• Is this different or similar to Confucianism?

“If I do nothing of themselves the people are transformed. If I love stillness, of themselves the people are correct. If I meddle in nothing of themselves the people are rich. If I desire nothing, of themselves the people are unhewn.”

• (Unhewn meaning not cut off from the way—not restrained by artificial ways of doing things.)

• Here is the Laozi’s ideal society (trans by Edmund Ryden, 2008):

“Let the state be small and the people few; let weapons of platoons and brigades be unused; let the people respect death and renounce travel. Though there be boats and carriages, yet none do ride therein; though there be armour and weapons, yet none do take them out. . . . Let it be that people go back to the days of knots in ropes and use them. They relish their food, embellish their dress. They cherish their ways, establish their home. Neighbouring states view each other. They hear the cries of chicken and dog, yet people reach old age without meeting each other.”

“Not elevating worth will stop the people competing, not valuing goods difficult to obtain will stop them becoming robbers, not displaying the desirable will stop their hearts being disorderly. This is why the sage’s ordering . . . Empties their hearts, fills their bellies: Weakens their intents, strengthens their bones, and constantly ensures that the people know nothing and desire nothing.”

• The sage deals with complexity through minimal action. The people deal with their own circumstances on the ground. A state thus does not need active governance.

Legalism

• For Legalists, whether human nature is good or bad does not matter.
• But they do believe that most people are selfish, and that they cannot be transformed by moral cultivation.
• This selfishness can be used. People seek benefit in their actions—for wealth and glory.
• Effective rule means you must satisfy this desire in a way that helps the state achieve its aims.
• Thus, Legalism was a cynical philosophy aimed at ruling and surviving during a time of mistrust and opportunism.
• ‘Legalism’ itself refers to laws, but also methods, standards or regulations.
• Don’t trust the teachings of the Sageist
• The school holds that in the past, different rulers had different standards. We must adapt to the times.
• Before, the land could supply us with all that we needed. We did not have to work because there were adequate resources.
• In the Warring States there were more people and competition was fierce. Established customs were not necessarily appropriate.
• Instead, there are the ‘two handles’: likes and dislikes.
• Like water flowing around a rock, people can go either way. Their direction depends on reward and punishment.
• Rewards and punishments are meted out by a clear-sighted ruler, who weighs up options and decides what is most beneficial.

“If everyone knows we’re lying...is it really dishonesty”

• Cannot trust anyone, use threat of punishment