not hurt. Many leaders could use a better sense of the rituals that really drive the psychology of modern people, rituals such as watching TV shows about young adults. But even watching reruns of “Friends” and “Seinfeld” will not make good leaders out of most politicians. Repeated participation in Labor Day, the Fourth of July, and Christmas, and repeated watching of “It’s A Wonderful Life” and “A Christmas Story”, does not make politicians better. Watching movies of Shakespeare’s plays might make politicians interesting, at least briefly, but it would not make them better at the public good. If politicians read histories of Presidents, politicians would have more precedents by which to tell misleading stories, but, again, likely historical literacy would not cause a big change in government. Going to a church, synagogue, mosque, temple, monastery, meditation group, or the freethinkers’ atheist potluck dinner, does not seem to make much difference either.

Ritual is supposed to teach character. Character is then enough to get a leader in contact with Heaven and to make a student a good leader. Teaching prospective leaders character alone is not enough no matter how we teach character and what kind of character we teach. We also have to teach how states really work and how economies really work.

I am not sure how to find future leaders and train them well. I am not sure how to train most people to be good citizens. I am familiar with all the programs that America has used since I was a child. They are not bad programs, and they do a lot of good, but they don't seem to do the job. Having a college degree is not guarantee that a person had the native ability to be a good citizen, official, or leader, and, if he-she did have the ability, he-she was trained up to capacity. Here is not the place to offer my ideas of what kind of character and institutions we need to make America better, and how to find and train our officials and leaders.

### **Content of Training and the Content of Confucianism.**

Suppose we can identify good candidates for leadership and citizenship, and have good methods for training them. Now the question is "What do we teach them?" The content of their education is just the content of our ideas about the state and its citizens.

Almost immediately the question arises about Heaven in the education of good citizens and prospective leaders. For most of Western history, and in Confucianism, this is not a question. Heaven has a definite place in the state and in teaching about the state. For now, though, forget about this question. I return to it later. Accept that we all know Heaven plays a role, and we don't want to bicker about the role. So we ignore the role of Heaven for now.

So now the question is "what do we teach about political life, the state, and how the state works?" Here I repeat what I said above: This is where Confucianism and the West differ most and where Confucianism fails. This is the single biggest point of this chapter. Confucianism had high ideals and a correct view of the importance of Heaven, a view with which nearly all Westerners would agree throughout all the history of China and the West. But Confucianism did not have a good body of analysis for:

- Various political situations, both of state societies and non-state societies.
- Types of states and how each type worked.
- Why one state type might be better than the others even if not perfect.
- How to sustain the good aspects of political life in particular conditions.
- How to go from one type of state to another.
- The role of law in the operation of states.
- The relation of the ruler and officials to the body of laws.
- The role of the people other than to follow example and to obey.

I am not saying that China did not have many political and legal precedents, Chinese officials were not diligent in using them, and Chinese officials were not adept at using them. I am not saying that Chinese thinkers were not analytic – they were rigorously and amazingly analytic. I am saying Chinese thinkers

did not develop the kind of analysis that we see in the West beginning in Plato and Aristotle and carrying onward.

Another way to put this is that the Chinese did not have a scientific logical analysis of social, civil, political, and state life, at least not by Western standards, and not enough to actually work. Social science, even in the West, even now, is not scientific by the standards of physics but it tries and it knows the need for proper categories and logic. It builds on a solid historical foundation of theory, analysis, and experience. Chinese understanding of the state was not like that.

The fact that Chinese analysis of political life was not systematic and scientific served the purposes of the ruling class and of the families that sent their children into the civil service. A non-scientific literary style of education that did not directly bear on practical and theoretical problems was fuzzy enough so that it did not endanger the power of the rulers and ruling families. It was fuzzy enough to be used by rulers and ruling families to keep their power. As far as I can tell, this kind of fuzzy education is typical where rulers and ruling families do not want the civil service to be too effective, as in Russia before the Revolution and in Latin America before modern times.

### **Example.**

Imagine two kinds of gardeners. Both men love life and love gardens. Both want to nurture life in an orderly and beautiful way. Their ideals are similar and equally high.

One gardener studies gardens from picture books of old classical gardens. He recognizes all the plants and knows that some plants are more like each other some ways and less like each other in some ways. He knows that all poppies are more like each other than poppies are like roses. He knows that annual plants are more like each other than perennials. He conducts ad hoc experiments to see which plant grows best in sunlight or shade, with little water or more water, and next to this other plant or that other plant. He knows how to save some diseased plants. He knows how to use some plants to keep away animal pests, and he knows how to set some traps for animal pests. In letters, he shares information with some of the other gardeners in the nation.

The other gardener has the picture books but also has manuals of soil science, botany, animal sciences, weather, climate, and chemistry. He knows how plants work and why. He knows about plant diseases. He knows how to make plants and soil work well together. He knows what to do in case plants and soil don't get along. He knows that some plants exude nutrients from their roots, some plants exude poison, and some exude both. He knows how to arrange plants so they work well together and so that they don't hurt each other. If roses are to be the queen of the garden, he knows where to plant them and how to plant around them so that everything works out well. He has history books of past gardens including explanations of how they worked aesthetically and scientifically. His knowledge is not perfect. He might not know of modern Darwinism or quantum chemistry. But it is good enough so that almost all gardens can succeed indefinitely.

The first gardener sometimes creates gardens of exquisite beauty but he is not always sure why, and the gardens never last a long time. His gardens often have problems so that dead spots and bushy spots

mar even the most beautiful gardens. His gardens are susceptible to sudden blights that sometimes wipe out the whole garden. He has trouble starting over again after a disease.

The second gardener also sometimes creates gardens of exquisite beauty. But, even when his gardens are not exquisitely beautiful, they are often beautiful. Even if he does not create as many one-off gardens of unique beauty as the first gardener, he does create some, and his gardens give more satisfaction and lasting satisfaction. His gardens rarely fail. He knows how to get rid of diseases. His gardens do have bare spots and bushy spots but he can minimize them and make each one go away as it crops up. If the owner of the land wants to change from featuring roses to featuring daffodils, he can do that.

Here are more ways to think about it:

Imagine the mechanic who fixes cars by experience and feel only versus the mechanic who really knows cars, metals, materials, electricity, and breaks, and who fixes by both feel and knowledge.

Imagine a computer person who fixes computers through experience and feel only versus a computer person who has studied operating systems, programs, languages, interfaces, and hardware.

### **Confucius and Conservatives.**

Edmund Burke, an English and Irish politician, 1729 to 1797, was father of the Conservative movement. Although intrigued by America and its independence, and said that English policy toward America was a serious mistake, he was appalled by the French Revolution and suspicious of capitalism, industrialism, and changes away from the traditional agrarian and aristocratic order. He did not support free enterprise and free market capitalism. He did not support the rising capitalists. He did support the aristocracy and its links to the mainstream Church, as long as the old order produced genuine responsible leaders. He did want progress. He was rational. I see him as a version of the Enlightenment. He saw a link between stable progressive society, traditional piety, and predictable order. Movement away from what works is likely to cause more harm than good. "If it aint broke, don't fix it." We can move forward if we do not cut our feet out from under us. Certain kinds of social order go well with human nature, while other kinds do not. It is up to responsible leaders to find those orders, to guide us to new such orders in time of change, to avoid bad orders, and to make it all make sense.

The modern American and British Conservative movement that began in the 1950s, gained momentum under Ronald Regan and Margaret Thatcher, and exploded with the Religious Right afterward, is NOT a continuation of Burke's ideas despite what its apologists claim. It departs from him toward irrationalism, dogma, and theocracy. It is closer to reactionary fundamentalism and to populist anti-democracy than to real Burke-like conservative ideas. It is closer to Mercantilism than to real free-market ideals, and only uses free-market ideals to rationalize its preferred state interventions. The modern American and British Conservative has to consider what it wishes to preserve, to conserve, and to change. It has to consider how it wishes to do that. It has not done this thinking well enough.

Confucius was like Edmund Burke but not like the modern American and British Conservative movement. He saw the links between piety, character, social order, ritual broadly defined, leadership, a cohesive state, and the progress that can be gained only by building on a cohesive state. Only some social orders

go along with human nature and Heaven, and we have to seek those orders. If we need to see Confucius in modern terms, think of him as a moderate Republican with leanings toward traditional piety, a trust in old wealth, and a wish to go into the future without losing what we have now. He would not be a staunch Right Wing Religious Conservative. He would not be a champion of the unbridled free market nor would he accept a business world that thrived only as the result of state support. He would not be a fascist. He would not be a Libertarian. He would approve of limited state programs.

Confucius believed in what a genuine “compassionate moderate conservative” would believe in America, including the role of Heaven in all aspects of life and the state. Confucius believed in the receptivity of human hearts and he stated the Golden Rule clearly. Contrary to stereotype, in accord with Jesus, he held virtue and service to the state more important than family. If family members erred, they should be corrected. Unlike Jesus, Confucius did not make the Golden Rule and “pay it forward” high-level goals, and did not see them as a key way whereby people could make themselves into proper citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. He was not committed in the same way to the same ideals as Jesus although he recognized them.

### **Religion, Confucius, Conservatives, and Liberals.**

I find it hard to imagine Confucius without Heaven, grace, virtue, and Heavenly principles. Religion was an integral part of his ideas of social life and the state. That was typical all over the world until about the 1700s in the West (excluding some Buddhist and Hindu analyses). Yet, now, we live in modern plural states where we try to conduct the state without leaning on religion. So the position of Confucius leads us directly to questions of religion and state. I have already said what I want to say in Chapters One, Two, and this chapter, so I don't repeat other than comments below. If we accept that values originally came from religion, the best values for the modern state originally came from Western European Christianity, values still have to feel sacred, and look for the values that work, then we can accept the values without worrying too much about which religion they originally came from. All religions, agnostics, and atheists can accept the values and get on with the difficult business of running a state.

Conservatives say the combination of Christianity, family values, going to church, a classical education with Greek and Roman values, and study of the political traditions of Northwestern Europe, in particular England, can make potential leaders into real leaders. I said something like this might be the difference between Confucianism and the West, at least when coupled with correct institutions for the administration of power. In contrast to China, this is what the West did for a long time; and this did seem to work until modern capitalism and populist democracy broke down the tradition. I am not sure it would work now in America or China in its traditional form. I think the study of Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Locke, and etc. is still relevant but is not enough for the modern world. We need more now. I think we have good ideas to add to the tradition but we are slow to adopt them. Whatever we find, I hope it mixes with both Western and Confucian traditions to give the world what it needs.

Conservatives in the West say the West evolved middle level institutions because it has the Christian Church, and the Church taught not only religious ideas but also the Classical education of Greece and Rome. Greece was obsessed with understanding (analyzing) the right working institutions and Rome actually found them for its time. Religion, non-religious theory, and practicality combined and carried on, and were available when needed. To a large extent, this conservative observation is true. What is

important here is that the West had the additional institutions for regular middle-level government, and the attitudes that go along with regular good government, while China did not. It might be important that the Church carried those additional institutions for most of Western history; or it might not matter that the Church did the job as long as some institution did the job; maybe philosophical schools would have done the job as well if they had survived. I think it did matter that the Church did the job. Although the Church and Confucius both based their ideas on Heaven (God), the Church held ideas about administering power that are both effective and humane while Confucians did not. I do not speculate on why that happened. While I give the Church more credit than most liberals do, I do not give the Church as much credit as conservatives do. The Church preserved a secular tradition along with Christianity; it did not preserve a purely religious tradition. It was the secular ideas of Greece and Rome that kept the ship on even keel and going forward. If the Western tradition had been purely religious, it would have been like the Jews or Egyptians, and we would not have modern self-government, science, or capitalism. I do not here argue about the role of the Christian Church and how the Christian Church compares to the religious component in the ideas of Confucius.

Conservatives make parallel opposite mistakes about the interplay of religious and secular ideas and institutions.

Liberals say we should end all mention of religion. I disagree. We need not adopt a state religion but it is silly to forget three thousand years of history and to overlook the fact that people want their values to feel sacred and to be grounded in religion. We can adopt values from Northwestern European Christianity without adopting all its religion-and-culture to the exclusion of all others. We can easily learn from other religions and cultures, and value them for what is good in them. At some point, a sane person has to simply say “grow up” about this topic.

The mistake that liberals make about religion might not be so bad but it bleeds over into character. It is one thing to (try to) block off religion. It is another thing to block off character. Regardless of where it came from, or comes from now, we need people of a particular character as leaders and citizens. There is no other way. Liberals believe we can maintain the correct idea of character, and maintain people of good character, without reference to religion. This is likely not true. Confucius certainly knew it is not true. People want religion. They want ties between religion and character. To grow good character, we have to come to grips with the link between religion and character. Again, this does not mean we have to adopt a state religion. But, if religion helps us to build character, then we should not suppress all mention of religion. We should allow religion to build good character. We should allow all religions to build the best character they can, especially once they have adopted the values that I related in Chapter Two. If we deny any link between religion and the kind of good character that we need in the state, then we get religion the bad character that leads to terrorism.

As liberalism tried to separate religion and character, and tried to carry on with character building without religion, character has floundered. I am not saying modern people are all wicked now as a result of no God; but they are confused and do follow bad demagogues, politicians, and bad dogma; see the chapter on Romanticism. Modern people do not work on citizenship. If religion can help us bring people to good values, character, and citizenship, then that result is good, not bad. If lack of religion lets people lapse into bad character, then we should be slow about excluding all religion. As always, we should work on allowing religion proper scope in a state society without instituting a state religion.

The parallel opposite Conservative mistake is a horrible exaggeration of the Confucian error. They think forcing their own religion on a person gives him-her good character automatically absolutely necessarily without any exception. They think having the state adopt their religion automatically necessarily without exception leads to good citizens and a good state. Nothing else is needed or should be added. All else should be excluded. Any additions are potentially dangerous. The religion does not have to train people in social science (political science) or the long tradition of Western social-and-political thought; it only has to give people a particular God experience and has to make sure they go to the right church often. I don't have to explain how wrong this. This is religious fundamentalism of the kind that we deplore in Muslims and that leads to religious terrorism. I don't have to explain that naïve Conservatives actually do believe this even if they know enough not to say it aloud in so many words. Even if a particular religion were true and Godly it would not necessarily lead to good character unless it was supplemented with other values, and it would not necessarily lead to good citizens and a good state. This conservative mistake drives the backlash not only of liberals but all sensible people. Again, at some point, an adult has to say "enough". We need better.

A good religion coupled with the right education in the Western tradition of social-and-political analysis is likely to lead to good character and moderately competent citizens. It might even lead some people to work hard and become good leaders. I think Confucius would agree if he could have some time to study world history and look at the modern situation.

Religion alone can't do this. Can a good secular education in the Western tradition alone, without the religious component, do this? Conservatives fear it can, and so they stress the religious component and belittle the secular component – to the embarrassment of good reasonable thinking people. Since about after World War Two, America and Europe have been experimenting with a blend of religion and secular education. They have been teaching the secular component in public schools and teaching the religious component in the family and church (temple, mosque, synagogue, etc.). Americans and Europeans want family and church to teach religion but they can't say so in public. For a while, this experiment was going well.

Unfortunately, that result led liberals to denigrate religion altogether – again the parallel opposite sad error on which conservatives blame all the troubles of the world. Before we could find the right balance, the experiment was derailed by the speed of change in the modern world, by the stress of America and Europe entering the modern world economy and world politics quickly. In that situation, it is hard to find the right balance and the resulting fights hurt everybody. The public schools system stopped teaching traditional Western secular social-and-political ideas, categories, values, and institutions to instead give pieces of paper for jobs. The family stopped teaching religion except for some empty formalism; the quality of religion taught by churches etc. varied quite a bit but mostly was not good and not enough for modern people; or religion degenerated into zealous dogmatic causes as described in the chapter here on Romanticism here. The family and church cannot teach the Western tradition of values and analysis, for reasons I don't go into here. The failure of privately-taught religion led to conservative calls for religion in school; and, that led to expected backlash from liberals and thinking moderate people. All this is quite annoying.

It might seem we could easily find a sensible blend of religious and secular instruction that did not favor one religion but that was honest about the source of our values and ideas in Western Christianity and the Western secular tradition. We need not promote any one religion in school but we could teach about all religions. With the Internet for supplement, this task should be easy and fun. Unfortunately, we will not do this. I don't explain why.

We have not been very good at any of this and we really need to do better. I am not sure what advice Confucius would give on doing better.

### **A Last Word on Goodness Winning.**

Goodness might win but goodness is not destined to win just because it is goodness. If goodness does win, rather than win because it is goodness, far more likely leaders will use force and leaders will appeal to emotions that go along with goodness but are not necessarily goodness, such as patriotism. So I see Confucius as I see Socrates, Jesus, and Gandhi. I hope they are right, but I doubt it. I think the best we can do is now far less than we could have done after World War One or World War Two, and even that will take a lot of work.