

## MEH TI ON NON-FATALISM

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MEH TI says: "The ancient rulers, dukes and great men, governing the kingdom, desired to have the country rich, with multitudes of people and good order in the administration. Yet instead of gaining multitudes the people became fewer; and instead of order they got disorder." Thus, they lost what they desired; while they gained what they hated. Why? Meh Ti says: "Because of the number of fatalists among the people!"

The fatalist says: "Being rich by fate, a man is rich; while being poor by fate, he is poor. Whether a nation increases or decreases is determined by fate. When order is fated, there will be peace; while when disorder is fated, there will be trouble. If fate determine that a man has a long life, he will have a long life; while if fate determine that a man has a short life, he will have a short life. What is the use of working against fate?" Thus, they preach to the rulers, dukes and great men above and prevent the people below from doing their business. Therefore, the fatalists are charged with being unbenevolent. We can not fail to understand what the fatalists say. But how do we discriminate these sayings? Meh Ti says: "We must have a standard." If there be no standard, it is no less difficult than to establish morning and evening on a wheel of fate. The distinction of right and wrong, of benefit and harm, can never be known.

Words must be judged by the "Three Standards." What are the Three Standards? Meh Ti says: "There is the standard of precedent; there is the standard of observation; and there is the standard of function." What is the precedent? It comes from the doings of the ancient holy emperors above. What is the observation? It is derived from the evidence of the ears and eyes of the multitude

below. What is the function? Its work lies in the administration of government and in the observation of the benefit to the country and its people. These are the Three Standards. Yet, the scholars and superior men nowadays sometimes think that fatalism is useful. Why not consult the affairs of the holy emperors?

T'ang received the disorder under Chieh and changed it into order; Wu Wang received the disorder of Chou and changed it into order. Thus, the time was not changed, and the people were the same. Under Chieh and Chou the world was in disorder; while under T'ang and Wu, the world became peaceful. Could this be fate?

Yet, the scholars and superior men of the present age sometimes think that fatalism is useful. Why not consult the writings of the ancient emperors? That which is to be proclaimed to the nation and the people are the statues. The statues of the ancient emperors say:

“Happiness can not be prayed for;  
Nor can trouble be avoided.  
Is there no value in being respectful;  
Is there no harm in being cruel?”

That which judges and pronounces sentence upon criminals is the penalty code. The penalty code of the ancient emperors says:

“Happiness can not be prayed for;  
Nor can trouble be avoided.  
Is there no value in being respectful;  
Is there no harm in being cruel?”

That which establishes and puts an army in order and makes the soldiers go back and forth is the oath. The oath of the ancient emperors also says:

“Happiness can not be prayed for;  
Nor can trouble be avoided.  
Is there no value in being respectful;  
Is there no harm in being cruel?”

Therefore, Meh Ti says: “I can not count all the good writings of the world; they are innumerable. These are three examples of them.” Are not the sayings of the fatalists wrong? If the sayings of the fatalists be applied, the righteousness of the world will be turned upside down. To turn upside down the righteousness of the

world is to establish fate. It is the curse to the people. To teach the people this is to destroy them.

But why do we desire to have the righteous above? It is said: "When the righteous are above, the world is at peace." Shang Ti and spirits of mountains and streams must have a minister; thus ten thousands of people are greatly benefited. How do we know this? Meh Ti says: "In ancient times, T'ang was appointed to Po<sup>33</sup> with a territory of a hundred square Li.<sup>34</sup> He cut the long and made up the short. He and his people loved each other; helped each other; and divided the extra wealth. He led his people to worship Heaven and respect the spirits above. Therefore, Heaven and the spirits made him rich: the barons helped him; people loved him; and the virtuous followed him. Before his death he became the emperor of the world and governed the barons.

"In ancient times Wen Wang was appointed to Ch'i Chou<sup>35</sup> with a territory of a hundred square Li. He cut the long and made up the short. He and his people loved each other and helped each other. Those near were peaceful under his administration and those distant followed his virtue. All those who heard of Wen Wang arose and ran toward him. The unfilial and unprofitable regretted this, saying: 'Is not our land equal to that of Wen Wang? I am active; I benefit others. Are our people not like those of Wen Wang?' This was because Heaven and the spirits made him rich; the barons helped him; the people loved him; and the virtuous followed him. Before his death he became the emperor of the world and governed the barons." The elders of country places had a saying: "When the righteous are above, the world is at peace. Shang Ti and spirits of mountains and streams must have a minister: the people are greatly benefited by them." Thus, I know. The ancient emperors, in issuing statues and announcing edicts, were to reward the good, punish the cruel and exhort the virtuous. At home you should be filial and merciful to your relatives; outside you should be as a younger or elder to your neighbors. In sitting down you

<sup>33</sup> Po was the place where King T'ang first organized his civil administration. It is the modern Chang An in Shensi.

<sup>34</sup> The character Li here used should be carefully distinguished from the Li explained in note 9. They have the same sound but are two different words in Chinese. In this case Li is a measurement; one Li is equal to one-third of a mile.

<sup>35</sup> Ch'i Chou was the place where Wen Wang first held his rule. It is the modern Ch'i Shan Hsien, Shensi.

should keep the regular place; in going out and coming in you should have a limit. There must be a distinction between male and female. If this comes to pass, the civil officials would not rob nor steal and the defenders of cities would not revolt. When the ruler is in distress, you should die for him; if he is exiled, you should accompany him. Such men the superiors will reward and the people below will praise.

The fatalists say: "The superiors give rewards to some men, not because of their virtue but because of their fate. The superiors execute punishments upon others, not because of their cruelty but because of their fate." It is for this reason; they are not filial nor merciful to their relatives at home and they are not orderly to their neighbors outside. When they sit down they do not keep in the proper place; in going out and coming in they have no limit. There is no distinction between male and female. Therefore, the civil officials rob and steal and the defenders of cities revolt. When the ruler is in distress, they do not die for him; when he is exiled, they do not follow him. Such conduct the superiors punish and the people below defame.

The fatalists say: "The superiors execute punishments upon them, not because of their cruelty but because of their fate. The superiors give rewards to them, not because of their virtue but because of their fate." If they really followed this, the rulers would not be righteous; ministers would not be loyal; parents would not be merciful; sons would not be filial; the elder brothers would not be good; and the younger brothers would not be respectful. These are the results of believing in fate. They have their birth in evil words. This is the Tao of the cruel.

But how do we know that fate is the Tao of the cruel? In ancient times the poor desired to eat and drink but were too lazy to work. Therefore, there were not enough clothes and food and they died of cold and hunger. They did not know the reason but said: "I cease from my business and I am lazy." They continued: "My fate is, indeed, unfortunate."

The ancient cruel emperors did not restrain their immoral ears and eyes and had no room in their evil minds for obedience to their relatives, so they lost their countries and ruined the national shrines. They did not know the reason but said: "I am not filial and cannot administer the government." And they continued: "My loss is pre-

determined by fate." Chung Hui<sup>36</sup> in his announcement said: "I have heard from the men of Hsia that he (Chieh) feigned the orders of Heaven and taught fatalism to those below. The emperor punished him for his crime: he lost his army." This saying shows that T'ang rebuked Chieh for his fatalism.

Wu Wang in his prayer made before the war says: "Chou did not worship Shang Ti and the spirits above and troubled his ancestors by neglecting sacrifices. He even said: 'My people have their fate; there is no use in punishing their disgrace in which Heaven also indulges.' Therefore, he abandoned them and did not keep them." This saying shows that Wu Wang rebuked Chou for his fatalism.

Following the word of the fatalists, the officials do not administer and the people do not do their business. If the officials do not administer, the government is in disorder; if the people do not work, the treasury is depleted. The officials can not make wine and grain offerings to Shang Ti and the spirits. The virtuous and the scholars will retreat. Outside there is nothing to welcome and entertain the barons' guests; inside there is no food to feed the old and weak, nor clothes for them to wear. Hence, fatalism is not beneficial to Heaven above; not beneficial to the spirits between, nor beneficial to men below. These are the results of believing in fate. They have their birth in evil words. This is the Tao of the cruel. Therefore, Meh Ti says: "Now the scholars and superior men, truly desiring to make the world rich and hating its poverty; desiring to have order in the world and hating disorder, can not fail to know that the words of the fatalists are wrong. It is the greatest evil in the world!"

<sup>36</sup> Chung Hui was one of the ministers of Ch'eng T'ang. He was a descendant of Hsi Chung, who was Master of the Horse under the Hsia dynasty.