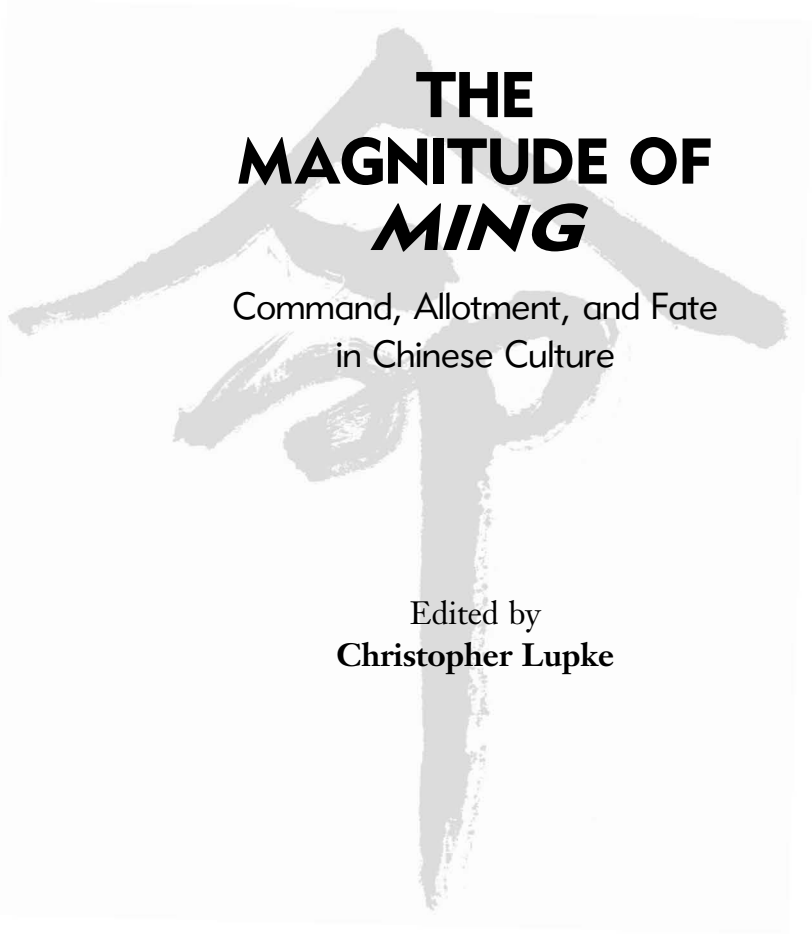

THE MAGNITUDE OF *MING*

Command, Allotment, and Fate in Chinese Culture

Edited by
Christopher Lupke

University of Hawai'i Press
Honolulu

Printed in the United States of America
05 06 07 08 09 10 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The magnitude of ming : command, allotment, and fate in Chinese culture /
edited by Christopher Lupke.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-8248-2739-2 (hardcover : alk. paper)
1. Fate and fatalism. 2. Philosophy, Chinese. I. Lupke, Christopher.
BJ1461.M34 2005
123′.0951—dc22
2004014194

Publication of this book has been assisted by a grant
from the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for
International Scholarly Exchange.

University of Hawai'i Press books are printed on acid-free
paper and meet the guidelines for permanence and durability
of the Council on Library Resources.

Designed by University of Hawai'i Press production staff
Printed by The Maple-Vail Book Manufacturing Group

2
Following the Commands of Heaven
The Notion of *Ming* in Early China

Michael Puett

I open with a quotation from one of Dong Zhongshu's 董仲舒 (ca. 179–ca. 104 BCE) memorials to Han Wudi 漢武帝 on the topic of the mandate of Heaven:

> 天命之謂命，命非聖人不行。
> Heaven's command I call the mandate *ming;* the mandate can only be put into practice by a sage. (*Hanshu* 漢書, Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 ed., 26: 2515)

The statement would appear to be a straightforward point concerning the relationship between Heaven and man: Heaven grants a mandate, and a sage must put it into practice. Heaven and man thus have a linked relationship, with man normatively putting in place what Heaven has ordained. Each, in a sense, needs the other; if there is to be order, then the sage must properly play his cosmic role, just as Heaven plays its role.

This memorial was written early in Han Wudi's reign as part of a critique of Han imperial rule. Dong Zhongshu, a scholar of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋, was calling on the young ruler to institutionalize the study of the classics, and he was arguing that doing so would allow the Han finally to put into practice the mandate that had been given to them.

Ming here seems properly translated as "mandate"—but "mandate" in a particular sense. *Ming* does not appear to be something mandated in a deterministic sense—it is not that we are forced to do X, or that we are fated to do X. It is, rather, "mandate" in a more relational sense: we are mandated by Heaven to do X, and if we so do X then the order desired by both Heaven and man will be obtained.

At first glance, such a usage of *ming* would appear to be fairly typical for early texts. It is clearly linked, for example, to earlier statements in the literature—statements running back to the discussions of the mandate of Heaven in the early chapters of the Shangshu 尚書.

But first glances can be deceptive. In making this argument, Dong Zhongshu significantly reformulated earlier discussions of the heavenly mandate, as well as earlier discussions of the relationship between Heaven and man. Part of this story has been told often before, particularly the emergence in Dong's thought of a cosmological system not seen in earlier thinkers who would have identified themselves as Ruists. But I will make a stronger argument here: Dong Zhongshu's argument of an inherent linkage between man and Heaven involved a strong rereading (perhaps better: misreading) of earlier Confucian positions.

More explicitly, I wish to argue that the seemingly straightforward viewpoint expressed in the passage above—that Heaven grants a mandate and that man must then put it into practice—should not be read as representing an assumption in early China concerning an inherent linkage between man and Heaven. On the contrary, I will argue here that pre-Han Confucian texts presented a strong tension between Heaven and man, and that such a tension in fact constituted a crucial part of early Confucian thought. In order to demonstrate this, I will provide a brief discussion of the *Lunyu* 論語 and the *Mencius* 孟子 and then analyze how and why Dong Zhongshu took the position about *ming* that he did.

Debates about the Role of *Ming* in Early Confucianism

A large body of scholarship has developed on the notion of *ming* in the *Lunyu* and the *Mencius*. The central problem around which this scholarship revolves is the seeming ambivalence in usages of the term. Many of the passages present *ming* as having been sent down by Heaven. However, if we assume that Heaven is a moral deity, and if we assume that this moral deity would, in the *Lunyu* and the *Mencius*, be providing moral mandates that humans would then be asked to put into practice (the basic position that Dong Zhongshu will later articulate), then we have a great deal of difficulty in accounting for most of the passages in these two texts that use the word "*ming*." In several passages of the texts, *ming* is associated with seemingly random events that occur without any apparent ethical calculus whatsoever. Indeed, the term is even used to describe those events in which horrible occurrences befall clearly moral people. The problem for the scholarship on this issue has thus been to reconcile such usages of *ming* with the assumed vision of Heaven as a moral agent.

To explain this seeming ambivalence, Ning Chen has recently argued that, at least for the *Mencius*, we should distinguish between two separate meanings of *ming*. On the one hand, Ning Chen states, Mencius speaks of *ming* in the sense of "blind fate," meaning one's "fixed lot" (Chen Ning 1997a: 495); and, on the other, he speaks of *ming* in the sense of "moral determinism," meaning that "happiness and misery are determined by a moral and personal god (or gods) who oversees human social and ethical conduct, rewarding the good and punishing the wicked" (Chen Ning 1997a: 495). Furthermore, as she observes, either or both meanings can appear in any one passage: "the *ming* employed by Mencius conveys at least two mutually related but different meanings—fixed fate and moral decree. Sometimes it refers to one of these, sometimes it involves both" (Chen Ning 1997a: 503). Indeed, Ning Chen argues that Mencius "often spoke of *ming* in different senses on the same occasion" (Chen Ning 1997a: 495). She points out that a similar ambivalence can be found in the *Lunyu* (Chen Ning 1997b: 514).

According to this reading, the seeming ambivalence in the texts can be explained as resulting from there being two distinct meanings of the term "*ming*"—moral commands on the one hand and blind fate on the other. And Ning Chen further maintains that Heaven itself is accordingly discussed in different ways in these texts—at times as an ethical deity, and at others as a fatalistic deity (Chen Ning 1997b: 514).

In Ning Chen's view, the reason early Confucians wanted to develop the notion of blind fate is that it enabled them to focus on self-cultivation without any assumption that this would result in divine blessings: "Psychologically, it enables the Confucians to free themselves from, or at least reduce the degree of, frustration and anxiety generated by the problem of unwarranted suffering by providing them with an explanation that certain aspects of an individual person's life are predetermined by a blind, impersonal power. . . . Now with the Confucians, moral conduct is no longer the means to obtain divine blessing . . ." (Chen Ning 1997b: 515).

Ted Slingerland has offered another interpretation of the usages of *ming* in the *Lunyu* and *Mencius*. Unlike Ning Chen, he argues that the concept of *ming* is consistent in early Confucian texts. The key, he claims, is that *ming* refers to an external realm, distinguished sharply from the internal:

> *Ming* refers to forces that lie in the outer realm—that is, the realm beyond the bounds of proper human endeavor, or the area of life in which "seeking contributes to one's getting it." This external world is not the concern of the gentleman, whose efforts are to be be concentrated on the self—the inner realm in which "seeking contributes to one's getting it." This is the arena in which the struggle for self-cultivation must be carried out. Once

> one has achieved success there, the vicissitudes of the outside world—life and death, fame and disgrace, wealth and poverty—can be faced "without worry and without fear." (Slingerland 1996: 568)

The seeming ambivalence concerning what Ning Chen saw as blind fate and moral mandates is thus explained away: both of these would simply be external, outside of our consideration. The fact that at times the mandates in this external realm will strike us as moral and at times as not should not concern us: the only thing humans should concern themselves with is the internal realm of self-cultivation.

Like Ning Chen, however, Slingerland sees the goal of such a view of *ming* in early Confucianism as being to force humans to focus on things that they can control—namely, their own self-cultivation—and to avoid thinking of things they cannot control. Therefore, matters such as wealth, life span, and career advancement are *ming*—outside the powers of what we can control, and thus outside the realm of what humans should concern themselves with: "The motivation informing these texts is the desire to change people's views of what is and what is not important, to redirect people's energy and efforts from the external realm (position, wealth, physical concerns) to the internal realm of self-cultivation. The conception of *ming* is employed in order to mark off, in effect, the outer boundaries of one's proper realm of action" (Slingerland 1996: 576). Slingerland would thus read all usages of *ming* in these texts as part of an overall attempt to convince humans to focus on self-cultivation.

On this latter point—the point of agreement between Slingerland and Ning Chen—I will agree fully as well. As both of these scholars correctly attest, the *Lunyu* and the *Mencius* claim that one may act properly, but this does not mean one will live long or well. Thus, humans must simply cultivate themselves without hoping thereby to gain reward or recompense.

Nonetheless, I will also suggest that the seeming ambivalence in the usages of *ming* should be explicated in a different way than either Ning Chen or Slingerland have proposed. Unlike Ning Chen, I believe that the usages of *ming* in these two texts are consistent: positing two distinct meanings of *ming* is not necessary. On the contrary, *ming* is used quite consistently in the *Lunyu* and *Mencius* to refer to the mandates or commands sent down by Heaven.

But then what do we do about the fact that at times these commands seem to be morally based, and at times they do not? Unlike Slingerland, I do think this distinction is relevant to the texts. For, as I will argue, Heaven is also presented in these same texts as the origin of the normative patterns by which humans should cultivate themselves. In other words, it is not simply

that the good are not always rewarded and the bad not always punished (although that is certainly believed to be the case). It is, rather, that Heaven, though the source of the normative patterns of humanity, does not always seem to act in accord with such patterns. Indeed, Mencius will go so far as to argue that Heaven at times actively prevents humans from enacting the proper patterns—even though those patterns are traceable back to Heaven itself.

The issue, then, is not that there are two distinct meanings of *ming*, or that *ming* refers to a realm about which we need not concern ourselves. The issue lies in the relationship of Heaven and humanity—and it is a relationship that is seen as charged with tensions.

Indeed, if we thus avoid the attempt to resolve the seeming ambivalence in the ways suggested above, then the tensions in the text are rendered all the more powerful. If *ming* is consistently associated with the commands of Heaven, if these commands cannot always be associated with a moral calculus, and if humans are being called upon to act morally despite these commands from Heaven, then it would imply that the relations between man and Heaven are highly complex, and certainly very different from those seen later in Dong Zhongshu.

My argument is closer to that of Lee Yearley, who focuses his attention on what he calls "irresolvable but revelatory and productive tensions" (Yearley 1975: 433). In Mencius, Yearley finds a figure "at one pole the notion of a human potential whose realization depends on each individual's effort; at the other, the notion of a sovereign power beyond man that creates the potential but also seems, in some way, to control and even frustrate its completion in most or all men" (Yearley 1975: 433). I will follow a similar argument here, but will take it a step further. For Mencius, it is not just that Heaven frustrates its completion; at times, Heaven actively works to prevent it. Why would early Confucians hold such a position? Until we can answer this question we may not be able to fully understand the ways they embraced the notion of *ming*.

Heaven and Man in the *Lunyu*

Confucius[1] strongly embraced the idea that humans must follow the mandates of Heaven.[2] Indeed, he argued that holding them in esteem was one of the points of difference between a gentleman and a lesser man:

> 孔子曰：「君子有三畏。畏天命，畏大人，畏聖人之言。小人不知天命而不也。」狎大人，侮聖人之言。
> Confucius said, "As for the gentleman, there are three things he esteems.

> He esteems the mandates *(ming)* of Heaven, he esteems great men, and he esteems the words of sages. A petty man, not understanding the mandate of Heaven, does not esteem it; he is disrespecful to great men, and ridicules the words of sages." (*Lunyu* 16/8)

And Confucius famously defined understanding the mandates of Heaven as one of the goals of his life:

> 子曰：「吾十有五而志於學，三十而立，四十而不惑，五十而知天命，六十而耳順，七十而從心所欲，不踰矩。」
> The master said, "At age fifteen, I set my intent on studying; at thirty I established myself; at forty I was no longer deluded; at fifty I understood the mandates of Heaven; at sixty my ear accorded; at seventy I followed what my heart desired without transgression." (*Lunyu* 2/4)

However, the mandates of Heaven for Confucius involved neither a simple granting of moral norms nor a rewarding of the worthy and punishing of the unworthy. Although Sima Qian would later, in his biography of Bo Yi and Shu Qi (Sima Qian 1959, *juan* 61: 2124–2125), criticize Confucius for believing that the good are rewarded and the bad punished, Confucius in fact held no such position. Indeed, for Confucius, the mandates of Heaven appear to involve no ethical calculus whatsoever, and this presumably is a part of why it took him until age fifty to understand them.

For example, when his favorite disciple Yan Hui died young, Confucius exclaimed:

> 顏淵死。子曰：「噫！天喪予！天喪予！」
> Yan Hui died. The master said, "Alas. Heaven is destroying me! Heaven is destroying me!" (*Lunyu* 11/9)

There is no sense here that Yan Hui had done anything to deserve dying young. On the contrary, Confucius' response was to rail at Heaven, as it is Heaven that controls the mandates. But what Heaven has mandated for us must simply be accepted:

> 季康子問：「弟子孰為好學？」孔子對曰：「有顏回者好學，不幸短命死矣，今也則亡。」
> Ji Kangzi asked, "Of your disciples, who loved learning?" Confucius responded, "There was Yan Hui who loved learning. Unfortunately he had a shortened mandate, and he died. Now there is no one." (*Lunyu* 11/7; a similar statement appears in 6/3)

What is mandated is under the control of Heaven, and there is no ethical calculation involved.

Indeed, Confucius often emphasizes the degree to which events are out of the control of humans. Once, when a certain Gongbo Liao defamed someone, and Zifu Jingbo asked Confucius if he should have Gongbo Liao killed, Confucius responded thus:

> 子曰：「道之將行也與，命也；道之將廢也與，命也。公伯寮其如命何？」
> The master said: "If the way is going to be put into practice, it is mandated *(ming)*. If it is going to be discarded, that too is mandated. What does Gongbo Liao have to do with what is mandated?" (*Lunyu* 14/36)

So even the question of whether or not the way will prevail is out of human hands: humans striving to put the way into practice can succeed only if Heaven so wishes it. As with Confucius' statements about his best disciple dying young, the attitude here is simply that one must accept what Heaven has ordained.

Nonetheless, Confucius adheres strongly to the view that no one should resent Heaven:

> 子曰：「莫我知也夫！」子貢曰：「何為其莫知子也？」子曰：「不怨天，不尤人，下學而上達。知我者其天乎！」
> The master said, "No one understands me." Zigong asked, "What does it mean to say no one understands you?" The master replied, "I do not resent Heaven nor bear a grudge against man. I study here and reach to what is above. Only Heaven understands me." (*Lunyu* 14/35)

Indeed, Confucius holds a much stronger position than just this. He argues that cultural patterns emerged when the initial sages modeled themselves upon Heaven and then brought those patterns to humanity:

> 子曰：「大哉堯之為君也！巍巍乎！唯天為大，唯堯則之。蕩蕩乎，民無能名焉。巍巍乎其有成功也，煥乎其有文章也！」
> The master said: "Great indeed was the rulership of Yao. So majestic—only Heaven is great, and only Yao patterned himself upon it. So boundless, the people were not able to find a name for it. Majestic were his achievements. Illustrious are his patterned forms." (*Lunyu* 8/19)

Heaven is also seen as being responsible for the continuation of these patterns:

子畏於匡，曰：「文王既沒，文不在茲乎？天之將喪斯文也，後死者不得與於斯文也；天之將未喪斯文也，匡人其如予何？」
When the master was in danger in Kuang, he said: "King Wen has died, but are his patterns not here? If Heaven had wanted to destroy these patterns, then those who died later would not have been able to participate in the patterns. Since Heaven has not destroyed these patterns, what can the people of Kuang do to me?" (*Lunyu* 9/5)

Heaven is thereby granted a normative role. The patterns of human culture emerged from Heaven, and it is Heaven that allows those patterns to continue.

Thus, the precepts that should guide human behavior are traceable back to Heaven—they are patterns observed by the sages and brought from Heaven to humanity. However, the commands of Heaven do not necessarily involve support for those who follow these patterns; and yet man must not resent Heaven for this, and indeed must strive to understand and even esteem these commands. Although the *Lunyu* does not work out the implications of this potential tension, they were indeed to play out in later writings within the tradition.

The Resignation of the Sage to the Order of Heaven: The *Mencius*

Like Confucius, Mencius calls on humans to accept the order of Heaven.[3] As he bluntly states:

順天者存，逆天者亡。
He who accords with Heaven is preserved; he who opposes Heaven is destroyed. (*Mengzi* 4A/7)

A proper submission to the order of Heaven is, for Mencius, a crucial element of one's path to sagehood.

Indeed, Mencius at times argues that cultivating oneself is precisely the means by which one fulfills one's duty to Heaven. Preserving and nourishing the mind and nature endowed to us by Heaven are how one serves Heaven, and knowing one's nature is how one knows Heaven. A crucial part of this acceptance of the order of Heaven means that one accepts whatever Heaven ordains without concern for living long or dying young:

孟子曰：「盡其心者，知其性也。知其性，則知天矣。存其心，養其性，所以事天也。殀壽不貳，脩身以俟之，所以立命也。」

> Mencius said: "He who has fully used his mind knows his nature. If he knows his nature, he knows Heaven. Preserving his mind and nourishing his nature is the way that he serves Heaven. Dying young or living long are not two distinct things. He cultivates himself so as to await what is to come. This is the means by which he establishes his destiny *(ming)*." (*Mengzi* 7A/1)

One establishes one's destiny by cultivating oneself and accepting whatever Heaven mandates.

Mencius also holds that Heaven grants humans a nature that, if cultivated properly, will allow them to become fully moral. The patterns of Heaven are thus located in man's mind:

> 君子所仁義禮智根於心。
> The nature of the superior man is humaneness, propriety, ritual, and knowledge. They are rooted in his mind. (*Mengzi* 7A/21)

The potential for sagehood is rooted by Heaven in all humans.

But such a commitment means that the tension we found implicit in the *Lunyu* becomes all the more significant. If all humans have within themselves the potential to become a sage, but if Heaven, not man, decides whether or not order will prevail, then the potential conflict between Heaven and man deepens. Allow me to quote the full passage in which the statement with which I opened this section appears:

> 孟子曰：「天下有道，小德役大德，小賢役大賢。天下無道，小役大，弱役強。斯二者，天也。順天者存，逆天者亡。」
> Mencius said, "If all under Heaven has the Way, those of small virtue serve those of great virtue, and the less worthy serve the greatly worthy. If all under Heaven lacks the Way, the small serve the big, and the weak serve the strong. These two are due to Heaven. He who accords with Heaven is preserved; he who opposes Heaven is destroyed." (*Mengzi* 4A/7)

One must indeed accord with the wishes of Heaven or be destroyed. But Mencius does make moral judgments on periods of history, and he makes it quite clear that according with Heaven means, at times, accepting a state of affairs that runs counter to the normative way—a way that Heaven itself has given man the potential to bring about.

But what happens in such an event? Must humans simply resign themselves to a lack of order if such are the wishes of Heaven? This is a difficult question for Mencius to answer. The ultimate answer, of course, is that one

must indeed accept the order that Heaven ordains. But this does not for Mencius result in a simple resignation. As he argues explicitly:

> 孟子曰：「莫非命也，順受其正；是故知命者不立乎巖牆之下。盡其道而死者，正命也；桎梏死者，非正命也。」
> Mencius said, "Everything is mandated *(ming)*. One accords with what is correct. Therefore, one who understands what is mandated does not stand beneath a falling wall. One who dies after fulfilling his way has corrected his mandate. Dying in fetters is not a correct mandate." (*Mengzi* 7A/2)

Everything may be mandated, but this should not lead to any lack of striving: the concern should rather be to correct one's mandate by trying to fulfill one's way.

But such an ethical stance opens several questions. Mencius' formulations seem to imply that whatever is to come is not necessarily right, even if one must accept it. This potential conflict plays out forcefully in numerous places in Mencius' work. One obvious problem, given Mencius' political theology, is the issue of hereditary monarchy. If anyone has the potential to become a sage, then why is it not the case that, at any given time, the most cultivated person in the realm would be the king? Indeed, for Mencius, most of the greatest sages since the introduction of hereditary monarchy have not been kings: Yi Yin, the duke of Zhou, Confucius, and, perhaps, Mencius himself. Is hereditary monarchy therefore in opposition to the order of Heaven?

On the contrary. Mencius is committed to claiming that Heaven itself established the custom:

> 萬章問曰：「人有言，至於禹而德衰，不傳於賢，而傳於子。有諸？」孟子曰：「否，不然也；天與賢，則與賢；天與子，則與子。」
> Wan Zhang asked: "Some people say that, when it came to the time of Yu, power *(de)* declined. He did not give power to the worthy but instead gave it to his son. Is this correct?" Mencius said, "No. It is not so. If Heaven had given it to a worthy, then it would have been given to a worthy. Since Heaven gave it to the son, it was given to the son." (*Mengzi* 5A/6)

Mencius goes on to recount the history of the sucession of Yao, Shun, and Yu, pointing out that, in each of these cases, the worthy man worked with the ruler for several years and the people grew to trust him. But this was not true of Yi, whom the people did not know well. Moreover, Qi, the son of Yu, was also worthy, whereas the sons of Yao and Shun were not. All of this, according to Mencius, was mandated by Heaven, and thus was not due to Yu:

> 皆天也，非人之所能為也。莫之為而為者，天也；莫之致而至者，命也。
> All of this was due to Heaven. It is not something that man could have done. If no one does it, and yet it is done, then it is Heaven. If no one brings something about, and yet it is brought about, it is mandated. (*Mengzi* 5A/6)

Mencius explains that, thereafter, hereditary monarchy became the norm: the kingship would always be handed down to the son. The only time this would ever be stopped would be if a ruler were truly horrible—as with Jie and Zhou. Otherwise, Heaven would not stop the succession. This for Mencius explains why Yi, Yi Yin, and the duke of Zhou could never be kings: they lived at a time when their rulers were acceptable—even if not as sagely as Yi, Yi Yin, and the duke of Zhou themselves.

But Mencius' argument begs the question. This may explain why Yu should not be criticized, but it hardly answers the larger point implied in Wan Zhang's query: even if Qi was a better prospective ruler than Yi, it does not follow that hereditary monarchy in general is a good thing. And, since Heaven chose the rulers, Heaven is responsible for the institution. Why, if Yi, Yi Yin, and the duke of Zhou were more worthy, did they not become rulers? Or, to put the question more forcefully, why would Heaven have ordained hereditary monarchy to become the norm?

No answer to this is given. Of note here is the fact that Mencius makes no attempt to claim that hereditary monarchy is a moral institution, or even that Heaven had good practical reasons to maintain it. For Mencius, all we can say is simply that Heaven has mandated it, and we must therefore accept it.

What happens when the mandates of Heaven clearly conflict with the ethical stance of the sage? The most forceful and poignant example of this occurred near the end of Mencius' career. Mencius spent several years traveling from state to state, trying to convince one of the rulers to listen to his advice. He actually received a position at the court of Qi, and, if our text is to be believed, held audience with the king of Qi on several occasions. As several commentators have noted, Mencius clearly perceived himself to be the Yi Yin of his era: just as Yi Yin had counseled Tang on how to bring order to the world and establish the Shang dynasty, so would Mencius advise the ruler of Qi how to bring order to the world and start a new dynasty.[4] However, the king did not follow Mencius' advice. Mencius did not become the next Yi Yin, and the world was not brought to order. His life project in failure, Mencius left the state of Qi:

> 孟子去齊，充虞路問曰：「夫子若有不豫色然。前日虞聞諸夫子曰：『君子不怨天，不尤人。』」曰：「彼一時，此一時也。五年必有王者興，其

間必有名世者。由周而來，七百有餘歲矣；以其數則過矣，以其時考之則可矣。夫天，未欲平治天下也，如欲平治天下，當今之世，舍我其誰也？吾何為不豫哉？」

When Mencius left Qi, Chong Yu asked him on the way, "Master, you seem to look displeased. A few days ago I heard you say that 'a gentleman does not resent Heaven nor bears a grudge against men.'" Mencius responded, "That was one time, this is another time. Every five hundred years, it must be the case that a king will arise. In the interval there must arise one from which an age takes its name. From the Zhou until now, it has been more than seven hundred years. The mark has passed, and the time, if one examines it, is proper. Yet Heaven does not yet wish to bring order to all under Heaven. If Heaven wished to bring order to all under Heaven, who in the present generation is there other than me? How could I be displeased?" (*Mengzi* 2B/13)[5]

The statement to which Chong Yu refers was the one quoted above from the *Lunyu*. In general terms, the passage from the *Mencius* reveals a similar view as that expressed in the *Lunyu* quotation, but the sentiment of Mencius is clearly less accepting of the situation.[6]

Mencius states here that there is a proper, cyclical order, in which a king will arise every five hundred years, and in the interval there will arise a sage. This is a normative pattern in human history, and the proper moment for a sage to emerge has arrived. Moreover, Mencius clearly feels that he has cultivated himself to become such a sage. The time is proper, and he, the sage, has arisen.

So why has Mencius' project ended in failure? The only reason that can be given is simply that Heaven does not wish for there to be order. There is no moral or practical reason for this state of affairs: in preventing order from arising, Heaven is acting against the normative pattern of human history and is blocking the path of a true sage. This is a much stronger claim than anything one can find in the *Lunyu.* Confucius did believe that Heaven was responsible for the way flourishing or not, and he did state that Heaven was destroying him for giving Yan Hui such a short life span. But Confucius never implied that such acts stood in opposition to some kind of normative order. In contrast, here Mencius is indeed positing a clear distinction between what is right according to the normative patterns of history and what Heaven actually does. Although it should be the case that the latter would always accord with the former, there are times, and Mencius clearly feels himself to be living in such a time, when no such accord exists.

For Mencius, then, there is a potential tension between the claims of Heaven and those of the sage. And yet, what can one do? The resolution of

such a tension is clear for him: if there is a disjunction between the normative patterns that a sage can understand and the actual decisions of Heaven, one must side with Heaven. According to Mencius' political theology, one must simply accept what Heaven ordains, and one must try to do so without resentment.

The commands of Heaven, therefore, do not necessarily correspond with the normative order that Heaven itself has given man the potential to realize. Sages have the potential to bring order to the world, but Heaven can, for no apparent reason, thwart such plans—even though it was Heaven that gave humans this potential in the first place. This is not to say that Heaven is unethical, but simply to say that, according to both Confucius and Mencius, ethical action on the part of humans is not enough. It is not the case that the most ethical person will necessarily become a king, or even the sage minister, and why Heaven has so mandated it is simply beyond our understanding. Although Confucianism is often portrayed as fundamentally optimistic, the argument of Mencius is actually based upon a very different type of cosmology. To call it "tragic" might be to go somewhat too far, but he clearly perceives a potential tension between Heaven and man.

If this analysis is correct, then we would have to conclude that the seeming ambivalence concerning *ming* is not based on distinct meanings of the term; rather, it concerns the conflicting visions in early Confucianism concerning the relative powers and positions of humans and Heaven. Although Heaven was perceived as the repository of the patterns that should guide humanity, it was not seen as necessarily supporting those humans who follow such patterns; indeed, Heaven would at times actively work to prevent the proper order from emerging. The *ming* of Heaven could thus be, from the point of view of humanity, either normative or destructive; one's goal was to correct it as best one could, and then ultimately resign oneself to it. Heaven is more powerful than man, and, ultimately, one must simply accept its *ming*.

The Practice of the Sage: Dong Zhongshu

I have presented these points to explicate some of the basic tensions that underlay early Confucianism. As Dong Zhongshu attempted to convince Wudi to accept the texts purportedly edited and authored by Confucius, he also reworked this earlier understanding of the relationship between Heaven and man.[7] To understand this full argument, it will be helpful to look in detail at his memorials to Han Wudi at the beginning of the emperor's reign.[8]

For Dong, Heaven both generated and aligned the cosmos:

> 臣聞天者萬物之祖也，故遍覆包函而無所殊，建日月風雨以和之，經陰陽寒暑以成之。
> I have heard that Heaven is the ancestor of the myriad things. Therefore, it completely covers, embraces, and envelops them, and nothing is treated differently. It established the sun and moon, wind and rain to harmonize them; it aligned *(jing)* yin and yang, hot and cold to complete them. (*Hanshu* 56: 2515)

Heaven gave birth to the myriad things and then organized the cosmos to nourish them. The sages then modeled themselves upon this alignment:

> 故聖人法天而立道，亦溥愛而亡私，布德施仁以厚之，設誼立禮以導之。
> Therefore, the sages modeled themselves on Heaven and established the Way. They cherished extensively and without selfishness, disseminated virtue and displayed humaneness to enrich them, and established propriety and set up rituals to guide them. (*Hanshu* 56: 2515)

This is an argument made by Confucius as well, but Dong takes it a step further: the sages modeling themselves upon Heaven was itself something mandated by Heaven.

> 人受命於天，固超然異於群生，入有父子兄弟之親，出有君臣上下之誼，會聚相遇，則有耆老長幼之施；粲然有文以相接，驩然有恩以相愛，此人之所以貴也。
> Humans receive the mandate from Heaven. They are certainly superior in the way they differ from the other forms of life. Within they possess the relations of father and son, elder and younger brother. Outside they possess the propriety of ruler and minister, upper and lower. When gathering together they possess the arrays of seniority and age. Bright is the culture *(wen)* with which they meet each other; peaceful is the kindness with which they relate to each other. This is why humans are so noble. (*Hanshu* 56: 2516)

What is distinctive about humans, and what makes them the most noble of creatures, is that Heaven has mandated them to possess hierarchy and distinctions. Moreover, they appropriate the rest of the natural world for their benefit:

> 生五穀以食之，桑麻以衣之，六畜以養之，服牛乘馬，圈豹檻虎，是其得天之靈，貴於物也。故孔子曰：「天地之人為貴。」
> They grow the five grains to feed themselves, silk and hemp to clothe themselves, six domestic animals to nourish themselves; they yoke oxen and

harness horses, ensnare leopards and cage tigers. This is how they obtain the numinousness of Heaven, and why they are more lofty than other things. Therefore Confucius said, "As for the nature of Heaven and Earth, man is the most lofty." (*Hanshu* 56: 2516)

The appropriation and domestication of nature by man is the means by which humans obtain the numinousness of Heaven. And, ultimately, one can come to accord with the patterns of the world:

明於天，知自貴於物；知自貴於物，然後知仁誼；知仁誼，然後重禮節；重禮節，然後安處善；安處善，然後樂循理；樂循理，然後謂之君子。故孔子曰：「不知命，亡以為君子」，此之謂也。
If one is illuminated about the nature of Heaven, one understands oneself to be more noble than other things. Only if one understands oneself to be more noble than other things does he understand humaneness and propriety. Only if he understands humaneness and propriety does he value ritual and modulation. Only if he values ritual and modulation does he reside in goodness. Only if he resides in goodness will he delight in according with the patterns. Only if he delights in according with the patterns can he be called a gentleman. Therefore, Confucius said, "If you do not understand the mandate, you are without that with which to become a gentleman." This is the meaning. (*Hanshu* 56: 2516)

There is a teleology here in which humans are mandated by Heaven to appropriate nature, and, by doing so, they will come into accord with the patterns of the cosmos.

The cosmos, then, was set up by Heaven for the benefit of man. Nature was made such that man will be able to appropriate it and thereby thrive. The implication is that the cosmos will not be properly ordered unless humans make it an object of appropriation. And this, indeed, is a crucial part of understanding Heaven's mandate.

And Dong continues: the cosmos itself requires that humans so bring order to the world.

故為人君者，正心以正朝 ，正朝以正官，正官以正萬民，正萬民以正四方。四方正，遠近莫敢不壹於正，而亡有邪氣奸其間者。是以陰陽調而風雨時，群生和而萬民殖，五穀孰而屮木茂，天地之間被潤澤而大豐美，四海之內聞盛德而皆徠臣，諸福之物，可致之祥，莫不畢至，而王道終矣。
Therefore, the ruler rectifies his mind and thereby rectifies his court; he rectifies his court and thereby rectifices the hundred officials; he rectifies the hundred officials and thereby rectifies the myriad people; he rectifies

> the myriad people and thereby rectifies the four quarters. Once the four quarters are rectified, no one, distant or near, would dare not unite with the rectification, and there would be no bad *qi* to corrupt those within. Because of this, yin and yang will mix and the wind and rain will be timely. The various forms of life will be harmonized and the myriad people will prosper, the five grains will ripen, and the grasses and trees will thrive. All within Heaven and Earth will be moistened and greatly abundant and splendid. Everyone within the four seas will hear of the flourishing virtue and come to serve. All the things of blessing and all the auspicious omens that can be summoned will arrive, and the kingly way will be achieved. (*Hanshu* 56: 2502–2503)

The ruler's rectification of himself begins the process whereby his court, the people, and ultimately the natural world will be brought to order and harmony.

Heaven, therefore, requires a human sage to complete the process of order. Heaven gives the mandate, but a sage must actually put it into practice:

> 天命之謂命，命非聖人不行；質樸之謂 ， 非教化不成；人欲之謂情，情非度制不節。是故王者上謹於承天意，以順命也；下務明教化民，以成也；正法度之宜，別上下之序，以防欲也。
> Heaven's command I call the mandate; the mandate can only be put into practice by a sage. One's substance I call nature; nature can only be completed through education. Human desire I call the disposition; the disposition can only be modulated through standards and regulations. It is for this reason that a king above is attentive to upholding the intent of Heaven so as to accord with the mandate, and below endeavors to clarify and educate the people so as to complete their nature. He corrects the appropriateness of the laws and standards and distinguishes the hierarchy of upper and lower so as to restrain their desires. (*Hanshu* 56: 2515)

Sagely action, again, is necessary in order for Heaven's commands to be realized.

As a consequence, the sage is granted extraordinary powers: not only does the order of the natural world depend upon him, but even the question of whether or not someone will be long-lived or die young depends upon his rule.

> 臣聞命者天之令也， 者生之質也，情者人之欲也。或夭或壽，或仁或鄙，陶冶而成之，不能粹美，有治亂之所生，故不齊也。孔子曰：「君子

之德風(也)，小人之德屮(也)，屮上之風必偃。」故堯舜行德則民仁壽，桀紂行暴則民鄙夭。夫上之化下，下之從上，猶泥之在鈞，唯甄者之所為；猶金之在鎔，唯冶者之所鑄。

I have heard that the mandate is the command of Heaven, nature is the substance one is born with, and disposition is human desire. As for dying young or living long, being humane or licentious: once it is molded and completed, it cannot be be purified or beautified. Order and disorder are generated; therefore things are unequal. Confucius said: "The virtue of a gentleman is like the wind; the virtue of a petty man is like the grass. If the wind blows above, [the grass] will invariably bend." Thus, when Yao and Shun practiced virtue, the people were humane and long-lived; and when Jie and Zhou practiced oppression, the people were licentious and died young. If what is above transforms what is below, what is below will follow what is above. This is like clay on a pottery wheel; only a potter can form it. Or like metal in a mold; only a smith can cast it. (*Hanshu* 56: 2501)

The order and life of both the human and natural worlds, therefore, depend upon the sages correctly utilizing and putting into practice the mandate of Heaven.

Such a cosmology differs in several significant ways from that seen in Confucius and Mencius. The potential conflict between Heaven and man—the conflict that so characterized early Confucian arguments—has here been replaced with an implicit teleology in which Heaven requires that man bring the cosmos into order. But if Dong has reformulated the cosmology of early Confucianism, how does he wrestle with the problems that so concerned Confucius and Mencius? In particular, how does he deal with the issue of theodicy? Or, more pointedly, how does he explain the fact that someone like Confucius was never crowned king, whereas the Qin and Han took power using (in Dong's view) immoral policies? Let us begin with Confucius.

For Dong Zhongshu, Confucius was in fact the last sage to have arisen. And the crucial act of Confucius modeling himself on Heaven occurred with the composition of the *Spring and Autumn Annals:*

孔子作春秋，上揆之天道，下質諸人情，參之於古，考之於今。

Confucius created the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, above calculating it to the heavenly way, below making it substantive with the fundamentals of man; comparing it with antiquity, examining it with the present. (*Hanshu* 56: 2515)

The consequence of Confucius so following Heaven is that the *Spring and Autumn Annals* matches the alignment of Heaven and Earth themselves:

春秋大一統者，天地之常經，古今之通誼也。
The great unity of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* is the enduring alignment *(jing)* of Heaven and Earth, the connecting propriety of the past and present. (*Hanshu* 56: 2523)

Since the text matches the alignment of the cosmos, it can be used in omenology: hidden in the text is the key to interpreting the cosmos and thus to guiding human action. For example, of a passage from the *Spring and Autumn Annals* that records a flood Dong Zhongshu provided the following interpretation:

董仲舒以為夫人哀姜淫亂，逆陰氣，故大水也。
Dong Zhongshu took this to mean that the consort Ai Jiang was licentious and disorderly, acting contrary to the *yin qi*. Therefore there was a great flood. (*Hanshu* 27A: 1339)

Because the cosmos is based upon the interplay of yin and yang, similar things attract: yin will attract yin, and yang will attract yang.

Dong Zhongshu is thus arguing that the *Spring and Autumn Annals* provide the principles according to which omens can be properly understood. The implication of the argument is that only scholars trained in such works can be guides to the rulers, for only they can correctly interpret omens.

But why, if Confucius was such a sage that he was able to author a text matching the alignment of the cosmos, did he not himself start a new dynasty? The answer again lies with the mandate. Like Mencius, Dong emphasizes that the receipt of the mandate is something that comes from Heaven; human effort could not have brought it about.

臣聞天之所大奉使之王者，必有非人力所能致而自至者，此受命之符也。
I have heard that the king who has been charged by Heaven invariably possesses something that human effort could not bring about and yet it arrives nonetheless. This is the tally of the receipt of the mandate. (*Hanshu* 56: 2500)

Confucius, therefore, whatever his sagely qualities, could not start a dynasty:

孔子曰：「鳳鳥不至，河不出圖，吾已矣夫！」自悲可致此物，而身卑賤不得致也。
Confucius said: "The phoenix does not arrive, the River does not show forth the diagram. I am at my end!"[9] Self-pity can summon these things;

but, because he held a low position, he was not able to summon them. (*Hanshu* 56: 2503)

If, however, Heaven grants one the position of rulership, then one has the power to summon the basis for order:

> 今陛下貴為天子，富有四海，居得致之位，操可致之勢，又有能致之資，行高而恩厚，知明而意美，愛民而好士，可謂誼主矣。然而天地未應而美祥莫至者，何也？凡以教化不立而萬民不正也。
> Now, your majesty, your noble position is as the Son of Heaven, your fortune possesses the four seas. You reside in the position from which you can summon, you control the authority to summon, and you possess the resources that can be used to summon. Your actions are lofty, and your kindness deep. Your knowledge is bright and your intentions splendid. You cherish the people and are fond of the officers. You can be called a proper ruler. And yet Heaven and Earth have not yet responded, and auspicious omens have not arrived. Why is this? Because education and transformation have not been established, and the myriad people have not been rectified. (*Hanshu* 56: 2503)

Dong's critique is that none of the Han rulers—those in position to bring order to the world—have succeeded in summoning the auspicious omens. Confucius properly modeled himself on Heaven, but Heaven had not granted him the position to summon the omens; the Han rulers have been granted the position to summon the omens, but they have failed to model themselves on Heaven.

The immediate solution to this problem, according to the way that Dong has set up the argument, is clear: the Han rulers need to follow the principles laid out in the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. But there is a deeper problem if we follow Dong's full argument. Why, if Heaven mandates who will be in positions of power, and if Heaven needs a proper person to carry out the mandate and thereby bring order to the cosmos, did Heaven not put Confucius in power? Why wait more than two centuries, then allow the Qin and Han to take power—particularly if all that was required was simply for them to follow the principles laid out by Confucius so long before?

The question is quite similar to that seen earlier in Mencius: why is it that sages are not given the mandate by Heaven? But Dong's response to the problem is distinctive. Whereas Mencius answers this with a simple statement of resignation that one must accept the mandate and attempt to do so without resentment, Dong instead offers an institutional response: although

Confucius was not granted the kingship, he did author the *Spring and Autumn Annals* in order to guide humans in following the heavenly way. Dong's response, then, is that the ruler should institutionalize this by setting up a formal system in which people would be trained to understand the alignment of the cosmos and to guide the ruler accordingly.

This is, in a sense, an institutionalization of the degeneration implied in the *Mencius*. The implicit claim here would appear to be that rulers at this point need institutionalized scholars to guide them: sages like Confucius will understand the alignment of the cosmos, and scholars of the texts composed or edited by Confucius will guide the ruler properly.

For Dong Zhongshu, then, the goal of humans is to bring to the natural world the proper functioning that Heaven requires for it. Sages are called upon to discover the proper patterns from Heaven and then to bring those patterns to the human and natural worlds. Thus, neither the natural nor the human world can reach its potentiality for order without sagely guidance.

The manner in which Dong Zhongshu has articulated this position serves to deny the tensions that pervaded the cosmology of Mencius. Heaven is an agent within this cosmology, but it is not presented as potentially disrupting the moral patterns that should be guiding humanity. Indeed, Heaven is equated with the patterns, and the only issue for Dong Zhongshu is whether or not sages follow these heavenly patterns and thereby bring order to the world.

Accordingly, if there is a discrepancy between the proper patterns of Heaven and the actual functioning of the natural or human worlds, the responsibility lies squarely with the ruler: it is the ruler who must bring the patterns of Heaven to the world. And the solution to the question of why Heaven has not granted rulership to a sage is answered institutionally. For whatever reason, Heaven does not tend to grant the mandate to sages as it did in the time of Yao, Shun, and Yu; sages tend now to be ministers, not rulers. This may not be ideal, but, in Dong's view, it also need not result in a lack of order. It simply means that ministers must be properly trained in the classics so that they can guide the rulers. In other words, the fact that rulers are not sages simply requires an institutional response.

Conclusion

In early Confucianism, the mandates of Heaven were highly problematic, granting humans both great potentials and radical limitations. Far from assuming an inherent correlation between humans and Heaven, early Confucians saw a potentially agonistic relationship. Indeed, the reasons why Confucius and Mencius kept emphasizing that humans should esteem the

mandate and not become resentful of Heaven reveal the tensions that surrounded the notion of *ming*—tensions between Heaven as the source of the patterns that should guide humanity but also the source of seemingly arbitrary commands that can disrupt those very patterns.

The implication of this is that the famed notion of humans and Heaven existing in harmony—a view so often attributed to Dong Zhongshu—was not an assumption at all in early China. Rather, it was articulated in response to the political events of the time and as an alternative view to the vision proffered by Mencius almost two centuries before. Dong Zhongshu's claim that sages are simply putting Heaven's mandate into practice is not an assumption about the link between Heaven and humanity, but is offered as a possible solution to the tension that pervaded early Confucianism. That even a figure such as Dong Zhongshu—a figure so associated with asserting the interdependence of man and Heaven—marshaled his argument in response to such a tension concerning *ming* reveals just how pervasive that tension was.

Notes

I would like to thank the participants of the conference "Heaven's Will and Life's Lot: Destiny and Determinism in Chinese Culture," organized by Christopher Lupke and held at the Breckinridge Conference Center, for their extremely helpful comments. All translations in this chapter are my own.

1. By "Confucius" I simply refer to the figure portrayed in the *Lunyu*. For an attempt to periodize the chapters of the *Lunyu* themselves, see Brooks and Taeko Brooks 1998.

2. For a fuller discussion of these issues in the *Lunyu*, see Puett 2002: 97–101, from which portions of this section have been excerpted.

3. Portions of this section also appear in Puett 2002: 134–140.

4. See, for example, Robert Eno's discussion (1990: 261n60). The relevant passages on Yi Yin are *Mengzi* 5A/7 and 5B/1.

5. My translation of this passage is heavily indebted to that given by D. C. Lau, *Mencius* 1970: 94.

6. I am reading the passage as revealing a level of anger on the part of Mencius. For a somewhat different view of the passage, see Bloom 2003; Ivanhoe 1988; Yearley 1975.

7. For an excellent analysis of Dong Zhongshu, see Queen 1996. My interpretations have been aided greatly by her work.

8. A fuller exposition of Dong Zhongshu can be found in Puett 2002: 289–300, from which portions of this section have been excerpted.

9. The quotation is from *Lunyu*, 9/9.