

性自命也

CHAPTER TWELVE

*NATURE COMES FROM THE MANDATE*¹

Introduction

Nature Comes from the Mandate (*Xìng zì Mìng Chū* 性自命出) is a work from a cache of manuscripts written on bamboo slips found, in 1993, in a tomb located near the town of Guōdiàn 郭店, in Jīngmén 荊門, Húběi Province 湖北省. The text can be dated with confidence to around 300 BCE, as that is when the tomb was sealed. Its authorship is contested, as is its affiliation, but it concerns a number of concepts such as human nature (xìng 性), dispositions (qíng 情), the heart (xīn 心), the mandate (mìng 命), ritual (lǐ 禮), right (yì 義), music (yuè 樂), Heaven (Tiān 天), sages (shèng 聖), etc. that are characteristic of Confucianism. Moreover, it discusses the central importance of the *Odes* (Shī 詩), *History* (Shū 書), *Rites* (Lǐ 禮), and *Music* (Yuè 樂) in education and moral self-cultivation, though it is not certain to what texts these names refer. Like several of the other works in the Guodian corpus, *Nature Comes from the Mandate* was lost some time between the late Warring States (403–221 BCE) and the Western Han (206 BCE–9 CE) periods and was not transmitted to future generations. While echoes of its influence can be heard throughout a wide range of later texts, the exact relationship between it and later philosophers and traditions remains highly speculative.



1. Though all human beings have a nature, their hearts lack a fixed intention. The heart waits until it encounters things and only then becomes aroused; it waits until it encounters what is pleasing and only then becomes active; it waits until it

1. Thanks to Eirik L. Harris and Justin Tiwald for helpful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this translation.

practices repeatedly and only then becomes fixed. The *qi* of joy, anger, grief, and sorrow are the nature. When they are manifested on the outside, things have taken hold of them. The nature comes from the mandate; the mandate descends from Heaven. The Way begins in dispositions and dispositions arise from the nature.² In the beginning, one is close to one's dispositions;³ in the end, one is close to the right. Those who understand the dispositions are able to draw them out; those who understand the right are able to draw it in. Likes and dislikes are the nature. What one likes and dislikes are things. Approval and disapproval are the nature. What one approves and disapproves of are circumstances.⁴

2. The nature is most basic and important; things take hold of it. The sounds of metal [bells] and stone [chimes] do not come forth unless they are struck. Though human beings possess the nature, if things do not take hold of their hearts it is not brought forth. Whenever the heart has an intention, it must be engaged with something. The heart cannot implement itself on its own, just as the mouth cannot converse on its own [i.e. without having something to talk about]. Oxen are born and grow large; geese are born and spread their wings; their natures cause this to be so. Human beings are born and learn; something causes this to be so.

3. All things display differences. Strong things are used as pillars; they are chosen for this purpose because they are strong. Pliable things are used as bindings; they are chosen for this purpose because they are pliable. All [people] within the Four Seas have the same nature, but each uses their heart differently; instruction causes this to be so.

4. As for the nature, some things move it, some things attract it, some things regulate it, some things hone it, some things draw it out, some things nurture it, some things grow it.

5. What moves the nature are things. What attracts the nature are pleasures. What regulates the nature are [proper] influences.⁵ What hones the nature is the

2. Cf. the opening lines of the *Mean* (in chapter 11 of this volume).

3. "Dispositions" (qíng 情) refers to our innate repertoire of emotional responses or reactive attitudes, the characteristic ways in which people tend to respond to certain things, events, or circumstance. See also *Xunzi* chapter 2, note 22, in chapter 9 of this volume.

4. Literally, "Good and not good [shàn bù shàn 善不善] are the nature. What one regards as good and regards as not good are circumstances." Cf. the notion of "the heart of approval and disapproval" (shì fēi zhī xīn 是非之心) in *Mengzi* 2A6 (in chapter 4 of this volume).

5. The sense is obscure but this probably means the norms, classical texts, and institutions that influence proper behavior and development that were intentionally designed "to bring about some specific effect." For the latter idea, see the following two sections.

right.⁶ What draws out the nature are circumstances. What nurtures the nature is practice. What grows the nature is the Way.

6. Whatever can be seen is called a thing. Whatever gratifies the self is called a pleasure. The circumstance [brought about by] a thing is called its circumstance.⁷ What is done to bring about some specific effect is called an influence. The right is the sum of the various things that are approved. Practice is what one uses to train the nature. The Way is the Way of the various things.

7. The working of the heart is the most basic and important of Ways. Of the four workings of the Way,⁸ only the human Way can be taken as the Way [i.e. only it can be chosen as a method for guiding the heart]. The other three workings [of the Way] are simply followed [as parts of the natural course of things].

8. When the *Odes*, *History*, *Rites*, and *Music* first came forth, they arose from human beings. The *Odes* was composed to bring about some specific effect; the *History* was enunciated to bring about some specific effect; the *Rites* and *Music* were held up to bring about specific effects.

9. The sages compared the different types [of classical texts] and sorted and collected them; they surveyed what came earlier and later and arranged them properly; they embodied the right and regulated and embellished it; they gave good order to the dispositions and brought forth [what should be manifested] and took in [what should be internalized]. Only then did they apply them to instruction. Instruction is how one gives rise to Virtue within.

10. The rites are created from the dispositions but elevate them. The rites regulate the dispositions by fitting them to what is proper for each affair; the order of what

6. The word “right” is a translation of the character *yì* 義, which is often translated as “righteousness.” For a discussion of its diverse meanings, see *Xunzi* chapter 1, note 12, in chapter 9 of this volume. See also *yi* under *Important Terms* in the appendices.

7. The point being that the nature’s circumstances are *set by* and depend upon external things and not the nature itself. Thanks to Justin Tiwald for insights on this issue.

8. What the four workings of the Way are is a matter of controversy and speculation. Perhaps this refers to the workings of Heaven, earth, ghosts and spirits, and humanity. Only the last concerns forming a fixed intention for one’s heart and following it *as the Way*. The others are all things that are simply so of themselves (*zìrán* 自然). Compare the second sentence of this section with the opening line of *Daodejing* chapter 1 (in chapter 6 of this volume).

comes earlier and what comes later results in the moral Way.⁹ The moderation of this order results in a refined pattern. Assuming an appropriate demeanor and expression is how one achieves a refined pattern and moderation. Noble people refine their dispositions, ennoble what is right, enhance their moderation, perfect their demeanor, find happiness in the Way, and take pleasure in instruction; this is how they become reverent. Doing obeisance is how they manifest their reverence. The praises they offer accord with a refined pattern. By presenting bolts of silk they attest to their trustworthiness.¹⁰ Their words are in accord with the moral Way.

11. Laughter is the shallow release of joy; happiness is the profound release of joy.

12. When sounds that come forth from dispositions are trustworthy, only then do they enter deeply into and profoundly stir the hearts of people. When one hears the sound of laughter, one is refreshed and feels delight. When one hears songs and ballads, one is pleased and feels elation. When one hears the sounds of zithers, one is anxious and sighs. When one observes the Lai or Wu [dances], one is angered and roused to take action. When one observes the Shao or Xia [dances], one makes effort and feels restraint. When singing out thoughts of longing, one's heart is moved as if letting out a sigh. When one resides in moderation for a long time, one takes care to return to what is fine and reverts to the beginning; one follows along in bringing forth and taking in [what is proper]—this is the beginning of Virtue. The music of Zheng and Wei is not the music one should listen to or follow.¹¹

13. All ancient music moves the heart; licentious music moves the lustful [inclinations]. Both types instruct those [who listen to them]. The Lai and Wu [dances] express happiness about the conquest [of the Shang];¹² the Shao and Xia [dances] express happiness in [proper] dispositions.¹³

14. Whenever one feels utmost happiness, one will come to feel sorrow; weeping in grief too, of course, is an expression of sorrow. These are all expressions of

9. "Moral Way" here and below is literally *yì dào* 義道, "Way of right" or "Way of righteousness."

10. Cf. "Twelfth Year of Duke Ai" in the *Zuo*zhuan, which describes how one offers "jade and silk" to attest to the covenants one signs.

11. Cf. *Analec*s 15.11 (in chapter 1 of this volume).

12. These dances celebrate the Zhou king Wu's conquest of the Shang dynasty, which had come to oppress and harry its people.

13. Cf. *Analec*s 7.14 and 15.11 (in chapter 1 of this volume).

dispositions. Grief and happiness are close to one another as natural dispositions. For this reason, as states of the heart, they are not far removed from one another. When weeping moves the heart, one is mired in depression; when such intense feelings linger on, one remains grief-stricken until the end. When happiness moves the heart, one is profoundly elated; when such intense feelings begin to slip away, one feels sorrow and becomes lost in distant longing.

15. Whenever one feels anxious and thinks longingly about it, one will feel sorrow. Whenever one feels happiness and thinks longingly about it, one will feel delight.

16. In longing [for something], one uses one's heart to the extreme. Sighing is the art or working¹⁴ of longing. When the sound [one makes] changes, the heart changes [with it]. When the heart changes, the sound [one makes] will change accordingly. A groan is the playing out of grief. An exclamation [of delight] is the playing out of happiness. Babbling is the playing out of [a child's] voice; chattering is the playing out of the heart.

17. Joy leads to being pleased. Being pleased leads to elation. Elation leads to singing. Singing leads to swaying. Swaying leads to dancing. Dancing is the culmination of joy. Anger leads to anxiousness. Anxiousness leads to indignation. Indignation leads to sighing. Sighing leads to beating one's breast. Beating one's breast leads to stomping one's feet. Stomping one's feet is the culmination of anger.

18. In learning, the most difficult thing is to seek for one's heart.¹⁵ By keeping track of what someone does, one can get close [to finding it], but this is not as fast a route as [seeking it] through music. Those who are capable of handling affairs but incapable of handling their hearts are not esteemed. Those who seek for their hearts through artifice will fail to obtain it. It is easy to understand why one cannot obtain the heart through artifice. Those who commit no error in carrying out ten consecutive undertakings must have their hearts in it.¹⁶ If one examines what is clearly manifest [about a person], how can one fail to grasp their dispositions?

14. Here and below, "art" means the method or workings of some state of the mind or character.

15. Cf. *Mencius* 6A11 (not in this volume).

16. Similar thoughts are expressed in *Xunzi* chapter 9 (in chapter 9 of this volume) and chapter 13 (not in this volume).

19. Conferring benefits is the art or working of the right.¹⁷ The right is the art or working of reverence. Reverence is moderation in regard to things. Sincerity is the art or working of benevolence.¹⁸ Benevolence is the art or working of the nature; the nature, in some respects, gives rise to it. Dutifulness is the art or working of trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is the art or working of the dispositions. The dispositions come forth from the nature.

20. There are seven types¹⁹ of care, but only care [that arises from] the nature is close to benevolence. There are five types of wisdom, but only that pertaining to the right is close to dutifulness. There are three types of loathing, but only the loathing of what is not benevolent²⁰ is close to the right. There are four Ways that are regarded as the Way, but only the human Way can be taken as the Way.²¹

21. Among the agitations that can arise from the exercise of the heart, the greatest involve longings. Among the anxieties that can arise from the exercise of the intelligence, the greatest involve worries. Among the states that can arise from the exercise of the dispositions, the greatest involve grief and joy. Among the comforts that can arise from the exercise of the body, the greatest involve pleasure. Among the ways exhaustion can arise from the exercise of one's strength, the greatest involve [the pursuit of] profit. The eyes' fondness for beauty, the ears' delight in sounds [arouse] profoundly pleasing forms of *qi*. People do not find it difficult to die in pursuit of these.²²

22. Those who are moderate but lack a forthright heart will become pretentious.²³ Those who are forthright but lack a happy personality will become unrestrained.

17. For this line and the line below about the "art or working of benevolence," see *Analects* 6.30 (in chapter 1 of this volume), which begins with a disciple asking Kongzi whether someone who extensively confers benefits to the people is Rén 仁 ("Good" or "benevolent") and ends by saying that relying on the Confucian version of the Golden Rule to "draw the inference [about how to treat others] from what is near at hand [i.e. oneself] is the art or working of benevolence."

18. Here, "sincerity" is dù 篤, not chéng 誠 ("Sincerity"), as in chapter 11. The same is true with "sincerely" below.

19. There is no other reference in this or collateral texts to the seven types of care mentioned here or the five types of wisdom mentioned in the following line.

20. Cf. *Analects* 4.6 (in chapter 1 of this volume) for the idea of loathing what is not benevolent.

21. Cf. note 8 (on paragraph 7), above.

22. Compare *Daodejing* chapter 12 (in chapter 6 of this volume).

23. The structure of the argument in much of this passage is reminiscent of *Analects* 8.2 (in chapter 1 of this volume).

Those who have clever words and crafty speech but lack a compliant heart will become degenerate.²⁴ Those who can pleasantly harmonize and be at home with others but lack an ardent and enterprising disposition will be disgraced. Those who are quick-witted must be guided. Those who are honest must be assisted.

23. Everyone loathes those who employ artifice. Artifice leads to secrecy. Secrecy leads to deception. Deception leads to none wanting to associate with you. Carefulness is the art or working of benevolence;²⁵ even its excesses²⁶ do not elicit blame.

Haste is the art or working of scheming, and its excesses elicit blame. For people not to be careful is itself a mistake; of this, one can be sure.

24. Everyone delights in those who possess [genuine] human dispositions. As long as one acts in accord with one's [genuine] dispositions, even one's excesses will not elicit loathing. If one does not act in accord with one's [genuine] dispositions, even though one [conquers] difficulties one will not win esteem. People trust those who act in accord with their [genuine] dispositions, even before they act.

25. Those who are trusted without having spoken²⁷ are those with refined dispositions. Those who cause the people to show constancy without having taught them are those whose nature is good. Those who inspire the people to follow without having rewarded them harbor wealth within. Those who cause the people to stand in awe without having punished them are those with majestic hearts.

26. Those who, though lowly, are esteemed by the people are those with Virtue. Those who, though poor, draw the people to them are those who have the Way. Those who dwell alone but are full of joy²⁸ are those who have inner discrimination. Those who, though loathed, cannot be shown to be wrong are those who comprehend the right. Those who, though wrong, cannot be loathed are those who

24. Compare *Analects* 1.3 (in chapter 1 of this volume) and 5.25, 15.27, and 17.17 (not in this volume).

25. See note 17 (on paragraph 19) above.

26. The word translated here and in the following section as "excesses" (guò 過) refers to a transgression or simply a mistake. Here, though, I think the author is playing on the idea that an excess of carefulness (like kindness) is not regarded as a mistake.

27. A number of other early texts contain the same line, for example, *Xunzi* chapter 8, "The Achievements of the Ru" (in a section of that chapter not in this volume), and the "Record of Music" (Yüèjì 樂記) and "Record of Examples" (Biāojiè 表記) chapters of the *Book of Rites*.

28. The same line appears in a section of *Xunzi* chapter 8, "The Achievements of the Ru," not included in this volume.

are sincerely benevolent. Those whose actions are free of excesses are those who understand the Way.

27. Those who hear the Way and bring it back to those above have dealings with those above.²⁹ Those who hear the Way and bring it back to those below have dealings with those below. Those who hear the Way and bring it back to themselves cultivate themselves. Having dealings with those above is close to serving a lord; having dealings with those below and winning over the masses is close to administering the government. Cultivating the self is close to attaining benevolence.

28. One uses the Way when dealing with those who share the same orientation. One uses the right when dealing with those who do not share the same orientation. One uses Virtue when dealing with those who delight in the same things. One uses planning when dealing with those who do not delight in the same things. For bringing good order within the home, one seeks leniency. For bringing good order outside the home, one seeks regulation.

29. Whenever setting out to persuade others, do not hold back; one must personally follow through with whatever one advocates and in speech clearly own up to it without any artifice. Whenever dealing with others, do not be overly intense, and always ensure your affairs reach a conclusion. Whenever summoned [to court], do not be afraid and do not offer monologues. Whenever living at home, practice [what you have learned]. If there are minor faults in what brings joy to your father and elder brothers, accept them, as long as they do no great harm. Once such things have passed, do not mention them again.

30. Whenever there are distressing or worrisome affairs, what is needed is to take responsibility. Whenever there are happy affairs, what is needed is to put oneself last. When it comes to one's self, what is needed is to be calm and free from envy. When it comes to contemplation, what is needed is to be profound and without artifice. When it comes to action, what is needed is to be courageous and persevere to the end. When it comes to appearance, what is needed is to be serious and unpretentious. When it comes to the heart, what is needed is to be pure and peaceful. When it comes to joy, what is needed is wisdom and disregarding what is not

29. The terms "have dealings with those above" (shàng jiāo 上交) and "have dealings with those below" (xià jiāo 下交) are found in the Great Appendix to the *Changes* (Part II), where Kongzi is quoted as saying, "The superior man, in his dealings with those above, does not flatter; in his dealings with those below, he shows no disrespect."

essential. When it comes to happiness, what is needed is good measure and a place to stop. When it comes to anxiety, what is needed is restraint without discouragement. When it comes to anger, what is needed is to wax full but not explode. When it comes to taking office, what is needed is to be modest and not deceitful. When it comes to retiring from office, what is needed is to be solemn and not insouciant. In regard to all of these, one must be finely patterned and without artifice.

31. When noble people maintain a firm commitment, they must have a broad and accommodating heart. When they speak, they must have resolute and straightforward trustworthiness. When they entertain guests, they must have a humble and reverent countenance. When they carry out sacrificial rituals, they must have chaste and perfect reverence. When they conduct mourning, they must have cherishing and longing feelings of grief. Noble people take their character as most basic and important.

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