

10<sup>th</sup> April 2025

## Patterns

**"If what the heart approves conforms to proper patterns,  
then even if one's desires are many,  
what harm would they be to good order?"**

Xun Zi, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*

For no reason I can recall, I know that on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1869 the Russian chemist and professor, Dmitrii Mendeleev, presented the first "Periodic Table." (I might have been better referencing this on 6<sup>th</sup> March but, clearly, another thought got in the way ...) Mendeleev attempted to classify elements according to their chemical properties and noticed patterns that led him to postulate his "periodic table", which he published in *The Principles of Chemistry* in 1869. On 6<sup>th</sup> March, he made a formal presentation to the *Russian Chemical Society*, entitled "The Dependence between the Properties of the Atomic Weights of the Elements." "All elements," he suggested, "if arranged according to their atomic mass and valence, exhibit an apparent periodicity of properties."

Now, I'm no chemist! So I'll trust the intelligence and accuracy of chemistry wizards – even though the Periodic Table still remains a mystery to me. But it's there, and it's accepted, and the elements are duly arranged, and they're set out in this way because – as the dictionary defines "periodic" – "they happen repeatedly in a fixed pattern."

The "Letter to Titus", one of the New Testament's "Pastoral Epistles", was written by the Apostle, Paul, to a young colleague whom he'd worked with in Corinth, and who, according to history, became the first Bishop of Crete. People were trying to live by patterns of behaviour, devotion and service that were both necessary and clear. In his short letter of guidance to the leaders and members of the young Church, Paul says this:

*In everything, show that you're following a pattern of good works; in your beliefs, show constancy, gravity, sincerity; speak well, so that you can't be condemned.*

If, as Mendeleev discovered, chemical elements are "periodic", with a set and fixed pattern, where do we find the patterns of behaviour Paul was outlining to his colleague? And "if what the heart approves conforms to proper patterns", can we ensure they happen repeatedly – as they should? Might there be more need for me to be "periodic" than I thought?

### A prayer for today

*A Way, a Truth and a Life. There are patterns in all of these we would do well to follow.*

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