Power and Humanity

An Introduction to Classical
East Asian Philosophy



Krystian Zawistowski

[Draft, 11 November 2026]

Krystian Zawistowski

Power and Humanity

An Introduction to Classical
East Asian Philosophy

[Draft, 11 November 2026]

Contents

1 The Purpose of This Book. 3

2 Rujia Philosophy (Confucianism). 6
2.1 Ambition and Vocation 6
2.2 The Capacity for Nobility. 13
2.3 Nobility as the Foundation of the State 18
2.4 Moral Criteria for Power and Office. 23

3 Controlling the Elite as the Central Problem of Politics — Shen Buhai and Han Fei 29
3.1 Fajia, Rujia, and Shen Buhai. 30
3.2 Aligning a Role with Its Results. 30
3.3 Protecting the System from Capture 33
3.4 Cliques and Collusion as a Multiplier 41
3.5 Historical and Biographical Note. 45

4 The Morality of Power and the Dysfunction of Autocracy. 50
4.1 The Peculiar Instability of the Imperial System. 56
4.2 The First Qin Emperor's Influence on the Imperial System 59
4.3 The First Emperor Qin Shi Huang According to Sima Qian. 61
4.4 Imperial Confucianism through Sima Qian's Eyes 69
4.5 The Han Dynasty's Legitimacy According to Sima. 76
4.6 Why a Republic Is Better. 79

5 The Disordered Will as a Strategic Weakness 82
5.1 The Ten Faults 84
5.2 Pride Goes Before a Fall. 93
5.3 Examples: Napoleon and the Fall of the Roman Republic 95
5.4 Yi Sun-sin's Recipe for Military Power 104

6 Political Rationality 108
6.1 The Priority of Purpose According to Mencius 108
6.2 Recursive Reasoning about Intentions 110
6.3 The Main Aspects of Recursive Reasoning . . . 113

7 Why Christianity Needs Asian Philosophy 117
7.1 Cultivating Nobility as a Shared Goal 117
7.2 Confucianism in Catholic Fundamental Theology 119
7.3 The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven . . . 121
7.4 The Empire on Which the Sun Set 125
7.5 The Sun King 132
7.6 Dreaming of Empire, Losing Poland 143

8 Free Will and Determinism, Freedom and Tyranny. 153
8.1 Will and Virtue as the Foundations of Both Obedience and Freedom 153
8.2 John Calvin as a Father of Historical Determinism 156
8.3 Predestination as an Alternative Theory of Rationality, Morality, and Power 160
8.4 Predestination within Catholicism: Bañezianism in the Spanish Empire 168
8.5 Molina's Universal Will to Save 173
8.6 The Damned Mass and the Influence of Pagan Aristocratic Ethics 176
8.7 The Chinese Rites Controversy as an Example of Intolerance within the Church 183

1 The Purpose of This Book.

This book addresses the following topics:

- The legitimacy of power: where the moral right to govern and demand obedience comes from, how to acquire it, and how to use it wisely.
- Self-cultivation and nobility as the foundation of a worthy life and properly directed ambition.
- The state and the organization as systems that must be effective, stable, and resilient against threats.

According to ancient Asian thinkers, these questions are fundamental to building a strong society and effective organizations. They were the first to consider the common good, rulers' responsibility for their subjects' welfare, meritocracy, and rational politics based on predictable mechanisms. They developed simple, comprehensive theories of human nature and society, grounded in observation and experience, that also work well in a contemporary democratic republic and modern organizations. Some philosophers from East Asia, such as Sungmoon Kim of South Korea, likewise argue that classical Confucianism is more compatible with a democratic republican system. I write this book from a similar perspective, favoring a republican system grounded in its citizens' moral nobility.

The following is a brief outline of the questions addressed:

Society has the right to hold leaders to high standards of competence, responsibility, and character, allowing it to entrust them with the state's vast resources and trust their decisions. The state then enjoys greater respect and commitment from its citizens, while its institutions are more stable and capable of decisive responses to crises. The state should foster nobility while also preparing for wrongdoing, to which those most hungry for power can be particularly prone. Institutional mechanisms whose effectiveness does

not depend on officeholders' morality are therefore also important. A particular threat comes from corrupt cliques that can capture the apparatus of power by promoting and protecting one another, manipulating the flow of information, and committing abuses. According to Fajia, detecting and restraining them is the central problem of administration.

The principles that allow organizations to function harmoniously also apply to individuals. Everyone should direct their ambition toward nobility and self-cultivation. Success, rewards, and office come more readily to those who prove reliable, keep their word, show foresight, and deserve respect. Properly directed ambition encourages us to develop these qualities first. Human will is free, but its choices become habits, inclining it ever more strongly toward what is right or toward personal advantage. Those guided exclusively by self-interest limit their capacity for greatness and fail to inspire others' trust.

Nobility and self-cultivation do not, of course, secure a prosperous and comfortable life more effectively than opportunism, for example. Yet they offer a fundamental answer to the question of life's meaning and purpose, providing fulfillment despite its brevity and suffering. Ancient Confucianism explained precisely what nobility means in the light of reason and why it matters here and now, devoting little attention to speculation about life after death.

Asian philosophy is therefore a valuable complement to Western traditions of thought. The sixteenth-century Jesuit Matteo Ricci recognized the affinity between these cultures, observing that Catholicism and Confucianism pursue similar aims and are intelligible to one another. His work produced the treatise *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, esteemed in East Asia. Some Korean scholars converted to Catholicism on their own after reading it.

Today, ideas can also flow in the other direction: Catholicism can benefit from Asian philosophy, just as it once drew on Aristotle. This concerns the rational justification of the need for self-cultivation and the pursuit of nobility, funda-

mental to Catholicism, and an explanation of free will's role in that process. Asian philosophy can also help explain how the functioning of states, elites, and institutions depends on the understanding of nobility and moral requirements they adopt. Poles in particular can benefit by better understanding their state's historical problems and finding ways to prevent them in the future.

2 Rujia Philosophy (Confucianism).

2.1 Ambition and Vocation

Almost everyone wants to achieve something. Ambition is an important driving force: without it, people would not undertake difficult projects, take risks for them, or sacrifice other goods.

Yet ambition can be good or bad. You can distinguish the two by asking yourself some questions: What are you seeking? The greatest gain you can obtain? The greatest good you can accomplish? How do you treat society? As a system to profit from, or one that should bear the costs of your actions? Or as a community of people to whom you owe something? What counts as success for you? Getting what you want, regardless of the consequences? Doing what is right as well as possible, regardless of the reward?

Good ambition creates order and prosperity, because everyone who possesses it serves the needs of the rest of society. Bad ambition is a great force of destruction, as various tyrants and wrongdoers demonstrate. The Confucian sages argued that good ambition fulfills human nature, while bad ambition is unreasonable and harmful.

A noble person can more easily live in peace, work effectively, and make prudent decisions. He concentrates on cultivating himself and on whether he has acted rightly, rather than on honors and benefits that do not belong to him. In this way he develops his mind at a higher level, making himself reasonable and effective. Thus, failure does not overwhelm him with anger; sacrificing a gain does not make him feel wronged; and having to abandon an opinion does not offend him. In every circumstance he can therefore work with dedication and enjoy a clear mind and undisturbed judgment. His peace rests on knowing that he has done everything that is truly his responsibility.

(The Great Learning):

> Knowing what one should aim for brings con-

> stancy. Constancy brings calm; calm brings inner balance; balance brings the capacity for reflection; and reflection brings the capacity to achieve one's goal. … Cultivating oneself requires putting one's heart in order. When anger rules a person, his heart loses its proper balance. When fear rules him, it loses its balance. When he is absorbed in something he likes, it loses its balance. When worries overwhelm him, it also loses its balance.

Analects 7.37

> The noble person remains at ease; the petty person lives in constant anxiety.

Analects 4.10

> The noble person neither insists in advance on any course of action nor rejects it unconditionally. He follows what is right.

Mencius 7a21

> The noble person's nature gains nothing even if his ideals are realized throughout the world, and loses nothing even if he must live in poverty and obscurity. For it is something given to him independently of fortune.

Analects 15.18

> The noble person takes righteousness as his foundation, realizes it through proper conduct, expresses himself with humility, and brings things to completion through trustworthiness.

Mencius 7a4

> Everything I need is within me. When I turn inward and find sincerity, there is no greater joy.

Things are different for someone who has accustomed himself to following advantage and desire, making his happiness depend on them.

Analects 17.15

> Can one serve a ruler alongside a petty person? Until he obtains what he desires (an office), he worries about how to get it. Once he has it, he trembles for fear of losing it. And once the fear of loss possesses him, there is nothing he would not do.

His day is not peaceful. Instead of attending to his daily duties, he thinks about goods he lacks but wants, or goods he already has but fears losing. As he desires them more and more and thinks of nothing else, he becomes capable of ever greater wrongdoing.

The first kind of person is more likely to inspire genuine admiration and respect. A wrongdoer, or someone ruled by desire and pursuing goods in a disordered way, inspires contempt even if he has social standing and power. Thus petty people do not desire honor reasonably, because they do not desire true dignity. They desire only its outward signs, which give them no lasting peace.



Junzi and Xiaoren

Mencius 6A15

> Whoever follows what is great within him becomes a great person. Whoever follows what is small within him becomes a petty person.

Mencius 6A17

> The desire for dignity is common to everyone. Everyone has something truly worthy of respect within him, but not everyone reflects on it. The dignities people confer on others are not true dignities. Whoever Zhao Meng can raise to honor, he can also bring down.

Third, if you want to lead others, you need to win their loyalty. A wicked person will not win genuine moral loyalty: he will alienate his subjects, good people will withdraw from him, and the vicious will serve only their own interests. Tyrants can, of course, build power through fear, ideology, or corrupt cliques, as we shall soon discuss.

Mencius 4A9

> Jie and Zhou lost rule over the world because they lost their people. They lost their people because they lost their hearts. There is a way to gain rule over the world: gain the people, and you will gain the world. There is a way to gain the people: gain their hearts, and you will gain the people. There is a way to gain their hearts: provide what they desire and do not impose what they detest.

Mencius 4B3

> If a ruler treats his officials as his own hands and feet, they treat him as their heart and inward organs. If he treats them as dogs and horses, they treat him as a stranger. If he treats them as mud and weeds, they treat him as an enemy.

Moreover, good ambition and nobility pass from a leader to his subordinates: seeing his nobility encourages their own efforts, and they become better themselves.

Mencius 4A3

> When the ruler is humane, everyone is humane. When the ruler is righteous, everyone acts righteously. When the ruler acts properly, everyone acts properly. Set the ruler right, and the state will regain order.

Fourth, the world around us and human nature are profoundly unsuited to the petty person's way of life. He desires certain advantages and makes them his life's purpose. How can he then bear losing them sooner or later, through illness, old age, a change of fortune, or the arrival of a better candidate for his position? Finally, death awaits him, bringing suffering and loss.

The ancient Rujia scholars argued that things are different for the noble person. Nevertheless, they were convinced that noble people retain their peace and inner strength even

in suffering and death. Death does no true harm to those who worthily fulfill their nature and destiny.

Analects 15.9

> A person of steadfast principles and true goodness will not save his life at the expense of humanity. He is ready instead to give his life to remain faithful to it.

Analects 4.9

> Whoever learns the Way in the morning may die in the evening without regret.

At the center of this theory we find Heaven, a mysterious metaphysical moral authority that a person discovers on the path toward nobility. Heaven guides a person toward nobility and destiny, speaking indirectly through circumstances.

Mencius 7A1 says:

> Whoever fully develops his heart and mind knows his own nature. Whoever knows his nature knows Heaven. Preserving one's heart and nurturing one's nature is the way to serve Heaven. Remaining unshaken by either an early death or a long life, cultivating oneself and awaiting what comes, is the way to establish one's destiny.

Analects 3.13 is one of the rare passages concerning the popular religion of ancient China.

> Wangsun Jia asked: "What does the saying mean: 'Better to seek the favor of the spirit of the hearth than of the household shrine'?" The Master answered: "It is not so. Whoever offends against Heaven has no one left to whom he can pray."

Confucius has just one comment: Heaven, which watches over people's good and evil deeds, is the highest metaphysical authority, and obedience to Heaven matters more than

other prayers and rituals. Thus, in Analects 7.23, Confucius comments on the threat from Huan Tui.[1]

> Heaven has brought virtue into being within me. What, then, can Huan Tui do to me?

And Mencius 7a20 says of noble people:

> Looking up, to feel no shame before Heaven; looking down, not to blush with shame before other people.

In this theory, "good ambition" also discovers its ultimate meaning: it is a vocation and mission given by Heaven, which we must fulfill. It includes our social role and the nobility we must develop to fulfill that role worthily.

A key passage is Analects 16.8:

> Confucius said: The noble person stands in awe of three things: the Mandate of Heaven, great people, and the words of sages. The petty person does not know the Mandate of Heaven and therefore feels no awe before it; he makes light of great people and despises the words of sages.

First comes Heaven's will, which reveals the moral weight of destiny (becoming what you ought to be), the duty to persevere through trials and adversity, and revulsion at doing evil. The petty person "does not know" Heaven's will. Rejecting the idea that Heaven judges his deeds, he also cannot accept that Heaven has a will. Only those with moral cultivation understand it.

Hence Analects 2.4, where Confucius says that only later in life did he understand Heaven's will:

> At fifteen I set my aspirations on learning… At fifty I understood Heaven's will. At sixty my ear

[1] Sima Qian. *Shiji: Kongzi shijia*. Wikisource, juan 47, "Kongzi shijia. According to this later account, Huan Tui intended to kill Confucius.

> became obedient. At seventy I could follow my heart's desires without overstepping the proper bounds.

This emphasizes the passage from moral cultivation to knowledge of Heaven.

The Doctrine of the Mean begins:

> What Heaven bestows on a person is called nature. Following that nature is called the Way. Cultivating the Way is called teaching.

In Analects 9.5 and 3.24, Confucius and others indicate that Heaven has called him to spread teachings about nobility and worthy government.

> Now that King Wen is dead, does not the cultural inheritance rest with me? If Heaven intended to destroy this culture, it would not have allowed me to share in it. Since Heaven does not intend to destroy it, what can the people of Kuang do to me?

> The world has long strayed from the Way. Heaven intends to make your Master a bell that proclaims it to the people.

Mencius 5A5 explains how to recognize Heaven's will: "Heaven does not speak in words. It reveals its will through deeds and the course of events."

2.2 The Capacity for Nobility.

Are people capable of nobility, or are they born with a fixed character?

Everyone has some moral sense; everyone can judge deeds as good or evil if they choose. Even an evil person, for example, does not want someone else to harm him, and is more sensitive about this than others: here lie the beginnings of vindictiveness, greed, and envy. The first impulse is natural

indignation at evil, or a desire to possess goods, but his reason and will allow him to act excessively and without proper order.

Such a person judges good and evil where his own worldly welfare is concerned, but makes no effort to achieve nobility himself—and thereby betrays his nature. His nature enables him to recognize good and evil; he cherry-picks the conclusions. Had he reflected honestly, he would be capable of improving himself.

Mencius (2A6) argues as follows: everyone has the beginnings of nobility, sometimes feeling compassion, shame, revulsion at wrongdoing, and similar impulses. These do not depend on calculations of self-interest or reputation. If you see a child about to fall into a well, Mencius says, you feel a strong urge to save it before you could think of receiving a reward or gaining honor among friends and neighbors.

Hence Mencius tells a king (1A7): do not say that you cannot be more humane. You simply do not want to.

Unlike other instincts, these do not serve goods useful for sustaining life; but they allow us to cultivate nobility. By reflecting on compassion or revulsion at evil—for example, on where we should follow one or the other in everyday situations—and practicing acting on them, we allow them to grow into virtues. Hence the thesis: developing nobility belongs to our nature. The central question of human morality is whether you diligently develop nobility or reject it. If you possess the beginnings of righteousness, goodness, and other virtues, yet eliminate them by choosing profit or pleasure, what kind of creature are you making yourself? Something like an animal, Mencius says in 6A8. This explains the metaphysical moral weight of destiny that people commonly feel. Similarly, Analects 4.16 says:

> The noble person (junzi) understands what is right; the petty or base person (xiaoren) understands what pays.

The word junzi means “a ruler’s son,” a Chinese metaphor

very close to the word "nobility."[2] In earlier times there were, for example, the "nobly born": an aristocracy holding high offices by inheritance.[3] Today, however, we use "nobility" to describe moral character. The distinction between junzi and xiaoren is a rigorous moral criterion that puts "becoming someone through one's actions" at the center of moral responsibility. This does not remove guilt for some great wickedness and the harm it does to others. Rather, a wrongdoer is also guilty of the whole course of vice through which he became capable of committing it. This dismantles intellectual evasions such as "How far can I bend my conscience and still claim to be moral?" Everything you do accumulates in your nature in two urns: "rightness" and "self-interest." The greedy, the sexually dissolute, and others fill the second urn disproportionately, making these things their nature.

Mencius identifies four beginnings of virtue, corresponding to four virtues: compassion is the beginning of benevolence (or humanity—ren). Shame is the beginning of righteousness. Respect is the beginning of propriety. A sense of rightness is the beginning of wisdom. Each beginning directs us toward good, but imperfectly, so reflection and practice are needed to apply it where it belongs. For example, Mencius 1A7 praises a king for his compassion toward an ox intended for sacrifice, but tells him that he should feel the same compassion for his suffering subjects.

---

[2] *Liji zhengyi: Fang ji*. Chinese Text Project, juan 51, "Fang ji, " Zheng Xuan's commentary; Zhu Xi. *Lunyu jizhu*. Wikisource, juan 1, commentary on 1.1. The commentaries document both the hereditary and moral meanings of junzi.

[3] *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, eighth year of Duke Yin, Du Yu's commentary. The source connects lineages with offices and fiefs; it does not establish that all offices were hereditary.



The Four Sprouts of Virtue

In 2B4, Mencius asks a governor named Juxin: if one of your spearmen broke ranks three times in a single day, would you sentence him to death? I would not wait for three times, comes the answer. Mencius replies that Juxin too has broken ranks many times: when harvests were poor in his province, thousands of old and weak people died in ditches, while the strong fled in all directions looking for food. Juxin says he could do nothing about it, given the weather or perhaps the king's decisions. Mencius answers: a herdsman is responsible for finding pasture for the oxen and sheep. If he cannot find pasture, should he return them to their owner, or stand watching them die? The governor then acknowledges his guilt.



Mencius and Governor Juxin

Nobility thus requires further reflection on our duties and the consequences of our actions. Hence the Doctrine of the Mean, chapter 20, praises sincerity, or moral authenticity, as a foundation.

> Sincerity is the Way of Heaven. Striving for sincerity is the human way. The sincere person reaches what is right without effort and understands without deliberation. Naturally and freely, he remains in accord with the Way. Such a person is a sage. Whoever strives for sincerity chooses the good and holds to it without wavering.

Thus whoever is morally authentic and strives for sincerity steadfastly chooses the good. A central mechanism of evil is self-deception and the avoidance of certain conclusions.

From this basic mechanism we readily derive a fairly demanding moral code regulating family and social life. Examples include stable marriages directed toward duties to society, chiefly bearing and raising children, and strict sexual morality. In Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan in the early 2010s, very few children were born outside marriage. In the

preceding decades, however, divorce and nonmarriage had increased.[4]

Patriotism and other social duties are another important matter. If you benefit from security, prosperity, and order, you must also contribute to them. Thus Asian cultures take great care to maintain order in the streets, while many people are also prepared, for example, to sacrifice their lives in defense of the state.

The key observation is that the code may be demanding, but it is simply an effective teacher. Through constant practice and properly directed reflection, the noble person makes nobility simple, natural, and reasonable, and also becomes capable of pursuing his ambitions effectively.

Following the Great Learning, we can elaborate: if you do not cultivate nobility in yourself, you will not bear everyday hardships well or build good relationships at work, in your neighborhood, or among those closest to you. Your faults will alienate others and encourage hostility and aggression. If there is no peace in your family, it will affect your life and the lives of your spouse and children, perhaps even leading to divorce. If you have children outside marriage, you will also face greater difficulties, setting a bad example and lacking a proper division of responsibilities. If you have no children at all, you will be alone in old age, perhaps regretting an unfulfilled vocation. If everyone lives this way, society as a whole will suffer, with greater chaos, confusion, and immorality.

2.3 Nobility as the Foundation of the State

Confucius and his successors focus on building the state. Confucius wanted to renew the existing Zhou feudal system

[4] James M. Raymo et al. “Marriage and Family in East Asia: Continuity and Change”. In: *Annual Review of Sociology* 41 (2015), pp. 471–492, sections “Nonmarital childbearing, ” “Divorce, ” and “Less marriage”. A study published in 2015.

by grounding it in noble customs.[5] Mencius wrote about the nature of benevolent government and the moral right to rule in a similar context.

Both confronted continual wars, exploitation of the population, and the moral corruption of elites. Living more than a century later,[6] Mencius witnessed the further disintegration of the Zhou order and the rise of militarized, aggressive despotisms. The state mobilized its population on a large scale to conquer and eliminate rivals. An extreme example was the model developed in Qin by Shang Yang.[7]

Elite predation therefore plays a central role in the problems Confucius and Mencius seek to solve. A third author will tell us that virtue is insufficient precisely here: Han Fei, one of the most important Chinese philosophers outside Rujia. At the same time, Rujia defended the conclusion that moral nobility is an important foundation of civilization, culture, and identity, without which lasting order and a strong state are difficult to achieve. Rujia therefore holds that the ruling elite must be the first to practice virtue, in order to exercise power worthily, retain authority, and set a good example.

The Great Learning begins:

> The ancients who wished to display the brilliance of nobility throughout the realm first brought order to their own states. Wishing to bring order to their states, they first put their families in order. Wishing to put their families in order, they first

[5] Zhu Xi. *Lunyu jizhu*. Wikisource, juan 4, commentary on 7.5. Zhu Xi, for example, interprets Confucius's aspirations as an intention to put the Duke of Zhou's Way into practice.

[6] Mark Csikszentmihalyi. *Confucius*. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. May 2, 2024, section 2. Traditional dates: Confucius, 551–479 BC; Mencius, 372–289 BC.

[7] Sima Qian. *Shiji: Shang jun liezhuan*. Wikisource, juan 68, "Shang jun liezhuan"; Sima Qian. *Shiji: Bai Qi Wang Jian liezhuan*. Wikisource, juan 73, 47th year of King Zhaoxiang. These passages describe promotion for military merit and conscription in Henei.

> cultivated themselves. Wishing to cultivate themselves, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought sincerity in their thoughts. Wishing to make their thoughts sincere, they first extended their knowledge to the utmost. Extending knowledge consisted in investigating things.
>
> When things had been investigated, their knowledge became complete. When their knowledge was complete, their thoughts became sincere. When their thoughts were sincere, their hearts became upright. When their hearts were upright, they cultivated themselves. When they cultivated themselves, their families were well ordered. When their families were well ordered, their states were well governed. When their states were well governed, peace and order prevailed throughout the realm.

Cultivating nobility is therefore the foundation of the whole order, which grows from the noble person's work, through the harmony of his family and household, and the noble performance of his role. Hence the text continues:

> From the Son of Heaven down to ordinary people, all should regard self-cultivation as the foundation of everything else. What grows from the root cannot be orderly if the root itself is neglected.

These conclusions are easy to justify and apply. **Power multiplies the effects of character.** One might suppose that justice and concern for the common interest are particular duties of ministers and judges. Yet a greedy, hateful, or power-hungry person will not cease to be so when given high office. His faults follow him.

Moreover, the benefits he craves are suddenly within reach: he can take bribes, protect his acquaintances, or

take revenge, then dishonestly secure impunity. According to Mencius's theory of moral beginnings, such a person grows worse and worse, regularly choosing benefits over moral principles. This in turn requires neutralizing certain conclusions suggested by conscience, according to what the Doctrine of the Mean says about central role sincerity.

Thus bad effects are often enormously multiplied, since those in power make decisions affecting thousands or millions of people, their property, and their safety. Developing responsibility and righteousness in the elite is therefore essential: the greater the power, the greater the consequences.

Setting a moral example. A key function of those in power is to set a moral example, because rulers' conduct establishes the standard of normal behavior in society. Analects 12.19 and Mencius 3A compare this to wind bending grass. Following Mencius's teachings, Duke Wen observes strict fasting after his father's death, despite his courtiers' advice against it. In time, those same courtiers are edified by his conduct and admire him more.

They also see that the ruler is a moral person who can reasonably be trusted, who will reward the upright and competent and suppress dishonesty and indulgence. This is a powerful mechanism of leadership arising from moral nature itself, rather than office or regulations: a junzi leader naturally inspires nobility and dedication in subordinates. Vicious rulers know this too, often adopting the mask of a father of the nation and defender of nobility while hiding the misconduct that would discredit them.

The reverse also holds: if senior officials steal without facing sanctions, wrongdoing spreads through various social mechanisms. Wickedness becomes an attractive career path when a corrupt minister promotes assistants who help his schemes, or buys impunity through bribery and blackmail. Honest people must adapt or leave, and the entire state apparatus becomes riddled with corruption, while its subjects regard it with hostility and fear.

Citizens' trust is essential to the state's existence. Trust is the main currency of politics, as Analects 12.7 indicates. Confucius identifies sufficient food, sufficient arms, and the people's trust as the essentials of a state, regarding the last as the most crucial. Trust underpins obedience to authority: paying taxes, respecting laws, and maintaining political loyalty. Still more, trust conditions the determination to sacrifice one's life or endure hardship in defense of the state, for example in war. Trust will collapse if government is corrupt (officials steal, for example) or morally discredited (its coercive apparatus releases criminals while harassing ordinary people who criticize it). Any major crisis may then be the state's last.

Mencius (1A7) identifies a requirement that is both moral and rational: people must have food, shelter, security, and the means to care for their families. Without these, trust and a sense of duty are harder to sustain, since desperate people have other concerns. Nor is it easy to speak of a moral right to govern when those in power neglect their duties yet demand that others fulfill theirs. On the contrary, a government that impoverishes and abuses people produces the very chaos it wishes to punish.

The family is a school for life in the state. Family life contains a person's most important relationships: first with parents and siblings, then with a spouse and children. It is also the setting of the most important duties, such as love and honesty toward a spouse, raising children, and caring for the elderly. Here a person also learns mutual responsibility, obedience and authority, conflict resolution, and impartiality.

For example, Analects 1.2 says:

> It is rare for someone who is a good son and, as a younger person, obedient to his elders to be inclined to oppose his superiors. Nor has anyone heard of a person without that inclination being inclined to start a rebellion.

Similarly, three of the five most important relationships in Mengzi 3A4 chiefly concern family relations: father and son, wife and husband, elder and younger.

2.4 Moral Criteria for Power and Office.

Confucian political theory closely links moral self-cultivation with social function. In a less literal way, it also links social function with Heaven's will. Confucius, for example, finds in his role as a traveling shi (teacher of rituals) Heaven's will to renew Zhou through teaching nobility.

A person who cultivates himself and seeks to serve the state and society well therefore fulfills his destiny, and this defines the proper identity of every role and function. To be a blacksmith, it is not enough to own a forge: one must also know how to forge tools and horseshoes and serve one's community well as a blacksmith. Then you can call yourself "the blacksmith of Krzywa Wólka," and others will acknowledge that you really are one. To be a courtier, one must act nobly, behave in a manner worthy of one's office, possess the proper skills, and serve the ruler faithfully, even to the point of dying in his defense.

Every role in practice also requires nobility, and expectations of exemplary conduct rise with elevation to an honored position. Hence two rather puzzling passages in the Analects.

Analects 12.11:

> Duke Jing of Qi asked Confucius about government. Confucius answered:
> "Let the ruler be a ruler, the minister a minister, the father a father, and the son a son."
> The duke said:
> "Excellent! Indeed, if the ruler is not a ruler, the minister not a minister, the father not a father, and the son not a son, then even if I have grain—will I be able to eat it?"

Analects 13.3:

> Zilu asked what Confucius would do first if entrusted with governing Wei. Confucius said: "I would certainly begin by rectifying names." "If names are not correct, words do not accord with the proper order.
> If words do not accord with the proper order, affairs cannot be brought to completion. (…)"

We can understand this, along with its radical implications, by turning to Mencius. In Mengzi 1B8, Mencius speaks with King Xuan of Qi:

> The king asked:
> "May a subject kill his ruler?" Mencius answered: "Someone who destroys benevolence (ren) is called a wrongdoer. Someone who destroys righteousness (yi) is called a villain. Someone who is both a villain and a wrongdoer is called simply an 'ordinary man.' I have heard of the execution of that man Zhou. I have not heard of a ruler being killed."

Here, then, is the rectification of names: "king," "minister," "judge," and other titles are not limited to visible functions and the possession of power. They contain duties and standards of worthy conduct that a "king," "minister," or "judge" ought to meet.

Mencius purposefully refers to an event around 1046 BC, when the Shang tyrant was overthrown in a rebellion. Wu, the victorious rebel leader, founded the new Zhou dynasty.[8] The Zhou dynasty ruled for nearly 800 years. By Confucius's

[8] Steven Wallech. *China and the West to 1600: Empire, Philosophy, and the Paradox of Culture*. Wiley, 2016, p. 24; *Shangshu zhengyi*. Wikisource, juan 10. King Zhòu (紂) and the Zhōu dynasty (周) have different names; the commentary explains Zhòu's name as destroying rightness and goodness.

time, its supremacy was already largely nominal.[9] Under the Zhou order, the monarch bore the title of king (Wang), while vassal rulers bore the titles of duke (Gong) and other dignitaries.

The father of King Xuan, with whom Mencius is speaking, broke with Zhou supremacy and proclaimed himself king, as did the other larger states.[10] In subsequent passages, Mencius nudges the elephant-in-the-room problem that Xuan's father was effectively a self-appointed warlord.

He does not, however, propose a return to Zhou. He repeatedly offers another basis for legitimacy: noble and benevolent government. Being an illegitimate king is not so important, just as lawful accession does not excuse a tyrant. Rule nobly and the people trust you and stand with you, just as Zhou itself began its rule by overthrowing a tyrant.

---

[9] Wallech, *China and the West to 1600: Empire, Philosophy, and the Paradox of Culture*, p. 24; Csikszentmihalyi, *Confucius*, section 2. Approximately 1046–256 BC.

[10] Sima Qian. *Shiji: Tian Jingzhong Wan shijia*. Chinese Text Project, juan 46, succession after King Wei; Sima Guang. *Zizhi tongjian*. Wikisource, juan 2, 35th year of King Xian. The chronicle describes Qi and Wei mutually recognizing royal titles in 334 BC; other states adopted them at different times.



Zhou Legitimacy and Benevolence

Let us return to the Analects. Why does Duke Jing ask, “Even if I have grain, will I be able to eat it?” Xing Bing explains 12.11 in the Lunyu zhushu as follows:[11]

> If the ruler does not depart from the Way (dao) of a ruler, and the son likewise does not depart from the Way (dao) of a son… only then is the state in proper order.

Duke Jing is saying that if subjects do not fulfill their proper roles, they will not perform their duties, and the state will not function. Taxes, or even grain from his fields, will then fail to reach his storehouses. According to Zhu Xi, this may allude to the growing power of great clans that weakened Qi’s ruler.[12]

[11] *Lunyu zhushu: Yan Yuan*. Chinese Text Project, juan 12, Xing Bing’s commentary on 12.11.

[12] Zhu Xi. *Lunyu jizhu*. Wikisource, juan 6, commentary on 12.11. Zhu Xi specifically mentions the Chen lineage and the unsettled succession.

The wording “a minister is a minister” is characteristic of a teleological construction of concepts. Concepts are understood through their purpose, a natural way of assigning meaning. Just as an eye is something for seeing, rather than a glass dummy of an eye, a minister is someone who properly fulfills a minister’s function, rather than someone who happens to occupy the position while pursuing a purpose other than “being the minister that a minister ought to be.”

This makes the argument clearer: according to Mencius, killing the tyrant Zhou is not killing a king, because of the tyrant’s wicked and cruel conduct. His deeds become those of an ordinary person, and he may be punished for his crimes as an ordinary person.

Regicide and other killings of rulers are regarded as great crimes because they strike at the foundation of the state. But this holds only when the king truly is that foundation, worthily fulfilling his Way (Dao).

Once we see this conclusion, it is hard to set aside, especially since it is less controversial now than 2,300 years ago. Europe has already experienced various regicides: Charles I in England, Louis XVI in France, and Nicholas II in Russia.[13] Although one may doubt that any of these three was a great wrongdoer, progressive philosophers such as Slavoj Žižek and Denis Diderot did not shrink from justifying revolutionary terror.[14]

I therefore think Mencius’s logic should be easy to grasp:

[13] UK Parliament. *Engrossment of the Official Record of the Trial of King Charles I*; Château de Versailles. *Versailles après la Révolution française*; Royal Collection Trust. *The Diary of King George V*, section “Nicholas II”. Charles I and Louis XVI were executed in 1649 and 1793; Nicholas II was killed in 1918, after his abdication.

[14] Slavoj Žižek. “Robespierre, or, the ‘Divine Violence’ of Terror”. In: *Virtue and Terror*. Ed. by Jean Ducange. Trans. by John Howe. London: Verso, 2007, pp. vii–xxxix, introduction. Žižek’s argument concerns Jacobin terror in general. Compare Denis Diderot. “Les Éleuthéromanes”. In: *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*. Ed. by J. Assézat and Maurice Tourneux. Vol. 9. Paris: Garnier frères, 1875, pp. 12–19, p. 16: Diderot presents a “poetic” image of a priest’s entrails as a rope for strangling a king.

if, as a judge charged with representing justice, you commit some great wickedness or even worse, you consort with criminals to let them go unpunished, you are no longer "a judge representing the office," but "someone who has disgraced the office of judge while holding it."

Mencius goes much further than discussing judges and ministers: if the right to rule rests on nobility, those in power are morally accountable. He argues that subjects have the right to overthrow their sovereign in a monarchic political setting. In 1B6, he suggests this perspective to King Xuan:

> "If someone entrusted his wife and children to a friend and traveled to Chu, then returned to discover that the friend had allowed them to suffer hunger and cold—what should he do?" The king answered: "Break with him."
> Mencius asked:
> "If the chief judge cannot keep his subordinates in order—what should be done?"
> The king answered: "Remove him."
> Mencius asked:
> "And if there is no good government anywhere within the state—what then?"
> The king turned toward his courtiers and began speaking about something else.

In 7B14, Mencius further argues that the moral right to rule rests on the common good, especially the material and moral welfare of ordinary people, who bear the greatest cost of maintaining the state and supply the ruling elite with goods.

> The people are most important. The altars of Earth and Grain [that is, food production] come second. The ruler is least important. Thus whoever gains the people becomes the Son of Heaven;

> whoever gains the Son of Heaven becomes a feudal prince; whoever gains the prince becomes a great official.

Hence notice: the top of hierarchy is one who gains people hearts, as much as one who has office is one who gains favour of the sovereign. This conclusion of the theory of moral nobility makes Mencius one of antiquity's most remarkable political philosophers, the creator of a theory of power founded on the ruler's benevolence and the people's loyalty. The Chinese empire and its neighbors did not, however, follow the path toward such a political order, as I shall also discuss.

3 Controlling the Elite as the Central Problem of Politics — Shen Buhai and Han Fei

So far we have discussed nobility. At the same time, people also pursue their own interests.

Holding power enormously multiplies influence and self-interest, since it allows people to control vast resources and make decisions that profoundly affect many lives. Misconduct by those who control offices, budget spending, coercive institutions, access to information, and other resources is therefore far more dangerous than the misconduct of individuals.

Moreover, holding power allows one to seize still more power through patronage, paid clients, filtering information, and similar means. Cliques and factions multiply corruption further by coordinating different operators, filling additional offices with their agents, and ultimately taking over the entire state in secret.

Following this reasoning, Shen Buhai and Han Fei made controlling the elite and safely delegating power the central problem of Asian politics. Later we will demonstrate they

point of view is very correct and very applicable to all kinds of politics, including crisises of European states.

3.1 Fajia, Rujia, and Shen Buhai.

Shen Buhai and Han Fei are conventionally assigned to Fajia (the "Legalists"), often associated with cruel penal systems and the total mobilization of society, represented, among others, by the state of Qin and Shang Yang. Han Fei synthesized the doctrines of Shen and Shang Yang, but the Fajia classification came later, through Sima Tan and the Hanshu catalogue.[15] Shen Buhai rejected terror,[16] and I think his administrative theories should be considered separately; I explain other reasons below. Since Shen's complete work has been lost,[17] Han Fei will be our main source, but this does not mean accepting him uncritically. On the contrary, Han Fei's contradictions suggest that the system is easier to combine with Rujia than with Fajia. For example, "rectifying names" and holding those in power accountable require active enforcement and supervision. Confucius could not yet have conceived this, since he wanted to repair the Zhou system, which rested on hereditary privilege.

3.2 Aligning a Role with Its Results.

We have discussed rectifying names: according to Confucius, everyone must fulfill their prescribed role for the state

[15] Sima Qian. *Shiji: Taishigong zixu*, juan 130, Sima Tan's discussion of the six schools; Ban Gu. *Hanshu: Yiwen zhi*, juan 30, "Fajia" section. This is a later grouping of authors.

[16] Sima Qian. *Shiji: Laozi Han Fei liezhuan*, juan 63, Pei Yin's commentary on Han Fei's biography. Pei Yin quotes Liu Xiang: Shen's techniques were meant to replace punishments with strict accountability for subordinates.

[17] Ban Gu, *Hanshu: Yiwen zhi*, juan 30, "Fajia" section; Fang Hui. *Xu gujin kao*, "Xing shi Shen Shang". Excerpts survive, including in the Qunshu zhiyao.

to function. But how can this be ensured when not everyone wants to listen to moral teaching? An office should be precisely defined and produce verifiable results, Shen Buhai said 2,400 years ago. First, high office has a defined scope of responsibility and duties. Second, one should establish what an official declares he will achieve and how it can later be verified objectively. He should then be held to those commitments.

One of the few surviving fragments of Shen Buhai says:[18]

> In ancient times Yao governed the world by means of names. His names were correct, and so the world was orderly. Jie too governed the world by means of names. His names were distorted, and so the world fell into disorder. Therefore the sage attaches great importance to defining names correctly.

This recalls one of Confucius's Analects. Rujia, however, encourages people to fulfill their roles through nobility. Shen Buhai and Han Fei propose a system in which everyone has an interest in doing so. Han Fei describes Shen Buhai's techniques as follows (Hanfeizi 43, Deciding between Two Doctrines of Fa):

> Technique is the means by which offices are established according to their responsibilities, actual performance is assessed against official titles, […] and officials' abilities are examined.

In Hanfeizi V, The Way of the Ruler, Han Fei presents the doctrine of ming-xing, using the term míng (name, designation of a role).[19]

[18] Shen Buhai. *Shenzi: Da ti*, juan 36, "Shenzi, " "Da ti". The text survives in a later excerpt.

[19] Shen Buhai, *Shenzi: Da ti*, juan 36, "Shenzi, " "Da ti". Míng means a name; mandate and destiny correspond to a different word, mìng.

> Whoever speaks words establishes a name (ming) for himself; whoever undertakes an affair creates its corresponding reality (xing). Compare the reality with the name and see whether they agree.

From this comes the technique in Hanfeizi VIII, Wielding Power:

> When a minister puts a proposal to the ruler, the ruler holds to the name, and the minister must bring its corresponding reality into being.

The ruler may hear his subordinates' proposals and allow them to act, while requiring the results they promised.

> The proper way to listen to ministers is to make what they have said the measure of the results they achieve.

Ministers should therefore be held accountable for results. This applies equally to every other kind of authority beyond Han Fei's absolute monarchy: everyone exercising power should be held accountable for its effects. To this day, East Asian states, for example, grant rulers extensive powers on the condition that they fulfill their roles and duties reasonably well. The arguments for this derive partly from Rujia and partly from Fajia. For Rujia, betraying one's ming is a moral failure and a metaphysical offense; for Fajia, it is a systemic pathology. If you cause a scandal or disaster, you will therefore face great public indignation and generally be held accountable. Hierarchy does not prevent the court trials of leading politicians and heads of major corporations.

Power is a key mechanism of the state, directing and regulating it. If we accept that sales, employment, and construction must be regulated by standardized, enforceable contracts, and that laws govern civil and criminal liability, then power should all the more rest on a clear, enforceable contract. The danger and consequences of abuse are greater than when someone "does not pay overtime" or "dishonestly sells a car after rolling back its odometer."

We have already mentioned Analects 4.16: the base person follows self-interest rather than what is right. This is the central problem of human nature, which only the individual can choose to eradicate, and we cannot assume in advance that he will. Social structures and the state apparatus act preventively to make dishonest manipulation of the system for private benefit impossible or costly. They may eliminate fraud, break up monopolies and predatory business practices, or ensure that individual customers and employees have a fair chance in disputes with large companies.

The same should apply especially to abuses of power, since power may be the most attractive good of all to immoral people. It satisfies ambition and inflated self-esteem and can readily be exchanged for money, pleasure, honors, privileges, impunity, or harm to opponents. Some people will therefore do literally anything to obtain it, as did the treacherous courtiers of Duke Huan of Qi: Shu Diao cut off his own genitals, and Ya Yi killed and cooked his own son. More about them shortly.

3.3 Protecting the System from Capture

The foundation is xing-ming: defining an office as a role, assigning requirements and assessment criteria, and distributing rewards and sanctions according to results. There are other important requirements too. Before Duke Huan's downfall, the dying minister Guan Zhong warned him against Shu Diao and the others. His argument was that someone who castrated himself to gain access to the duke's chambers was probably not trustworthy. Han Fei uses this story to stress that removing one wicked person will not protect against others. The structure of power itself must resist hostile takeover and exploitation by people pursuing their own interests. Rujia therefore says: choose the right people. Han Fei answers: build a system that does not depend on finding the right people.

Here are the key measures.

- Control the flow of information. Supervising those in power requires access to information that cannot come only from them. If a subordinate controls both an affair and what you know about it, he can effectively engineer a picture useful to himself, contrary to the relevant facts.

- Independent verification rather than trust. Holding those in power accountable for results, as xing-ming requires, is especially vulnerable to dishonesty. An official can selectively manipulate facts about himself, acting as a judge in his own case. Assessments, results, and reports should be verified against different sources and checked by the ruler.

- An office must have a clear scope of responsibility and clear limits. Exceeding one's authority is a way of accumulating power. If an army general begins organizing independent supplies because existing logistics do not work properly, for example, he removes the ruler's ability to control him. An Lushan, who launched an enormous rebellion in the eighth century, was just such an independent military governor in the Tang empire.[20]

- Some sectors are especially vulnerable to capture and abuse. Granting rewards, detecting misconduct, imposing punishments, and making appointments can easily be converted into additional power. They allow one to intimidate and remove competitors, protect one's own people, and pay and promote supporters.

- A senior official supervising lower offices must concentrate on setting goals and verifying results, rather than doing similar work himself, since he would then be unable to devote sufficient effort and attention to supervision.

[20] Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi. *Xin Tang shu: An Lushan*, juan 225A, biography of An Lushan. An Lushan held command of three military districts; the chronicle also describes his accumulation of troops and supplies.

Below are several passages from Han Fei Zi. (Hanfeizi V, 主道 — The Way of the Ruler)

> The ruler makes wise men exhaust their minds and then uses their judgments, without exhausting his own reason. He makes capable people use their talents and then entrusts them with appropriate offices, without exhausting his own abilities. Thus, though not outstandingly capable himself, the ruler can direct capable people; though not a sage himself, he can supervise sages. Ministers undertake the labor, and the ruler reaps its fruits. Such is the enduring principle of a good ruler.

The basis of government is delegation and verification of what has been done. You do not need to understand various experts in order to manage them; it is enough to understand the specific results you agree upon and hold them accountable for.
(Hanfeizi VI — On Established Measures and Rules)

> If the ruler had to inspect every official personally, he would have neither enough time nor enough strength. Moreover, if a superior relies on his own eyes, the subordinate will embellish what he shows him; if he relies on his own ears, the subordinate will embellish what he tells him; and if the superior relies on his own reasoning, the subordinate will arrange his words to guide it. The ancient kings therefore regarded these three abilities as insufficient. They set aside their own abilities, relied on laws and objective measures, and diligently applied the principles of reward and punishment.

Fa-jia means the school of measures and rules.[21] A ruler's decisions should therefore not be discretionary and

[21] *Guanzi: Qi fa*, juan 2, "Qi fa". Here fa includes measures and stan-

personal, since these can then be manipulated. Wherever possible, decisions should rest on an objective standard established in advance. Then, the author believes, everyone knows what to do and under what rules; the honest will not lose their reward, and the deceitful will not obtain it through manipulation.

> Court officials, from highest to lowest, neither encroached on one another's responsibilities nor exceeded the boundaries of their offices. Administrative affairs therefore did not consume all the ruler's time, and each day he had sufficient leisure. This was because the ruler relied on his position and the power it conferred.

Here an established and enforced division of roles exemplifies "Fa." It coordinates duties properly and prevents officials from acting without the ruler's knowledge and consent, even though he spends little time supervising them.

(Hanfeizi VII — The Two Handles)

> The intelligent ruler has only two handles by which to direct ministers: punishment and reward. What do punishment and reward mean? Killing and imposing penalties are called punishment; honors and benefits are called reward. Ministers fear punishments and desire honors and rewards. If the ruler himself controls punishments and rewards, ministers fear his power and turn to him for benefits. Treacherous ministers, however, act otherwise. They can present those they hate to the ruler in a way that gets them punished, and those they love in a way that gets them rewarded. If the ruler does not make the power to punish and the benefits of rewarding

dards; "school of measures and rules" is the translation adopted in this book.

> issue from himself, but listens to ministers and distributes rewards and punishments according to their words, everyone in the state will begin to fear the ministers and slight the ruler; they will turn toward the ministers and away from the ruler. Tian Chang asked the ruler for ranks and grants, then distributed them to officials himself; he also increased the measures of grain he gave as relief to the people. Thus Duke Jian lost the handle of reward, and Tian Chang began to wield it. In the end, Duke Jian was murdered.

Punishments and appointments allow one to build support and a network of followers, and potentially seize power. Tian Chang built a clientele at court, but also gave the needy more grain than the ruler prescribed, building his reputation. Why did he need this? Regicide creates a succession crisis in which those suspected of eliminating the current ruler are immediately regarded as criminals and enemies of the state. Retaining power requires more than seizing the throne: one must also establish a rationale of legality and authority. Similar considerations lay behind the repression of Emperor Yongle (d. 1424), who seized the throne in a military coup, probably causing the death of his nephew, Emperor Jianwen.[22] Supporters of Jianwen embodied the obvious fact that Yongle was a usurper, so he destroyed them cruelly and took revenge on their relatives too.[23]

We next read the following about ming-xing:

> If the ruler wishes to restrain guilty ministers, he must ensure that actual results match names and

[22] Zhang Tingyu and others. *Ming shi: Jianwen*, juan 4, end of Jianwen's reign. The chronicle describes the fall of the capital and the palace fire; it leaves Jianwen's fate uncertain.

[23] Zhang Tingyu and others. *Ming shi: Fang Xiaoru*, juan 141, biography of Fang Xiaoru. It describes Fang's death and reprisals against his relatives and friends.

> words match assigned tasks. When a minister proposes something, the ruler should assign him a task according to his words and then assess its performance. If the result matches the task and the task matches the words, the minister should be rewarded. If the result does not match the task, or the task does not match the words, he should be punished.

The principle is illustrated by this radical example:

> Long ago, Marquis Zhao of Han became drunk and fell asleep. The official responsible for his headgear saw that the ruler was cold and covered him with a robe. When the marquis awoke, he was pleased and asked his servants: "Who covered me?" "The official responsible for headgear," they answered. The marquis then found the official responsible for robes guilty and sentenced the official responsible for headgear to death. He punished the first for neglecting his duty and the second for exceeding the boundaries of his office. This was not because he did not fear catching cold, but because he regarded exceeding assigned duties as a greater danger than catching cold himself.

Zhao was the ruler of Han under whom Shen Buhai served.[24] The incident is meant to show the importance of officials staying within their roles, although Fajia's characteristic urge to punish everyone "equally," regardless of an act's purpose and actual harm, produces unnecessary brutality and suspicion.

Hanfeizi XV, Signs of Ruin, gives a long list of pathologies preceding a state's collapse. These include controlled access to information and the formation of cliques.

[24] Sima Qian. *Shiji: Laozi Han Fei liezhuan*, juan 63, biography of Shen Buhai. Marquis Zhao appointed Shen as minister.

> If the ruler's state is weak but private families are powerful; if the ruler's power is slight but his ministers are powerful—the state faces ruin. (…) If the ruler listens only to high-ranking ministers, does not compare different opinions or verify their truth, and makes one person the sole channel through which information reaches him, the state faces ruin. … If offices and positions can be obtained through influential people, and ranks and stipends through bribery, the state faces ruin.

Hanfeizi XXX, Inner Collection of Explanations, Part One: Seven Techniques, lists the following techniques of effective government:

> The first of the seven techniques is comparing and examining the various available accounts; the second is ensuring the inevitability of punishment and the clarity of authority; the third is reliably granting rewards so that everyone fully uses his abilities; the fourth is hearing each side separately and holding each speaker accountable for his words; the fifth is issuing apparent orders and making trial appointments; the sixth is asking about matters on which the ruler already has information; the seventh is reversing statements and presenting matters the other way round. The ruler should use these seven techniques. If he does not compare what he sees and hears, he will never reach the true state of affairs. If information reaches him through only one particular channel, ministers will be able to deceive him.

We have already identified the first four: access to information through multiple channels, government through rewards and punishments based on clear rules, and align-

ing ming with xing. Here is a simple example of assessing courtiers' individual abilities:

> King Xuan of Qi ordered musicians to play the *yu* and maintained an orchestra of three hundred. […] After his death, King Min took the throne and wished to hear each musician separately. Then [the impostors hiding in the orchestra] fled.

The next stories concern testing subordinates' honesty and competence, for example by requiring actions with known effects or requesting information the ruler already knows.

> The ruler of Zhou lost some jade pins and ordered his officials to find them. For three days they failed. The ruler then sent other people to search, and within one day they found the pins in a private house. "Now I know the officials are not doing their duties," said the ruler of Zhou. "They searched for the jade pins for three days and did not find them; the people I sent separately found them in one day." From then on, officials greatly feared him, believing he possessed an extraordinary ability to see through affairs.

[…]

> Marquis Zhao of Han sent riders into the countryside. When they returned, he asked what they had seen. "Nothing," they answered. "You must have seen something. What was it?" They replied that beyond the southern gate they had seen yellow calves eating rice growing on the left side of the road. The marquis ordered them to tell no one. He then ordered inspectors to count the cattle that had entered the fields in defiance of the ban and report back. The inspectors searched three sides of the area and presented their findings. "That is

not all," said the marquis. They went out again and found the yellow calves beyond the southern gate. From then on, convinced that Marquis Zhao saw everything clearly, officials trembled before his discernment and dared not commit abuses.

3.4 Cliques and Collusion as a Multiplier

All these dangers would be relatively easy to address if officials acted alone. An excessively powerful position, sudden injections of undocumented wealth, or suspicious incompetence and procrastination—deliberate delay and reluctance to act—would be immediately visible. Evidence of abuse could be traced and sanctions enforced.

In practice, however, such people rarely act alone, because collusion or forming a clique greatly multiplies their opportunities and protection from accountability. Officials cooperate to promote and protect one another and expand the clique by filling more offices with their agents.



Cliques and Factions

Similarly, raids and sting operations can easily eliminate transactional corruption among low-ranking officials, such

as customs officers admitting contraband in exchange for payment. Grand corruption, however, is relational: networks of powerful, wealthy acquaintances exchange services and information. They not only have nothing to fear from the state; they soon begin to govern it themselves.

Cliques are a central theme of Hanfeizi; the author repeatedly attacks their destructive influence, and social theatre they performed to gain leverage.

(Hanfeizi XVII, 備内 — Precautions against Internal Threats)

[…]

> Powerful ministers form factions and together conceal the true state of affairs from the ruler. In secret they maintain close relations, but publicly they pretend mutual dislike to appear impartial. They serve as one another's eyes and ears, watching for moments when the ruler is inattentive. Surrounded and deceived in this way, the ruler no longer has a channel for news from outside. He retains the title of ruler but not actual power, while ministers take the laws into their own hands and apply them at will.

(Hanfeizi VIII — Wielding Power)

> Whoever wishes to rule his state must break up cliques. If he does not, they will gather people around them. […] Established rules and criteria are the ruler's treasure; followers and allies are the minister's treasure.

Hanfeizi XI, Solitary Indignation, is a personal chapter illustrating the conflict between an influential great minister and a solitary advocate of fa (rules and measures) and shu (techniques of government). This was what Han Fei encountered in Han: although of the princely family, he had no influence over the state while watching corrupt cliques

plunder it.[25] In Solitary Indignation, the great minister controls all resources, so courtiers, officials, and even envoys from other states must go through him.

> His office and rank are high, his clique is numerous, and the entire state speaks in his defense.

The advocate of fa and shu faces the opposite situation:

> He occupies a low and weak position; he has no faction and stands alone. With one mouth he competes against the whole state—by the nature of things he cannot win.

Thus what is accepted as truth or consensus is engineered by a crowd of clients and supporters told what to repeat, rather than settled through rational argument. Incompetence and immorality are generally very useful for this role: members of the clique then have no value or political reason to exist apart from their patron, Han Fei observes.

> It is in the ruler's interest to employ outstanding and capable people; it is in the minister's interest to use a clique for private purposes. The great minister surrounds himself with foolish and corrupt people; above, he joins them in deceiving the ruler; below, he joins them in seizing benefits and plundering [the people]. They form a clique, stick together, and speak as with one mouth, misleading the ruler and destroying the law.

Hanfeizi VI presents another creative way to profit on the side: serving as an envoy to another state.

[25] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Laozi Han Fei liezhuan*, juan 63, biography of Han Fei. The chronicle records his membership of the ruling family and the rejection of his advice; reading the chapter as autobiographical is an interpretation.

> … as envoys they conduct affairs with other states, exhaust their own state's resources, and then await a moment of danger to pressure the ruler, saying: "Without me we cannot strengthen friendship; without me we cannot ease hostility." In this way they gain the ruler's trust, take over affairs of state, expand their own influence at the expense of his authority, and benefit their own families at the expense of the state's resources…

The envoy finds friends among foreigners by advancing their interests at the expense of his office. Those same foreigners can later be used to pressure his principal and obtain further benefits. Here are several similar quotations connecting cliques, private interests, and ruin. (Hanfeizi):

> All of them, as ministers, formed cliques and bound themselves together; they concealed the proper way to pursue private designs; above, they pressured the ruler; below, they disrupted government; they relied on outside forces to interfere in internal affairs and won over subordinates to plot against superiors.

(Hanfeizi XVIII — Facing South)

> If the ruler abandons rules (fa) and supervises ministers through other ministers, those who like one another will unite for wicked purposes and praise one another; those who hate one another will form opposing factions and slander one another. When conflicting praise and accusations reach the ruler, he becomes confused and cannot determine the truth.

(Hanfeizi XXXV)

> If cliques cooperate and ministers achieve their private designs, the ruler is isolated. If, instead, ministers recommend candidates for the public good and do not collude, the ruler sees clearly.

Han Fei sees the solution to cliques in the measures already described: above all, rejecting ministers' influence on decisions, appointments, and rewards, relying on objective, impersonal fa, and continually checking one's subordinates.

For example:

(Hanfeizi XVII)

> Examine agreements and disagreements in statements to identify divisions into cliques; compare independent checks to establish the truth of the claims presented.

(Hanfeizi IX — The Eight Villainies)

> Test their actual abilities and examine their errors; do not allow ministers to speak for one another.

(Hanfeizi)

> A minister must be held accountable for his words, and his claims must be tested in practice; thus the statements of cliques do not reach the ruler.

3.5 Historical and Biographical Note.

Shen Buhai (d. 337 BC) was chancellor of Han, the smallest of the seven "Warring States." Han Fei (d. 233 BC) belonged to the ruling family of the same state, although his advice was not accepted.[26]

Han had emerged only a little earlier, during 453–376 BC. The three largest aristocratic clans of Jin divided its territories among themselves, making the duke of Jin a purely titular figure and leaving him a small patch of land. This created the states of Wei, Zhao, and Han. The king of Zhou

[26] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Laozi Han Fei liezhuan*, juan 63, biographies of Shen and Han Fei; Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian*, juan 2, 32nd year of King Xian; Sima Qian. *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, 14th year of King Zheng. The death dates correspond to the regnal years: 337 and 233 BC.

approved the usurpation in 403 BC by granting the rebellious clans the title of marquis (hou); the last duke of Jin was expelled in 376 BC.[27]

We are still discussing the Zhou feudal order that Confucius wanted to restore. The king of Zhou was formally sovereign and confirmed the titles of other dukes and lords in China, who were supposed to be his vassals. In practice, however, in the period after 770 BC Zhou was only a small state squeezed between the powerful territories of regional lords who effectively ruled independently.[28] Although overthrowing one's own ruler in Jin can hardly be called lawful, in the fifth century BC the king of Zhou tried to preserve the remaining respect for his office by recognizing the three rebellious clans as autonomous vassals. This did not stop Zhou's further disintegration: in the second half of the fourth century BC, the rulers of successive states assumed the sovereign title of king (wang), rejecting Zhou's titular supremacy.[29]

Why does this matter? From the beginning, Han was a state in which the traditional logic of lawful authority explicitly did not work. Its ruling dynasty was a clan of ministers who had betrayed their superior. Someone else could just as well drive out the Han dynasty. Hence magnates probably saw plotting, cliques, and treason less often as offenses against Heaven and more often as strategic opportunities. Moreover, Han was the smallest state of all, raising fears of invasion by stronger neighbors.

Chancellor Shen Buhai and Marquis Zhao of Han there-

[27] Sima Qian. *Shiji: Jin shijia*, juan 39, reigns of Ai and You; Sima Guang. *Zizhi tongjian*, juan 1, 23rd year of Weilie and 26th year of An. The partition of Jin, recognition of the three lineages in 403, and elimination of the remaining Jin territory in 376 BC were separate stages.

[28] Sima Qian. *Shiji: Zhou benji*, juan 4, reign of King Ping. The chronicle describes Zhou's weakening and the growing power of the regional states.

[29] Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian*, juan 2, years 334, 325, and 323 BC; Sima Qian. *Shiji: Chu shijia*, juan 40, King Wu of Chu. Chu had used the royal title earlier.

fore reformed court and government according to shu. The reform proved effective, bringing stability and military strength. According to the Shiji, no one invaded Han during Shen's remaining lifetime.[30] Shen served as chancellor until his death, an uncommon fate among prominent advocates of Fa. His reforms did not endure through subsequent generations. A hundred years later, Han Fei lived in a Han marked by institutional decay, corruption, and external threats from stronger states, especially Qin.

Qin lay on China's western periphery, but Fajia reforms made it the strongest military state and ultimately the hegemon that conquered all China. The principal reformer was Shang Yang (d. 338 BC), Qin's cruel chancellor, quoted approvingly by Han Fei Zi. The reforms imposed very harsh penalties even for minor offenses, mass surveillance, collective responsibility (family and neighbors were sentenced alongside an offender if they failed to report him), and the conscription of the population into farming and military service.[31] An effective and modern component was the system of rewards and promotions. The privileges of the hereditary aristocracy were curtailed, and commoners too began to receive promotion. Delivering greater quantities of grain, or enemy heads, could earn a reward or higher rank. Social advancement rested on a kind of meritocracy that replaced feudal privilege.[32] Shang Yang himself was accused of treason and killed when, after his patron's death, a prince whom Shang had offended by mutilating his tutors came to the throne.[33]

[30] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Laozi Han Fei liezhuan*, juan 63, Shen's biography and Sima Zhen's commentary. The commentary, however, cites a different account of invasions under Marquis Zhao.

[31] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Shang jun liezhuan*, juan 68, Shang Yang's reforms; Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian*, juan 2, 31st year of King Xian. These describe collective responsibility and rewards for production and military merit; Shang Yang's death falls in 338 BC.

[32] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Shang jun liezhuan*, juan 68, military merit, ranks, and agricultural production.

[33] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Shang jun liezhuan*, juan 68. The chronicle de-

Another important Qin figure was Li Si, chancellor of Qin and of the entire unified empire. While still a minor official in Chu, Li Si adopted a simple philosophy of life: some rats live in latrines, eat filthy, foul-smelling scraps, and constantly fear dogs and people. Others live in granaries and can eat grain all day. People are similar: what matters most is where they position themselves.[34]



The Rat in the Granary and the Rat in the Sewer

Li Si therefore decided to pursue a career. He went to Qin's court and won the king's favor by recommending this strategy: bribe scholars and officials at rival courts to spread confusion, and if they refuse the money, send assassins after them.[35]

Li Si and Han Fei knew each other: both studied under the Confucian scholar Xun Zi. Li Si probably felt fear or envy

scribes his flight, fighting, death, and the subsequent dismemberment of his body.

[34]Sima Qian. *Shiji: Li Si liezhuan*, juan 87. A biographical anecdote about rats in a latrine and a granary.

[35]Sima Qian, *Shiji: Li Si liezhuan*, juan 87.

toward the more intelligent Han Fei.[36] Han Fei, meanwhile, was a prince of Han, so his "ming" was bound to Han; he did not want simply to flee to another state's court. At the same time, Qin's king, the future emperor Qin Shi Huang, greatly admired his Fajia writings. Han Fei traveled to Qin as Han's envoy but was imprisoned at Li Si's instigation; Li Si then brought about his death.[37]

Han Fei's memorial to the king of Qin appears in the Cun Han chapter of Han Fei Zi. He tries to persuade the king not to attack Han, arguing that Han is Qin's obedient vassal and that Qin is wasting time needed to conquer other, stronger states. Thus, as a prince of Han, he tried unsuccessfully to save his state. Imprisoned by Qin, according to the Shiji he was forced to commit suicide in 233 BC.

Li Si is regarded as one of the most important figures in Chinese history because, after China's unification in 221 BC, he built the empire's institutional foundations, especially by standardizing government, writing, laws, and measures.[38] At the same time, he directed a ruthless apparatus of terror and forced labor and became known for other wicked measures. One example was compulsory burning of unauthorized books, especially historical records and philosophy, under penalty of death or forced labor.[39]

Li Si died in 208 BC, a victim of the conspiracy he had helped organize. When Emperor Qin Shi Huang died in 210

[36] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Laozi Han Fei liezhuan*, juan 63, biography of Han Fei. Both reportedly studied under Xunzi; according to the chronicle, Li Si considered himself less able.

[37] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Laozi Han Fei liezhuan*, juan 63, embassy to Qin. Li Si reportedly supplied poison and ordered him to commit suicide.

[38] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, year 26, discussion of administration and standardization of measures and writing. The source describes Qin policy and Li Si's participation, rather than attributing the reforms solely to him.

[39] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, year 34, Li Si's memorial. Failure to surrender books incurred penal tattooing and labor; discussing the Book of Songs and the Book of Documents was among the offenses punishable by death. These works include the overthrow of the Shang tyrant by Wu and the associated idea of benevolent government.

BC, Li Si and the eunuch Zhao Gao concealed his death and forged imperial edicts to murder the heir Fusu and his supporter General Meng Tian, replacing him with the compliant Huhai. Soon afterward, Zhao Gao betrayed Li Si, falsely accused him of treason, and had him murdered together with his entire family.[40] The Qin empire itself sank into civil wars and chaos lasting until 202 BC. Liu Bang emerged victorious and took the throne as the first emperor of the Han dynasty.[41]

4 The Morality of Power and the Dysfunction of Autocracy.

A particular problem in the history of Confucianism is whether an objective moral order exists and whether the ruler is subject to it like everyone else. Or is the ruler the supreme intermediary between people and Heaven? Classical Confucianism firmly supports the first option. The Doctrine of the Mean says:

> What Heaven bestows is called nature; acting in accordance with nature is called the Way.

And the Great Learning:

> From the Son of Heaven down to ordinary people, self-cultivation is the foundation for everyone without exception.

Asked how Heaven chooses a ruler, Mencius answers by quoting the ancient Book of Documents:

> Heaven sees as my people see. Heaven hears as my people hear.

[40] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, year 37; Sima Qian, *Shiji: Li Si liezhuan*, juan 87. The traditional account of the conspiracy and reprisals dates Li Si's execution to 208 BC.

[41] Sima Qian. *Shiji: Gaozu benji*, juan 8, fifth year of Han.

He similarly quotes the sage-king Wu of Zhou presenting his struggle against a tyrant as the execution of a moral judgment:

> I shall enter the lands of Shang with all my might and seize the oppressor. I shall sentence him to death as punishment. Thus I shall make known the greatness of my work, more glorious than the achievements of Tang.

Confucius and Mencius therefore regularly criticize lords for their deeds and refuse further service, without feeling morally dependent on the ruler's will.

This, then, is the position of "classical Confucianism," from King Wu of Zhou (c. 1050 BC) to Mencius (d. 289 BC). Is it true? In my view, decidedly so. "Heaven sees as my people see." If obedience to authority is a moral duty, it must be possible to feel and understand that duty *individually*, like other virtues and good deeds, according to Mencius's theory. If a tyrant kills or ruins an innocent person, moral people feel sorrow and indignation similar to what they feel when a bandit attacks a stranger—or greater, since at least the bandit does not pretend to be something he is not. The same "moral beginnings" and reflection that urge us to save a child falling into a well, or to despise the idea of cheating someone at a market, also moved Thrasea Paetus, for example, to refuse to congratulate Nero on murdering his mother.[42]

[42]Tacitus. *The Annals*. Trans. by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb. London: Macmillan, 1876, p. 14.12. Tacitus describes Thrasea leaving the Senate after its votes of thanksgiving.



Thrasea Paetus and Nero

Or consider this: if you feel a duty to feed a hungry person, you should likewise care that others nearby have sufficient means to live. This is precisely the conclusion Mencius proposes to various lords in Mengzi 1, making it a requirement. If someone wants others to have the means to live, but the ruler's extortion prevents them from having enough, moral sense opposes such government. This is why Confucius indignantly repudiated Ran Qiu in Analects 11.17, after he impoverished the people by extracting high taxes and enormously enriching his employers of the Ji clan. In 16.1 he rebuked Ran Qiu and Zilu for failing to try to dissuade their ruler from starting a war.

Mencius's theory of rebellion in 1B8 fits as well: the tyrant Zhou died as an ordinary person because he had ceased to be king. Why had he ceased to be king? Because he had lost the people's moral sense of duty to obey his commands. Without moral duty, what distinguishes their obedience from that of bandits to their chief? They too obey for profit, from fear, or for similar reasons.

To discover the core of this argument, let us turn to the

Shiji, the Annals of the First Emperor of Qin, and its diagnosis of Qin's collapse in 210–206 BC. Sima Qian, quoting and approving Jia Yi's argument,[43] suggests that Qin's political power collapsed through the very mechanisms intended to make it absolute. The moral loyalty of subjects living in poverty and constant fear disappeared, and they were willing to be loyal to anyone else who offered to improve their lot.

> The Second Emperor did not take that path, but deepened his lawless rule. He destroyed ancestral temples and disturbed the people, resumed construction of the Epang Palace, multiplied harsh punishments and executions, and his officials governed with ruthless severity. Rewards and punishments were unjustly distributed, taxes and levies imposed without restraint, and problems multiplied throughout the state beyond the officials' ability to manage them. The people fell into poverty, yet the ruler showed no concern. Fraud and hypocrisy then spread everywhere, while superiors and subordinates evaded responsibility toward one another. Countless people were accused of crimes; lines of condemned prisoners awaiting execution stretched along the roads, and the whole country suffered. From the highest dignitaries to ordinary people, everyone feared for their own safety. People lived in deprivation and suffering, no one felt secure, and so they were easily stirred to rebellion.

People were suffering and had nothing to lose, so they readily joined the rebellion.

> Thus Chen She needed neither the virtues of the ancient sage-kings Tang and Wu nor the dignity of

[43] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6. The following quotations on Qin's fall come from Jia Yi's argument.

> dukes and marquises. He merely had to raise his arm in rebellion at Daze, and the entire country answered his call—because the people were desperate.

Chen She was a minor officer delayed with his unit by heavy rain and flooding, for which he faced death.[44] He therefore decided he might as well rebel; once he did, vast numbers of local commoners joined him. Armed with bamboo poles and farm tools, since Qin had confiscated private weapons,[45] they conquered dozens of cities in Anhui and Henan with little resistance. Chen She made a masterful psychological move by invoking the heir Fusu.[46] Chen She was defeated after several mistakes, but the myth of Qin's might collapsed when a peasant army with bamboo poles shook it. Qin's days were now numbered: rebellions broke out everywhere, and their leaders proclaimed themselves kings of Yan, Zhao, Qi, Chu, Han, and Wei.

---

[44] Sima Qian. *Shiji: Chen She shijia*, juan 48, beginning of the rebellion. This is how the chronicle describes the threat.

[45] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, year 26. It describes weapons being collected and melted down.

[46] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Chen She shijia*, juan 48, the rebel leaders' plan.



Chen Sheng's Rebellion

Political power thus collapsed through the mechanisms intended to make it absolute: terror and purges undermined access to accurate information and the willingness of its own officials and generals to act.

Sima Qian repeats this conclusion with a measure of irony, sometimes putting it into his characters' mouths. For example, in paragraph 52, Emperor Er Shi murders his brothers in the imperial family on false charges of treason, seeking to protect himself against rivals after having murdered the legitimate heir Fusu:

> The entire imperial clan was terrified. Ministers who dared remonstrate with the ruler were accused of slander. Senior officials cared only about retaining their positions and incomes and seeking the court's favor, while ordinary people trembled with fear.

When this same Er Shi was finally surrounded by assassins (58), only one eunuch remained with him. Asked why he had not warned him earlier, he answered:

> I dared say nothing, and that is why I survived. Had I spoken earlier, I would long since have been executed. How could I have lived to see this day?[47]

Earlier (41), two magicians employed by the First Emperor, Qin Shi Huang, to seek an elixir of immortality concluded that he would surely kill them when he saw no progress.

> The Emperor delights in punishments and executions, using them to build his authority. Thus people throughout the state fear committing an offense, yet cling to their positions; no one dares display full loyalty. The Emperor hears no criticism and grows more arrogant each day. His ministers tremble with fear, flatter him, and deceive him to gain his favor.

The magicians therefore fled. Qin Shi Huang flew into a rage and began killing alchemists and scholars, including Confucian scholars, for whom the heir Fusu interceded.[48]

4.1 The Peculiar Instability of the Imperial System.

Imperial China is distinguished by the contrast between long-term stability in peacetime and rare but exceptionally destructive crises and civil wars.

Sima Qian's paradox persists: authority can proclaim itself absolute and superhuman, yet loyalty to it becomes more

[47] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, Er Shi's reign and the assassination at Wangyi. Source for both scenes concerning fear among the imperial family and officials.

[48] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, year 35, Hou Sheng and Lu Sheng's conversation and Fusu's remonstrance. Hou Sheng and Lu Sheng voice the quoted assessment of tyranny; Fusu invokes Confucius.

conditional. Imperial ideology exalted the monarch but supplied no credible way to determine when he was legitimate. This reverses Mencius's proposition: show that you are a responsible and moral ruler, and your subjects' loyalty will grow.

Rebellions and civil wars occurred everywhere, but were more often constrained by cultural taboos and self-interest. A powerful vassal rebelling against his sovereign could not easily count on sympathy and support; total war against one's own people provoked indignation; attempts to overthrow the existing social system inspired distrust. I mention this to show that imperial Confucianism also professes these values—loyalty, patriotism, order, hierarchy—yet cannot defend them in times of crisis, and there must be a reason. This does not mean that civilians in fifteenth- or seventeenth-century Europe, for example, died on a smaller scale or more humanely.

An Lushan, leader of the rebellion of 755, was precisely such an open traitor and usurper against the Tang emperor, who had earlier made him a leading general and military governor. The rebellion caused enormous population losses, whose scale remains uncertain.[49] An Lushan proclaimed himself emperor in Luoyang, and his troops later captured Chang'an. Illness, intense paranoia, and brutality toward subordinates brought his downfall when his son and leading advisers killed him.[50]

Hong Xiuquan (d. 1864) launched the Taiping Rebellion against the Qing dynasty. On the basis of Liang Afa's Protestant tracts and visions, he proclaimed himself God's second son and Jesus Christ's younger brother. Fourteen years of

[49] Thomas J. Mazanec. *Poet-Monks: The Invention of Buddhist Poetry in Late Medieval China*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2024, 236, note 15 to chapter 1. Authors have proposed figures from ten million upward, but the evidence is uncertain.

[50] Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi, *Xin Tang shu: An Lushan*, juan 225A, biography of An Lushan. He proclaimed himself emperor in 756; the chronicle describes his assassination in a conspiracy in 757.

destructive civil war claimed about 20 million lives.[51] The rebellion's ideological foundations were dubious, based on a hastily invented pseudo-Christian sect. Moreover, it explicitly sought to destroy the entire existing political order; nevertheless, it readily achieved considerable success.

In the seventeenth century, the Jurchens, Manchurian nomads who were clients of the empire, rose against the Ming under Nurhaci. War with the Ming began in 1618; in 1644 the Jurchen ruler took power in Beijing as the Shunzhi Emperor.[52] This would have been impossible without allies among Ming officials and generals who cooperated with the Jurchens. That cooperation began as early as 1618, when it was far from clear that Nurhaci could challenge all China.[53]



The Jurchens and a Ming General

Imperial authority was thus extraordinarily powerful and

[51] Asia for Educators, Columbia University. *The Taiping Rebellion, 1850–1864*; Encyclopaedia Britannica. *Hong Xiuquan*. The death toll is uncertain.

[52] Zhao Erxun and others. *Qing shi gao*, juan 1, Tianming years 1 and 3, juan 4, annals of Shunzhi.

[53] Zhao Erxun and others, *Qing shi gao*, juan 231, biography of Li Yongfang. The chronicle records Li Yongfang's defection to Nurhaci after the capture of Fushun in 1618.

superhuman, yet its legitimacy could quickly prove more conditional and less binding than that of a minor duke. If your moral judgment cannot challenge an emperor's dignity, moral judgment has no bearing on which of two or more claimants deserves recognition.

4.2 The First Qin Emperor's Influence on the Imperial System

Although the moral psychology of power in Confucius, Mencius, and Sima Qian sounds very modern for antiquity, imperial Confucianism is not their direct expression. The imperial system of China and neighboring states is associated instead with an autocracy resistant to reform, an oppressive system of control inherited from Qin, and elaborate rituals presenting the emperor as above every other ruler and human being. The term "emperor," or "huang di," deliberately evokes deities and mythical heroes.[54]

Opposition to the emperor existed, but was less straightforward than criticizing feudal lords in Mencius's time, because the emperor stood above them and wielded enormous power. Reading the Shiji's Annals of the First Emperor of Qin reveals the peculiar nature of opposition to an absolute ruler. There is "opposition" the ruler strategically wants to hear from flatterers, so that they first suggest wicked ideas he wants but does not want to propose himself; and there is opposition he does not want to hear, because he or his favorites would lose something. Thus there was no mechanism of accountability, and even criticism could end very badly, as for Fang Xiaoru or Sima Qian, who was castrated for a mild remonstrance. Fang Xiaoru was murdered in 1402 with numerous relatives for opposing Emperor Yongle's usurpation.[55]

[54] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, year 26, deliberations on the title.

[55] Zhang Tingyu and others, *Ming shi: Fang Xiaoru*, juan 141, biography of Fang Xiaoru. The reprisals followed his refusal to draft the proclama-

Sima Qian (d. 86 BC) was perhaps the ancient world's greatest historian. In the Shiji, translated as "Historical Records" or "Records of the Grand Historian" after his court office, he recorded more than a thousand years of earlier Chinese history; the oldest records probably dated from around 1300 BC. He lived under the Han dynasty. In a court intrigue, he defended an unjustly accused general, bringing upon himself the emperor's fury and castration.[56]

A surprising suggestion of the Shiji is that the imperial ritual system also derives from the First Emperor, Qin Shi Huang, who conquered and unified China in 221 BC. The ruler's title, "Huang-Di," likewise originated with him and deliberately assigned him a superhuman status, incomparable to earlier kings and surpassing mythical sovereigns. The black color of the water element was favored. Sima Qian links this to hard, severe government resembling a cosmic element that human opposition cannot restrain.[57]

Despite adopting Confucianism, Han and subsequent dynasties retained imperial ideology along with the state for 2,100 years.[58] The dragon motif became even more central: the first Han emperor, Liu Bang (d. 195 BC), was, according to legend, born after his mother dreamed of encountering a deity; his father reportedly saw a dragon above her.[59] In the fifth century BC, Confucius criticized lords and ministers for splendor and rituals above their prescribed rank (Analects 3.1, 3.2, 3.6, 3.22, 5.18, 16.1–3). He would probably not have liked the dragon throne and "Huangdi."

The Confucian tradition held Qin Shi Huang in low regard,

---

tion of accession.

[56] Ban Gu. *Hanshu: Sima Qian zhuan*, juan 62, biography and letter to Ren An. The letter describes his defense of Li Ling and punishment.

[57] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, year 26, cycle of the five powers. The chronicle connects water, black, and the severity of Qin's rule.

[58] Sima Qian. *Shiji: Liu Jing Shusun Tong liezhuan*, juan 99, biography of Shusun Tong. Han ceremonial combined ancient rites with Qin ceremonial.

[59] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Gaozu benji*, juan 8.

remembering his killing of scholars, burning of books and historical records, and other cultural vandalism. It made him a cautionary example: no stable state can be built without righteousness and proper customs. At the same time, it had to operate in a system largely constructed according to his design.

4.3 The First Emperor Qin Shi Huang According to Sima Qian.

Rather than directly judging Qin Shi Huang, the Shiji often quotes stone inscriptions and edicts he erected to praise his "virtue" and the state's harmony, interspersing them with factual accounts that discredit him, producing cognitive dissonance and irony. This dissonance seems directed not only at Qin Shi Huang but at the entire imperial system, a conclusion no official could state openly.

Here is one inscription Qin Shi Huang ordered erected [60]:

> In the twenty-eighth year of his reign, the Emperor established a new beginning. He established just laws and regulations, making them the foundation of all affairs. He ordered relations among people and brought harmony between fathers and sons. Through sagely wisdom, goodness, and righteousness, he clearly displayed the principles of moral conduct. He traveled east to pacify the eastern lands and inspected his troops. Having accomplished great deeds, he then reached the sea. The Emperor's achievements encouraged diligence and faithful performance of duties. He promoted agriculture and restrained trade, thereby securing prosperity for ordinary people. Throughout all-under-Heaven,

[60] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, year 28, Langye inscription. Imperial self-presentation, rather than the historian's endorsement of its praise.

> all hearts united in common purpose and aspiration. Weights and measures were standardized, and written characters brought into one system. Wherever sunlight and moonlight reached, wherever boats and carts could travel, everyone could fulfill their destiny, and no one lacked the opportunity to prosper. Responding to the needs of the time and directing affairs properly—such is the Emperor's virtue. He corrected distorted customs, tamed the rivers, and traveled throughout the land. He cared for ordinary people and never ceased his efforts, day or night. He removed all doubts and established laws so that everyone knew what to avoid. Regional officials were assigned duties, making government orderly and efficient. Every action was proper; everything followed a perfect design. The Emperor's wisdom encompassed the four quarters of the world.

Other paragraphs of the Shiji confirm nothing of the kind. They describe cruel wars, fits of rage, obsessions, and sensitivity to criticism, the main reason for burning books and killing scholars (see paragraph 38). They also describe a circle of dishonest magicians charged with producing an elixir of immortality, and finally the state's poor condition, bandits, assassination attempts, and famine: for example, grain costing 1,600 per shi in the 31st year of his reign, probably a very high price.[61]

The rationale for the title Huang Di begins peculiarly with a statement about how Qin Shi Huang was "morally compelled" to attack other states, while earlier sections emphasize his active aggression and immorality: for example, that plans to attack Han originated with him, and that he bribed ministers to destroy other states from within (paragraph 4).[62]

[61] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, year 31.

[62] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, year 26, deliberations

> When the king of Qin first unified all-under-Heaven, he issued an order to the chancellors and imperial censors: “Formerly the king of Han surrendered his lands and seal, asking to become Qin’s vassal. Later, however, he broke the agreement and allied with Zhao and Wei against Qin. We therefore sent troops to punish him and captured their king. I considered this good, hoping it would end the wars. The king of Zhao sent his chancellor Li Mu to make an alliance with us, so I returned the prince held hostage among us. Later, however, they broke the alliance and rebelled in Taiyuan, which belonged to my state. We therefore sent troops to punish them and captured their king. The Zhao prince Jia proclaimed himself king of Dai without authorization, so I sent troops against him and destroyed his state. The king of Wei initially agreed to submit and come to Qin, but later plotted with Han and Zhao to attack Qin; […]”

Qin Shi Huang ends by congratulating himself on solving all these problems and commemorating his achievement.

> With my humble self, I raised troops to punish violence and disorder; relying on the divine protection of our ancestral temple, all six kings have been made to bear their guilt, and now the empire is at peace. Now that titles remain unchanged, there will be no way to honor my achievements or pass them on to future generations. Let us deliberate on the imperial title.
>
> I, in my humble person, raised troops to punish violence and rebellion. Through the divine protection of our ancestral temple, the six kings were

on the imperial title. Speeches by the king and ministers as recorded in the chronicle.

> punished for their offenses, and all-under-Heaven saw peace. Yet if titles now remain unchanged, there will be no way properly to honor my achievements and transmit their memory to future generations. Let us therefore consider establishing an imperial title.

The ministers answer:

> In ancient times the Five Emperors ruled lands extending a thousand li in every direction. Beyond them lay the fiefs of marquises and the lands of barbarians. The feudal lords there sometimes came to pay homage and sometimes did not; even the Son of Heaven could not control them. Now Your Highness has assembled righteous armies to punish the cruel and wicked, pacified all-under-Heaven, established commanderies and counties throughout the state, and unified the laws into one system. Nothing like this has been accomplished since the earliest times; even the Five Emperors could not match it. We, Your Highness's humble servants, have carefully consulted the scholars. They say: "In antiquity there were the Heavenly Sovereign (Tianhuang), the Earthly Sovereign (Dihuang), and the Supreme Sovereign (Taihuang). Among them, the Supreme Sovereign was most exalted." We therefore respectfully venture to submit this honorific title to Your Highness: **"Supreme Sovereign" (Taihuang)**.

The ministers propose Taihuang, the highest of the three titles mentioned. Qin Shi Huang then combines huang with the ancient title di to form huangdi, with divine and cosmic associations. His argument rests on a hypocritical or retrospective justification of his wars that turns into self-adulation.

Throughout the account of the First Emperor, we can trace an ironic and dangerous political argument: "Huang Di" is not "Confucianism" but the product of the megalomania of a tyrant who conquered China by force, ruled with an iron fist, and came to a miserable end. Sima Qian could not write this directly—he was sentenced to death for much less, as we shall see—but scattered remarks and the selection of episodes continually point toward that conclusion.

For example [63]:

> On his return journey, the First Emperor passed through Pengcheng. He performed rites and offered sacrifices in the temples, hoping to recover the Zhou dynasty's ritual tripod from the Si River. He ordered a thousand men to dive into the river and search, but they could not find it. He then headed southwest, crossed the Huai River, and reached Hengshan and Nanjun. Traveling by boat along the Yangtze, he arrived at the shrine on Mount Xiang. A violent wind arose and almost prevented the crossing. The Emperor asked the scholars: "Is the Lady of Xiang a deity?" They answered: "We have heard that she was Yao's daughter and Shun's wife, and that she was buried here." The First Emperor became furious and ordered three thousand convicts to cut down every tree on Mount Xiang, leaving it completely bare. He himself returned from Nanjun through Wuguan Pass.

The emperor wanted to obtain one of the nine ding, or cauldrons and tripods. These symbolized the status of the Zhou ruler and his vassals, and possession was strictly regulated by ritual. They could therefore serve as a sign that the mandate to rule had passed from Zhou to Qin. Another tradition

[63] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, year 28, Pengcheng and Mount Xiang.

says that Qin seized the cauldrons by force when it invaded Zhou in 256 BC, though what happened to them in the meantime is unclear.[64] Ironically, an emperor with divine ambitions himself performs rites to deities to recover Zhou's symbols of power. A storm then provokes Qin Shi Huang to punish a local polytheistic deity. She is the daughter of Yao and wife of Shun, precisely two of the ancient "Di" above whom he places himself; hearing about them deeply offends him. His return by a different route, as though afraid, suggests that "Huangdi" controls immense human resources but not the forces of nature.

His dealings with fangshi develop this theme. These Daoist magicians offered, among other things, techniques for attaining immortality (40, 41), and Qin Shi Huang employed them to evade biological death. Eventually they decide to flee, reasoning that the emperor will certainly kill them and that the elixirs fail because he is ruthless and excessively hungry for power.

> Hou Sheng and Lu Sheng consulted one another, saying: "Qin Shi Huang is by nature hard, severe, and willful. He rose from among the feudal lords to unify all-under-Heaven; now he revels in his success and indulges his desires, believing that no one since antiquity can equal him. […] The chancellor and other highest ministers merely receive decisions already made; every affair depends on the Emperor's own judgment. The Emperor delights in punishments and executions, using them to build his authority. Thus people throughout the state fear committing an offense, yet cling to their positions; no one dares display full loyalty. The Emperor hears no criticism and grows more arro-

[64] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Zhou benji*, juan 4, end of Zhou; Sima Qian. *Shiji: Fengshan shu*, juan 28, accounts of the nine cauldrons. The work preserves different versions: the cauldrons being taken to Qin and their sinking in the Si River.

gant each day. His ministers tremble with fear, flatter him, and deceive him to gain his favor. Under Qin law, if alchemists cannot present verifiable results from their various methods, they are immediately put to death. Yet there were as many as three hundred astrologers and diviners, all capable people. Fearing repression, however, they prudently flattered the Emperor and never dared point out his errors openly. […] His lust for power has reached its extreme. We cannot seek an elixir of immortality for such a man." Having said this, they fled and disappeared.



The Elixir of Immortality

The preceding paragraph (40) also matters. Lu Sheng persuades the emperor that living in secrecy and withdrawing from worldly affairs are necessary for immortality. Qin Shi Huang calls himself *Zhenren*, a Daoist term meaning "true, perfected person," conceals his whereabouts from ministers, and builds a network of connected palaces—yet remains just as ruthless and hungry for power. Hence the conclusion that the emperor is unsuited to their magical practices. At the same time, the alchemists face death if their

techniques fail, while the emperor listens only to flatterers. They therefore fled, and the enraged emperor had several hundred scholars buried alive. He also banished his eldest son Fusu after he pointed out that killing Confucian scholars might cause unrest among the people.[65]



Burying Scholars Alive

The intense obsession with immortality bore no fruit: the First Emperor died young, at 49, in 210 BC. The next emperor, Liu Bang of Han, was only three years older than him. Today the cause of death is known to have been fangshi elixirs containing mercury salts.[66]

The Shiji says that late in life the emperor feared death and did not want to hear of it. This probably explains why he did not arrange a stable succession for Fusu. He fell ill and died during one of his journeys around the state, and his chancellor Li Si and chief eunuch Zhao Gao betrayed him. They concealed his death for many days, carrying a basket of foul-smelling fish behind his closed litter. They forged imperial edicts ordering the popular, respected heir Fusu to commit suicide, replacing him with another prince known

[65] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, year 35.

[66] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, birth and year 37.

to history as Qin Er Shi.[67] Qin Er Shi ruled for three years, was extremely incompetent and depraved, committed many crimes, and was finally murdered by the same Zhao Gao, who feared for his own life. Earlier, the two had murdered their fellow conspirator Li Si by cutting him apart alive.[68]

Among their achievements, they completed work on Qin Shi Huang's mausoleum, begun after his accession. It contains the famous Terracotta Army and the First Emperor's still-sealed tomb.[69]

Zhao Gao installed the last ruler, Ziying, as king (Wang) rather than emperor (Huang Di), since Qin had lost much of its conquered territory. Ziying then killed the wicked Zhao Gao.[70] Ziying was regarded as upright, but ruled for only 46 days: there was no longer an empire left to save. He surrendered to Liu Bang but was soon murdered by another warlord, Xiang Yu.

Thus Sima Qian described the ironic epilogue to the First Emperor's reign, his entry into the company of deities, and his rule with an iron fist: the ruin of a state that disintegrated within three years of his death, covered in disgrace and despised by its subjects.

4.4 Imperial Confucianism through Sima Qian's Eyes

Let us return briefly to the author himself. The title "Grand Historian" suggests an important court figure, but in his let-

[67] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, year 37, concealment of the death and conspiracy; Sima Qian, *Shiji: Li Si liezhuan*, juan 87, the conspirators' conversations. Huhai also participated in the conspiracy.

[68] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, third year of Er Shi; Sima Qian, *Shiji: Li Si liezhuan*, juan 87, Li Si's death.

[69] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, Lishan and the first year of Er Shi; Department of Physics, Lund University. *Mercury Emission from Emperor Qin's Mausoleum Measured by Lidar*. 2020. The burial chamber had not been opened as of 2020.

[70] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, Ziying's installation and the end of Qin.

ter to Ren An, Sima acknowledges his limited standing.[71]

> My ancestors never rendered the dynasty great services for which they received hereditary titles and ceremonial privileges. Their duties concerned documents, historical chronicles, astronomy, and the calendar—occupations little different in rank from those of diviners and ritual specialists. The ruler treated such people as a source of entertainment, keeping them like musicians and jesters, and society despised them.

The letter was written between 93 and 91 BC. In 99 BC, Sima became entangled in a court intrigue that cost him a death sentence and castration. General Li Ling was defeated fighting the northern Xiongnu nomads: surrounded by superior forces, he was captured after a long struggle. Other generals had failed to support and protect him, and blame might have fallen on an imperial favorite. Courtiers therefore blamed Li Ling, and Sima Qian alone defended him. The emperor became furious and sentenced Sima Qian to death; this was commuted to imprisonment and castration. After leaving prison three years later, Sima took employment as a eunuch archivist.

[71] Ban Gu, *Hanshu: Sima Qian zhuan*, juan 62, letter to Ren An.



Battle against the Xiongnu

Sima Qian describes the affair and his death sentence as follows in the *Letter to Ren An*:[72]

> Li Ling, commanding fewer than five thousand infantrymen, penetrated deep into enemy territory, reaching the vicinity of the chanyu's headquarters. He exposed himself to mortal danger, challenged the mighty Xiongnu, and confronted their countless troops.

An expedition with 5,000 infantry and no cavalry into Xiongnu territory was itself risky and dangerous, but Li Ling wanted recognition and honors. Hanshu 54 says that he himself pressed the emperor for an independent, risky mission. The emperor agreed, seeing an opportunity for himself at little risk. Another general, Lu Bode, who was to command the rear guard, was also reluctant and reasonably proposed postponing the operation until spring, to attack a more weakened Xiongnu with cavalry. The emperor, however, became angry, thinking Li Ling had suggested

[72] Ban Gu, *Hanshu: Sima Qian zhuan*, juan 62, letter to Ren An.

this to Lu Bode to escape his promise, and instead sent Li without a rear guard. Li's mission was to divert Xiongnu forces from a larger offensive led by Li Guangli, the imperial favorite.[73]

> For more than ten days he fought the chanyu himself, inflicting losses greater than his own. The Xiongnu could not keep up with recovering the wounded and dead, and their leaders were terrified. The chanyu then summoned all his princes of the left and right wings and everyone capable of bearing a bow, so that the forces of the entire state assembled to surround and attack Li Ling. Fighting and retreating for hundreds of kilometers, his soldiers exhausted their arrows and found no route of escape. Reinforcements did not come, and the dead and wounded piled upon one another.
>
> … Yet when Li Ling addressed his men and encouraged them, they all rose to fight. He himself wept, and his soldiers, wiping away blood and suppressing tears, drew empty bows, faced naked swords, and turned north, ready to fight the enemy to the death.

Li's mission was daring, but his troops fought effectively and fulfilled their task of drawing enemy forces away: the Xiongnu had to mobilize the core of their forces, as many as 80,000 cavalry, to defeat him.[74] Yet Han's commanders sent no reinforcements and did not exploit the opportunity to attack, although reports of success reached court. Li's army was ultimately destroyed and he surrendered; much of the blame belonged to people more important than him.

[73] Ban Gu. *Hanshu: Li Guang Su Jian zhuan*, juan 54, second year of Tianhan, Li Ling's expedition.

[74] Ban Gu, *Hanshu: Li Guang Su Jian zhuan*, juan 54, fighting against the chanyu. Troop figures come from the chronicle.

> Before Li Ling's defeat, a messenger arrived with news of his achievements. The princes, ministers, and dignitaries of the Han court raised their cups to congratulate the emperor on the victories. Several days later came news of Li Ling's defeat. The emperor lost his appetite and could find no peace during court audiences. Ministers were terrified and did not know how to behave. Disregarding my low position, seeing the emperor's deep sorrow, I sincerely wished to offer my modest reflections. I believed that Li Ling had always shared his soldiers' hardships and deprivation, renouncing comfort and sharing even what little he had. In this way he had won their willingness to give their lives for him.

Asked his opinion by the emperor, Sima Qian tried to emphasize that Li had served well and competently and made great sacrifices, which seems to have been true. This was received as an attack on the favorite Li Guangli.

> At that moment I was summoned before the emperor and asked my opinion. I took the opportunity to describe Li Ling's merits, hoping to broaden His Imperial Majesty's view of the affair and end the malicious accusations. I did not, however, manage to explain my thoughts fully. The emperor misunderstood my intentions and believed I was trying to discredit General Ershi (Li Guangli) by defending Li Ling.
>
> As a result, I was handed over to the judicial officials. My sincere loyalty found no opportunity to defend itself. I was accused of opposing the emperor through false claims, and the judicial officials' sentence was ultimately accepted. My family was poor, and I lacked the money to buy exemption from punishment. None of my friends or

> acquaintances came to my aid, and no one close to the emperor spoke a word in my defense.

Somewhat later, Li was also accused of training the Xiongnu for battle, for which the emperor ordered his entire clan exterminated. Qin too had practiced the custom of murdering the families of perpetrators of certain crimes, especially those directed against the state and ruler.[75]

This story depicts a political system in which suspicion, flattery, and favoritism often matter more than competence and merit, while also reflecting the cruelty and atmosphere of fear of the First Qin Emperor's time.

Shiji 109, which discusses Li Ling, begins with his grandfather Li Guang. He too was a general and distinguished veteran blamed for a failed operation. He committed suicide to avoid a trial.[76] The Shiji praises his nobility, as though to protect his name from posthumous slander.

> I saw General Li with my own eyes. He was modest and straightforward, like an ordinary villager, and could not speak in fine words. Yet on the day of his death, everyone under Heaven, both those who knew him personally and those who did not, sank into deep grief. Was this not because his loyalty and sincerity had won the trust of soldiers and officers?[77]

As for Li Ling, the Hanshu says that the Xiongnu valued his courage despite his having been their enemy. Their ruler gave him his daughter in marriage, and he lived among them for the rest of his life. After Emperor Wu died, a Han envoy

[75] Ban Gu, *Hanshu: Li Guang Su Jian zhuan*, juan 54, reprisals after Li Ling's surrender; Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, year 34, punishments extending to the family. The Hanshu describes the accusation and extermination of Li's family.

[76] Sima Qian. *Shiji: Li jiangjun liezhuan*, juan 109.

[77] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Li jiangjun liezhuan*, juan 109.

offered Li the chance to return, but he refused, saying he "could not endure humiliation a second time."[78]

In the Shiji, Sima Qian slips in discreet praise of the Xiongnu, describing their customs and quoting Zhonghang Yue's dialogue with a Han envoy,[79] as though questioning whether they are so barbarous, or Han so civilized. Their daily lives center on herding cattle, riding, and archery, allowing more rest, recreation, and leisure. Their social rules are clear and intuitive, making them easy to govern.

> Thus in times of danger people practice riding and archery, and in peaceful times they enjoy freedom from work. Their rules are simple and easy to follow. Relations between ruler and subjects are uncomplicated, and the whole state functions like one body.

Zhonghang Yue also points out that the Han system forces peasants into exhausting labor and employs excessive repression, provoking resentment:

> People labor at cultivating the land and raising silkworms to obtain food and clothing, and build walls and fortifications for defense. Thus in times of danger they are unpracticed in fighting, and in times of peace labor exhausts them.
>
> Moreover, when rituals and principles of righteousness become distorted, superiors and subjects resent one another, and excessive construction of houses and buildings inevitably exhausts the people's strength.

Sima Qian also mentions Xiongnu penal regulations. Minor crimes received a penalty interpreted differently by

[78] Ban Gu, *Hanshu: Li Guang Su Jian zhuan*, juan 54, Li Ling's marriage and the embassy under Emperor Zhao.

[79] Sima Qian. *Shiji: Xiongnu liezhuan*, juan 110, Zhonghang Yue's conversation with the Han envoy. The following comparisons are voiced by Zhonghang Yue, who had defected to the Xiongnu.

commentators, major ones were punished by death, and theft by confiscation extending to the offender's household.[80] Imprisonment lasted no more than ten days, and the number of prisoners in the whole state did not exceed a handful.

4.5 The Han Dynasty's Legitimacy According to Sima.

Finally, an interesting addition appears in the transmitted Shiji at the end of the Annals of the First Emperor of Qin. It suggests that Han officials themselves probably understood the problem: from beyond the grave, Sima Qian had committed the unforgivable crime of suggesting that the Han empire was just as cruel, greedy, and hungry for total power as Qin, and, worse, would therefore meet the same end.

Sima Qian wrote of concealing his work and leaving a copy in the capital. The Hanshu credits his grandson Yang Yun with circulating it under Emperor Xuan.[81] In 74 CE, Emperor Ming asked Ban Gu to assess Sima Qian's remarks; material associated with this exchange was later appended to the Shiji.[82] Among these remarks is a justification of the imperial title:

> The allotted span of Zhou had passed; a benevolent dynasty does not replace its mother. Qin took an intermediate place, but Lü Zheng proved cruel and despotic. Nevertheless, by taking the throne as a feudal ruler at the age of thirteen and uniting the entire empire under Heaven beneath one rule, he indulged his unrestrained

[80] Sima Qian. *Shiji: Xiongnu liezhuan*, juan 110, commentaries on punishments. The commentaries mention beating, cutting the face, or crushing joints.

[81] Ban Gu, *Hanshu: Sima Qian zhuan*, juan 62, preservation and circulation of the work.

[82] Sima Qian. *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, supplement, commentaries by Sima Zhen and Zhang Shoujie.

> desires while securing the livelihood of his relatives. For thirty-seven years his military forces reached everywhere, and the laws and decrees established then applied to later kings. Perhaps, having gained a sage's power when the river god offered him a map—drawing on the influence of the stars Lang, Hu, Shen, and Fa, and supporting government to drive out enemies—he resisted all opposition and was therefore called Shi Huang (First Emperor).[83]

The first sentence represents a rather strained cosmology with deadly consequences. Zhou is assigned the element of wood or vegetation, an idea from Han times; the account of Qin assigned fire to Zhou. Han is supposed to be fire, born from Zhou's "wood" and representing "goodness." But because benevolent authority could not simply seize power, Qin was needed as an anomalous intermediary. Qin claimed the water element to justify its severity and ruthlessness, and Qin's fall was a cosmic necessity.[84] This theory weakens the politically dangerous conclusion that cruelty and predation by those in power sow collapse and rebellion. The supplement then calls Qin Shi Huang Lü Zheng, as though he were the illegitimate son of the empress's lover. That lover was a merchant,[85] and merchants stand low in the Confucian hierarchy, symbolizing greed and feeding upon the social system. This establishes the proper context for the origins of "unrestrained desires" and nepotism. Yet it precedes the statement that since Qin Shi Huang conquered China, he evidently earned the imperial title, and neither birth nor evil deeds changes that. Rather, some metaphysical explanation

[83] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, commentaries on the supplement.

[84] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, Sima Zhen's commentary on the supplement; Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, year 26, five powers.

[85] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*, juan 6, Sima Zhen's commentary on "Lü Zheng".

for his success must exist, such as a river god's gift.

Sima Qian suggests nothing of the kind; quite the opposite. The circumstances surrounding the invention of the title Huang Di, already quoted, combine an apology for attacking neighbors, self-congratulatory megalomania, and courtiers' flattery, often from people living in constant terror or paid wrongdoers who ultimately betrayed the First Emperor. From this mixture crystallizes the semidivine title Huang Di. For the next imperial dynasty, using the same title, this conclusion is deeply inconvenient. Han's founder Liu Bang was a peasant: it is not obvious why such a person should found a dynasty and operate an apparatus of terror like Qin's, rather than govern more humanely and under greater restraint. His main rival for the throne during the Chu–Han war was Xiang Yu, an aristocrat of Chu. Xiang Yu was indeed arrogant and excessively cruel: according to the Shiji, he killed more than 200,000 Qin prisoners.[86] Liu Bang, however, was no "humane peasant." He too was ruthless and power-hungry, but more calculating, which enabled him to win. On the throne, he became known for purging his supporters and retained much of Qin's cruel system of repression.

In Liu Bang's case, Sima Qian deploys his greatest skill, knowing that criticizing him means challenging Han's legitimacy, which might cost him further body parts and, above all, the destruction of his precious manuscript. The annals concerning Liu contain a festival of flattery, beginning with the myth of his supernatural, draconic birth: his mother dreamed of a deity, and his father saw a dragon.[87] This flattery lowers the censors' guard and most probably also functions as irony, since the dark truth about Liu's ruthless mentality and total power in general is scattered across many other chapters of the Shiji.

Shiji 90 tells the story of Peng Yue, a general who had ren-

[86] Sima Qian. *Shiji: Xiang Yu benji*, juan 7, Xin'an and Waihuang.

[87] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Gaozu benji*, juan 8.

dered Liu Bang great services. Liu Bang nevertheless suspected him of treason. When a subordinate accused him, Liu ordered him demoted and banished. The Shiji says that the empress then persuaded Liu to kill him and his clan, because she considered it dangerous to leave such a capable commander alive," and Liu agreed.[88] Han Xin, another crucial ally, met a similar fate: Liu deceived him, took away his army and provinces, and the empress and chancellor brought about his killing. Sima made sure to record Han Xin's conversation with Xiang Yu's envoy, who told him: "If King Xiang dies today, you will be next."[89] In Shiji 7 and 95, fleeing Xiang Yu's cavalry, Liu Bang throws his own children out of his carriage to make it faster, while becoming furious with the driver who tries to save them.[90] In 97 we hear of his peculiar habit: he "dislikes scholars, and when they come in Confucian caps, he takes them off and urinates in them." Later, following Li Yiji's admonition, Liu Bang changes his behavior toward him.[91]

4.6 Why a Republic Is Better.

All the ancient sages we have quoted are monarchists, and Fajia proposes something resembling absolutism. Han Fei's argument for such an absolute monarchy, incidentally, is that without the monarch's monopoly on power, magnates will split into competing factions and interest groups that tear the state apart in their struggle for power.

In this contest (XI—Solitary Indignation), a corrupt minister who surrounds himself with scoundrels and breaks rules

[88] Sima Qian. *Shiji: Wei Bao Peng Yue liezhuan*, juan 90.

[89] Sima Qian. *Shiji: Huaiyin hou liezhuan*, juan 92. The same chapter attributes a conspiracy to Han Xin and condemns him in its final assessment.

[90] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Xiang Yu benji*, juan 7, flight from Pengcheng; Sima Qian. *Shiji: Fan Li Teng Guan liezhuan*, juan 95, Xiahou Ying. Both passages describe the rescue of the children and Liu Bang's anger.

[91] Sima Qian. *Shiji: Li Sheng Lu Jia liezhuan*, juan 97, Li Yiji's first meeting with Liu Bang.

for his own benefit has various advantages over honest people doing their duties. This creates a perverse incentive structure: the more corrupt and ruthless you are, the easier it is to gain power. In a monarchy, Han Fei believes, the ruler should guarantee standards for the state's proper functioning, including the promotion of capable and honest people, punishment of the treacherous or incompetent, and ensuring that office is not treated as hereditary property or a reward for supposed merits.

The collapse of the Zhou system and the "Warring States" period were among many examples showing that fears of predatory feudal lords were justified. Qin's fall, however, showed that the monarch's wrongdoing is also a problem. Both oligarchic predation and the corruption of cliques, as well as a tyrant's banditry, have repeatedly proved destructive in history.

Moral reasoning also enters the picture, whether that of Confucius in Asia, Christianity in the West, or another tradition. It does so not only by encouraging good conduct but also by providing a collective system for distinguishing "our own" from "outsiders." You do not have to be moral to understand that an evil person above you will be a greater problem than a bandit at a crossroads. Even when factions of wrongdoers hide and protect one another, society as a whole knows them "by their fruits": a political elite may be openly depraved, produce disasters and failures for which no one answers, protect its own people, and destroy its critics in the name of "justice." A shared moral language then makes it possible to obstruct wrongdoers and support those who openly fight them. This provides additional protection against corruption and hostile takeover of the state.

Several conclusions follow.

First, an objective moral system can help keep power in check, but this offers no direct advantage to those in power, since they may, for example, be judged unworthy. Hence various tensions arise, such as Caesaropapism and schism in the West, or imperial Confucianism restricting theories of

rulers' accountability.

Second, if political authority places itself at the top of the moral hierarchy of goods, merely challenging it is enough to challenge the entire hierarchy. Challenging a ruler is practically straightforward and attractive: if you are powerful and win, you can become the new ruler. But if rebellion against the ruler is first regarded as "the basest deed," then turns out to be an available option, other moral norms may prove equally conditional. Systems that assign moral absoluteness to power thus seem capable of long-term stability, but at the cost of more destructive crises. Imperial Confucianism confirms this relationship when we examine dynastic collapses and political crises.

Third, a political system can be built the other way round, on society's own interest and a moral doctrine regulating that interest. Both combine with institutional mechanisms so that society enjoys inviolable rights and can hold those in power accountable. This was the model of the United States as conceived by its Founding Fathers,[92] and it proved very successful, building what was once the world's greatest power.

John Adams, however, acknowledged that the constitution was suited only to governing a moral and religious people.[93] Only in this way does the republic's entire institutional structure work: promises are generally kept, laws obeyed, truthful and relevant information generally available, and elections genuinely based on counting votes, because everyone feels obliged to act this way and society watches the powerful to ensure that they do.

[92] James Madison. *Federalist No. 51*. Feb. 6, 1788. Madison argues for mutual checks among the branches of government.

[93] John Adams. *Letter to the Massachusetts Militia*. Oct. 11, 1798, letter to the Massachusetts militia, 11 October 1798. This is Adams's statement about morality and religion.



The American Republic: Ambition and Virtue

If moral doctrine does not regulate self-interest, however, everyone has private interests that generally conflict with obedience to the state. This produces more crime below and cliques and corruption above. Constitutional freedom makes the problem of cliques return with redoubled force, since it can no longer be solved with Han Fei's "iron fist." Democracy becomes an arena for competing interest groups or rival moral ideologies. This greatly hinders the republic's central, fundamental task: answering Han Fei's problem of protecting the state's political order against hostile appropriation by factions and corruption. The boundaries of permissible and impermissible conduct become unclear, as does the distinction between bending rules for one's own benefit and ruining the state.

5 The Disordered Will as a Strategic Weakness

We have often heard of outstanding strategists, commanders, and rulers making a poorly calculated decision and

paying dearly for it. Pride, a thirst for glory, hostility, greed, or similar failings were often involved.

Both Confucius and Han Fei understood this relationship well: a ruler needs practical prudence, self-control, and the ability to consider scenarios in which events do not go his way. He must also perform his duties conscientiously, without distractions.

Someone who seeks power to satisfy his appetites will not be a good ruler. Some want women, luxury, wealth, banquets, palaces, and similar pleasures. These distract them from their duties and allow those who supply them to gain leverage over the ruler.

Others enjoy feeling powerful, humiliating enemies, and displaying strength. Yet sound government more often requires restraint, cold calculation, confronting problems the ruler would rather ignore, and making unwelcome decisions. For Han Fei, effective government means directing a system, often according to a dull routine with little room for personal whims. Rulers unwilling to do this will create dangerous dysfunctions. Moreover, a ruler must restrain even ordinary human friendships and affections, since these can be used against him.

Still others work hard and conscientiously to achieve greatness and accumulate power, but the same pride and appetite for power drive them toward enormous risks, unrestrained arrogance, belief in their own genius, and underestimation of circumstances and opponents. Ultimately, these traits prevent them from cutting their losses and compromising.

A proud person who wishes to acknowledge only his own authority is also more inclined to acknowledge only his own opinions, plans, and understanding of the situation. This can easily turn against him.

A will that desires such goods without restraint can therefore bring defeat and ruin. According to Han Fei, a good ruler should be prudent, hardworking, and reasonably restrained in everything.

At the same time, the Hanfeizi does not discuss how to secure this in the long term. It criticizes Confucians very harshly (chapter 50), comparing them to sorcerers and magicians. Yet events give considerable support to Mencius on this question. Qin, organized strictly according to Fajia's ideas, could conquer China, but perished shortly after its first succession crisis. Its rulers could adopt administrative techniques to get what they wanted, but not the recommendations above to want something other than what they actually desired. Human beings exhibit an inertia of the will: over time they settle on a lasting, considered decision about what they want from life and coordinate their actions to obtain it. As they receive what they wanted, they often become more firmly committed to that choice.

Thus Nero, whom we will discuss shortly, could listen to his tutors during the early years of his reign, revealing his murderous inclinations only in secret. During the last four years, no one could restrain his cruelty, depravity, or his "career" as a musician and poet. Napoleon was a strategic genius and a skilled administrator, but growing pride and greed prevented him from withdrawing or compromising when doing so would have made sense. Xuanzong was a very good emperor of a powerful and wealthy state for many years, but at sixty the pleasures of the harem began to rule him completely, ending in a catastrophic rebellion.

Whether such a character produces a political catastrophe is, of course, a separate question. A Confucian *junzi* certainly has a much greater chance of showing practical prudence and clarity of mind as a political decision-maker.

5.1 The Ten Faults

We will quote passages from chapter X of the Hanfeizi, "The Ten Faults," which mainly concerns the ruler's disordered will.

> The first fault is to practice petty loyalty at the

expense of greater loyalty, thereby sacrificing the latter.

Han Fei describes a faithful servant who brought a general his favorite wine. The general became drunk and missed a council of war. The king discovered his intoxication and had him beheaded. The lesson is that subordinates who indulge a ruler's desires are dangerous, even when acting from sincere affection. Valuable subordinates act in the interests of the ruler and the state. A tyrant such as the First Emperor is an interesting case: important information and advice do not reach him if he may respond with fury, because officials fear for their lives. A good ruler thinks in the opposite way: those who put the satisfaction of his whims above his interests are potentially dangerous and should be avoided.

2. The second fault is to pursue small advantages and thereby lose much greater ones.

According to Han Fei's anecdote, Duke Xian of Jin wanted to attack Guo. His ruthless minister Xun Xi proposed buying passage through Yu by offering its duke jade from the treasury and fine horses. When Duke Xian objected, he was told that he would soon get them back. Yu and Guo were small neighbors that depended on each other for protection against Jin because of the natural barriers between them. The fall of one meant the imminent fall of the other. Yet Yu's greedy ruler accepted the offer and permitted passage. Jin conquered him three years later.



Marching through Yu to Guo

The lesson is that a small but unrestrained appetite for trinkets and luxuries allows others to exploit a ruler and take away far more: his entire state, including the trinkets.

The next three concern distractions and pleasures that draw attention away from duty:

> 4. The fourth fault is to neglect affairs of state and indulge in the pleasures of music, thereby bringing misfortune upon oneself.
>
> 6. The sixth fault is to indulge in entertainments with singing women and neglect affairs of state, which foretells disaster and the state's downfall.
>
> 7. The seventh fault is to leave one's country on distant journeys and disregard advisers' warnings, which is the surest way to endanger one's position.

An absent ruler travels far away without ensuring the exercise of the powers needed to maintain order and keep the

state functioning. There is a dilemma: if he transfers full authority to someone else, he may never recover it. If he does not, conspiracy and rebellion may still follow. A ruler's indulgence in luxury, pleasure, and other distractions, together with neglect of duty, has repeatedly caused serious problems.

Han Fei tells the story of Duke Huan of Qi (died 643 BC) as a striking warning against excessively devoted subordinates and an argument for listening to proven, effective ones. Sensual goods are central to the story, since these excessively devoted servants provide benefits the ruler values. The duke visited the dying Guan Zhong (died 645 BC), his trusted minister and the architect of Qi's hegemony. Asked for final advice, Guan Zhong immediately requested the expulsion of three courtiers, or four in another version discussed below. Shu Diao was the harem supervisor who had castrated himself to obtain the position. The cook Yi Ya had killed and cooked his own son after hearing the duke joke that human flesh was the only meat he had never tasted. Kaifang was a courtier who had not visited his parents for fifteen years. Guan Zhong argued that people who despise what is normal to human nature cannot be motivated by loyalty. Huan did not in fact dismiss them permanently, because their services were convenient: they managed his harem and supplied exquisite food. Three years later, these courtiers imprisoned and starved the sick duke to control the succession.



Guan Zhong's Final Warning

The version in the Guanzi reveals two interesting details. Kaifang belonged to Wey's ruling family, yet chose service in Qi and effectively cut himself off from his clan for fifteen years. Guan argues that someone who forgoes the opportunity to rule a large fief must expect something still more valuable. In another version, in the Lüshi chunqiu, Guan's list of suspects also included the court sorcerer Tang Wu. Guan believed that life and death were governed by fate, while a sorcerer could exploit the duke without restraint by promising unverifiable effects in the supernatural world.[94]

Fourteen hundred years later, China was ruled by Emperor Xuanzong (died 762; reigned 712–756). He reigned at the height of Tang power and prosperity, which was soon to end in a genuine cataclysm. His reign lasted forty-four years. In his youth he was an effective and capable ruler who devoted his energy to important problems: corruption, bureaucratic reform, the treasury, and irrigation canals. He expanded Chinese possessions in Central Asia, supported music and

[94] *Lüshi chunqiu: Zhi jie*, juan 16, "Zhi jie".

literature, and reduced palace spending and the number of servants.

In later life he became licentious and hedonistic, becoming famous for a vast harem. Later sources describe tens of thousands of dancers, performers, and servants in the palace who could also be used sexually at his pleasure. He also pursued poetry, music, and Daoist mysticism. From around 741, he was absorbed in courting Consort Yang, fulfilling her wishes, and composing music and poetry. Xuanzong was then about fifty-six, and she was twenty-two.[95] His authority was exercised by Chancellor Li Linfu and his successor Yang Guozhong, both regarded as corrupt and ruthless. Li Linfu excelled at retaining office and secretly destroying every rival. He introduced the idea of appointing foreigners as military governors, since they had no ties to Chinese aristocratic clans and could not threaten the emperor. In doing so, he also protected himself against rivals for his own office.

Disaster came somewhat later, and this reform contributed to it, but the greater share of responsibility lay with the jaded emperor's favoritism rather than with Li. By 751, one of these military governors, the Sogdian An Lushan, had accumulated control over three important military districts in eastern China. He was also a frequent visitor at court and an imperial favorite, thanks to calculated flattery, a facade of being a straightforward barbarian filled with admiration, and participation in the emperor's court amusements. Li Linfu's successor as chancellor was Yang Guozhong, who owed his rapid rise to his cousin, the aforementioned Consort Yang. He became known as a corrupt chancellor, politically rather incompetent, who undermined the imperial government by removing capable officials and filling offices with members of his own clique.

The underlying cause of An Lushan's rebellion was his enormous, unchecked authority over the army and

[95] Liu Xu and others. *Jiu Tang shu: Yang Guifei*, juan 51, Yang Guifei.

provinces; his quarrel with Yang Guozhong merely supplied the immediate mechanism. [96] Yang rightly suspected that An Lushan might soon rebel, but could do nothing useful with this knowledge. He eliminated some of An Lushan's supporters and tried to deprive him of his command. An Lushan openly rebelled and marched on the capital at the head of his army, ostensibly to remove Yang. The resulting great rebellion devastated the Tang state and caused enormous population losses that are difficult to estimate.[97] An Lushan briefly proclaimed himself emperor, but soon became ill and also suffered from unrestrained anger and paranoia. His son and subordinates, fearing his outbursts, murdered him in 757.



Xuanzong and An Lushan

A withdrawn, inactive ruler therefore leaves a vacuum in which ruthless subordinates and their cliques compete,

[96] Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi. *Xin Tang shu: Yang Guozhong*, juan 206, Yang Guozhong; Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi, *Xin Tang shu: An Lushan*, juan 225A, An Lushan. The biographies describe court rivalry and the concentration of military commands.

[97] Mazanec, *Poet-Monks: The Invention of Buddhist Poetry in Late Medieval China*, 236, note 15.

while his unrestrained pleasures and preferences give others effective means of influencing him.

We can readily name others who caused great harm and were overthrown because of extreme, perverse hedonism, often combined with cruelty and extravagance. We have already mentioned King Zhou of Shang (died 1046 BC), overthrown by Wu. Another withdrawn, sexually depraved, and cruel ruler was the Roman emperor Nero, who reigned from 54 to 68, when he was overthrown and committed suicide. Nero governed reasonably well for about five years under the influence of his tutor Seneca and the prefect Sextus Afranius Burrus.[98] Taxes were reduced and legal protections for slaves expanded, although Nero also arranged the murders of his mother and adoptive brother. During his final four years, he devoted himself to acting, music, perverse pleasures, and further crimes. Enormous taxes for building a vast palace, combined with his withdrawal from duty and the elite's growing contempt and outrage, soon provoked rebellions in the provinces. Isolated and terrified, Nero committed suicide as the last emperor of the dynasty of Julius Caesar and Octavian. The state descended into the political chaos known as the "Year of the Four Emperors."

Other Roman sybarites included Elagabalus (died 222) and Caligula (died 41), both of whom reigned for only four years. Caligula may consequently have been less destructive than Nero, since the prestige and effectiveness of the imperial throne suffered less damage. The Praetorians murdered him and within hours installed his uncle Claudius. Claudius was regarded as a harmless intellectual. He himself was considered a good emperor. He reigned for thirteen years and, according to one account, was poisoned by his wife Agrippina, Nero's mother mentioned above, who wanted to secure her son's accession.[99]

Another famous example was Ibrahim the Mad (died

[98] Tacitus. *The Annals*. Trans. by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb. 1876, p. 13.2.

[99] Suetonius. *The Life of Claudius*. Trans. by J. C. Rolfe, p. 44.

1648). One of the most incompetent and unstable Ottoman sultans, he was in some sense a product of ruthless Ottoman dynastic politics. In the seventeenth century, male members of the ruling family were sometimes confined in the Kafes, literally the "cage": luxurious house arrest, isolated from the world, intended to cut them off from court cliques that might plot to install a new sultan. A future monarch thus spent many years in isolation, with limited opportunities to gain experience.

Ahmed I devised the Kafes in the early seventeenth century to curb earlier sultans' practice of murdering all their brothers.[100] This practice had even been codified in fifteenth-century law. The interregnum of 1402–1413 had ended in a great civil war, and neither Islamic law nor Turkish custom supplied a rule such as "the eldest son inherits the throne": every son was a claimant. Ahmed's father, Mehmed III, murdered nineteen brothers, including small children, and the massacre caused some outrage among the public and Islamic scholars. Moreover, if a sultan died without a male descendant, the dynasty would end, bringing further chaos. Nevertheless, Ibrahim's predecessor Murad IV still murdered three brothers confined in the Kafes after the Janissaries began threatening him with a coup. Only Ibrahim, regarded as weak and sickly, survived. He nevertheless ascended the throne as the dynasty's last living descendant.

Ibrahim spent many years in the "cage," constantly fearing his brother's executioners, which may have affected his mental health. He reigned from 1640 to 1648. Like several others, he governed fairly well at first under the influence of Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa and the queen mother. In 1644, however, he killed the vizier, and his vices and paranoia came to dominate. Court cliques also manipulated him heavily. One obsession was sable fur imported from the

[100] Ekrem Buğra Ekinci. "Fratricide in Ottoman Law". In: *Belleten* 82.295 (2018), "New succession procedure in the Ottoman dynasty".

north, with which he covered walls and floors at enormous expense. Another was the intensive use of his harem and concubines. According to an unconfirmed legend, he also drowned all 280 concubines in sacks during a fit of rage. Ultimately, the enormous cost of his extravagance, promotion of corrupt favorites, military defeats, and intention to kill the Janissary leaders brought his reign to an end. The Janissaries, Islamic scholars, and queen mother joined forces to overthrow him.[101]

5.2 Pride Goes Before a Fall.

Five of the ten faults described in the Hanfeizi concern pride. Here are further examples.

> 3. The third fault is to act according to one's prejudices, insist willfully on one's own opinions, and show disrespect to other rulers, thereby bringing about one's own destruction.
>
> 8. The eighth fault is to make mistakes, reject loyal ministers' advice, and willfully insist on one's own opinion, thereby losing one's good reputation and becoming an object of ridicule.

Subordinates are needed to understand things as they are, make plans, and anticipate threats. Prejudice, stubbornness, and insistence on one's own opinions narrow one's perspective, sometimes with painful consequences. Everyone generally has a plan. Disasters arise because that plan is foolish or unrealistic, or works only under very specific circumstances and fails catastrophically under slightly different ones. This is essentially a disordered attachment to the products of one's own mind and an unwillingness to revise them, as in the proverb that everyone is satisfied with his intellect, but few with their purse.

[101] Feridun Emecen. *İbrâhim*. TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi. 2000.

Another case is insulting people who may have an advantage over us or whose help we may need. A proud person wants to "show them" when the opportunity arises. A cautious person prefers to keep his options open when doing so costs nothing.

> 5. The fifth fault is greed, stubbornness, and finding all happiness in personal gain, which is a source of the state's downfall and the ruler's own destruction.

Greed, stubbornness, and love of gain here probably mean putting one's own interest above everything else, a separate category from addiction to sensual pleasures and intellectual pride. Government normally acts in the interests of the state and the public. Yet that interest can be redefined and pursued so ruthlessly that the results are entirely opposite to those intended, and the height of power becomes the beginning of ruin. We will show, or have already shown, how Qin, ancient Rome, Napoleon, and the Habsburgs achieved military victories and conquests, only to choke on their gains or create dysfunctions that soon took their revenge.

Among the various strands of this process, I will mention one: a will that clothes its own interest in the language of glory, greatness, and legacy, without recoiling from systematic wrongdoing.

The final two faults apply the preceding arguments to relations between states.

> 9. The ninth fault is to overestimate one's strength and rely on assistance from foreign rulers, thereby exposing the state to the loss of part of its territory.
>
> 10. The tenth fault is for the ruler of a small state to disrespect more powerful states and reject his ministers' warnings, thereby bringing destruction upon his own dynasty.

Alliances generally serve interests. The British, for example, could fight in Portugal and Spain in 1808–1814 because they could afford a war on someone else's territory and could not afford to let Napoleon grow stronger, impose a trade blockade, and perhaps attack them next. Conversely, the Americans decided not to support France in 1793 despite an existing alliance treaty, since their young, fragile republic might not have survived it.[102]

A famous example of a small state's ruler insulting a more powerful state is Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, who ruled in 597–586 BC. The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II installed him after crushing Jehoiachin's earlier rebellion. Zedekiah was to pay tribute in return, but broke the agreement around 589 BC, provoking invasion, siege, and the deportation of the Jews to Babylon.[103] The story has a characteristically moral emphasis: the idolatry and corruption of the king and the Jewish elite were associated with arrogance even in the face of the powerful Babylonian threat.

5.3 Examples: Napoleon and the Fall of the Roman Republic

Napoleon was an outstanding general, a skilled administrator, politician, and intriguer, and a great advocate of his own advantage. Continental liberals praise him for mastering the chaos of the French Revolution, reforming the law through the Napoleonic Code, and fulfilling some aspirations for national liberation. To the British, Spaniards, Austrians, and Russians, he was the "Corsican Ogre" or the Antichrist. He never had enough conquests and wars. His

[102] United States and France. *Treaty of Alliance*. Feb. 6, 1778, articles 2 and 11–12; George Washington. *Neutrality Proclamation*. Apr. 22, 1793. The treaty was defensive; in 1793 Washington proclaimed impartiality toward the belligerent states.

[103] *Bible: 2 Kings*, 2 Kings 24:17–25:21. Zedekiah replaced Jehoiachin; the text describes the city's capture and the deportations.

army's supply system relied on continual plundering of civilians, while his regime lied, terrorized, and above all pursued total mobilization for war. The official imagery of the Emperor of the French, with the Legion of Honor, Imperial Eagles, and official propaganda, is of interest here. In 1802 Napoleon himself admitted that he needed honors because soldiers needed glory, distinctions, and rewards.[104] This accorded with his materialist and sensualist theory of management, discussed in my previous book.

Critics (such as Chateaubriand and Constant) portrayed this as an alternative cult of "glory" and "honour," serving to justify violence, plunder, and idolatrous veneration of the dictator.[105]

This interpretation also explains Napoleon's personal values, in which glory and greatness played central roles. In 1795, while still defending the Convention, he dispersed rebellious Parisians with cannon fire.[106] After several years of success, recruiting supporters, and propaganda, he could seize power and establish a dictatorship. He then conquered vast possessions in Europe. Yet his downfall was marked by contempt for opponents, provoking wars he lost, inability to compromise, and finally glaring strategic errors.

[104] Fondation Napoléon. *1802 : avril-juin*, May 1802. A statement associated with establishing the Legion of Honor.

[105] François-René de Chateaubriand. *De Buonaparte et des Bourbons*. 1814; Benjamin Constant. *De l'esprit de conquête et de l'usurpation*. 1814, Part I, Chapter V. The former portrays Napoleon as a political idol, while the latter criticizes the cult of conquest and the subordination of morality to Napoleon's interests.

[106] Fondation Napoléon. *The Coup d'État of 18 Brumaire*.



Napoleon Fires on Demonstrators in Paris, 1795

The war in Spain (1808–1814) became known as the "Spanish Ulcer." The population was enraged by the French army's plunder, cruelty, and impiety, the installation of Napoleon's brother as king, and the confiscation of Church property. Guerrilla warfare in hostile territory was difficult and costly for the French, and it also gave Wellington, commanding the British fighting alongside the Spaniards, greater opportunities. If the French concentrated for battle, guerrillas would destroy their logistics. When they dispersed across the territory, Wellington destroyed one division after another. The war proved extremely costly for the French and ultimately ended in defeat.



The Madrid Uprising, 1808

Napoleon was finally undone by the invasion of Russia, which he should never have undertaken on such terms. It unfolded much like Charles XII's campaign against Peter the Great a century earlier, only many times worse. We know that the French army based much of its logistics on systematically plundering surrounding territory, allowing Napoleon to move quickly and mobilize enormous forces. The Russians anticipated this and began destroying and burning everything the Grande Armée could eat or use for shelter. Napoleon anticipated logistical problems, but his solutions were wholly inadequate: logistics over such distances and on Russia's dirt roads were too slow and inefficient. Nevertheless, he did not turn back. Driven by his ego and conviction of superiority over his opponent, he walked into the trap, hoping for a decisive battle.

Before the campaign, Napoleon's central force numbered several hundred thousand men.[107] At Borodino, 120 kilo-

[107] Fondation Napoléon. *The Retreat*, "Retreat" and "Berezina". Troop strengths do not permit a simple calculation of deaths.

meters from Moscow, he could count on around 130,000, of whom around 30,000 were killed or wounded in battle.[108] Losses from cold, disease, hunger, and similar causes are difficult to estimate because some troops were assigned to garrisons and to protecting transport routes attacked by Cossacks and partisans. A week later, on 14 September 1812, Napoleon entered Moscow, where a large share of the buildings had burned and most inhabitants had left.[109] After five weeks he had to retreat. He had no provisions or quarters, no peace offer was forthcoming, and the Russian army lay south of Moscow, threatening to cut him off. For similar reasons he could not march on St. Petersburg either. Only ten to twenty thousand people survived the chaotic winter retreat through devastated territory under constant pressure from Russian raiding forces.

Another famous example of pride before a fall was Marcus Licinius Crassus, one of the most powerful men of the late Roman Republic. Crassus amassed a vast fortune by buying the property of citizens murdered by Sulla, buying burning properties cheaply, and taking tax-collection contracts that allowed unscrupulous collectors to plunder provincial populations. Together with Caesar and Pompey, he formed the so-called First Triumvirate. Through coordinated corruption and mutual political support, the three could subordinate most important institutions in Rome.

Crassus ultimately desired the glory of a conqueror, like his two companions, and decided to launch an unprovoked invasion of the Parthians on the eastern frontier. Yet he greatly overestimated his military abilities and wanted everything done his own way. King Artavasdes II of Armenia offered him a plan and assistance: Crassus would receive up to 46,000 soldiers if he attacked Parthia through the mountains. On paper, the plan was sound, neutralizing

[108] Fondation Napoléon. *Borodino (La Moskowa)*.

[109] Fondation Napoléon. *From the Niemen to Moscow*, letter of 20 September 1812. Napoleon wrote that three quarters of the houses had burned.

the Parthian cavalry's advantage on open ground and securing supply lines. Impatient and wanting all the glory for himself, Crassus rejected the proposal and chose to cross the hot Mesopotamian desert, exhausting and dehydrating his army. At Carrhae, he finally encountered ten thousand Parthian cavalry. He probably made another mistake by drawing his legions into a tight formation, allowing Parthian mounted archers to inflict heavy losses.[110] The Parthians captured and killed Crassus at a failed negotiating meeting. Popular tradition says they poured molten gold down his throat to mock this "statesman," driven to the end by unrestrained greed.[111]

Crassus's death ended the First Triumvirate and led to armed confrontation between Caesar and the Senate and Pompey. While alive, Crassus was the weakest triumvir politically and militarily, but his enormous fortune allowed him to support the weaker against the stronger and preserve stability.

Caesar's war with the Senate, meaning the dominant aristocratic faction of the optimates, contains three further striking episodes illustrating the same mentality among Rome's elite, which contributed substantially to the Republic's overthrow.

The senators decided to eliminate Caesar from political life, but initially there were attempts to strike a bargain and avoid another civil war. Caesar promised to disband his legions if Pompey did the same, but Pompey and the senators refused. Caesar then negotiated a proposal with Cicero: he would retain only one legion and one province, preserving his legal protection until the next consular election, so that the optimates could not immediately prosecute him. Suetonius and Plutarch give different versions of this

[110] Plutarch. *Life of Crassus*. Trans. by Bernadotte Perrin. 1916, 2, 19, and 24. Source for the stories of property purchases, Armenian assistance, and the battle against the Parthians.

[111] Plutarch, *Life of Crassus*, p. 31; Cassius Dio. *Roman History*. Trans. by Earnest Cary, p. 40.27.

offer: one legion and Illyricum, or two provinces and six thousand men.[112]

Pompey and Cicero agreed. One legion was a small force compared with the fifteen controlled by the Senate and Pompey; the entire issue concerned retaining office and postponing the threat of prosecution. Cato the Younger and Lentulus undermined the proposal, wanting Caesar tried in Rome like any citizen.[113] The optimates thus went to civil war against Caesar.

Caesar was of course no angel: he governed through mass corruption, bribing the common people with games, and terror by street thugs such as Clodius. The optimates had reasons for fear and hostility. Yet trying to solve the problem with an army was ruthless, politically costly, and extraordinarily risky. Some optimates, such as Cicero, understood this; others did not.

The second interesting episode was the battle of Pharsalus. The war was well underway, and Pompey had just driven Caesar into the Greek interior after inflicting heavy losses at Dyrrhachium. Pompey preferred to avoid a decisive battle and starve Caesar's army by cutting off its supplies, since he dominated the sea and had a logistical base.

He probably also knew that the battle might not unfold as the optimates imagined, despite their numerical advantage of more than two to one. Caesar had veterans and proven officers. Pompey had politically appointed commanders, an elite entourage beginning to treat him as a hired soldier, newly raised legions, and cavalry drawn from the aristocracy.

The taunts and pressure of arrogant senators persuaded him to change his plans. They accused him of cowardice and

[112] Suetonius. *Life of Julius Caesar*. Trans. by J. C. Rolfe, p. 29; Plutarch. *Life of Caesar*. Trans. by Bernadotte Perrin, p. 31.

[113] Suetonius, *Life of Julius Caesar*, p. 30; Plutarch, *Life of Caesar*, p. 31. Suetonius describes Cato's threats; Plutarch describes Lentulus's direct obstruction.

savoring power. Their camp believed battle was a mere formality, and they were already arguing over the distribution of spoils and offices in Rome after eliminating Caesar's supporters. Eventually, the senators made clear that Pompey's position after the war depended heavily on how quickly he ended it, and some even called for removing him from command. Unwilling to endure the Roman elite's disfavor and contempt, Pompey risked battle, which ended in a crushing defeat for the optimates.[114] Caesar won the war and established himself as dictator.



Pompey at Pharsalus

The third episode of arrogance and failure to think ahead was Caesar's murder. The optimates wanted to see this as tyrannicide in the Republic's name. The problem was that, Caesar was hardly so bad by Roman standards that killing him could be deemed necessary to defend the public good. Of course, he continued to appropriate the republican system. Yet the common people and soldiers adored him in return for games, food, Rome's "glory," farmland, and debt

[114] Plutarch. *Life of Pompey*. Trans. by Bernadotte Perrin, pp. 67–69.

reduction, while the optimates were seen instead as an oligarchy feeding on the body of the nation. Once in power, Caesar also released most political enemies, whereas they had previously fantasized about mass elimination of Caesar's supporters and the enormous sums they would gain from it. Moreover, on this reading, Caesar's path to dictatorship was eased when the plot to eliminate him failed catastrophically because of its authors' personal failings.[115]



The Assassination of Caesar

The assassination on the Ides of March was another act of the same plot, with consequences an order of magnitude more disastrous. The Senate and optimates lost their remaining public standing by showing they would do absolutely anything rather than reach an agreement or relent. At Caesar's funeral, for example, the plebs tried to burn down the houses of the conspirators Brutus and Cassius.[116] Several claimants replaced Caesar, fighting on a much greater

[115]Suetonius, *Life of Julius Caesar*, p. 30. Suetonius also discusses Caesar's earlier ambitions.

[116]Suetonius, *Life of Julius Caesar*, p. 85.

scale, staging political massacres, plundering and ruining even Italy, and ultimately dismantling republican institutions.

5.4 Yi Sun-sin's Recipe for Military Power

Yi Sun-sin, the Korean admiral and one of his country's greatest national heroes, reportedly told his forces on the eve of the battle in the Myeongnyang Strait:

> Those who seek death will live. Those who seek life will die.[117]

The occasion was fitting. Yi, only just reinstated after a series of defeats under an incompetent royal favorite, had only twelve or thirteen ships against a great Japanese fleet.[118]



Yi Sun-sin Arrives at Camp

[117] Yi Sun-sin. *Nanjung ilgi*, juan 8, ninth month of 1597, day 15. Record of the commanders' briefing in a later collected edition of the diary.

[118] Academy of Korean Studies. *The Battle of Myeongnyang and Yi Sun-sin*. Yi's reinstatement followed the defeat of Won Gyun's forces.

He meant something like this: those who fight with desperate determination to give their lives may survive, whereas those who try to save themselves will suffer defeat and die. Yi initially fought with his own ship alone, firing on the great Japanese fleet and keeping it at a distance with the help of changing currents. Only then did his subordinates join him, encouraged by his effectiveness, and the Korean fleet won a great victory. About thirty Japanese ships were wrecked, and one Japanese commander was also killed.[119]



The Battle of Myeongnyang

The lesson is that a good commander can sacrifice his own life as he sacrifices the lives of his subordinates. He can take risks and win where others would withdraw from battle. His example also strengthens his subordinates.

Horatio Nelson won at Trafalgar in a similar way. Aggressive initiative in battle and courage had already built his reputation and career. At Trafalgar he sailed at the head of his

[119]Yi Sun-sin, *Nanjung ilgi*, juan 8, ninth month of 1597, day 16. Yi's account mentions thirty wrecked vessels and his calls for subordinates to join the fighting.

fleet perpendicular to the enemy's line, inflicting enormous damage in exchanges of fire at close range. This was extremely dangerous, and Nelson himself died that day from a French marksman's bullet. The British nevertheless won a crushing victory, losing no ships while capturing or sinking twenty-two.[120]



The Battle of Trafalgar

Let us return briefly to Napoleon, whom I described as pursuing his own interests. Napoleon too repeatedly took daring risks, but as head of state he also gave high priority to his own survival, which limited his options in battle. In October 1812, two battles took place at Tarutino and Maloyaroslavets. In the first, the Russians defeated the French advance guard. In the second, Napoleon and Kutuzov fought with only part of their armies, resulting in a French tactical victory. Napoleon nevertheless did not exploit it to obtain the decisive battle he had sought since the beginning of the campaign. He neither pressed Kutuzov's army

[120] Katherine Gazzard. *Turner's The Battle of Trafalgar*. Royal Museums Greenwich, "The cultural significance of the Battle of Trafalgar".

further nor committed his full strength, although breaking through southward might have greatly improved his position through warmer weather and opportunities to plunder provisions. Napoleon, however, was visibly ill, lacked cavalry and scouts, leaving him vulnerable to surprise, and did not want to commit his elite Imperial Guard. He chose retreat through the devastated Smolensk corridor. This ended in his army's destruction, but Napoleon himself reached the vicinity of Grodno in relative safety and left the remnants of his army at Smorgoni in a carriage, traveling incognito to Paris.[121] As ruler of an empire covering over two million square kilometers, he had much to lose in the cold Russian wilderness. The enraged Russians might well have killed him rather than negotiated his retirement with Talleyrand; Napoleon carried a vial of poison to avoid being captured by them.



Napoleon's Dilemma

[121] Fondation Napoléon, *The Retreat*, "Leaving Moscow" and "The Incredible Ride".

6 Political Rationality

How do Asian scholars reach their conclusions? They use two key tools.

The first is the study of purposes and intentions. This resembles the tool I discussed in the previous book. Physical reality, ordered in time and governed by causal relationships, poses a central question: how do earlier facts and phenomena lead to future effects? Asking about this ordering allows us to consider a sound scientific theory, a worthy purpose for human life, and an effective social system.

The second tool is recursive reasoning about other people's intentions and beliefs. People think about what others think, including what others think about their own thinking. On this basis they predict others' behavior and draw conclusions that no one has explicitly presented to them.

6.1 The Priority of Purpose According to Mencius

Mencius is a master of the first approach. It enables him, as early as the fourth and third centuries BC, to teach about universal human dignity, rulers' accountability to their subjects, and the priority of the common good over rulers' interests. In doing so, he avoids an important flaw found, for example, in Aristotle's ethics: treating existing social structures as natural and therefore good. Aristotle regards slavery as natural and assigns the greatest moral value to an idle aristocracy. He argues that this is how nature is ordered [122], making the evidence conform to that assumption.

Mencius lives in a time of war, exploitation, and chaos, yet refuses to call this condition orderly or natural. Nor does he advocate hereditary aristocracy as Confucius does. In passage 6A8, he directly answers a similar objection. Mount Niu was once covered in a great, luxuriant forest. People

[122] Aristotle. *Politics*, pp. I, 5–6; Aristotle. *Politics*, pp. VII, 9.

cut down the forest, however, and cattle and sheep ate the vegetation. Eventually only bare rock and barren soil remained. Seeing this, people assumed it was the mountain's nature. This was a mistake: rain and new shoots allowed the forest to regenerate, but people and animals kept destroying that growth.

Human nature, Mencius says, is similar. People are capable of nobility and constantly prompted toward it by moral "beginnings." Yet deliberately choosing wickedness and self-interest, as well as harsh living conditions, can repeatedly destroy these capacities. A person's duty is to cultivate the beginnings of nobility; the state's duty is to provide the order necessary for normal life.

Today it is easy to see the force of this argument. One need not possess exceptional virtue to reject slavery and the idleness of elites. It is enough to recognize the waste of resources and human potential, and the injustice of a system in which some receive great rewards while others suffer harsh repression without substantial justification.

To reconstruct Mencius's conclusions, however, we must give the study of purposes priority over categories, analogies, and other forms of argument. This also applies to a supposed empiricism that professes fidelity to facts while drawing conclusions based on undisclosed assumptions.

We have already cited examples. In 1B8, King Xuan of Qi asks Mencius whether a minister may kill a ruler. Mencius replies that he has heard of the execution of an ordinary man, Zhou (纣), but has not heard of a ruler being killed. Zhou was the last king of the Shang dynasty, in the eleventh century BC. He was regarded as a wicked tyrant, overthrown by Wu, founder of the Zhou dynasty (周). The names 纣 and 周 are different words, pronounced with different tones: Zhòu and Zhōu.

The Zhou dynasty formally ruled China for more than six hundred years, and Qi's rulers were its vassal dukes. Xuan's father rejected this supremacy and proclaimed himself an independent king (wang). Mencius thus recalls how Zhou

gained the power subsequently regarded as legitimate for centuries. A tyrant ceases to be a king in the moral sense because he acts against the purpose of his office. He can therefore be punished for his crimes like an ordinary bandit. Merely possessing power or belonging to a legitimate dynasty does not change this. These are circumstances that may accompany holding office, as when a son succeeds his father, but they do not replace its purpose.

In 1A7, King Xuan decides to spare an ox intended for sacrifice when he sees its terror. Mencius points out that the king's compassion demonstrates his capacity for nobility. The purpose of compassion is benevolence. The king should therefore direct it properly and extend it to his suffering subjects. This argument appeals to purpose: misfortunes arouse compassion, which prompts assistance. Through properly directed compassion, a person can remedy some misfortunes and achieve nobility himself.

In 1B6, Mencius tries to persuade Xuan to acknowledge that a king is accountable for his duties like anyone else. He gives the examples of an unreliable friend with whom one should break and an incompetent judge who should be removed from office. Finally, he asks what should be done if the entire kingdom is badly governed. The analogy works because it appeals to a shared purpose: mechanisms of accountability are meant to maintain social order. Either the king too will be subject to them, or the kingdom will decline.

6.2 Recursive Reasoning about Intentions

Asian political thought often considers what other people think and believe. It also takes account of their beliefs about still other people's beliefs: what people think about what others think, and so on. Repeating reasoning at successive levels is what we call recursion here. Accurately predicting others' expectations and beliefs allows prudent decisions and effective government.

Here are several examples. *Hanfeizi* 10 recounts the

story of the commander Zhibo, who besieged the Zhao clan's leader at Jinyang for three years after he refused to surrender the land demanded. Zhibo had the support of two other clans, Han and Wei. Eventually he flooded the fortress with water from a nearby river. At the same time, his arrogant comments made the Han and Wei leaders fear that he would conquer them next. Zhang Mengtan, an adviser serving Zhao Xiangzi, recognized this possibility. He slipped out of the fortress and went to the Han and Wei commanders with this message:

The following speech is a loose paraphrase.

> "I have heard that when the lips are gone, the teeth grow cold (唇亡齿寒). Today Zhi Bo has led you both to attack Zhao. If the Zhao family falls today, tomorrow will surely be your families' turn. Instead of helping a tyrant destroy us only to become his victims yourselves, we should unite our forces, support one another like lips and teeth, save our families together, and destroy Zhi Bo."

The Han and Wei leaders agreed to an alliance. They breached the dikes to flood Zhibo's army, then attacked it by surprise and destroyed it completely.



Zhibo at Jinyang

In *Analects* 12.18, Ji Kangzi complains about widespread theft. Confucius replies that if he himself abandoned greed, the people would not steal. As an authority figure, a ruler influences the standards of success his subjects recognize. If he is greedy, they too begin pursuing money. Similarly, in *Hanfeizi* 14, if corruption goes unpunished and provides a comfortable life, it becomes a rational career path. Others see that the corrupt prosper and face no danger.

In 1A7 and 1A3, Mencius contrasts the vicious circle of tyranny with the mutual reinforcement of care for subjects and their loyalty. Poverty caused by exploitation drives people toward desperation and crime. When repression follows, the people lose their remaining trust, and order deteriorates further. Security and the satisfaction of basic needs, meanwhile, allow people to live peacefully and support their families. Under these conditions, they can also more readily feel responsible for the state.

6.3 The Main Aspects of Recursive Reasoning

6.3.1 A Recursive Theory of Interests

Political order endures when society shapes interests, status, and expectations so that cooperation and obedience reinforce one another. A stable equilibrium then emerges. Civilizations decline, however, when incentives favor corruption, disloyalty, and predation. This can trigger a chain reaction in which actions that deepen disorder become increasingly profitable for individuals.

If a competent and loyal official receives rewards and recognition, others gain an incentive to imitate him and perform their duties better. They may be motivated by prestige, material benefits, or the conviction that noble conduct is an attractive way of life. Similarly, impunity for corrupt and treacherous people undermines the system's credibility and makes corruption look like a profitable career strategy.

6.3.2 Second-Order Social Coordination

As social beings, people naturally consider what others think and expect. They adapt their behavior to what others usually approve, reward, imitate, or punish. They also seek to cooperate with like-minded people to make their joint actions more effective.

People seeking prestige, for example, use recognizable signs of status: formal dress, luxury goods, refined manners, or membership in particular circles. Subordinates also select the information and advice they give superiors partly by predicting what will receive approval or reward.

6.3.3 Institutions Coordinate Behavior

A central task of politics is to design institutions that direct ordinary human motivations toward actions beneficial to society.

A constitutional republic, for example, establishes mechanisms for holding those in power accountable and transferring government peacefully. These are intended to restrain violent struggles for power and abuses by officials. A market economy, in turn, is seen as a mechanism for increasing efficiency: entrepreneurs compete by supplying profitable products and seeking to use resources ever more efficiently.

Every institution thus favors, strengthens, and perpetuates particular kinds of character, strategies, and standards of conduct. A corrupt court facilitates flatterers' careers and the growth of cliques. A well-managed court promotes competence, loyalty, and a sense of public duty.

6.3.4 Legitimacy and Positional Power

The two tools discussed—the study of purposes and recursive reflection on intentions and beliefs—lead to two concepts concerning the nature of power.

Mencius and Confucius address the problem of legitimacy: to what extent a ruler can demand obedience as a moral duty of his subjects.

Han Fei and the Fajia school concentrate instead on positional power: to what extent the ruler's position, social relationships, and institutional mechanisms secure compliance and the execution of orders.

Both factors are necessary. A sense of duty alone is insufficient for government, since many people do not act from it. Coercion and benefits, in turn, cannot control everything.

6.3.5 The Dilemma of Delegation

Han Fei's theory of xing-ming describes a mechanism for effective delegation. Clearly defined offices, established goals, and accountability for results allow a ruler to retain control over a subordinate's actions without excessive effort and, above all, without granting the subordinate independent power.

Every act of delegation weakens the superior's direct control. When a minister controls resources, those who need them depend on him and must cooperate on his terms. A faction can thereby promote supporters to office and destroy independent officials by sabotaging their work. Moreover, entrusting someone with distributing goods immediately earns him recognition among the beneficiaries. In the *Book of Maccabees*, the corrupt high priest Jason sends another Hellenized Jew, Menelaus, with a bribe to King Antiochus Epiphanes. Menelaus, however, promises the king a larger sum, receiving Jason's office in return.[123]

Han Fei cites the example of the treacherous minister Tian Chang of Qi. Tian Chang distributed grain to the needy, winning popular recognition. This enabled him to murder the duke and seize power. Han Fei presents an extreme case here: delegating a relatively innocent task and apparent benevolence make a coup possible.

Rujia answers this example differently: if the government does not care for the people, the people do not care for the government. There is then no moral justification for loyalty to the ruler. Someone whom the people regard as more trustworthy and favorable to the common good can exploit this absence. If subjects care about their ruler, however, regicide becomes very costly for its perpetrators. Any opponent can challenge them, gain support, and obstruct their actions. The same mechanism can work against the reigning ruler when subjects have grounds to consider him a usurper. This is how Chen Sheng challenged Qin: he invoked the name of Prince Fusu, whom Li Si and Zhao Gao had deprived of the throne.[124]

Han Fei cannot solve this problem without falling into excessive suspicion, since any useful initiative can then be seen as an attempt to seize power. In *Hanfeizi* 7, Zhao of

[123] USCCB. *2 Maccabees*, 4:23–26. Menelaus outbid Jason by three hundred talents of silver.

[124] Sima Qian, *Shiji: Chen She shijia*, p. 48. The rebels exploited popular uncertainty about Fusu's death.

Han sentences a courtier to death for covering him with a cloak while he slept drunk. The courtier was responsible for the ruler's headgear rather than his robes, and had therefore exceeded his office's scope. Fajia thus tries to solve its central paradox through widespread coercion and punishment. This suppresses loyal subordinates' initiative, however, and encourages flight or rebellion if remaining in office exposes them to repression.

6.3.6 Positional Power and Legitimacy in a Crisis

Crises test the state's effectiveness. In France, the public finance crisis of the 1780s was one factor leading to revolution. Qin's collapse was preceded by a succession crisis: corrupt ministers murdered Fusu and replaced him with a compliant prince. The fall of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, culminating in the partitions of 1772–1795, was the culmination of factional struggles, the concentration of power and wealth among magnates, and their betrayal in favor of neighboring powers.

In every crisis, the position of those in power weakens to some degree. Ordinary orders and prerogatives become less effective or insufficient for the necessary radical action. In the 1780s, for example, the king of France and his successive ministers could not force through greater tax burdens in the face of resistance, riots, and rebellions.

Punishments and rewards allow control over subordinates only when they believe these will actually be administered and the expected balance of gains and losses is more favorable than the alternatives. These conditions usually hold in orderly times, when the government retains a monopoly on the use of force, but may disappear in a deep crisis. Officials and commanders then delay action to avoid risking their lives in defense of a collapsing system or to await a more favorable turn of events[125]. Sometimes they choose

[125] An interesting question is why Józef Piłsudski ("Ziuk") submitted his

flight or betrayal to increase their own gains.

Strong legitimacy thus provides a safeguard: some subordinates will defend the state on their own initiative, independently of rewards and punishments.

7 Why Christianity Needs Asian Philosophy

7.1 Cultivating Nobility as a Shared Goal

The relationship between Catholicism and Confucianism is particularly important here. First, the saints and Doctors of the Church repeatedly express the view that human problems can ultimately be resolved only through the sanctification of souls.

For example, St. John Chrysostom writes in his *Homilies on the Statues*, 17:

> "The virtue and piety of its inhabitants: these are a city's dignity, adornment, and defense."[126]

Rerum Novarum states:

> "The chief thing needed is to restore Christian morality. Without this, all the plans and measures of the wisest will come to nothing."[127]

In the *Summa theologiae*, II–II, q. 23, a. 8, St. Thomas calls charity the form of the virtues (*forma virtutum*). Charity directs the exercise of the other virtues toward humanity's ultimate end.[128] Here Thomas also follows St. Paul (1

resignation on 12 August 1920 and subsequently delayed the attack by the force entrusted to him. What would have happened if Rozwadowski had lost the battle?

[126] John Chrysostom. *Homily 17 on the Statues*, pp. 17, 12–14.

[127] Leo XIII. *Rerum novarum*. May 15, 1891, p. 62. The conclusion of the discussion of the condition of workers.

[128] Thomas Aquinas. *Summa theologiae*, II–II, q. 23, a. 8. Charity directs acts of virtue toward the ultimate end.

Corinthians 13). This is therefore the central goal of human life, directly determining whether we attain happiness after death.

As means of attaining nobility, the Church recommends practicing piety, love of one's neighbor, and humility, trusting God's will, and fulfilling one's vocation: see, for example, St. Francis de Sales's *Introduction to the Devout Life*. It also requires people to acknowledge and abandon their sins.[129]

These recommendations closely resemble those of classical Confucianism, which calls on the noble person to practice moral sincerity, benevolence, reverence for Heaven, and fidelity to one's vocation.

The following close parallels therefore emerge:

- humility and conversion correspond to moral sincerity and the proper direction of the heart;
- piety corresponds to reverence for Heaven;
- charity corresponds to benevolence, or humanity;
- God's will corresponds to the Mandate of Heaven.

Humanity (*ren*) in the *Mengzi* clearly resembles the Catholic definition: it involves wanting everyone to attain the proper goal of life, including a dignified existence, the fulfillment of their duties, and the cultivation of nobility.

Classical Confucianism, as a philosophical tradition, is therefore closer to Catholicism than many other philosophies available in Europe. The ancient and medieval Church borrowed certain explanations and theories from Plato and Aristotle, for example. Yet their moral views conflicted with Christianity, as various Church Fathers pointed out, including St. John Chrysostom in *On St. Babylas, Against Julian and the Pagans*. The central disagreement concerned

[129] Francis de Sales. *Introduction to the Devout Life*, pp. I, 3. Devotion should correspond to the duties of each vocation.

virtue. The Greco-Roman ideal was a cultivated and respected aristocrat who achieved social and political success, won military glory, or practiced philosophy. Strict morals, righteousness, loyalty, and prudence had some place in this ideal, but worldly success received excessive emphasis, without love of one's neighbor, faith in God, or repentance for sin.

The moral philosophy of ancient China differed through the strong influence of natural theism. The missionary Matteo Ricci, now a Venerable Servant of God, noticed this Catholic–Confucian connection when he arrived in China in the sixteenth century. Studying the Confucian classics, he discovered that Rujia had emerged from the ancient theism prevailing in China around 1000 BC. We will present his arguments in the following section.

7.2 Confucianism in Catholic Fundamental Theology

Fundamental theology examines the rational grounds of Christianity: that God exists, that the soul is immortal, that Christianity is true revelation, and so on. My previous books addressed such questions indirectly, through Duhem's thesis about the origins of physics in theology, miracles, and teleological philosophy, of which classical Asian philosophy is itself a branch.

In practice, however, such answers rarely suffice to bring someone to faith. People more often seek quite different answers. They want to manage their lives and believe those lives will have meaning despite the passage of time, disappointments, and misfortunes. An offer along the lines of "believe and give up various things we consider sinful, or go to hell" hardly encourages them: it seems to add problems rather than solve them. Catholicism has its own virtue ethics, but does not make this a central focus of its teaching.

It may be easier to begin by working through a purely rational philosophy that tells you to cultivate nobility and seek

and fulfill your vocation in the service of others. This can help you find peace, strength, and a life well lived. Yet no European philosophy will give you quite that answer. Aristotle and the Stoics offer somewhat distorted versions. A whole range of modern thinkers offer no such answer at all; more than half concern themselves with refuting it, including Voltaire, Nietzsche, Freud, Russell, and others. Rujia philosophy can help here because it has much to say about moral cultivation and its role in society.

A second important question concerns institutions and politics. In its early centuries, Catholicism existed in unofficial communities that established far more equal and moral social relations than those of Greco-Roman state paganism.[130] It then became Europe's dominant religion for almost 1,500 years, but some events during that period inspire little admiration. The Church's participation in feudalism, its tolerance of elite brutality and exploitation, religious wars and persecution, and similar abuses require some explanation.

The problem is probably complex. One important aspect, however, is how rarely Christian ethics was applied to building institutions and exercising power. The Church concentrated on life after death, while many of its institutions became integrated into the feudal system. It therefore focused on firmly condemning excesses and moral failings, and less often on restructuring secular government.

Scholastics and other medieval clergy sometimes participated in attempts at reform. One example is England's Magna Carta of 1215, in whose creation Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, played an important role.[131] Bishop Robert Grosseteste, an eminent thirteenth-century scholar and scholastic philosopher, participated in constitutional opposition to Henry III and influenced the cir-

[130] Justin Martyr. *First Apology*, p. 67. Justin describes collective assistance to orphans, widows, the sick, and prisoners.

[131] David Carpenter. "Archbishop Langton and Magna Carta". In: *The English Historical Review* 126.522 (2011), pp. 1041–1065. Historians debate the extent of Langton's contribution.

cle of later reformers.[132] An earlier example was the Peace of God, a movement begun in the late tenth century whose councils sought to restrict private warfare, plunder, and violence by feudal magnates against defenseless people.[133] Some church dignitaries also supported urban self-government, limiting the arbitrary power of local lords. These initiatives did not bring political relations under the lasting authority of Christian ethics. Their influence on political life declined after the fourteenth century, although important examples of reformist thought continued to appear, including Paweł Włodkowic, Bartolomé de las Casas, and certain Spanish scholastics.[134]

Asian philosophy concentrates strongly on the relationship between ethics, institutional design, and the exercise of power, making it a valuable addition here. The following essays attempt to explain parts of the history of early modern Catholic states on this basis.

7.3 The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven

In 1582, the Jesuit Matteo Ricci arrived in China intending to undertake missionary work. He initially encountered considerable difficulties, but his scientific abilities and acquired

[132] Robert Grosseteste. "Letter to Eleanor of Provence". In: *Roberti Grosseteste episcopi quondam Lincolniensis epistolae*. Ed. by Henry Richards Luard. London, 1861, pp. 310–311, no. 103, pp. 310–311; Philippa Hoskin. "Robert Grosseteste, natural law and Magna Carta. National and universal law in 1253". In: *International Journal of Regional and Local History* 10.2 (2015), pp. 120–132. Grosseteste called for an end to royal abuses; in 1253 he drew up episcopal complaints invoking natural law and charters of liberties.

[133] Council of Charroux. *Peace of God*, canons 1–3. The Council of Charroux in 989 protected, among others, the property of the poor and unarmed clergy.

[134] Stanislaus F. Belch. *Paulus Vladimiri and His Doctrine Concerning International Law and Politics*. Vol. 2. The Hague: Mouton, 1965, vol. II, pp. 799–801, 808, Saevientibus I.2 and I.9. At the Council of Constance, Włodkowic defended non-Christians' rights to property and sovereignty and the voluntary acceptance of faith.

knowledge of Chinese writing and philosophy enabled him to win the trust of Confucian scholars.



Matteo Ricci Explains Geometry

In 1603, he published *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (*Tianzhu Shiyi*) in Chinese. It sought to explain to Confucian philosophers the basic Christian teachings about God, the immortal soul, life after death, nobility, and related matters.[135] Ricci appealed to their own philosophy. The book succeeded and was among the works read by Korean scholars, among whom a Catholic community began to form in the late eighteenth century.[136]

Among Ricci's arguments is the following: the oldest Rujia writings, dating from more than a thousand years before our era, testify to belief in the "Supreme Lord," Shang Di. The Supreme Lord received the highest reverence of all deities and governed the world and human society, requiring nobility and hating wrongdoing. The English translators

[135] Dicastero delle Cause dei Santi. *Matteo Ricci*.

[136] Don Baker. "The Korean Catholic Church's First Hundred Years". In: *Acta Koreana* 15.1 (2012), pp. 1–14.

of *Tianzhu Shiyi* (*The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Introduction, part 6)[137] explain that Shang Di was also associated with the noble ancestors of aristocratic clans, who lived in heaven with him and influenced earthly affairs. They also state that after the Zhou dynasty took power, another, more impersonal term was introduced: Heaven (Tian). For a time, Tian and Shang Di were used interchangeably, until Tian became practically dominant. Ricci and his associates were thus "convinced that they had found the traces of early theism they were seeking" (ibid.). The term Tian soon became "attractive" when the missionaries arrived in China, because it "was widely used in a manner similar to the word Heaven as sometimes used in the West, that is, Providence" (ibid.).

Below we reproduce Ricci's list of passages from the Rujia classics concerning the Supreme Lord. According to Ricci, they point to a personal God resembling the Christian God.[138]

The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven, 2.104–108.

The Doctrine of the Mean (*Zhongyong*), chapter 19:

> "The sacrificial rites to Heaven and Earth serve to worship the Supreme Lord."

The Book of Songs (*Shijing*):

> "Mighty was King Wu; none equaled the greatness of his deeds. How glorious were Kings Cheng and Kang! The Supreme Lord exalted them."

The Book of Songs, "Chen Gong":

> "How splendid are the wheat and barley! Soon we shall gather their abundant harvest. May the

[137] Matteo Ricci. *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*. Ed. by Thierry Meynard. Trans. by Douglas Lancashire and Peter Kuo-chen Hu. Chestnut Hill, MA: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2016, Introduction, part 6.

[138] Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, II, §104, note 145; Zhu Xi. *Zhongyong zhangju*. Wikisource, p. 19. Ricci argues against Zhu Xi's explanation here.

> Supreme Lord, radiant in glory, grant us a fruitful year."

The Book of Songs, "Changfa":

> "Tang did not delay in humbling himself before the worthy, and his wisdom and reverence grew each day. His understanding and generosity extended to all; he reverently served the Supreme Lord. The Supreme Lord entrusted him with dominion over the nine regions."

The Book of Songs, "Da Ming":

> "Here was King Wen, ever watchful and reverent, diligently serving the Supreme Lord, and therefore receiving many blessings."

The Book of Rites (*Liji*), "Record of Exemplary Conduct" ("Biao Ji"):

> "The Son of Heaven personally tills the soil to prepare grain for the sacrifices and fragrant black-millet wine, with which he honors the Supreme Lord. Therefore the princes diligently assist the Son of Heaven in fulfilling his duties."

The Book of Documents (*Shujing*), "The Oath of Tang" ("Tang Shi"):

> "The house of Xia has committed offenses. I fear the Supreme Lord and therefore dare not refrain from punishing it."

The Book of Documents, "The Announcement of Tang" ("Tang Gao"):

> "The great Supreme Lord endowed the people with a sense of what is right, so that humanity possesses an enduring moral nature. The ruler's task is to provide conditions in which people can follow a path consistent with that nature."

The Book of Documents, “The Metal-Bound Coffer” (“Jin Teng”):

> “For he received a mandate at the court of the Supreme Lord to extend his protection to all four quarters of the world.”[139]

7.4 The Empire on Which the Sun Set

The Habsburg Empire was the world’s greatest power between 1516 and 1648, from Charles V’s accession in Spain, after which he also inherited Austria and obtained the imperial crown, to the end of the Thirty Years’ War, which devastated the German Empire.[140]

Its power developed through the expulsion of Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula, the Reconquista, and the establishment of the first overseas colonies in America and East Asia. Yet the Reconquista also helped create some of the institutional failings that later brought the empire down. Propaganda defeats arising from brutal slavery played a role in this decline. The atrocities were real, although accounts often distorted them while overlooking equally brutal Protestant slavery.

To mobilize lords and knights against the Muslims, the ruler offered them conquered lands together with their inhabitants, who would then owe compulsory labor. In return, the lords paid a sum agreed in advance, providing the Crown with immediate revenue. The system obviously allowed lords to build their own centers of power, but it was relatively stable by contemporary standards. The Crown retained control over the arrangement, and existing laws and customs regulated the subjects’ obligations. Moreover, es-

[139] Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, II, §§104–108. Passages collected from Ricci; working translation.

[140] Schloß Schönbrunn Kultur- und Betriebsgesellschaft. *Charles V*; Universität Wien. *Kaiser Karl V.*. Charles’s inheritance accumulated in stages; Austria passed to him in 1519.

tates were treated as long-term possessions. Established tradition thus kept the system functioning reasonably well.

During the age of exploration and colonial conquest, this feudal system was transferred to the colonies, giving rise to the *encomiendas*. The consequences were brutal and tragic: exhausting forced labor contributed to the deaths of Indigenous people.

A similar delegation of authority lay behind the mechanism: encomenderos received colonial privileges entitling them to services and tribute from Indigenous communities.[141] Several harmful factors compounded this arrangement, including weak supervision from the center and personnel often drawn from adventurers and brutal criminals seeking the largest possible immediate profits. The encomenderos themselves were generally high dignitaries who hired adventurers to manage their estates in return for a share of the profits. The most ruthless criminals were often the most effective at this business. Torture and kidnapping, for example, were common ways to extract the greatest possible benefits from Indigenous chiefs. Successive emperors and Spanish kings tolerated the practice while obtaining large quantities of silver and gold from it. The colonies were gradually regulated during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including through the New Laws of 1542, which initially provoked a revolt by the encomenderos. The system increasingly resembled state-administered compulsory labor, but remained brutal and carried a high death toll, as in the highly profitable silver mines of Peru.

The encomienda system took this form because of a central organizational failing: the Habsburg monarchy continually lacked cash because of its constant wars. Maximilian I even planned to make himself pope to obtain money.[142]

[141] Archivo General de Indias. *Concesiones y Confirmaciones de Encomiendas*. Grants regulated subjects' obligations; they did not simply confer ownership of land and people.

[142] Schloß Schönbrunn Kultur- und Betriebsgesellschaft. *Maximilian and*

Their territories were attacked by the Turks, French, and English, among others, and had to fight them. Yet Philip II, who inherited Spain and the Netherlands from Charles V, also tended to seek wars and disorder where they were largely unnecessary. The Eighty Years' War in the Netherlands, also known as the Dutch ulcer, is one example.

Philip inherited the Netherlands as one of Europe's richest and most developed provinces. A political and religious crisis became a prolonged rebellion that he could neither suppress nor end. This does not necessarily mean that military intervention itself was wrong. In 1566, supporters of Protestantism unleashed brutal riots and uncontrolled vandalism. Hundreds of Catholic churches were ruined and desecrated, with valuable art and relics destroyed. This was regarded as criminal violence and a challenge to the ruler.

The problem was that Philip launched a campaign of mass terror instead of punishing the rioters and their supporters alone. First, the military administration of Fernando de Toledo, Duke of Alba, sentenced about a thousand citizens to death, or rather killed them. They included wealthy Catholic aristocrats loyal to Philip's government.

The most distinguished were the counts of Egmont and Horn. Both were knights of the prestigious Habsburg Order of the Golden Fleece. Lamoral, Count of Egmont, was a war hero who had won two important battles against the French for Philip, securing his European hegemony. In 1566, Lamoral also used his troops to stop Protestant riots. They were executed essentially for opposing the Inquisition and calling for religious compromise.[143]

---

the Emperorship.

[143] Rijksmuseum. *The Beheading of Egmont and Horne*. The execution took place on 5 June 1568; the formal charges were treason and support for Protestants.



Count Egmont Captured by Alba

Fernando de Toledo may have been an outstanding general, but he and Philip also carried out one of the most outrageous and irrational political acts in the eyes of Europe's contemporary elite. Had he merely murdered and plundered many thousands of townspeople, as we will discuss shortly, he might have escaped the consequences. Europe, however, was a world of aristocrats, feudal privileges, and family connections. Lamoral came from the wealthy Flemish aristocracy, and his mother belonged to a collateral branch of the House of Luxembourg, which had ruled the German Empire, Bohemia, Brandenburg, and Hungary during the Middle Ages. In 1566, as one of the most distinguished aristocrats, Lamoral sat on the Council of State of Flanders alongside Horn and William of Orange. His death therefore immediately discredited Philip's regime. Suddenly loyalty, service, office, honors, wealth, and family connections counted for nothing against a tyrant's violence. This was especially striking when the victim was a distinguished minister seeking to negotiate peace and raising reasonably rational objections. Emperor Maximilian II, German princes,

and other knights of the Golden Fleece sought Lamoral's release; his wife was the sister of the Elector Palatine.

De Toledo probably hoped to eliminate political opposition and frighten the remaining nobility at the same time, demonstrating that nobody was untouchable. Instead, he destroyed the possibility of compromise and the legitimacy of Spanish rule in the Netherlands.

He also committed other injustices: confiscating estates, deliberately organizing civilian massacres to terrorize other cities into obedience, and imposing an unsustainable tax. He levied 10% on every sale, which may not seem much.[144] VAT, for example, can now reach 23%, alongside other taxes. But VAT allows businesses to deduct tax charged at earlier stages of trade. The Dutch economy relied on importing raw materials, repeated sales, processing, and exporting finished goods. A merchant might buy wool from importers and sheep farmers and sell it to weavers, who made cloth. Dyers bought the cloth, dyed it, and sold it to tailors. The tailors made coats and shirts, which went to customers or exporters. The whole process could suddenly face a tax burden of 50% or more, making it impossible to earn a living. The tax met with widespread boycott, and Alba withdrew it in 1572.

The worst was still to come. Philip II went bankrupt in 1575, when the enormous cost of the army in the Netherlands exceeded the proceeds from colonial silver.[145] Genoese bankers cut off his credit, temporarily leaving the army unpaid and often without supplies. The enraged tercios responded with organized mutinies and the brutal sack of Antwerp. Political crisis and the plundering of Dutch

[144] William of Orange. *Apology*. 1581, The King's Responsibility for the Tenth Penny. William of Orange's defense documents the political dispute over the tax.

[145] Mauricio Drelichman and Hans-Joachim Voth. "The Sustainable Debts of Philip II". in: *The Journal of Economic History* 70.4 (2010), pp. 813–842. The suspension of payments was associated with a liquidity crisis; it did not mean permanent insolvency.

cities had occurred before, but the scale of the sack of one of Europe's richest cities and the ruthless massacre of thousands of civilians terrified the other Catholic provinces of the Netherlands. Four days later, an agreement already under preparation was concluded with the Protestant rebels, demanding the expulsion of all Spanish troops.[146]

This discredited Philip: while demanding unlimited power, he could not control even his own troops, who had quickly come to resemble organized and ruthless brigands. The authorities in the Catholic Netherlands obtained whatever help they could by reaching an agreement with the Protestant rebels. This illustrates Mencius's theory that benevolence, or at least meeting basic material needs and providing security, is essential to political legitimacy.

Protestants carefully exploited these events to construct a dark legend of cruelty, tyranny, and fanaticism around Philip and his subordinates, selectively overlooking the deeds of Calvinist rebels. Such is the nature of propaganda: it need not be truthful and impartial as long as it rests approximately on real grievances.

A new governor, the Italian Alexander Farnese, restored Habsburg rule in the Catholic provinces. He succeeded through negotiation and conciliation toward the Dutch, together with a series of outstanding military victories. He governed from 1578 to 1592 and even had a chance to take the whole Netherlands. Involvement in Philip II's other wars, in France and the failed invasion of England, and his loss of favor through jealous courtiers prevented these plans from being realized.

When Philip died in 1598, the Spanish Empire still possessed its greatest territorial extent. In the final decades of his reign, he fought simultaneously against France, where he sponsored civil war, the Netherlands, and England, which he unsuccessfully tried to invade by sea. These wars

[146]Estates of the Netherlands Provinces. *Pacificatie van Gent*. Nov. 8, 1576; Nationaal Archief. *Pacificatie van Gent*. The Pacification of Ghent was concluded on 8 November 1576.

brought him no gains. They left enormous debts and, above all, gave the Habsburgs a reputation as ruthless invaders and fanatical tyrants. Propaganda encouraged this reputation, but it was also largely deserved.

Subjects in Portugal and Bohemia learned that negotiating with the regime was pointless: it was better to launch a full-scale rebellion immediately and negotiate from a position of strength. Opponents regarded the Habsburgs as a ruthless existential threat to be weakened at every opportunity. This was how Cardinal Richelieu explained to French zealots in 1631 why he was financing ruthless Swedish Protestant invaders against the Catholic emperor. The Thirty Years' War of 1618–1648 ultimately devastated Germany. Swedes, French, Spaniards, and others committed mass killings, and the German Empire lost 15–20% of its population.

The Habsburgs abandoned their hopes of absolute rule in Germany but retained Austria, Bohemia, and Hungary. Spain, meanwhile, suffered a major crisis in the seventeenth century. Colonial silver shipments declined, while domestic production remained poorly developed: Philip's constant wars had left no surplus for investment. Portugal rebelled against the Habsburgs in 1640 and became independent; an unsuccessful rebellion also swept through Catalonia. The last kings of the Spanish line suffered from various ailments to which marriages between close relatives within the dynasty may have contributed. The last, Charles II, died childless in 1700. Under the influence of the French faction at court, he left the Crown to Philip of Anjou of the Bourbon dynasty, provoking the War of the Spanish Succession. England, the Netherlands, Austria, and others allied against the prospect of French–Spanish hegemony.[147]

[147] Gonzalo Alvarez, Francisco C. Ceballos, and Celsa Quinteiro. "The Role of Inbreeding in the Extinction of a European Royal Dynasty". In: *PLoS ONE* 4.4, e5174 (2009).

7.5 The Sun King

Louis XIV, the "Sun King," ruled from 1643 to 1715. France became the world's most powerful state during this period. An earlier chief minister, Cardinal Richelieu, who died in 1642, had laid the foundations of its power. More than a hundred years later, however, the French monarchy ended with the French Revolution and the Jacobin Terror, during which revolutionaries guillotined Louis XVI. The Bourbons were briefly restored in 1814–1830, interrupted by Napoleon's Hundred Days, until another revolution in July 1830.[148]

Louis XIV, Cardinal Richelieu, and Cardinal Mazarin, Richelieu's successor and Louis's chief minister and tutor, who died in 1661, shared the same main political goals. At home, they sought to control the aristocracy and feudal warlords and deprive them of political and military independence. Abroad, they sought to contain the Habsburgs and ultimately end their hegemony. From the Fajia perspective, this is entirely understandable: powerful, disloyal subordinates and their cliques are the main danger. The principal external threat is a powerful and ruthless hegemon that mobilizes its population, attacks without restraint, and can swallow smaller states one after another.[149]

France's feudal divisions developed during the Middle Ages, when younger royal sons received whole provinces as hereditary governorships. Over the centuries, these collateral branches became powerful and independent, and their disloyalty and lawlessness repeatedly harmed France. During the Hundred Years' War of 1337–1453, the powerful Duchy of Burgundy acquired power and wealth comparable to the king's. The Burgundians betrayed the king in favor of the English: they captured Joan of Arc and handed her over to the English, who killed her and helped the English take

[148] Château de Versailles. *Louis XVIII*.
[149] Château de Versailles. *Louis XIV*.

Paris.[150] Southern lords, such as those of Armagnac and Foix, freely reached agreements with either the English or Paris when it served their interests. In 1465, when Louis XI attempted to centralize power, the lords launched a major rebellion to defend their private military and political monopolies.[151] Civil wars among warlords thus devastated medieval France in much the same way as China in the fourth century BC.

These feudal factions treated ordinary people far more brutally than comparable forms of feudalism in neighboring countries. Plundering and killing the enemy's population was a major instrument of warfare. Both the retainers of feudal lords and unofficially tolerated bands of mercenaries and brigands, the Écorcheurs, engaged in it. The main problem with the knightly class was therefore its cruelty and terrible brigandage in addition to feudal burdens. Desperate, starving peasants sometimes revolted, as in the Jacquerie of 1358. Its conclusion exposed the false promises of the chivalric code. The rebel leader was ostensibly invited to negotiate, then betrayed, captured, brutally tortured, and killed. The architect of this trick, Charles II of Navarre, treated everyone similarly: during the Hundred Years' War, he repeatedly betrayed both France and England and even made several attempts to poison his sovereign, the French king. Chroniclers liked to suggest that divine punishment eventually overtook him. When Charles was gravely ill, physicians wrapped him in cloths soaked in strong alcohol. A servant accidentally set them alight, turning him into a human torch. Internal disorder intensified one last time with the Reformation and the sixteenth-century religious wars. Plundering and killing people of the opposing religion, usually itself imposed by force, suddenly lost the stigma of a

[150] Henry VI and the Royal Council. *English Records Concerning Joan of Arc*. The English council financed the trial in Rouen in 1431.

[151] Bibliothèque nationale de France. *Traité de Louis XI avec la Ligue du Bien public*. The so-called League of the Public Weal rose against Louis XI.

grave offense against love of one's neighbor.

Richelieu and Louis knew this painful lesson well, as did the people. Richelieu therefore dismantled the principal foundations of aristocratic power. The system of provincial governors who collected taxes and maintained armies themselves was replaced by a centralized system of professional officials, the intendants, recruited from the educated urban middle class. Loyal to the king and government, they performed the functions of tax collectors, police, and appellate courts in the provinces. Through a network of spies and informants, Richelieu could detect magnates' conspiracies and corruption early and effectively. He replaced traditional aristocratic courts, which generally imposed lenient punishments, with his own royal tribunals. One of the last such conspiracies during his lifetime was the plot of the Marquis de Cinq-Mars in 1642. This young royal favorite, together with Gaston, Duke of Orléans, planned to overthrow or kill Richelieu and negotiate a peace agreement with Spain. Richelieu's spies discovered the conspiracy, and Cinq-Mars was sentenced to death. Another symbolic end to the world of feudal lords was the cardinal's demolition of castles and fortresses not needed for frontier defense, together with the introduction of the death penalty for dueling.



Richelieu and the Ban on Duelling

Richelieu also ended the military and political autonomy of the Protestant opposition while pragmatically allowing the Huguenots to retain their privileges and offices and worship freely.[152]

Aristocrats simultaneously received new career opportunities, but these remained under court control. Intendants and other officials handled the everyday administrative functions that became dangerous in a provincial governor's hands: punishment, adjudication, taxation, and the appointment and payment of subordinates. The army and its officer corps, the royal court, and the most prestigious positions as ambassadors, diplomats, and colonial viceroys remained the aristocracy's domain. Louis XIV understood very well that the power to reward and punish should emanate from the throne. The splendor and pleasures of Versailles therefore also provided a mechanism for shaping and

[152] Armand Jean du Plessis Richelieu. *Political Testament*, Reason and Government; Musée protestant. *Les dernières guerres de religion*. Richelieu's testament presents his program of government; the Peace of Alès abolished the Huguenots' military autonomy.

selecting compliant subordinates. They lived there and did everything they could to please the king in return for some privilege or position. Becoming an ambassador, for example, gave a candidate access to Europe's greatest luxury and considerable social prestige. It also made him entirely dependent on the royal treasury and therefore loyal. Army officers had to follow orders; their positions depended on royal and governmental favor, and their subordinates were loyal to the Crown rather than the feudal hierarchy.



Louis XIV at Versailles

These were the mechanisms of early modern French power. By Fajia principles, Richelieu would probably qualify as a good statesman for so skillfully dismantling feudal disorder and arbitrary power. Yet Richelieu, Louis XIV, and their successors did not carry this work far enough. The new system still contained hereditary privileges, abuses of power, and patronage. Even His Red Eminence himself had to rely on an extensive network of clients. Officials, generals, and courtiers could therefore continue to accumulate independent power. Armand Richelieu naturally had

many powerful enemies and had to work with existing power structures. Continuing the reform fell to successors who did not always meet the challenge.

One serious problem was allowing the bureaucracy itself to expand and develop its own power faction, also supported by Jansenism, a Catholic heresy resembling Calvinism. Bureaucrats could not openly oppose Louis XIV while he lived, but Jansenism spread through informal groups as officials accumulated hereditary prerogatives, connections, and clients.

The problem was not simply that a bureaucratic center of power had emerged. The bureaucrats became parasites much as the aristocracy had before them. They might be skillful in handling taxes, precedents, and legal reasoning, yet remained comfortably indifferent to whether the state functioned effectively and society respected it.

Jansenius's heresy was precisely a heresy of predestination, with effects similar to those of Calvin's, discussed in detail below. Here I will only summarize the point: predestination is a convenient doctrine for forming cliques, since it permits a strong tribal mentality and a lack of moral restraint toward outsiders. The result was a bureaucratic clique that paralyzed the French government and damaged French Catholicism from within. It used its power against rival factions, for example by expelling the Jesuits[153], opposing papal decrees, and imposing censorship on its own terms, without offering a rational and moral foundation comparable to that of the Jesuits. Yet all the bureaucrats' power came from the throne they opposed, while Jansenism's intellectual prestige came from the Catholicism and papacy it resisted. The term "parasite" therefore makes sense. In the Revolution's early years, the throne fell and Catholicism lost its endowments and was even outlawed. Some bureaucrats went to the scaffold; others found places in the revolution-

[153] Parlement de Paris. *Arrêt du 6 août 1762*. The judgment of the Parlement of Paris on 6 August 1762 concerned the suppression of Jesuit institutions.

ary government.

The bureaucrats' final achievement before the Revolution was the repeated obstruction of fiscal reform and, ultimately, the chaos of state insolvency. Like the Habsburgs, the Bourbons suffered from a dangerous dependence on money and debt to finance wars, armies, a lavish court, and interest payments. They too exchanged long-term losses for immediate cash, allowing independent centers of power and patronage to develop. They sold offices and lifetime privileges for gold. They relied on private tax collectors who paid an agreed sum in advance in return for the right to collect taxes. Such a contract rewards the most opportunistic individuals: if an honest collector can collect ten thousand ducats and a dishonest one fifteen thousand, the latter can also pay more for the collection rights. Numerous other privileges allowed nobles to profit from bridges, roads, tolls, and similar arrangements, whose numbers and rates generally increased. Kings thereby reduced the system's effectiveness and gradually lost control of it.

Legitimacy is a separate factor: it encourages people to fulfill their duties despite everything. For centuries, however, both French kings and the elite undermined their own legitimacy. They considered their authority and privileges God-given, while their conduct often contradicted Catholic moral requirements. Jansenism exploited this gap, attacking the symbolic signs of corruption at the French court: sexual license, scandals, luxury, and gambling. Well-known royal mistresses had existed at the French court since the Middle Ages, but Francis I, who died in 1547, was the first to give his chief mistress, Anne de Pisseleu, an open court position. Ambassadors of the austere and hypocritically religious Habsburgs were shocked to see mistresses wielding considerable power, dictating appointments and accepting bribes. In their eyes, a dissolute court produced weak and effeminate leaders. Public scandal offended God and the state, while a royal courtesan serving as chancellor, chief of staff, and chief recipient of bribes approached an abdication

of government. This judgment was not entirely misplaced: de Pisseleu entered into a bitter conflict with Constable Montmorency, the commander-in-chief, which harmed the war effort against the Habsburgs. The next king, Henry II, gave his mistress Diane de Poitiers the Crown Jewels, insulting Queen Catherine de' Medici, together with enormous wealth and considerable influence over major state decisions.

The main difference was how widely the mistresses were known and what position they held, rather than whether kings had them. The Habsburgs also had mistresses, but more often kept them away from power and under close control, for example by paying them or confining them in convents. In France, this became "official policy," and courtiers and aristocrats participated in similar pleasures. Catherine de' Medici and Louis XIV deliberately supplied them with mistresses to control them, extract secrets, distract them, and make them dependent on court status and enjoyment. Versailles was a vast festival of theater, music, gambling, and other entertainments. Behind it stood Louis's strategy of depriving the old aristocracy of its traditional position as independent governors and commanders. The court, from which rewards and promotions flowed, defined the new career path.

France's lower classes could therefore more easily interpret the unjust system of privilege as a fraud perpetrated by a depraved elite. The privileged classes could continue to feel powerful and released from moral requirements, as the king had felt much earlier. Catholic morality was conditional for the great and powerful, and the prerogatives of authority were negotiable too. The king stood at the top of the feudal system, and power passed from father to son, making usurpation difficult: a feudal lord who overthrew him did not thereby become a legitimate king. The aristocracy had a corresponding interest in preserving the order of which it was a privileged part. Yet just as a Habsburg could kill Lamoral despite his lineage and service, a courtesan could ac-

quire the Crown Jewels through less than honorable means. I am not deciding whether this was good or bad; I am pointing to the instability. Subordinates had not agreed to such arrangements, so why should they honor their own obligations within the system?

The French Revolution itself arose indirectly from another financial crisis and attempts to tax the elites between 1781 and 1789, which aristocrats and bureaucrats firmly resisted. In theory, the king could impose a tax by edict, as had been done for several hundred years. But administrative paralysis, rebellions, and riots prevented enforcement. The bankruptcy of the treasury became so urgent that the king summoned the Estates-General, including representatives of the Third Estate, the townspeople and peasants, to impose new taxes with the authority of society as a whole. Representatives of the Third Estate demanded a written constitution, individual liberties, and equal political rights. They also broke with the Estates-General, where their votes carried minority weight, and formed the National Assembly instead. The king was forced to accept it. This was the beginning of the French Revolution.[154]

Its most interesting feature, however, is the peculiar crisis of legitimacy that began after 1786 and continued until Napoleon's reforms. Subjects lost faith in the system and ceased to feel obliged to obey it. Serious failures brought latent indignation into the open, while disorder weakened the force of coercion. The state was bankrupt and could not solve basic problems, such as importing food in years of poor harvests or ensuring the competitiveness of domestic industry. A free-trade treaty signed with Great Britain in 1786 effectively favored Britain because its production was better organized and more modern. Many people lost their jobs. Famine followed in 1788, sparking unrest in the larger cities.

[154] Assemblée nationale. *Assemblée nationale constituante*, 17–20 June 1789. The Third Estate and some clerical deputies formed the National Assembly.

The revolutionary government brought little calm. It wanted to collect almost the same taxes as the monarchy and enforce payment by force. Food seizures and mass military conscription soon followed. Paper notes issued against confiscated Church property were printed without adequate backing, leading to hyperinflation. This devalued debt, but also ruined economic life.

Under these circumstances, the state ceased to perform its basic functions, and "lawlessness" became a reasonable survival strategy. In the years before the Revolution, tax and customs evasion, violence against collectors, and urban riots over high food prices became widespread. The revolutionary government improved matters little: its fiscal needs scarcely declined, while its ability to collect taxes actually weakened after the dismantling of the hated Ferme Générale. The Jacobins introduced forced requisitions through armed revolutionary detachments. Peasants were ordered to sell their food reserves for the worthless paper notes mentioned above, with refusal punishable by death. They therefore hid grain and traded secretly through barter. Jacobin mass conscription, together with religious and tax grievances, sparked peasant rebellions in 1793–1794. Attempts to eliminate Catholicism and replace it with a religion devised by revolutionaries, the Cult of Reason and later the Cult of the Supreme Being, supplied ideological fuel for uprisings such as that in the Vendée. From our perspective, this is logical. Jacobin rule was more ruthless than the late Bourbon monarchy and explicitly rejected prevailing ideas of moral rightness and social order. The state became a predatory institution sending armed agents to seize food and young men for the army, and also a visible manifestation of Satan.[155]

The Directory, established in 1795, somewhat curtailed Jacobin mass terror but could neither stabilize the system nor

[155]The Spanish reached a similar conclusion about Napoleon in 1807, enraged by the brutal crimes and sacrileges of French marauders. Just as the Habsburg had his Dutch ulcer, Bonaparte had his Spanish ulcer.

build lasting support. Successive elections were annulled because their outcomes generally differed from what the rulers wanted. The army maintained order, a practice that would return to haunt the government a few years later in Napoleon's coup. Aggressive conscription prompted mass flight by prospective recruits. Economic collapse encouraged tax evasion and withdrawal from the official trading system. Bands of brigands also attacked officials to rob them of confiscated goods.

In 1799, Napoleon, one of its most trusted enforcers, overthrew the Directory. In 1795, the Convention's attempts to manipulate elections had produced enormous protests and riots in Paris.[156] Napoleon fired cannon at the advancing crowd, killing about three hundred people. This display of ruthlessness made him useful and popular in ruling circles and enabled his rapid rise. He seized power in 1799 and established relative order, partly through terror and censorship, partly by guaranteeing the minimum conditions necessary for normal life. Persecution of the Catholic Church ended, and a new, stable monetary system based on a franc tied to gold and silver[157] was introduced. The Napoleonic Code also reaffirmed property rights. At the same time, the free press was abolished. In 1800, the number of Paris political newspapers was reduced from several dozen to thirteen, and those remaining came under close regime supervision.[158] Strict censorship, a network of secret surveillance, and strong, effective enforcement agencies for taxation and military conscription were immediately developed.

[156] Académie française. *Vendémiaire*.

[157] Monnaie de Paris. *Métalmorphoses*, p. 1803. The germinal franc was based on bimetallism.

[158] Veronica Granata. "Marché du livre, censure et littérature clandestine". In: *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 343 (2006), pp. 123–145. The decree of 17 January 1800 placed the remaining titles under police supervision.

7.6 Dreaming of Empire, Losing Poland

The Commonwealth's defeat in the eighteenth century. Late medieval Poland was a rapidly modernizing state that lagged little behind its western neighbors. Military strength and income from agriculture and salt made it reasonably powerful. Society quickly adopted Western innovations, developing municipal self-government, written law, and intellectual life. By the eighteenth century, the Commonwealth, uniting Poland, Lithuania, and Ruthenia, lagged behind the West on almost every front. Life for most people was as dangerous and impoverished as in sprawling, authoritarian Russia. Russia, however, retained a much greater ability to mobilize the state's resources. It would therefore soon devour its formerly equal neighbor, taking more than half its territory by 1795 and, with Prussian and Austrian help, removing it from Europe's map for 123 years.

The elite gained ever more control over a state increasingly unable to control it. Why did this happen? My answer follows the Hanfeizi: the central problem of politics is controlling the elite. By uniting with Lithuania and Ruthenia, Poland allowed its elite to reject the Western organizational and moral model without adopting the Eastern model of strong central authority. The aristocracy increasingly appropriated and controlled the system, using it for its own interests without concern for the state's survival.

Even supporters of the Nobles' Commonwealth, I believe, understand that a corrupt elite caused its downfall, so I take this as my starting point. Yet the Hanfeizi suggests that putting it this way means blaming the rain rather than the hole in the roof. We must first ask how, and whether, the system protected itself against corruption and appropriation of the structure of power. Moreover, individual corruption differs from collective, coordinated corruption on a mass scale. The early modern French aristocracy was considered immoral and conspiratorial. Yet France was powerful and effective, and its aristocracy mobilized its productive

forces for the state's benefit in return for rewards and privileges.

In the West, developing institutions constrained the powerful. The Commonwealth changed Poland systemically, rather than merely changing its personnel. From the fourteenth century, Poland united with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, in practice a Lithuanian-Ruthenian state when we consider the powerful Ruthenian feudal lords in its east and south, as well as the boyars, or nobles, serving Lithuanian lords. This union presented a significant problem. The West was gradually developing decentralization and institutional forms of government: written laws, formal royal councils, and lower judicial and fiscal bureaucracies. The Church was also a major source of cultural and moral influence. The feudal elite remained powerful, but faced increasing administrative and moral pressure, and could not easily extend its control over the parallel structures of authority that were developing.

In Lithuania and Ruthenia, strong monarchical authority disciplined the magnates. The Western arrangement was a particular product of culture, religion, and political change. Outside the West, the more widespread way of protecting the system against its elite was autocracy, with broad authority over subjects' lives and property, unrestrained by procedures. Various customary norms regulated the legitimacy of monarchical power, but few formal or procedural constraints prevented rapid, violent escalation when the ruler had a justified interest in it. This was the situation in Lithuania and Ruthenia. Jogaila, for example, imprisoned his uncle Kęstutis in 1382; Kęstutis died in captivity in unexplained circumstances. Vytautas removed Vladimir Olgerdovich, prince of Kyiv, and replaced other appanage princes with appointed governors.[159]

The union weakened constraints on the magnates'

[159]Encyclopedia of Ukraine. *Vytautas the Great*. Vytautas removed appanage princes, including Vladimir Olgerdovich from Kyiv.

power. From the fourteenth through the sixteenth century, Poland, Lithuania, and Ruthenia were gradually united into one state. This gave the nobility and aristocracy much greater freedom to wrest control of the system than they would have enjoyed in either West or East. Jogaila, who became Władysław II in 1386, had to make substantial concessions while bargaining with magnates for the crown. He then had to present himself as a Christian monarch to gain prestige and obedience.

Kings paid for recognition of their authority with privileges. The greatest concessions had already been formalized under Louis of Hungary at Košice in 1374. Jogaila merely had to accept them again if he wanted the crown. This made renegotiation harder, since they already constituted the status quo. From the perspective of Chinese Fajia thinkers, these medieval privileges might have been particularly alarming:

- Almost complete exemption of the nobility from taxation.
- No new taxes without the nobility's consent.
- A prohibition on appointing anyone other than Polish nobles to certain offices and dignities.

160

It is often emphasized that the last provision excluded foreigners, but it equally excluded Polish commoners from political representation. It thus cut off political representation for anyone outside the nobility. Equally important, taxes could no longer be imposed on nobles, who possessed a disproportionately large share of resources, without their own consent. Every occasion requiring state funding, whether war or another undertaking, therefore became grounds for demanding further privileges.

[160] Polish History Museum. *The Privilege of Košice*. The privilege of 1374 retained a tax of two groszy per peasant holding on noble estates.

Poland was thus already in constitutional danger through the nobility's own initiative, even before Jogaila and the Lithuanian magnates. The difference was that the eastward political orientation closed off alternative scenarios. A pro-Western Polish aristocracy might itself have adopted an ideal of public duty and prudence, or admitted talented professionals, merchants, and scholars to privilege and power, recognizing that otherwise its state could not survive. Alternatively, a pro-Western king might have obtained Western assistance, created a mass conscript army, terrorized the nobility, and then changed the law and constitution.

Several versions of the latter plan were attempted, unsuccessfully. Union with Lithuania made the Commonwealth a vast state in territory and population, matching the continent's greatest powers, at least temporarily. Lithuanian and Ruthenian boyars finally felt liberated from the stern eye of the *gosudar* and his staff, the last guarantee of public order in the East. Polish landowners saw that Western political and moral concepts, such as the common good, responsibility, and virtue, and Western institutions were not necessary for the state to function. Instead, they could adopt the same outlook as their eastern brothers, treating every patch of land and its inhabitants as their sovereign property. They called this idea "Golden Liberty," also claiming Roman and Sarmatian ancestry.

War and succession gave the nobility further leverage over the king. In 1422, Władysław Jagiełło granted the Privilege of Czerwińsk to keep the magnates committed to war against the Teutonic Order. He guaranteed that property could not be confiscated without a court judgment and that new coinage could not be minted without the royal council's consent. Soon afterward he opened the floodgates to privileges, since the magnates did not regard his royal authority as hereditary. In return for agreement to the succession of his son Władysław III, Jagiełło promised that nobles would not be arrested or deprived of property without a judgment from the appropriate noble court. This sounds al-

most like Anglo-Saxon habeas corpus, but it decidedly was not, because it contained an ugly detail: nobles would be judged only by other nobles, who had an interest in defending their collective interests at everyone else's expense.[161]

Privileges accumulated, while calls for responsibility remained ineffective. Successive kings were forced to offer further privileges, chiefly allowing nobles to extract as much as possible from their subjects and consolidate their privileged position. The process accelerated somewhat through royal elections, in which nobles voted for the new king and thus held a strong bargaining position over candidates, and through the Protestant Reformation. Many Polish nobles became Calvinists; in some regions Calvinists constituted between a third and half of the representatives at regional assemblies. As we will discuss in the next chapter, Calvinism can be interpreted as an ideology of privilege, removing moral effort and good works as necessary conditions of salvation. The Jesuits and Counter-Reformation reduced the number of these converts, but did little to halt the nobility's moral decay, which contradicted its professed Catholicism. The Church's influence on society generally weakened.

Father Skarga and other Catholic preachers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries condemned pride, greed, pursuit of private advantage, and oppression of subjects. Examples include Father Chądzyński's *A Discourse by a Polish Priest on Why God Punishes the Polish Crown and How We May Escape Further Punishment* and Father Starowolski's *The Worm of Conscience of an Evil Man Who Neither Fears God nor Cares for His Salvation*, but these efforts had little effect. The devastating wars of 1648–1657 were explained as divine punishment, which was a convenient change of subject. The nobility disgraced itself in Europe's eyes by proving unable to fight the Swedish invader, surren-

[161] Integrated Educational Platform. *Jagiełło's Dynastic Policy*. Personal guarantees were associated with the privileges of Jedlnia and Kraków in 1430 and 1433.

dering to Charles Gustav at Ujście[162] and naively seeking his favor. Yet the Swedes had already become notorious for ruthlessness during the recent Thirty Years' War, and similarly plundered the Commonwealth.

An attempt to strengthen the monarchy provoked armed resistance from the nobility. When the state finally mobilized against the Swedes, King John Casimir made the Lwów Vows to Our Lady in 1656, promising, among other things, to improve the peasants' condition. His plans for absolutist reform probably had some logic in this direction. Creating a strong peasant infantry raised from agricultural holdings would establish a center of military power independent of the nobility, able to dictate terms in the only language it understood. He also planned to strengthen his successor's authority by holding an election during his own lifetime. To make this plan succeed, Queen Gonzaga began heavily bribing magnates with gold brought from Paris. They nevertheless perceived a threat to "Golden Liberty." The result was Lubomirski's great noble rebellion, which John Casimir lost.

[162] Polish Army Museum. *The Surrender at Ujście*. The Swedish commander Arvid Wittenberg accepted the surrender in July 1655.



John Casimir's Lwów Vows

Military victories did not remove the political system's weaknesses. The Commonwealth certainly possessed considerable military strength in its warrior elite, as numerous sixteenth- and seventeenth-century victories demonstrated. Despite the defeats of 1648–1657, it partly reversed its battlefield fortunes in the later seventeenth century, defeating the Turks and Tatars at Khotyn in 1673 and Vienna in 1683, and later at Hodów in 1694 and Podhajce in 1698. The nobility's next, effectively definitive organizational and military disgrace followed soon afterward. The main reasons were these.

First, nobles could mobilize for war when they wanted to, which could happen when they recognized a threat from within, as before Khotyn in 1673. Yet insubordination and anarchy prevented responses to many other threats, as during the Khmelnytsky uprising. The quality of commanders and officers also declined greatly. At Pyliavtsi in 1648, for example, a large Commonwealth army fled without fighting, abandoning a rich baggage train and a hundred cannon because of incompetent, quarrelling commanders and the low morale of supposedly professional troops, who fled on hear-

ing a false rumor.

Second, in the eighteenth century we will see European armies based on infantry and professional support beginning to prevail over Polish-Lithuanian cavalry organized in noble retinues. The main problem was that the Commonwealth had to rely on this cavalry: the system gave the nobility a relative monopoly on military force, and nobles would not permit another army funded by their own taxes and subjects.

The reign of Augustus II: the Great Northern War lost through the nobility.

In 1697, Augustus II, ruler of Saxony, became king of Poland. The nobility would hardly welcome a candidate with his own state and army, who had both the means and plans to introduce absolutism. Yet the enormous bribes he offered were hard to refuse. Russian and Austrian support, motivated by fear of the French candidate, the Prince de Conti, allowed him to march troops into Kraków.

The Great Northern War proved disastrous for both Augustus and weakened Poland. Together with Denmark and Russia, he tried to seize Swedish possessions, expecting to receive Livonia. Defeat resulted from the Polish nobility's political apathy, gross insubordination, and outdated tactics. Augustus lost his first major battle in Livonia, on the Daugava, because the nobles refused support and declared neutrality. The Saxon–Russian forces were defeated by Charles XII's army.[163] Charles XII could consequently advance into Poland. To repel him, Augustus assembled a substantial numerical advantage: 23,000 men against 12,000, including 6,800 in the Polish Crown army under Hieronim Augustyn Lubomirski, among them elite winged hussar units. He faced the Swedes at Kliszów in 1702 under conditions offering a strong chance of victory.[164]

Lubomirski charged the Swedish flank with his cavalry,

[163] Anonymous. *Account of the Battle near Riga*. 1701. The account concerns the crossing of the Daugava in 1701.

[164] Polish History Museum. *The Battle of Kliszów*.

but Swedish discipline, effective musket volleys, and improvised palisades repelled him. Instead of continuing the attack or returning to formation and trying another plan, he panicked or lost his temper and abandoned Augustus II, exposing the Saxon flank and handing Charles XII an easy victory. Hieronim Lubomirski was the son of the previously mentioned rebel Jerzy Lubomirski and a fabulously wealthy magnate who, like his father, firmly believed in Golden Liberty.

For Russia and other great powers, Kliszów was the definitive "green light." It showed that powerful Polish magnates would sabotage their own king out of envy, and that they were no longer capable of fighting regional powers' armies on equal terms. At Ujście in 1655, the noble levy had surrendered; at Kliszów, the principal general with the main army readily abandoned the king after a single unsuccessful assault.

At Pułtusk in 1703, larger Saxon-Polish forces again lost after being surprised by the Swedes. Polish troops fell significantly below contemporary standards, lacking fortifications, reconnaissance forces, and reliable logistics. Providing these required additional taxes, which nobles continually vetoed.

Foreign powers take control of the Commonwealth. The victorious Charles XII installed his own candidate, Stanisław Leszczyński, on the Polish throne, provoking a civil war that further demonstrated the limited value of noble and magnate forces. Charles's power was broken only at Poltava in 1709, where a much stronger Russian army cornered him.

Historians regard "Carolus Rex" as an excellent general, and he could probably have emerged from the war on better terms. Yet he made the same mistake as Augustus. He wasted time and, having installed the king favored by Polish-Lithuanian magnates, assumed they would prove useful and mobilize substantial reinforcements against Russia.

Augustus subsequently regained the throne with victori-

ous Russian support. His further attempts to centralize authority ended in another rebellion and war, during which the nobles invited Peter I to negotiate peace. Peter sent eighteen thousand soldiers as "peacekeepers" and dictated a settlement strictly in Russia's interests, restoring noble privileges while undermining every attempt to strengthen the state and giving Russia grounds to impose its role as guarantor of the settlement. The Commonwealth thus gradually became an informal Russian protectorate.[165]

A good hereditary elite justifies its position through service to the state. One final observation: various defenders of tradition, including Klub Jagielloński, Kopczyński, and Guzowski, describe conclusions like mine as "Marxist clichés." I reject Marxism while also denying that these authors are right. Here is why. A rational defense of hereditary hierarchy, such as those of Aristotle, Confucius, or Edmund Burke, would argue that it is beneficial because it provides loyal, outstanding personnel with a strong sense of ownership and duty within the system, formed from childhood to carry on their nation's identity, traditions, and ethos.

Napoleon met his match in the Royal Navy, as did the powerful Japanese fleet in Yi Sun-sin, partly because they faced "good" hierarchies whose ability, spirit, and devotion exceeded those of mercenary armies and professional bureaucracies. Han Fei, a prince of Han, knew he had to defend his declining state to the end, despite lacking power or influence and having the option of defecting to Qin, where his talents would have been richly rewarded. The political treatise Hanfeizi resulted from these efforts.

Yet the same thinkers generally also anticipated immoral and incompetent people who indulged their vices, lived parasitically off society, and used privileges for arbitrary action. For a state, this is the seed of imminent ruin; see Hanfeizi 15.

[165] Urszula Kosińska. *The Silent Sejm*.

A state's collapse demonstrates its elite's political failure. We therefore need not begin with the oppression and poverty of the Polish people. Better to begin with the enormous eighteenth-century defeat: domination by a neighbor regarded only a century earlier as militarily equal and organizationally backward. We should also begin with an elite's dishonor in betraying its king, fleeing battle, taking enemies' bribes, and inviting them to defend its license. Avoiding a repetition of such mistakes is especially important.

8 Free Will and Determinism, Freedom and Tyranny.

8.1 Will and Virtue as the Foundations of Both Obedience and Freedom

Political legitimacy presents obedience as a moral duty and establishes a moral right to demand and enforce it. It is therefore a construct similar to benevolence, righteousness, and other virtues, and rests on similar grounds. Virtue is a lasting disposition to choose the proper, greater good over partial and lesser goods: for example, to perform a good deed and forgo food or clothing beyond what is necessary. Legitimacy and obedience to rightful authority thus form a kind of "communal nobility." Political order and cooperation with it allow greater good to be achieved than individual action alone. A noble person should choose that greater good, just as one chooses a good deed over some personal advantage.

If obedience to legitimate authority is a kind of virtue, however, it is subject to the same internal deliberation of will and intellect. The intellect considers various goods and presents them to the will. The will is attracted by them and freely chooses among them, making the decision final: see the Twenty-Four Thomistic Theses, thesis 21. Obedience di-

rected toward a legitimate public good is therefore a virtue. The same cannot be said of participating in wrongdoing or carrying out a tyrant's arbitrary demands without regard for other, more fundamental goods. Obedience itself may even be directed toward someone attempting to overthrow the tyrant rather than toward the officeholder, provided that trusting this person has moral and rational grounds.[166]

Freedom and virtue thus provide the foundation of political liberty. If we reason, "I could do this or that, but I want to choose the greater good," we can also ask, "Is obedience to the political regime good, or should I do something else?" and "Is this regime what it ought to be, or should something else exist, and what can I do about it?"

This reasoning offers a barrier against tyranny and parasitic government, but it is also a principal target of tyrants. Modern totalitarian systems and tyrannies often rejected free will, teaching that historical necessity governs human destiny. Examples include Marxist historical necessity, the Darwinian biological determinism of Hitler's followers, Hegel's political theories, and the materialism of the French revolutionary period.

Recurring argumentative mechanisms always stand at the center:

Removing moral responsibility for actions through historical necessity.

Virtue ethics provides grounds for judging every human action according to whether the person could have chosen better and whether the will chose a higher good, such as righteousness, over a lower one, such as self-interest. Removing the possibility of a real choice between good and evil removes the basis for judging particular actions as good or evil. If events are necessary, nothing else could have happened. Alternatively, a Calvinist does not believe in freely choosing among different options, but only that the will is

[166] Sacra Congregatio Studiorum. *The Twenty-Four Thomistic Theses*. Trans. by W. H. Marshner. July 27, 1914, theses 21 and 24.

free because it acts voluntarily while its end remains determined. Only two absolute moral judgments then remain: "elect" and "damned," "us" and "them." If the elect do something evil, it may be necessity rather than evil. Or they may commit a sin that does not define them as evil, since they will certainly receive Christ's forgiveness and be saved. Thus, if Oliver Cromwell, Calvinism's "chosen of God," fights the "tyrant" Charles I in England, it suddenly becomes harder to call Cromwell a tyrant for identical or worse actions. He has moved into an entirely different metaphysical and moral category. Communists, Jacobins, and Hegel borrow the same pattern.

Removing moral responsibility for the formation of character.

According to virtue ethics, both nobility and wickedness result from dispositions of the will accumulated over time through daily choices and efforts at self-improvement. Even when someone seems to commit a bad action without deciding entirely freely, as when lust drives infidelity or anger drives violence, responsibility also extends to one's character and its cultivation. Catholic theology intensifies this responsibility: Christ's grace is far more valuable than human efforts, and it will not be given without limit to those who deliberately insult it by persisting in wrongdoing. This established "inertia" of the will also makes universal definitions of good and evil people possible. Good people seek nobility, strive for what is good, watch their actions, and gradually improve. Evil people generally desire gratification without restraint and thereby become capable of anything, like the *xiaoren* in *Analects* 17.15. Historical determinism reverses this mechanism, making the elect "noble" through their secret knowledge of the true good and historical necessity.[167]

[167]Catholic Church. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, pp. 1731–1734. Freedom is connected with reason, will, and responsibility for one's actions.

8.2 John Calvin as a Father of Historical Determinism

The best-known and most obvious advocate of predestination, and one of the most influential predecessors of modern historical determinism, is John Calvin, the sixteenth-century Protestant reformer.

His religious doctrine can be summarized as follows:

- God sends some people to hell and others to heaven without regard for their choices or actions.
- Human nature is corrupt and, without grace, incapable of salvific good.
- Christ died only for these so-called elect, rather than for all humanity.
- The elect cannot lose eternal happiness through any sins or offenses.[168]

In English, the acronym TULIP stands for total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints.[169]

Calvin thus considers himself the representative of the only true form of Christianity while fighting by every possible means against the view that virtue, the orientation of free will toward the greater good, has any importance for human life. Every possible means includes challenging even the basic premises of reasoning and knowledge, as we shall see shortly.

Calvin was a leading figure of the Protestant revolution. He worked in Geneva in 1536–1538 and 1541–1564,[170]

[168] Synod of Dort. *Canons of Dort.* 1618–1619, pp. V, 4–7. The doctrine of perseverance also includes a return to repentance.

[169] Synod of Dort, *Canons of Dort*, pp. I, III/IV, V. The five points are associated with the later Synod of 1618–1619; TULIP was not Calvin's own acronym.

[170] Archives d'État de Genève. *Farel et Calvin à Genève*. Calvin was in exile in 1538–1541.

wielding considerable power and regulating matters of conduct. Clothing, dancing, and beer consumption were regulated, for example, while various sins incurred punishments including humiliating corporal penalties, exile, and death. The Protestant Servetus, a critic of Calvin's theology, was burned at the stake when he appeared in Geneva.[171]



The Burning of Servetus

Predestination quite naturally became a political program, shifting the emphasis from improving oneself first to reforming society. Free will and conscience are means to virtue insofar as they recognize the good and practice pursuing it. Calvin explicitly rejects this possibility through both total depravity and unconditional election.

The focus of Calvinist ethics shifts elsewhere, toward external institutions that restrain vices and maintain order through fear, pressure, and habit. The rejected and damned can thereby behave in a roughly prosocial manner. The elect, meanwhile, build an image of paradise, and their rulers wield extensive authority, receiving inner inspiration from God himself without needing to deliberate about jus-

[171] République et canton de Genève. *Michel Servet*. Servetus was executed in Geneva on 27 October 1553.

tice or other values. Being "elect" also does not require reforming one's cruelty, greed, or unrestrained pride. Calvin would naturally have harmed his own position had he explicitly declared good deeds useless and allowed ordinary people to commit offenses against public order that undermined his legitimacy. But people with power and money generally have an interest in subtler wrongdoing than street crime. Calvin takes this further still by attributing to the elect an inner knowledge of good and evil beyond rational human judgment, as I will explain in detail shortly. Eric Voegelin called this view Gnosticism and identified it as the principal path Calvin opened for later tyrannies and violent ideologies. He calls Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* a Gnostic Koran: a self-sufficient absolute truth intended to replace all existing theological and philosophical traditions.[172] For a book concerned with power, it is therefore a particularly interesting object of study.

Early modern Europe was hardly so idyllic that Calvin's grim penitentiary and subversive ambitions stood out sharply against the background of religious warfare and violence. As an active battering ram, Calvinists contributed to the rejection of absolute monarchy and the foundation of republics in the sixteenth-century Netherlands and during the English Civil War of 1642–1651. Yet this legacy remains at least ambivalent because of Calvinist mobs' street violence and criminality, the arrogant mentality of the so-called elect, and the terror they imposed whenever they felt strong enough. Examples include Cromwell's dictatorship and the disturbances in the Netherlands in 1566, when Calvinist crowds committed many acts of sacrilege and destroyed church art, antagonizing moderate factions. Philip and Fernando de Toledo then antagonized those factions in the opposite direction, making compromise unlikely on both sides. William Cobbett, in *A History of*

[172]Thomas Heilke. *Calvin, Gnosis, and Anti-Philosophy*. Oct. 10, 2017. Heilke discusses and quotes Voegelin's assessment in The New Science of Politics.

the Protestant Reformation in England and Ireland, lists Calvinists as the worst sort of "reformers." In section 291, for example, he discusses their creed of unconditional election, the betrayals and killings of Calvinist magnates, and the brigandage that made the population of Paris readily turn against them during the massacre of 1572. This also helps explain why Philip might have considered his conduct reasonable, given whom and what he believed he faced. It is difficult, however, to attribute all this violence to Calvinism when feudal warlords and their armies had behaved similarly before the Reformation. Nevertheless, the doctrine that good conduct was useless for salvation offered a convenient justification for existing ways of life.

Calvin's *Institutes* could succeed without constituting a body of rational arguments, and reading it as such is unhelpful. It served instead as an ideological vehicle for existing ambitions and grievances on which sixteenth-century Catholicism clearly imposed constraints.

The following are examples of interests to which Calvinism responded:

- Church finances. The Church possessed substantial property and income. It collected a compulsory tithe of 10% from believers, together with various charges for baptisms, weddings, and other services. Often little of this money remained in the parish. Much larger payments to monarchs and magnates brought the total burden to between 35 and 60% of ordinary people's incomes. A reformer who challenged the pope and Catholicism was useful because he offered lower burdens, for example by eliminating the share going to Rome and the bishop, and even the possibility of seizing Church property.

- The bourgeoisie against the feudal nobility. In 1500, real power lay chiefly with feudal nobles and Catholic bishops. Wealthy merchants and bureaucrats held urban offices but could not easily approach the same level

of social prestige and independence. Calvin offered the new elite a broad mandate to govern, the privileged status of the "elect," and spiritual leadership of their communities, previously reserved for celibate clergy.

- Local identity and early modern great powers. Early modern feudal states fought for supremacy, conquering smaller states and imposing additional burdens on their subjects to finance armies. Leaving this system and its expansionist ambitions therefore offered benefits. Calvin had engineered a new political identity for small communities of God's elect.

8.3 Predestination as an Alternative Theory of Rationality, Morality, and Power

I have described the *Institutes* as an instrument of self-interest. What mattered, therefore, was less whether its arguments were logical than whether its claims were useful, easy to spread, and defensible in practice. Calvin's arguments can indeed be defended, but at a high price.

A similar case is that of Kuhn and Koyré. Seeking to remove Duhem's thesis and scholastic philosophy from the history of physics, they must adopt radical measures, declaring physics a construct of crowd psychology. Their ideological predecessor is John Calvin, a remarkably effective producer of rational arguments for the claim that ordinary rational arguments are incoherent or worthless. We will examine four subjects in particular: the foundations of reasoning and knowledge, moral questions, piety, and finally power.

In I.7.5, Calvin writes as follows about the authority of Scripture, which is justified by an inner feeling of certainty among the elect:

> "Let it therefore be accepted as an unshakable principle that those whom the Holy Spirit teaches inwardly acknowledge the authority of Scripture without reservation."

> "Enlightened by him, we no longer believe that Scripture comes from God on the basis of our own judgment or that of other people."

This applies exclusively to the elect, rather than to everyone:

> "God grants this special privilege only to his elect, whom he separates from the rest of humanity."[173]

This raises the question of how Scripture is defined. Different collections of books exist, and the reformers initially rejected some, including books that seemed to contradict them. For example: "He has commanded no one to be ungodly, and has given no one permission to sin" (Sirach 15). There are also conflicting interpretations of Scripture. Protestant interpretations contradicted Catholicism, but Protestants also disagreed fundamentally among themselves: Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, for example, understood Christ's presence in the Eucharist differently.[174]

Calvin's answer is that the elect understand Scripture inwardly through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and their understanding transcends all natural rationality.

I.9.3:

> "For the Lord has so closely joined the certainty of his Word and his Spirit that our minds become properly imbued with reverence for the Word only when the Spirit, by enlightening them, enables us to see God's face in it."[175]

III.2.34:

> "Since, therefore, we cannot come to Christ in any way unless we are drawn by the Spirit, once we

[173]John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Trans. by Henry Beveridge. Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845–1846, p. I.7.5.
[174]Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, pp. IV.17.32–34.
[175]Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, pp. I.9.2–3.

> are drawn, both our mind and spirit are raised far above our natural powers of understanding." … "For the soul, when enlightened by him, receives, as it were, a new eye with which to contemplate heavenly mysteries."

The reprobate do not understand it, and by their very nature it cannot be explained to them through rational arguments.

II.2.20, on the special illumination received by the elect:

> "If we were convinced of the truth that ought to remain beyond all dispute, namely that human nature possesses none of the gifts which the elect receive from their Heavenly Father through the Spirit of regeneration, there would be no room for hesitation here."
>
> "I see … that my words cannot fill people's minds with divine truths unless the Lord enlightens their understanding by his Spirit."

Such exclusive reliance on "inner inspiration," and the division of people into the elect and the damned according to whether they agree with us, removes the role of reason in argument.

St. Thomas and other Catholic philosophers acknowledged that faith in some sense transcends reason. Nevertheless, the truths of faith and the fruits of grace are partly verifiable. Arguments from Scripture, for example, should be logically coherent.

ST I, q. 1, a. 8:

> "Since grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, natural reason should serve faith."[176]

[176]Thomas Aquinas. *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2. Grace perfects nature.

Saints can be recognized objectively through virtues widely acknowledged as valuable, such as charity, self-control, and sound judgment.

ST II–II, q. 4, a. 3:

> "Charity is called the form of faith insofar as the act of faith is perfected and formed by charity."[177]

For Calvin, saints are those he considers saints, without any means of verification independent of himself. He attributes this state of affairs to original sin, which he turns into a weapon against humanity's natural rational and moral capacities (II.2.12):

> … man's natural gifts were corrupted by sin, and his supernatural gifts were taken away. By supernatural gifts are meant the light of faith and righteousness, which would have sufficed to attain heavenly life and eternal happiness. When man departed from obedience to God, he was deprived of the spiritual gifts through which he had been raised to the hope of eternal salvation. …

After presenting a fairly standard account of original sin, he practically contradicts himself at the end. He cannot say that reason has been "entirely destroyed," because people can use it effectively, yet he calls it a "shapeless ruin."

> On the other hand, soundness of mind and uprightness of heart were also taken away, and this is precisely what the corruption of natural gifts consists in. Although some remnants of intelligence, judgment, and will remain, we cannot call a mind sound and intact when it is both weak and plunged into darkness. The corruption of the will is only too well known. Since reason, by which man distinguishes good from evil, understands,

[177] Thomas Aquinas. *Summa theologiae*, II–II, q. 4, a. 3. Charity gives form to the act of faith.

> and judges, is a natural gift, it could not have been entirely destroyed. Yet, partly weakened and partly corrupted, it remained only a shapeless ruin.[178]

This provides a useful vehicle for political radicalism. Modern states, for example, promise to resolve political disputes rationally. The foregoing offers a theory of absolute monopoly over eschatological and moral truth.

Let us turn to free will. In II.2, Calvin declares free will incompatible with humanity's fallen condition, which resembles Catholic teaching. Catholicism differs, however, in holding that grace enables the will to choose good or evil: see, for example, the Twenty-Four Thomistic Theses, thesis 21. Báñez, discussed shortly, is an exception.

Calvin takes another view: the will's end is always determined where the choice of good and evil is concerned. The reprobate necessarily choose evil, while the elect choose good through God's grace.

Free will is defined through voluntariness rather than the possibility of choice (II.2.7):

> "In this sense, therefore, man is said to possess free will: not because he can freely choose between good and evil, but because he acts voluntarily rather than under compulsion."

This conveniently shifts the basis for judging character and actions. Choosing the greatest possible good or avoiding evil as effectively as possible no longer grounds judgment, because no real choice exists. The only distinction is between the elect and the reprobate. The elect know the true good; the reprobate necessarily choose evil. Nothing therefore stands between final rejection and irrevocable election. Cruel acts by Calvinist magistrates need not be evil as bad decisions, because no genuine decisions exist in the moral

[178] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, pp. II.2.12–17. Calvin distinguishes knowledge of earthly matters from salvific knowledge.

sense. Moreover, only the elect understand good through inner inspiration; the reprobate do not. The elect are redeemed by Christ regardless; the reprobate are not.

In II.3.5, he observes of the fallen will:

> "It is incapable even of moving toward the good, much less of pursuing it steadfastly."

In chapter 5 of the 1541 edition, he explicitly rejects the classical Catholic view that free will is compatible with the movement of grace:

> God does not move our will in the manner long imagined and taught, as though it afterward remained in our power to decide whether to submit to his movement or resist it.

In II.5.1, he introduces the unconvincing conclusion that sin remains culpable despite the absence of choice, explicitly replacing the concept of moral responsibility. Responsibility concerns something measurable and tangible: failing to do good or committing an evil that could have been avoided.

> "I therefore deny that sin is less culpable because it is necessary; I also deny the conclusion they draw from this, that because it is voluntary, it can be avoided."

Instead, the wicked remain wicked despite being entirely unable to avoid what they do. At the same time, even the elect cannot do anything with the perfection that ought to be objectively recognized as a sign of divine election (III.19.4).

Piety is a central question, since Calvin regards the papacy as the throne of Antichrist. The Catholic understanding of piety is rooted in the other moral virtues and natural reason. Impiety is a vice resembling pride, characterized by contempt for divine things. It naturally characterizes wicked people who choose temporal goods over eternal and divine

ones. Piety rests on choosing eternal good over temporal good. It therefore entails reverence for divine truths and commandments, together with the need to ask for and respect God's grace in order to become holy and please him.

The English martyr St. Edmund Campion, in *Decem Rationes*, I, II, and III, therefore explicitly calls the actions of Calvin and the other reformers "sacrilege against the majesty of Holy Scripture." The reformers select, discard, and distort biblical books. Asked by what authority they act against the Church and the Church Fathers, they say that the Holy Spirit teaches them to do so, precisely Calvin's answer in I.7.5. The problem, Campion argues, is that Calvinists, Lutherans, and other groups disagree on most matters, thereby also blaspheming against the Holy Spirit as though he contradicted himself. In VIII, Campion attributes the following views to Calvin:

> "God is the author and cause of evil: he wills it, suggests it, brings it about, commands it, accomplishes it, and directs the wicked designs of evildoers toward it."
>
> "Just as Paul's calling was the work of God himself, so too were David's adultery and the wickedness of the traitor Judas."[179]

Calvin would disagree, however, since he claims that God made sin inevitable without bearing responsibility for it. The disagreement thus concerns the meaning of key terms, such as responsibility, and Calvin's dismantling of them.

Another objection, in *Decem Rationes*, III, concerns the visible Church. Calvin argues in the Prefatory Address, 6, that the Church need not be visible, but can exist without any visible form:

> "We maintain, first, that the Church can exist without any visible form; second, that its form

[179] Edmund Campion. *Ten Reasons*. Trans. by Joseph Rickaby. 1914, p. VIII.

> does not consist in the outward splendor which they so foolishly admire, but is distinguished by an entirely different criterion, namely the pure preaching of God's Word and the proper administration of the sacraments."

The issue is obviously not the "outward splendor" that "they so foolishly admire." It is that the visible Church has existed for 1,500 years, preserving institutional and doctrinal continuity since antiquity. Moreover, who determines what constitutes pure preaching of God's Word and proper administration of the sacraments, when Calvin would have serious difficulty supporting his ideas from Scripture? He therefore has to dismantle rational and moral arguments without addressing their content.

From this position, Calvin can attack Catholicism at the core of its beliefs, presenting them as blasphemous, idolatrous, and subject to Antichrist, rather than merely criticizing institutional and moral abuses. Sincere and rational religious beliefs may still be corrupt because reason and will are corrupt (I.11.8). Well-intentioned worship may be idolatrous (I.11.1–16). Humanly established forms of worship need not please God (IV.10.8–11). Membership in the visible Church guarantees nothing, and the pope claims the supreme jurisdiction belonging to Christ alone (IV.6–7). Each charge can equally be applied to Calvin and his sect, as the reformers themselves realized. Castellio, for example, wrote that Calvin condemned the pope yet surpassed him in his own diabolical pride and intolerance, acting as a new absolute religious tyrant in Geneva. One Inquisition censor reportedly wrote "bene dicit" in the margin.

After reason, will, and piety, Calvin's fourth central subject is power, the heavenly ambrosia of many wicked people. Unsurprisingly, he sounds like one of its most devoted connoisseurs.

In IV.20.4, having first disposed of reason, virtue, the pope, the saints, the Church Fathers, and other existing au-

thorities, Calvin raises one authority above all others: that of rulers.

> "When those who hold governing office are called gods, let no one suppose that this designation has little significance."
>
> "They have received a commission from God, have been endowed with divine authority, and in fact represent the person of God, acting, as it were, as his deputies."

After invoking David, Josiah, Joseph, Daniel, Moses, and Joshua, Calvin states that government is also the most honorable and glorious position:

> "Civil government is in God's sight not only holy and lawful, but the holiest and by far the most honorable of all positions in temporal life."

Calvin prefers government for the common good. Where it is absent, however, this signifies punishment for the people's wickedness (IV.20.25). He does not allow human free choice to determine the world's fate:

> "For those who govern for the public good are true examples and testimonies of his goodness, while those who exercise power unjustly and tyrannically are raised up by him to punish the people for their wickedness."[180]

8.4 Predestination within Catholicism: Bañezianism in the Spanish Empire

A view of free will similar to Calvin's also existed within Catholicism. On this account, the will is free because it acts voluntarily, but God has already determined its end, and it cannot change that end. Even when it deliberates

[180] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, pp. IV.20.4, 25, 31–32.

over several options and chooses one, God has determined the choice in advance.

We have already met this author's employer: Philip II of Habsburg, who died in 1598. The author was Domingo Báñez, a Dominican, holder of the prestigious chair of theology at the University of Salamanca, and an expert for the Spanish Inquisition.[181]

I intend to show that Báñez had a political interest in his doctrine similar to Calvin's. He may have sought to give moral sanction to the existing great-power politics and the repressive atmosphere of the Spanish Inquisition. Strong-handed government could seem rational and necessary during the Protestant Revolution, regarded as the greatest ideological upheaval in many centuries. Predestination removes moral judgment of particular decisions and permits a simple, clear division between "us" and "them." If nobility requires the will to consider different options and goods, freely choose among them, and select the greatest good, then a political regime can be criticized on the same grounds. One can expect, for example, that a regime could be better than it actually is if it were reformed or those running it were replaced. Protestants, of course, thought in precisely this way, while the Catholic side may have feared appearing weak.

We have already discussed how colonial slavery, oppressive taxation, and excessive warfare cast a shadow over Philip's rule. The main instrument of violence within Christianity was the Spanish Inquisition, an institution under his authority, ruthless and often corrupt. Its violence and terror began in the fifteenth century, in 1478, chiefly targeting converts suspected of secretly practicing Islam or Judaism. Several hundred people were killed for heresy under Philip. It also persecuted the culture of Muslim and Jewish converts and attacked Catholic clergy who departed from its narrow conception of orthodoxy.

[181] John Volz. *Domingo Báñez*. The Catholic Encyclopedia. 1907.

One of the most influential bishops, Bartolomé Carranza, Archbishop of Toledo, spent seventeen years in prison without a verdict establishing his guilt. The likely reason was Grand Inquisitor Valdés's hatred of Carranza and desire to seize his property. Philip found himself trapped: Valdés had offered him Carranza's enormous wealth in advance, and the king continually needed money to repay his debts. If Carranza were released, Philip would have to return it. Carranza remained in a Spanish prison from 1559 to 1567, when St. Pius V finally became furious and threatened Philip with the excommunication of the Inquisition, an interdict, and the withholding of Church tax revenues. Carranza was therefore transferred to Rome. He remained imprisoned there for another nine years, however, because Philip successfully obstructed and prolonged the proceedings from within while demanding a conviction. A verdict finally came in 1576, after seventeen years and after Pius V's death. Carranza was cleared of heresy but declared "vehemently suspected of heresy" and sent to a monastery for further penance.[182] He did not live to undergo it: imprisonment had destroyed his health, and he died eighteen days later. There is one further detail: in 1563, an international commission of theologians at the Council of Trent had declared Carranza's *Catechism* doctrinally correct, orthodox, and useful for teaching the Catholic faith. This also prompted efforts to secure his release from Spanish imprisonment.

The Inquisition's bad reputation, this problematic situation, and the response of Pius V and the Council, showing their lack of trust in the people involved, establish one point. We should not assume that chief theologian Báñez obtained his chair through intellectual brilliance. It is more likely that someone deeply compliant with official performance targets was promoted. His view of free will meets a common-sense

[182]Johann Peter Kirsch. *Bartolomé Carranza*. The Catholic Encyclopedia. 1908; University of Pennsylvania Libraries. *Vida y causa de Bartolomé Carranza*. The trial lasted from 1559 to 1576; the verdict imposed sanctions without finding actual heresy.

objection: it departs from the Church Fathers and undermines Christianity's rational foundations. Christianity is rational because human beings, possessing free will, need virtues. Báñez adds, however, that free will does not determine salvation and does not exist in the ordinary sense, since choice is predetermined, as in a theater of automatons.

Báñez's doctrine became the subject of the *de auxiliis* controversy between Dominicans and Jesuits. This was not a dispute involving the whole Church, but it was dominated by Spanish theologians.

The Jesuits condemned Báñez's doctrine of the will as eliminating human free will, for example:

> When the will acts from a necessity arising from a prior premise that in no way depends on it, it does not act freely. (Luis de Molina, *Censura contra propositiones vigintitres Patris Fratris Dominici Bannes*, 1598, p. 514.)[183]

> For if such a movement were in itself infallibly connected with the will's free consent, it would in no way allow the will to exercise its freedom. (Section 12, *Disputatio de efficacia praevenientis auxilii gratiae*.)

They also address Báñez's metaphysical theory that free human choices are physically predetermined. They point out that no such doctrine exists in the tradition and that a seemingly mechanical cause does not appear capable of producing this effect.

> We hold, in accordance with St. Augustine and the other Fathers and scholastics, that it cannot consist in some simple entity which, by acting on

[183] Robert Joseph Matava. "Divine Causality and Human Free Choice". PhD thesis. University of St Andrews, 2010, p. 185, note 65.

> the will and physically predetermining it, causes the will to turn and act piously. (Section 3, ibid.)

Báñez holds that God's predetermination "perfects" free choice while leaving it free (ibid., section 12):

> This does not destroy the exercise of free choice; rather, it is perfected and actualized by God, who is the first mover and first deliberator (*primus deliberator*), to whose absolute determination the creature's free choice is subject.

He evidently understands that this leaves unexplained how the will can be free. Yet where the Jesuits see a contradiction undermining his arguments, he calls it a great mystery and maintains his position nonetheless.

> We also confess that this is an incomprehensible mystery in the present life. Nevertheless, we are certain that man cannot otherwise make good use of free choice unless God first moves him effectively and inwardly toward its good use.[184]

In 1582, the Hieronymite Juan de Santa Cruz denounced to the Inquisition two professors who had clashed with Báñez: the Jesuit Prudencio de Montemayor and the Augustinian Luis de León. Central to the denounced propositions, reportedly quite different from their actual views, were opposition to predetermination and support for free will allowing genuine choice among the options considered. The Inquisition expelled Montemayor from the university, while León received a severe reprimand and was forbidden to discuss these subjects.

The Jesuits learned this lesson, seeing how certain Dominicans, including Báñez, could use the Inquisition to destroy inconvenient intellectuals. In 1588, Luis de Molina,

[184] Domingo Báñez and Societas Iesu. *Disputatio de efficacia praevenientis auxilii gratiae*. ScholaThomistica. 1599–1600, §§3, 12.

S.J., published *On the Concord of Free Will with the Gifts of Grace*, a precise treatise of scholastic philosophy. The Jesuits also secured their own institutional support by publishing the book in Portugal with the approval of the local Inquisition. They had considerably greater influence in Portugal, and the Inquisition was headed by the sympathetic viceroy Albert of Austria, Philip's nephew. When Báñez accused Molina of heresy, therefore, he neither stopped publication nor achieved any other substantial result. The Jesuits in turn accused him of a heresy resembling Calvin's views, on the grounds that he undermined free will. The *de auxiliis* controversy continued for more than a decade and eventually reached Rome. The pope ultimately declined to condemn either side and forbade Jesuits and Dominicans to call one another heretics on these grounds.[185]

8.5 Molina's Universal Will to Save

Let us consider two arguments Luis de Molina raised against Báñez:

1. Free will does not exist without a real possibility, determined by the agent, of choosing among the different options presented by the intellect.

2. "Sufficient" means adequate and available in the quantity required for its intended purpose. Sufficient grace is therefore divine grace that a person can accept and through which salvation can be attained, under a condition dependent only on the person: the cooperation of free will.

[185] Luis de Molina. *Concordia liberi arbitrii*. Lisboa: António Ribeiro, 1588; Matava, "Divine Causality and Human Free Choice", pp. 39–41. The Concordia was published in Lisbon in 1588; Paul V ended the dispute in 1607 without condemning either school.



Molina: Freedom and Grace

The argument can be summarized from the "Molinism" entry as follows:[186]

> If sufficient grace cannot produce a good action without an additional grace that only God can grant, in what sense was the first grace sufficient?

The second argument addresses an important existential question within Christianity: how many will be saved when we include pagans, heretics, members of false religions, and other non-Catholics? According to Scripture, for example 1 Timothy 2:4, Titus 2:11, and 2 Peter 3:9[187], God offers sufficient grace to all people. This is the teaching of the universal will to save. Yet theologians have always faced the difficulty that relatively few people genuinely convert to Catholicism and live holy lives.

One answer to the question of the number of the saved, widely promoted by the Church in modern times, is that the

[186]Joseph Pohle. *Molinism*. The Catholic Encyclopedia. 1911.
[187]Bible. *Bible: 1 Timothy*, 2:3–6.

prayers of the faithful few obtain substantial help toward the salvation of many more, even where the latter's own response is limited and imperfect. The number saved should therefore be considered much greater than the number of genuine believers. Invincible ignorance and the possibility of deeper conversion later in life play important roles. Moreover, if the light of grace is not equal for everyone, responsibility for cooperating with it extends only as far as a person's capacity to cooperate.[188]

Starting from the foundations of moral philosophy, Luis de Molina was among the first to present an optimistic account of salvation. *Scientia media*, or middle knowledge, allows him to consider infinitely many worlds that God could foresee and modify, ultimately choosing one in which genuine free will is perfectly balanced with divine Providence and mercy. The grace of salvation can therefore readily be offered to everyone willing to accept it. External circumstances beyond a person's control do not limit this possibility.[189]

Another important argument stands behind Molina and his *scientia media*. It had earlier brought late scholastic philosophy to a level unmatched by other traditions. We may call it the strong thesis of contingency. Scholastics first formulated it in the Paris condemnations of 1277 against Aristotle and the errors of philosophers. They selected various Aristotelian propositions claiming that physical reality must conform to certain necessities and answered that, since God is omnipotent, he could have made things otherwise.[190] They thereby discovered an enormous number of possible models of the world, none of which could be imposed as necessary.

[188] Second Vatican Council. *Lumen gentium*. Nov. 21, 1964, p. 16. The document describes salvation in other religions more optimistically where ignorance of the Gospel is not culpable; it does not specify the number saved.

[189] Alfred J. Freddoso. *Luis de Molina*. 1998, part 3.

[190] Krystian Zawistowski. *Order and Contingency. The Duhem Thesis on Origin of Physics in Christian Theology*. 2025. viXra: 2505.0203, chapter 3.1, pp. 53–55.

In *Order and Contingency*, I described this as the principal stimulus for the development of physics: first the theory of impetus, compound physical quantities, the mathematical description of accelerated motion, and universal gravitation; then the central theories of Newton, Cauchy, and Ampère, which established the research program of modern physics as a whole. We thus also know that the reasoning of 1277 proved effective in practice.

By considering many models of the world, Molina presents a similar account of divine omnipotence and love. He suggests that we received this particular world from among many possibilities because it offers us greater eternal good, rather than temporal good.

8.6 The Damned Mass and the Influence of Pagan Aristocratic Ethics

Some earlier Catholic thinkers assumed that the overwhelming majority of humanity was damned, although no uniform doctrine was established. St. Augustine, for example, coined the term *massa damnata*, the "damned mass," to describe humanity's shared fallen condition, from which, in his view, God does not actively deliver everyone, contrary to the passages from Timothy, Titus, and Peter cited above, and does not provide effective means to achieve it.[191]

St. Thomas Aquinas argues for a similar view as follows (*Summa theologiae*, I, q. 23, a. 7, ad 3):

> "The good corresponding to the ordinary condition of nature occurs in the majority […], whereas the good exceeding the ordinary condition of nature occurs in a minority."[192]

[191] Augustine of Hippo. *Enchiridion*, pp. 27, 98–103. The damned mass denotes humanity's shared condition in Adam, from which some are saved.

[192] Thomas Aquinas. *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 23, a. 7, ad 3. Aquinas applies the argument to the minority who are saved.

The important point is that salvation exceeds nature and natural virtues. The "good of nature" occurs in many people, while the good "exceeding the condition of nature" does not. The concept of nature is fundamental here.

St. Thomas borrowed extensively from Aristotle and Cicero. His account of virtues and natural law rests on their work. The Catholic catechism presents justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude as the four cardinal virtues. The last three are capacities: they matter, but do not establish whether someone uses them rightly, just as a brave criminal possesses "fortitude." In Aquinas's strict terminology, such a capacity alone is not yet a complete virtue.[193] Justice obviously matters, but Aristotle does not understand it as Christians do when extending it to other nations and social classes.

The problem goes beyond these virtues being "insufficient for salvation." Aristotle attributes full virtue to the politically active aristocracy. He offers a convenient set of virtues in which martial ability, pride, and honor rank highest, while the elite's duty toward subjects scarcely exists. Subjects themselves often stand outside the moral framework: women, artisans, and slaves are assigned subordinate forms of virtue.[194] Cicero is somewhat more modern in grounding goodness in social duties. Yet Roman *virtus* still assigns a dominant role to the desirable qualities of a warrior aristocracy and of people who achieve social and political success.

St. Thomas lived at the height of Aristotle's intellectual prestige in the Christian world and himself came from an Italian aristocratic family. By accepting these Aristotelian theories, he adopted a different account of the relationship between nature and virtue from that of St. John Chrysostom, for example.

What is at issue? For St. John Chrysostom, in his *Hom-*

[193]Thomas Aquinas. *Summa theologiae*, II–II, q. 47, a. 13.
[194]Aristotle, *Politics*, pp. I, 13.

ilies on First Corinthians, the only virtue proper to human nature and capable of sustaining an orderly society is Christian virtue: love of one's neighbor, the fulfillment of duties, proper family life, repentance for sin, and fidelity to one's vocation. One need not accept Catholicism to recognize the value of such virtue. Thus the Ninevites understand for themselves that they must repent of their sins, and the Roman Cornelius understands that he should support the poor. Tax collectors and prostitutes "enter the kingdom first": society condemns them, but they genuinely repent. Chrysostom therefore presents the authenticity of Christian virtue as an argument for Christianity in *On St. Babylas, Against Julian and the Apostates*. Others in the past also claimed miracles, but none brought true teaching about nobility and effective means of attaining it as Christ and the Apostles did. Interestingly, this true virtue develops along a path similar to Confucius's: first moral learning, the discovery of truth, and sincerity toward one's conscience, conformity to that truth; then the practice of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and other virtues.

Chrysostom judges the virtue of pagan philosophers negatively: see *On St. Babylas, Against Julian and the Pagans*. He seeks to show that the pagan emperor Julian the Apostate was vainly reviving a culture that had never possessed a true moral foundation. Aristotle, Diogenes, and Plato may teach something resembling virtue, but it is fundamentally corrupt and futile because their ultimate goal is mistaken. The best of them, Diogenes, practiced demanding ascetic exercises and lived in voluntary poverty in a barrel. Yet other behavior suggests an arrogant eccentric provoking society for fame, for example by masturbating in public. In Chrysostom's view, Plato was the worst: he recommended sharing wives and presented pederasty as an honorable part of philosophy. In his fourth homily on First Corinthians, Chrysostom accuses him of arrogance and meaningless ar-

guments.[195]

Why is this a problem? If true virtue is defined by its end, it begins with the will choosing that end. "I desire righteousness, and I desire life. If I cannot have both, I will give up life and choose righteousness" (Mencius 6A10). As we have already discussed, nobility therefore begins with recognizing moral truths, the Great Learning, and sincerity of conscience. Similarly, the Catholic prerequisite for life in God's grace is repentance for mortal sins, and Christ repeatedly condemns the "hypocritical" Temple elite. Plato may therefore write about virtue, but his scandalous proposals show that he does not himself seek virtue as a disposition of the will always desiring the higher good.

Let us therefore summarize how virtue relates to nature, taking Chrysostom's account into consideration.

The Church teaches that God's grace is absolutely necessary for salvation. Because of original sin, a person cannot choose a good conducive to salvation without receiving divine grace.

Yet combining Chrysostom's arguments with Aristotle's definition of nature as "an internal principle of change directed toward an appointed end" makes clear that natural virtue, understood as a tendency toward authentic nobility, has a primary role in salvation. It does not replace grace. Rather, the will cooperates with successive actual graces in doing good. The person then receives sanctifying grace and continues cooperating with it toward holiness.

St. Thomas held a similar view of the graces received before sanctifying grace:

ST I–II, q. 112, a. 2, ad 1:

> "There is also another, imperfect preparation, which sometimes precedes the reception of sanctifying grace and likewise comes from divine movement."

ST I–II, q. 112, a. 2, ad 2:

[195]John Chrysostom. *Homily 4 on First Corinthians*, pp. 4, 6.

> "For it sometimes happens that God moves a person toward good, but not yet toward perfect good, and such preparation precedes the reception of grace."[196]

He also teaches that a person who "does what lies within his power" receives grace, and that the preceding action itself is also a fruit of grace:

ST I–II, q. 109, a. 6, arg. 2 and ad 2:

> "God does not deny grace to anyone who does everything within his power."[197]

Let us emphasize this conclusion:

> Natural and supernatural virtue have decisive importance for salvation in Catholicism.

Aquinas's account is imperfect, of course, because Greco-Roman "natural virtue" may involve strength of character, political success, and contemplation of lofty truths without resolving questions such as persistence in sin without repentance or the desire to serve God rather than oneself. Aquinas therefore does not say when this process actually succeeds, whereas Chrysostom can answer.

What follows from this? Molina's second objection to Báñez was that sufficient grace means "adequate and sufficient for salvation," nothing else. If Báñez wishes to add another kind of divine action required for salvation, "efficacious grace," without which "sufficient grace" cannot be used, he has two options. Either the first grace was not sufficient, as with Calvin, or God, in his universal action as the First Cause sustaining everything in existence through natural causes, arbitrarily modifies human nature to make it capable or incapable of accepting grace. But this too is contradictory. It would no longer be the same nature as an internal principle of change directed toward an end, because

[196]Thomas Aquinas. *Summa theologiae*, I–II, q. 112, a. 2, ad 1–2, a. 3.

[197]Thomas Aquinas. *Summa theologiae*, I–II, q. 109, a. 6, arg. 2 and ad 2.

the person would no longer have the capacity to choose that end, salvation, in cooperation with grace.

Báñez proposes the following: human nature remains functional in everything concerning Aristotelian nature, but salvation transcends nature, so a disposition toward salvation need not belong to it. There is a third factor that God gives or withholds independently of natural virtue. Having replaced free will and sufficient grace, Báñez now offers the most dangerous substitution of all: someone may fulfill every duty perfectly, possess an impeccable reputation, be humble, and submit to superiors, yet this may be merely "natural virtue," while the person may actually be a heretic.

We thus continue along the path of Aristotelian confusion and the corrupted virtue condemned by Chrysostom. Natural virtue indeed does not "guarantee" salvation. This is because grace belongs to a different category from nature, and because the Greeks' natural virtue is not authentic virtue.

Yet authentic natural virtue is humanity's principal means of contact with God and of receiving grace from him. There is no other independent means. This truth is indirectly replaced and undermined here by some third factor independent of human free will, which some simply possess and others do not.

In my interpretation, Báñez's theory can support the following points:

- If Molina is right, pagans and heretics may experience God's mercy by doing what they can recognize as right in their own consciences. In Báñez's account, such virtue determines nothing; what counts is an exceptional grace given regardless.
- Philip's wars in Europe and America were a divine rescue mission rather than aggression and plunder. Local people who witnessed crimes in the Netherlands and America, became enraged, and fled to his opponents remained rebels. They reasoned from worthless natural morality against supernatural authority.

- Montemayor, Carranza, and León could be attacked by the Inquisition for alleged infidelities even though no heresy could objectively be proved against them. Moreover, León and Carranza could remain imprisoned for years without a verdict, and this was not considered an injustice.
- The culture of Arab or Jewish converts to Christianity was a collection of corrupt remnants of false worship to be eliminated, rather than an acceptable expression of identity.

These points describe a recurring mode of operation among certain government-connected members of the Spanish Dominican order in the second half of the sixteenth century. It appears in support for imperial wars, politicized Inquisition trials, and hostility toward pagans, which we will discuss shortly in connection with the Chinese Rites controversy. It is therefore difficult to suppose that Báñez produced these arguments without a reason, or that he had no reason for attempting to attack Molina through the Inquisition.

Other sixteenth-century Dominicans nevertheless made important intellectual contributions and also tried to limit the excesses of Philip II's state. Bartolomé de las Casas, for example, was among the strongest opponents of slavery. He persuaded Charles V to enact the New Laws of 1542, intended to improve the situation of Indigenous people. Colonial exploitation diminished little, however, because Philip continually needed the encomenderos' silver and gold and therefore had limited influence over them. Domingo de Soto, who died in 1560, distinguished himself as a theologian at the Council of Trent and a physicist in the late scholastic tradition, being the first to formulate the law of universal gravitation.

8.7 The Chinese Rites Controversy as an Example of Intolerance within the Church

Matteo Ricci, the Jesuit mentioned earlier, achieved spectacular success in preaching Catholicism in China. Unfortunately, two hundred years after his death little remained of the mission because of a controversy that intensified in the early eighteenth century. It arose from a collision between imperial Confucianism and the rather contemptuous, intolerant outlook of Church representatives. In 1715, the Church condemned Confucian rites. Pius XII lifted the condemnation in 1939, allowing rites of a civil character, as the Jesuits had sought,[198] suggesting that the decision had been unnecessary.

We have mentioned that Ricci found common ground with Confucian philosophers holding important positions in Chinese administration. Formally, they formed the core of the entire civil administration, up to the grand chancellor. Learning Chinese language and writing, Ricci discovered that Confucianism recommended cultivating virtue and building a harmonious social order. Much of its doctrine was clear, free from religious influences, and close to Catholic morality. Moreover, the missionary's main ideological opponents—sorcerers, Buddhists, and Daoists—were also unpopular among Confucian scholars.

Using his scientific skills, Ricci quickly found a place among them as a Western philosopher teaching virtue and nobility, winning their interest. This did not mean that people rushed to baptism in crowds, but he gradually secured toleration for Catholicism. Jesuits, who also served as scholars, cartographers, and advisers, found positions at the imperial court and obtained permission for missionary activity.[199] They were not representatives of some cult, but

[198] Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide. "Plane compertum est". In: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 32 (Dec. 8, 1939), pp. 24–26, pp. 24–26.

[199] Clement XI and Kangxi. *The Chinese Rites Controversy*. Fordham University, edicts of 1692 and 1721, decree of 1715. The documents

teachers of a “Way” similar to that set out in the Confucian Four Books. This strategic compromise meant that Chinese people did not have to believe their teaching to regard their activity as tolerable or even useful.

Once the mission was established, Dominicans and Franciscans arrived to undertake pastoral work among ordinary people. Conflict soon erupted over customs and ceremonies prescribed by official Confucian philosophy, chiefly intended to cultivate morality and tradition. These included fasting and ascetic practices, including years of mourning[200], proper conduct in the family and local community, respect for officials, and ancestor veneration, which attracted the greatest attention.

Ricci questioned high-ranking scholars about the meaning of rites honoring ancestors. They described them as secular practices expressing due respect, like bowing at court, or cultivating virtue and nobility in those paying homage. This was an old and widespread theory, found in Xunzi (died 238 BC; see Xunzi 17 and 19) and Zhu Xi (died 1200; see Zhuzi Yulei, 22 and 25).[201]

Among ordinary people, ancestral rites could be syncretic, incorporating elements of folk worship, superstition, and Buddhism. Confucian philosophers did not respect such ideas, merely tolerating them for the consolation of less educated groups. Their classics argued with remarkable pre-

show the transition from toleration to conflict over rites.

[200] Xunzi. *Xunzi: Li lun*. Wikisource, p. 19.

[201] Zhu Xi presents ancestral commemorative rites as a practice that cultivates virtue: sustaining gratitude deepens the participant’s character and, through that person’s example, encourages others toward goodness (Zhu Xi. *Zhuzi yulei, juan 22*. Ed. by Li Jingde. Wikisource, juan 22, on Lunyu 1.9). This is a specific account of a rite’s moral influence: remembrance of the life and upbringing one has received is expressed in sincere reverence, and practicing it strengthens the corresponding disposition. In ancestral rites, Zhu Xi emphasizes filial reverence; he also explains their efficacy through the continuity of qi between ancestors and descendants, rejecting the idea that seeking spirits’ favor can replace moral conduct (Zhu Xi. *Zhuzi yulei, juan 25*. Ed. by Li Jingde. Wikisource, juan 25, on Lunyu 3.12–13).

cision that the proper purpose of these rites was to render due honor and cultivate one's own nobility, while seeking actual contact with spirits and benefits from them was superstition. A harmless compromise consistent with orthodoxy was therefore entirely possible for Chinese Christians performing these rites. It might have read: "You may perform the rites as officials prescribe, but without idols and Buddhism; you may use them to pray to the Lord of Heaven and ask righteous ancestors for their intercession."

Under Dominican influence, the Catholic Church condemned these rites in the second decade of the eighteenth century. This decision brought about the Chinese mission's decline and ultimately proved disastrous precisely because the logic had been on Ricci's side all along. In 1939, Pius XII reversed the earlier ruling, showing that the entire conflict and its suffering could have been avoided.

This brings us back to virtue and nature, confirming our conclusions that a mistaken understanding of natural virtue operated within the Church, particularly among some Dominicans.

Consider whether it is better for a pagan to honor his dead ancestors as best he can, or to do nothing. We feel that the first answer is right. Ancestral rites are good at the level of natural morality and appear in many cultures. Honoring ancestors emphasizes the basic human duties of fidelity and gratitude for life and upbringing, as well as our own duty to live well. This is one reason Confucians attached such importance to filial piety: if moral order rests on human relationships and the duties arising from them, filial piety is fundamental. Practicing Catholics in Europe understand this similarly. They honor deceased loved ones by lighting lamps or candles, keeping mementos, observing death anniversaries, and praying for their souls.[202]

Trying to take all this away from the Chinese before offering a real alternative was bound to be seen as pro-

[202] Catholic Church. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, pp. 958, 1032.

foundly wrong: these foreigners wanted to dismantle a system that had held state and society together for seventeen hundred years. Had the Chinese known Europe more thoroughly than Ricci's general courtesies allowed, their judgment would probably have been no more favorable. Europe itself was torn by religious wars and chaos, and the Church had great difficulty reforming, for example, a brutal and predatory aristocracy that justified blood feuds and nepotism through family obligations.

The Dominicans categorically demanded that converts stop participating in these rites, considering them sinful in themselves, rather than only when they contained superstition or religion. This recalls the Spanish Inquisition's atmosphere of suspicion and efforts to eradicate elements of Jewish and Arab culture. It points to a negative judgment of human nature unless renewed by divine grace within visible membership of the Church.

In this matter, as in those discussed earlier, the Church lost great opportunities. These episodes also left a reputation for contempt toward other cultures, intolerance, and wrongdoing. I hope, however, that this book will help rebuild some of those burned bridges and bring both West and East closer to truth and nobility.

Bibliography

Académie française. *Vendémiaire*. URL: https://www.dictionnaire-academie.fr/article/A9V0350 (visited on 11/08/2026).

Academy of Korean Studies. *The Battle of Myeongnyang and Yi Sun-sin*. URL: https://dhlab.aks.ac.kr/Korea100/wiki/index.php/The_Battle_of_Myeongnyang_and_Yi_Sun-sin (visited on 11/08/2026).

Adams, John. *Letter to the Massachusetts Militia*. Oct. 11, 1798. URL: https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-3102 (visited on 11/08/2026).

Alvarez, Gonzalo, Francisco C. Ceballos, and Celsa Quinteiro. "The Role of Inbreeding in the Extinction of a European Royal Dynasty". In: *PLoS ONE* 4.4, e5174 (2009). DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0005174. URL: https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2664480/ (visited on 11/08/2026).

Anonymous. *Account of the Battle near Riga*. 1701. URL: https://cbdu.ijppan.pl/id/eprint/12640/ (visited on 11/08/2026).

Archives d'État de Genève. *Farel et Calvin à Genève*. URL: https://archives-etat-ge.ch/page_de_base/17-farel-et-calvin-a-geneve/ (visited on 11/08/2026).

Archivo General de Indias. *Concesiones y Confirmaciones de Encomiendas*. URL: https://www.cultura.gob.es/en/cultura/areas/archivos/mc/archivos/agi/consultas/profesionales/encomiendas.html (visited on 11/08/2026).

Aristotle. *Politics*. URL: https://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.1.one.html (visited on 11/08/2026).

— *Politics*. URL: https://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.7.seven.html (visited on 11/08/2026).

Asia for Educators, Columbia University. *The Taiping Rebellion, 1850–1864*. URL: https://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china_1750_taiping.htm (visited on 11/08/2026).

Assemblée nationale. *Assemblée nationale constituante*. URL: https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/histoire-e

t-patrimoine/revolution-francaise/assemblee-nationale-constituante (visited on 11/08/2026).
Augustine of Hippo. *Enchiridion*. URL: https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1302.htm (visited on 11/08/2026).
Baker, Don. "The Korean Catholic Church's First Hundred Years". In: *Acta Koreana* 15.1 (2012), pp. 1–14. DOI: 10.18399/acta.2012.15.1.001. URL: https://www.kci.go.kr/kciportal/landing/article.kci?arti_id=ART001667406 (visited on 11/08/2026).
Ban Gu. *Hanshu: Li Guang Su Jian zhuan*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E6%BC%A2%E6%9B%B8/%E5%8D%B7054 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Hanshu: Sima Qian zhuan*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E6%BC%A2%E6%9B%B8/%E5%8D%B7062 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Hanshu: Yiwen zhi*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E6%BC%A2%E6%9B%B8/%E5%8D%B7030 (visited on 11/08/2026).
Báñez, Domingo and Societas Iesu. *Disputatio de efficacia praevenientis auxilii gratiae*. Checked in a working English translation; not collated against the Latin printed edition. ScholaThomistica. 1599–1600. URL: https://scholathomistica.com/works/disputatio-de-efficacia-praevenientis-auxilii-gratiae?lang=en (visited on 11/08/2026).
Belch, Stanislaus F. *Paulus Vladimiri and His Doctrine Concerning International Law and Politics*. Vol. 2. Includes an edition of Paweł Włodkowic's Saevientibus. The Hague: Mouton, 1965. URL: https://api.pageplace.de/preview/DT0400.9783111589725_A35174589/preview-9783111589725_A35174589.pdf (visited on 11/08/2026).
Bible. *Bible: 1 Timothy*. URL: https://www.newadvent.org/bible/1ti002.htm (visited on 11/08/2026).
Bible: 2 Kings. King James Version. URL: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Bible_(King_James)/2_Kings (visited on 11/08/2026).

Bibliothèque nationale de France. *Traité de Louis XI avec la Ligue du Bien public*. URL: https://ccfr.bnf.fr/portailccfr/ark%3A/16871/004D36F11569 (visited on 11/08/2026).
Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Trans. by Henry Beveridge. Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845–1846. URL: https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.toc.html (visited on 11/08/2026).
Campion, Edmund. *Ten Reasons*. Trans. by Joseph Rickaby. 1914. URL: https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/13133.html.images (visited on 11/08/2026).
Carpenter, David. "Archbishop Langton and Magna Carta". In: *The English Historical Review* 126.522 (2011), pp. 1041–1065. URL: https://academic.oup.com/ehr/article-abstract/CXXVI/522/1041/536749 (visited on 11/08/2026).
Cassius Dio. *Roman History*. Trans. by Earnest Cary. URL: https://lexundria.com/dio/40.27/cy (visited on 11/08/2026).
Catholic Church. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. URL: https://www.vatican.va/content/catechism/en/part_three/section_one/chapter_one/article_3/i_freedom_and_responsibility.html (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. No. 958; compare no. 1032. URL: https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/__P2B.HTM (visited on 11/08/2026).
Château de Versailles. *Louis XIV*. URL: https://www.chateauversailles.fr/decouvrir/histoire/grands-personnages/louis-xiv (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Louis XVIII*. URL: https://www.chateauversailles.fr/decouvrir/histoire/grands-personnages/louis-xviii (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Versailles après la Révolution française*. URL: https://www.chateauversailles.fr/decouvrir/histoire/les-grandes-dates/versailles-apres-revolution-francaise (visited on 11/08/2026).
Chateaubriand, François-René de. *De Buonaparte et des Bourbons*. 1814. URL: https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/De_Buonaparte_et_des_Bourbons (visited on 11/08/2026).

Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi. Commentaries by Du Yu and Kong Yingda. URL: https://chenkang.js.cn/books/chunqiuzuozhuan.pdf (visited on 11/08/2026).

Clement XI and Kangxi. *The Chinese Rites Controversy*. Fordham University. URL: https://sourcebooks.web.fordham.edu/mod/1715chineserites.asp (visited on 11/08/2026).

Constant, Benjamin. *De l'esprit de conquête et de l'usurpation*. 1814. URL: https://davidmhart.com/liberty/FrenchClassicalLiberals/Constant/1814-EspritConquete/1st-Edition/index.html (visited on 11/08/2026).

Council of Charroux. *Peace of God*. URL: https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/pc-of-god.asp (visited on 11/08/2026).

Csikszentmihalyi, Mark. *Confucius*. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. May 2, 2024. URL: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/Confucius/ (visited on 11/08/2026).

Department of Physics, Lund University. *Mercury Emission from Emperor Qin's Mausoleum Measured by Lidar*. 2020. URL: https://www.fysik.lu.se/en/article/mercury-emission-terracotta-army-emperor-qins-mausoleum-xian-measured-lidar (visited on 11/08/2026).

Dicastero delle Cause dei Santi. *Matteo Ricci*. URL: https://www.causesanti.va/it/venerabili/matteo-ricci.html (visited on 11/08/2026).

Diderot, Denis. "Les Éleuthéromanes". In: *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*. Ed. by J. Assézat and Maurice Tourneux. Vol. 9. Paris: Garnier frères, 1875, pp. 12–19. URL: https://www.philo-labo.fr/fichiers/Diderot%20-%20Oeuvres%2009.pdf.

Drelichman, Mauricio and Hans-Joachim Voth. "The Sustainable Debts of Philip II". In: *The Journal of Economic History* 70.4 (2010), pp. 813–842. URL: https://econ-papers.upf.edu/papers/1121.pdf (visited on 11/08/2026).

Ekinci, Ekrem Buğra. "Fratricide in Ottoman Law". In: *Belleten* 82.295 (2018). URL: https://belleten.gov.tr/tam-metin/354/eng (visited on 11/08/2026).

Emecen, Feridun. *İbrâhim*. TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi. 2000. URL: https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/ibrahim--padisah (visited on 11/08/2026).
Encyclopaedia Britannica. *Hong Xiuquan*. URL: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hong-Xiuquan (visited on 11/08/2026).
Encyclopedia of Ukraine. *Vytautas the Great*. URL: https://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pagesvyvytautasthegreat.htm (visited on 11/08/2026).
Estates of the Netherlands Provinces. *Pacificatie van Gent*. Nov. 8, 1576. URL: https://dutchrevolt.library.universiteitleiden.nl/nederlands/bronnen/dutch_bronnen_1576_11_08_ned/ (visited on 11/08/2026).
Fang Hui. *Xu gujin kao*. URL: https://www.shidianguji.com/zh/book/SK1805b/chapter/1l9o3vhttvrwq (visited on 11/08/2026).
Fondation Napoléon. *1802 : avril-juin*. URL: https://www.napoleon.org/histoire-des-2-empires/chronologies/1802-avril-juin-la-grande-et-la-petite-histoire-il-y-a-deux-cents-ans/ (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Borodino (La Moskowa)*. URL: https://www.napoleon.org/en/magazine/places/borodino-la-moskowa-2/ (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *From the Niemen to Moscow*. URL: https://www.napoleon.org/en/history-of-the-two-empires/timelines/napoleons-russian-campaign-from-the-niemen-to-moscow/ (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *The Coup d'État of 18 Brumaire*. URL: https://www.napoleon.org/en/history-of-the-two-empires/close-up/the-coup-detat-of-18-and-19-brumaire-an-viii-9-and-10-november1799 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *The Retreat*. URL: https://www.napoleon.org/en/history-of-the-two-empires/timelines/napoleons-russian-campaign-the-retreat/ (visited on 11/08/2026).
Francis de Sales. *Introduction to the Devout Life*. URL: https://ccel.org/ccel/desales/devout_life.iii.iii.html (visited on 11/08/2026).

Freddoso, Alfred J. *Luis de Molina*. 1998. URL: https://www.freddoso.com/papers/molina.htm (visited on 11/08/2026).
Gazzard, Katherine. *Turner's The Battle of Trafalgar*. Royal Museums Greenwich. URL: https://www.rmg.co.uk/stories/art-culture/turners-battle-trafalgar-maligned-masterpiece (visited on 11/08/2026).
Granata, Veronica. "Marché du livre, censure et littérature clandestine". In: *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 343 (2006), pp. 123–145. DOI: 10.3406/ahrf.2006.2867. URL: https://www.persee.fr/doc/ahrf_0003-4436_2006_num_343_1_2867 (visited on 11/08/2026).
Grosseteste, Robert. "Letter to Eleanor of Provence". In: *Roberti Grosseteste episcopi quondam Lincolniensis epistolae*. Ed. by Henry Richards Luard. Letter no. 103, ca. 1244; text and translation in Epistolae. London, 1861, pp. 310–311. URL: https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/660.html (visited on 11/08/2026).
Guanzi: Qi fa. URL: https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?chapter=79732&if=en (visited on 11/08/2026).
Heilke, Thomas. *Calvin, Gnosis, and Anti-Philosophy*. Oct. 10, 2017. URL: https://voegelinview.com/calvin-gnosis-anti-philosophy-voegelins-intepretation-reformation-part/ (visited on 11/08/2026).
Henry VI and the Royal Council. *English Records Concerning Joan of Arc*. URL: https://archive.joan-of-arc.org/joanofarc_english_records.html (visited on 11/08/2026).
Hoskin, Philippa. "Robert Grosseteste, natural law and Magna Carta. National and universal law in 1253". In: *International Journal of Regional and Local History* 10.2 (2015), pp. 120–132. DOI: 10.1080/20514530.2015.1101293. URL: https://doi.org/10.1080/20514530.2015.1101293 (visited on 11/08/2026).
Integrated Educational Platform. *Jagiełło's Dynastic Policy*. URL: https://zpe.gov.pl/a/przeczytaj/DhRU86kjg (visited on 11/08/2026).

John Chrysostom. *Homily 17 on the Statues*. URL: https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/190117.htm (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Homily 4 on First Corinthians*. URL: https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/220104.htm (visited on 11/08/2026).
Justin Martyr. *First Apology*. URL: https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0126.htm (visited on 11/08/2026).
Kirsch, Johann Peter. *Bartolomé Carranza*. The Catholic Encyclopedia. 1908. URL: https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03376a.htm (visited on 11/08/2026).
Kosińska, Urszula. *The Silent Sejm*. URL: https://muzhp.pl/kalendarium/sejm-niemy (visited on 11/08/2026).
Leo XIII. *Rerum novarum*. May 15, 1891. URL: https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html (visited on 11/08/2026).
Liji zhengyi: Fang ji. Commentaries by Zheng Xuan and Kong Yingda. Chinese Text Project. URL: https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?chapter=533020&if=en (visited on 11/08/2026).
Liu Xu and others. *Jiu Tang shu: Yang Guifei*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E8%88%8A%E5%94%90%E6%9B%B8/%E5%8D%B751 (visited on 11/08/2026).
Lunyu zhushu: Yan Yuan. Commentaries by He Yan and Xing Bing. Chinese Text Project. URL: https://ctext.org/lunyu-zhushu/yan-yuan/zh (visited on 11/08/2026).
Lüshi chunqiu: Zhi jie. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/%E5%91%82%E6%B0%8F%E6%98%A5%E7%A7%8B/%E5%8D%B7%E5%8D%81%E5%85%AD (visited on 11/08/2026).
Madison, James. *Federalist No. 51*. Feb. 6, 1788. URL: https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed51.asp (visited on 11/08/2026).
Matava, Robert Joseph. “Divine Causality and Human Free Choice”. PhD thesis. University of St Andrews, 2010. DOI: 10.17630/10023-989. URL: https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/10023/989/Th

esis-Robert-Matava-complete-version.pdf?sequence=3 (visited on 11/08/2026).
Mazanec, Thomas J. *Poet-Monks: The Invention of Buddhist Poetry in Late Medieval China*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2024. URL: https://eastasian.ucsb.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Mazanec-Thomas-J-Poet-Monks-The-Invention-of-Buddhist-Poetry-in-Late-Medieval-China-Cornell-University-Press-2024.pdf.
Molina, Luis de. *Concordia liberi arbitrii*. Lisboa: António Ribeiro, 1588. URL: https://loyola.biblioteca.deusto.es/items/900d23b6-4245-4f10-9661-4ab68de0f612 (visited on 11/08/2026).
Monnaie de Paris. *Métalmorphoses*. URL: https://www.monnaiedeparis.fr/media/contentmanager/content/Frise_chrono_logique_compress_e.pdf (visited on 11/08/2026).
Musée protestant. *Les dernières guerres de religion*. URL: https://museeprotestant.org/notice/les-dernieres-guerres-de-religion-1621-1629/ (visited on 11/08/2026).
Nationaal Archief. *Pacificatie van Gent*. URL: https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/beleven/onderwijs/bronnenbox/pacificatie-van-gent-1576 (visited on 11/08/2026).
Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi. *Xin Tang shu: An Lushan*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E6%96%B0%E5%94%90%E6%9B%B8/%E5%8D%B7225%E4%B8%8A (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Xin Tang shu: Yang Guozhong*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E6%96%B0%E5%94%90%E6%9B%B8/%E5%8D%B7206 (visited on 11/08/2026).
Parlement de Paris. *Arrêt du 6 août 1762*. URL: https://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark%3A/12148/cb337639322 (visited on 11/08/2026).
Plutarch. *Life of Caesar*. Trans. by Bernadotte Perrin. URL: https://lexundria.com/plut_caes/31/prr (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Life of Crassus*. Trans. by Bernadotte Perrin. 1916. URL: https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Crassus*.html (visited on 11/08/2026).

Plutarch. *Life of Pompey*. Trans. by Bernadotte Perrin. URL: https://lexundria.com/plut_pomp/67/prr (visited on 11/08/2026).
Pohle, Joseph. *Molinism*. The Catholic Encyclopedia. 1911. URL: https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10437a.htm (visited on 11/08/2026).
Polish Army Museum. *The Surrender at Ujście*. URL: https://muzeumwp.pl/timeline/kapitulacja-wielkopolskiego-pospolitego-ruszenia-pod-ujsciem-21-lipca-armia-szwedzka-przekroczyla-granice-rzeczypospolitej-juz-dwa-dni-pozniej-stanela-pod-ujsciem-gdzie-mialo-ich-powstrzymac-pospolit/ (visited on 11/08/2026).
Polish History Museum. *The Battle of Kliszów*. URL: https://muzhp.pl/kalendarium/bitwa-pod-kliszowem (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *The Privilege of Košice*. URL: https://muzhp.pl/kalendarium/przywilej-koszycki (visited on 11/08/2026).
Raymo, James M. et al. “Marriage and Family in East Asia: Continuity and Change”. In: *Annual Review of Sociology* 41 (2015), pp. 471–492. DOI: 10.1146/annurev-soc-073014-112428. URL: https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6070151/.
République et canton de Genève. *Michel Servet*. URL: https://noms-geographiques.app.ge.ch/voie/geneve/rue-michel-servet (visited on 11/08/2026).
Ricci, Matteo. *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*. Ed. by Thierry Meynard. Trans. by Douglas Lancashire and Peter Kuo-chen Hu. Chestnut Hill, MA: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2016. URL: https://xinxingren.gen.nz/neoclassics/Ricci_1603/TMotLoH.html (visited on 11/08/2026).
Richelieu, Armand Jean du Plessis. *Political Testament*. URL: https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1764richelieu-poltest-excerpts.asp (visited on 11/08/2026).
Rijksmuseum. *The Beheading of Egmont and Horne*. URL: https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/object/The-Beheading-of-Egmont-and-Horne--ae93b1b46323e084d6aeac24c29293a8 (visited on 11/08/2026).

Royal Collection Trust. *The Diary of King George V*. URL: https://www.rct.uk/collection/stories/the-diary-of-king-george-v (visited on 11/08/2026).
Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide. “Plane compertum est”. In: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 32 (Dec. 8, 1939), pp. 24–26. URL: https://www.vatican.va/archive/aas/documents/AAS-32-1940-ocr.pdf#page=24 (visited on 11/08/2026).
Sacra Congregatio Studiorum. *The Twenty-Four Thomistic Theses*. Trans. by W. H. Marshner. July 27, 1914. URL: https://marshner.christendom.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/24-theses-webedit.pdf (visited on 11/08/2026).
Schloß Schönbrunn Kultur- und Betriebsgesellschaft. *Charles V*. URL: https://www.habsburger.net/en/persons/habsburg-emperor/charles-v (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Maximilian and the Emperorship*. URL: https://www.habsburger.net/en/chapter/maximilian-and-emperorship-balancing-act-between-utopia-and-reality (visited on 11/08/2026).
Second Vatican Council. *Lumen gentium*. Nov. 21, 1964. URL: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (visited on 11/08/2026).
Shangshu zhengyi. Commentary by Kong Yingda and others. Wikisource. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%B0%9A%E6%9B%B8%E6%AD%A3%E7%BE%A9/%E5%8D%B7%E5%8D%81 (visited on 11/08/2026).
Shen Buhai. *Shenzi: Da ti*. Excerpt in Qunshu zhiyao, compiled by Wei Zheng and others. URL: https://www.shidianguji.com/zh/book/SBCK095/chapter/SBCK095_87 (visited on 11/08/2026).
Sima Guang. *Zizhi tongjian*. Wikisource. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/%E8%B3%87%E6%B2%BB%E9%80%9A%E9%91%91/%E5%8D%B7002 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Zizhi tongjian*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/%E8%B3%87%E6%B2%BB%E9%80%9A%E9%91%91/%E5%8D%B7001 (visited on 11/08/2026).

Sima Qian. *Shiji: Bai Qi Wang Jian liezhuan*. Wikisource. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98/%E5%8D%B7073 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Shiji: Chen She shijia*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98/%E5%8D%B7048 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Shiji: Chu shijia*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98/%E5%8D%B7040 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Shiji: Fan Li Teng Guan liezhuan*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98/%E5%8D%B7095 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Shiji: Fengshan shu*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98/%E5%8D%B7028 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Shiji: Gaozu benji*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98/%E5%8D%B7008 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Shiji: Huaiyin hou liezhuan*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98/%E5%8D%B7092 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Shiji: Jin shijia*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98/%E5%8D%B7039 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Shiji: Kongzi shijia*. Wikisource. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98/%E5%8D%B7047 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Shiji: Laozi Han Fei liezhuan*. URL: https://www.shidianguji.com/zh/book/SK0698/chapter/1l9z5ze79ni21 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Shiji: Laozi Han Fei liezhuan*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98/%E5%8D%B7063 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Shiji: Li jiangjun liezhuan*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98/%E5%8D%B7109 (visited on 11/08/2026).

Sima Qian. *Shiji: Li Sheng Lu Jia liezhuan*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98/%E5%8D%B7097 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Shiji: Li Si liezhuan*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98/%E5%8D%B7087 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Shiji: Liu Jing Shusun Tong liezhuan*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98/%E5%8D%B7099 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98/%E5%8D%B7006 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Shiji: Qin Shihuang benji*. Commentaries by Pei Yin, Sima Zhen, and Zhang Shoujie. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98%E4%B8%89%E5%AE%B6%E8%A8%BB/%E5%8D%B7006 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Shiji: Shang jun liezhuan*. Wikisource. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98/%E5%8D%B7068 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Shiji: Taishigong zixu*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98/%E5%8D%B7130 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Shiji: Tian Jingzhong Wan shijia*. Chinese Text Project. URL: https://ctext.org/text.pl?if=gb&node=6897&show=parallel (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Shiji: Wei Bao Peng Yue liezhuan*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98/%E5%8D%B7090 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Shiji: Xiang Yu benji*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98/%E5%8D%B7007 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Shiji: Xiongnu liezhuan*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98/%E5%8D%B7110 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Shiji: Xiongnu liezhuan*. Commentaries by Pei Yin, Sima Zhen, and Zhang Shoujie. URL: https://zh.wikisource.o

rg/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98%E4%B8%89%E5%AE%B6%E8%A8%BB/%E5%8D%B7110 (visited on 11/08/2026).
Sima Qian. *Shiji: Zhou benji*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%8F%B2%E8%A8%98/%E5%8D%B7004 (visited on 11/08/2026).
Suetonius. *Life of Julius Caesar*. Trans. by J. C. Rolfe. URL: https://lexundria.com/suet_jul/29/r (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *The Life of Claudius*. Trans. by J. C. Rolfe. URL: https://lexundria.com/suet_cl/44/r (visited on 11/08/2026).
Synod of Dort. *Canons of Dort*. 1618–1619. URL: https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/canons-dort (visited on 11/08/2026).
Tacitus. *The Annals*. Trans. by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb. London: Macmillan, 1876. URL: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Annals_(Tacitus)/Book_14#12.
— *The Annals*. Trans. by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb. 1876. URL: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Annals_(Tacitus)/Book_13 (visited on 11/08/2026).
Thomas Aquinas. *Summa theologiae*. URL: https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3023.htm (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Summa theologiae*. URL: https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1001.htm (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Summa theologiae*. URL: https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3004.htm (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Summa theologiae*. URL: https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1023.htm (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Summa theologiae*. URL: https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3047.htm (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Summa theologiae*. URL: https://www.newadvent.org/summa/2112.htm (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Summa theologiae*. URL: https://www.newadvent.org/summa/2109.htm (visited on 11/08/2026).
UK Parliament. *Engrossment of the Official Record of the Trial of King Charles I*. URL: https://www.parliament.uk

/about/living-heritage/evolutionofparliament/parliamentwork/offices-and-ceremonies/collections/clerk-of-the-hoc/charles-trial/ (visited on 11/08/2026).
United States and France. *Treaty of Alliance*. Feb. 6, 1778. URL: https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fr1788-2.asp (visited on 11/08/2026).
Universität Wien. *Kaiser Karl V.* URL: https://fnz-online.univie.ac.at/glossar/einzelansicht/news/kaiser-karl-v/ (visited on 11/08/2026).
University of Pennsylvania Libraries. *Vida y causa de Bartolomé Carranza*. URL: https://colenda.library.upenn.edu/catalog/81431-p3xw4810m (visited on 11/08/2026).
USCCB. *2 Maccabees*. URL: https://bible.usccb.org/bible/2maccabees/4 (visited on 11/08/2026).
Volz, John. *Domingo Báñez*. The Catholic Encyclopedia. 1907. URL: https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02247a.htm (visited on 11/08/2026).
Wallech, Steven. *China and the West to 1600: Empire, Philosophy, and the Paradox of Culture*. Wiley, 2016. URL: https://catalogimages.wiley.com/images/db/pdf/9781118879993.excerpt.pdf.
Washington, George. *Neutrality Proclamation*. Apr. 22, 1793. URL: https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-12-02-0371 (visited on 11/08/2026).
William of Orange. *Apology*. 1581. URL: https://dutchrevolt.library.universiteitleiden.nl/nederlands/bronnen/dutch_bronnen_1581-00-00-eng/ (visited on 11/08/2026).
Xunzi. *Xunzi: Li lun*. Wikisource. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/%E8%8D%80%E5%AD%90/%E7%A6%AE%E8%AB%96%E7%AF%87 (visited on 11/08/2026).
Yi Sun-sin. *Nanjung ilgi*. In Yi Chungmugong jeonseo, collected edition of 1795. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/%E6%9D%8E%E5%BF%A0%E6%AD%A6%E5%85%AC%E5%85%A8%E6%9B%B8/%E5%8D%B7%E5%85%AB (visited on 11/08/2026).
Zawistowski, Krystian. *Order and Contingency. The Duhem Thesis on Origin of Physics in Christian Theology*. 2025.

viXra: 2505.0203. URL: https://vixra.org/abs/2505.0203 (visited on 11/08/2026).
Zhang Tingyu and others. *Ming shi: Fang Xiaoru*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh-hant/%E6%98%8E%E5%8F%B2_(%E5%9B%9B%E5%BA%AB%E5%85%A8%E6%9B%B8%E6%9C%AC)/%E5%8D%B7141 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Ming shi: Jianwen*. URL: https://www.shidianguji.com/zh/book/CADAL01027941/chapter/1l1wlibu46fj6 (visited on 11/08/2026).
Zhao Erxun and others. *Qing shi gao*. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/%E6%B8%85%E5%8F%B2%E7%A8%BF (visited on 11/08/2026).
Zhu Xi. *Lunyu jizhu*. Wikisource. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%9B%9B%E6%9B%B8%E7%AB%A0%E5%8F%A5%E9%9B%86%E8%A8%BB/%E8%AB%96%E8%AA%9E%E9%9B%86%E6%B3%A8%E5%8D%B7%E4%B8%80 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Lunyu jizhu*. Wikisource. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%9B%9B%E6%9B%B8%E7%AB%A0%E5%8F%A5%E9%9B%86%E8%A8%BB/%E8%AB%96%E8%AA%9E%E9%9B%86%E6%B3%A8%E5%8D%B7%E5%9B%9B (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Lunyu jizhu*. Wikisource. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%9B%9B%E6%9B%B8%E7%AB%A0%E5%8F%A5%E9%9B%86%E8%A8%BB/%E8%AB%96%E8%AA%9E%E9%9B%86%E6%B3%A8%E5%8D%B7%E5%85%AD (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Zhongyong zhangju*. Wikisource. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E5%9B%9B%E6%9B%B8%E7%AB%A0%E5%8F%A5%E9%9B%86%E8%A8%BB/%E4%B8%AD%E5%BA%B8%E7%AB%A0%E5%8F%A5 (visited on 11/08/2026).
— *Zhuzi yulei, juan 22*. Ed. by Li Jingde. Wikisource. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/%E6%9C%B1%E5%AD%90%E8%AA%9E%E9%A1%9E/022 (visited on 11/08/2026).

Zhu Xi. *Zhuzi yulei, juan 25*. Ed. by Li Jingde. Wikisource. URL: https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/%E6%9C%B1%E5%AD%90%E8%AA%9E%E9%A1%9E/025 (visited on 11/08/2026).

Žižek, Slavoj. “Robespierre, or, the ‘Divine Violence’ of Terror”. In: *Virtue and Terror*. Ed. by Jean Ducange. Trans. by John Howe. London: Verso, 2007, pp. vii–xxxix. URL: https://www.lacan.com/zizrobes.htm.