

# *To become a god*

Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-  
Divinization in Early China

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For God doth know that in the day ye eat therof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods.

—*The Bible*, Genesis 3, King James version

Emperors and kings,  
are but obeyed in their several provinces,  
Nor can they raise the wind or rend the clouds;  
But in his dominion that exceeds in this  
Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man.  
A sound magician is a mighty god:  
Here, Faustus, try thy brains to gain a deity.

—Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragedy of Doctor Faustus*, lines 60–66

Who was it who first  
Wrecked the bonds of love  
And transformed them into chains?  
Which led rebels to make  
A mock of their rights  
And the heavenly fire and,  
Disdaining mortal ways,  
Elect presumption,  
Striving to become the equals of gods.

—Friedrich Hölderlin, "The Rhine" (Translation by Richard Sieburth, *Hymns and Fragments*, pp. 73–75)

## 2 *Gaining the powers of spirits*

### The Emergence of Self-Divinization Claims in the Fourth Century BC

Concentrate the *qi* as if a spirit, and all the myriad things will reside within. Can you concentrate? Can you unify? Can you not engage in crackmaking and milfoil divination and yet understand auspiciousness and inauspiciousness? Can you stop? Can you reach an end? Can you not seek from others and obtain it in yourself? Think about it, think about it, and think about it again. If you think about it but do not penetrate, the ghosts and spirits will penetrate it. This is not due to the power of the ghosts and spirits; it is due to the ultimate point of essential *qi*.<sup>1</sup>

The fourth-century BC authors of this passage from the "Neiye" chapter of the *Guanzi* are arguing for a *qi*-based cosmology in which spirits can understand the future not because they control it but because, as concentrated *qi*, everything resides within them. In a similar fashion, those humans who can concentrate their *qi* to the same degree as a spirit will also gain an understanding of auspiciousness without resorting to the arts of divination. As we will see, this statement is only one of a number of such claims voiced in this period about the abilities of humans to gain access to divine powers without the mediation of ritual specialists. The emergence of these views

1. *Guanzi*, "Neiye," 16.5a.

leads to one subject of this chapter: the question of why such claims arose at this time.<sup>2</sup>

As noted in the Introduction, much of the secondary scholarship on texts such as these is divided between two readings: one school of interpretation sees these texts as records of a shift from religion (based on an animistic worldview) to philosophy (based on a human-centered worldview); the other views them as an organic development of a set of deep assumptions concerning the continuity of humans and divinities. Both readings are based on the claim that philosophy in early China emerged from an earlier shamanism, but they disagree on the degree to which philosophy broke from this earlier tradition. As we saw in the preceding chapter, the shamanism hypothesis for the Chinese Bronze Age is questionable. In this chapter, I argue that the shamanism hypothesis, and hence our understanding of the development of Chinese thought, grows out of a misleading comparison of Greece and China and that the concerns evident in this quotation from the *Guanzi* were not outgrowths of an earlier shamanism. I offer an alternative explanation and argue for a different approach for comparing these developments with those found in ancient Greece.

#### Spirits Within Humans: The Issue of Shamanism in Early China and Early Greece

K. C. Chang was a strong advocate of the view that Chinese thought of the Warring States period evolved from earlier shamanistic practices:

What may be seen as the most striking feature of ancient Chinese civilization is that ideologically speaking it was created within a framework of cosmogonic holism. In the words of Frederick More, "the genuine Chinese cosmogony is that of organismic process, meaning that all of the parts of the entire cosmos belong to one organic whole and that they all interact as participants in one spontaneously self-generating life process." This organismic process, Tu Wei-ming amplifies, "exhibits three basic motifs: continuity, wholeness, and dynamism. All modalities of being, from a rock to heaven, are integral parts of a continuum. . . . Since nothing is outside of this continuum, the chain of being is never broken. A linkage will always be found between any given pair of things in the universe." This ancient Chinese world view, sometimes referred to as

2. Portions of this chapter are taken from my "Humans and Gods: The Theme of Self-Divinization in Early China and Early Greece."

"correlative cosmology," is surely not unique; in essence it represents the substratum of the human view of the world found widely among primitive societies (see, e.g., Lévi-Strauss). What is uniquely significant about its presence in ancient China is the fact that a veritable civilization was built on top of and within its confines.<sup>3</sup>

Julia Ching argues a very similar position,<sup>4</sup> and A. C. Graham develops a comparable argument. Graham reads the "Neiye" as a meditation text based on earlier shamanistic practice: "It is interesting also in providing clear evidence that the meditation practiced privately and recommended to rulers as an arcanum of government descends directly from the trance of the professional shaman." But whereas shamanism dealt with actual spirits, the "Neiye" deals with naturalistic, numinous forces: "By this period the gods and ghosts, like Heaven itself, are in the direction of becoming depersonalised though still vaguely numinous forces of nature. . . . Man himself can aspire, not indeed to omniscience (since Chinese thinking does not deal in absolutes), but to that supremely lucid awareness which excites a shudder of numinous awe." The meditation techniques of the "Neiye" thus involve a shifting of emphasis from linking with the spirits to perfecting the self: "The shamanic origin of the exercise is plain. The point of it however is not to become a medium for the gods or for deceased ancestors. This is a programme for self-perfection, as usual addressed primarily to the rulers." As such, the text "may well be the earliest Chinese interpretation of the experience of mystical oneness."<sup>5</sup>

Although Graham does not go as far as Chang and Ching in directly connecting shamanism to later notions of correlative cosmology, he does, like Chang and Ching, see the notion of humans being fully linked to the oneness of the cosmos as a philosophical re-reading of an earlier shamanistic experience. Indeed, the main differences in the positions of these scholars concern the relations between this earlier shamanism and later philosophy. For Chang and Ching, shamanism marked the primordial experience out of which later Chinese philosophy grew, whereas for Graham the philosophy involved a significant reworking of the earlier shamanistic practice. Chang and Ching are arguing for a fundamental assumption of monism in early

3. K. C. Chang, "Ancient China and Its Anthropological Significance," pp. 161-62.

4. Ching, *Mysticism and Kingship in China*, pp. 67-131.

5. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, pp. 101, 104.

China that can be traced to a shamanistic past, and Graham is utilizing a "religion to philosophy" framework in which part of the distinctiveness of Chinese philosophy emerged when thinkers turned from shamanism to self-cultivation.<sup>6</sup> In both approaches, however, shamanism lies behind Chinese philosophy.

These arguments by Chang and Graham are closely paralleled by a large body of scholarship on ancient Greece that argues that Greek philosophy emerged against a shamanistic background. The most influential thesis was that advanced by E. R. Dodds. Much as Graham claims for China, Dodds argues that a fundamental shift in notions of the self occurred in Greece in the fifth century BC:

The "soul" was no reluctant prisoner of the body (in pre-fifth century BC Greece); it was the life or spirit of the body, and perfectly at home there. It was here that the new religious pattern made its fateful contribution: by crediting man with an occult self of divine origin, and thus setting soul and body at odds, it introduced into European culture a new interpretation of human existence, the interpretation we call puritanical.<sup>7</sup>

Dodds argues that this occult notion of the soul is traceable to Central Asian shamanistic practices:

Now a belief of this kind is an essential element of the shamanistic culture which still exists in Siberia. . . . A shaman may be described as a psychically unstable person who has received a call to the religious life. . . . His own soul is thought to leave its body and travel to distant parts, most often to the spirit world. . . . From these experiences, narrated by him in extempore song, he derives the skill in divination, religious poetry, and magical medicine which makes him socially important. He becomes the repository of a supernatural wisdom. (p. 140)

Dodds argues that this shamanistic culture entered Greece in the seventh century from Scythia and Thrace (pp. 140, 142)<sup>8</sup> and was picked up by fig-

6. Several other scholars have developed this same "religion to philosophy" argument in regard to the "Neiye," as well as the related "Xinshu" chapters. (I discuss the "Xinshu" texts in Chapter 4.) See, e.g., Shibata, "Kanshi shihen ni okeru shün to dö"; and Qiu Xigui, "Jixia Daojia jingqi shuo de yanjiu." Both Shibata and Qiu paint the same general narrative that Graham does—from a shamanistic practice based on external spirits entering the human body to a philosophical regimen based on the cultivation of an internal spirit.

7. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, p. 139; hereinafter cited in the text.

8. Dodds is building here on Karl Meuli's work; see his "Scythia."

ures such as Pythagoras and Empedocles: "These men diffused the belief in a detachable soul or self, which by suitable techniques can be withdrawn from the body even during life, a self which is older than the body and will outlast it" (pp. 146-47). In short, the diffusion of shamanistic culture to Greece led to the emergence of a true dualism of body and soul—a dualism that had never existed before in early Greece.

We have seen—or I hope we have seen—how contact with shamanistic beliefs and practices might suggest to a thoughtful people like the Greeks the rudiments of such a psychology: how the notion of psychic excursion in sleep or trance might sharpen the soul-body antithesis; how the shamanistic "retreat" might provide the model for a deliberate askēsis, a conscious training of the psychic powers through abstinence and spiritual exercises; how tales of vanishing and reappearing shamans might encourage the belief in an indestructible magical or daemonic self. (pp. 149-50)

Dodds goes on to detail how this notion of an occult self of divine origin was later appropriated by Plato (pp. 207-35).

These ideas have since been hotly debated. Jan Bremmer, for one, has strongly criticized Dodds's shamanism hypothesis. After a lengthy survey of the evidence, both in Greece and Scythia, Bremmer concludes: "No convincing evidence exists for shamanistic influence on Archaic Greece. . . . It has not yet even been shown that the Scythians who were supposed by Dodds to have influenced the Greeks knew a shamanistic journey of the soul!"<sup>9</sup> Peter Kingsley, however, has recently come out in defense of the hypothesis.<sup>10</sup> Carlo Ginzburg has referred favorably to it as a piece of what he sees as a widespread diffusion of shamanism across Eurasia in the early period.<sup>11</sup>

I will follow Bremmer in rejecting Dodds's hypothesis. Before doing so, however, I would like to stress the implications of Dodds's theory for the shamanism hypothesis made for China. Arguments that might at first glance appear similar to Dodds's diffusion hypothesis have been made for China. Victor Mair has argued, based on linguistic and archaeological evidence, that the *wu*, the Chinese term usually translated as "shaman" in reference to early

9. Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul*, pp. 34-53; quotation at p. 47.

10. Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic*; see also idem, "Greeks, Shamans, and Magi."

11. Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, pp. 218n4, 276n78.

China, might in fact have been Iranian *magi* who entered China during the Bronze Age.<sup>12</sup> And, of course, the Scythians, whom Dodds sees as having become so influential in Greece, were Iranians. This line of reasoning implies that both China and Greece received a similar diffusion of ideas and techniques from the same Iranian source. Moreover, H. S. Nyberg has famously argued that Zoroastrianism was influenced by Siberian shamanism.<sup>13</sup> Thus, were one to follow all these links, one could trace a shamanism arising in Siberia, influencing Iranian culture, and in turn influencing both Greece and China.

However, several problems arise for anyone who wished to trace such a historical development. First, Nyberg's arguments about links between Siberian shamanism and Zoroastrianism have been widely rejected by specialists.<sup>14</sup> Even Eliade himself, who argues explicitly that shamanism was diffused from Siberia to many cultures throughout the world, has questioned them. Eliade instead reads Zoroastrianism as revealing elements of a belief in a sacred link between heaven and earth—ideas, as discussed in the previous chapter, that Eliade reads as primordial elements of human experience. He thus opposes the attempt to see such elements as a result of a diffusion of shamanism from Siberia:

The ecstatic and mystical elements in the religion of Zarathustra that bear resemblances to the ideology and techniques of shamanism form part of a complex and hence do not imply any "shamanic" structure in Zarathustra's religious experience. The sacred space, the importance of song, mystical or symbolical communication between heaven and earth, the initiatory or funerary bridge—these various elements, although they form an integral part of Asian shamanism, precede and go beyond it.<sup>15</sup>

As I noted in the previous chapter, I reject Eliade's arguments concerning the primordality of notions of sacred space in human experience. But it is relevant to the current discussion that even Eliade—the figure one would expect to be most sympathetic to Nyberg—has rejected his claims.

12. Mair, "Old Sinitic \*Myag, Old Persian *Magus*, and English 'Magician.'"

13. Nyberg, *Die Religionen des Alten Iran*.

14. For an overview of the arguments, see Widengren, "Henrik Samuel Nyberg and Iranian Studies in the Light of Personal Reminiscences."

15. Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 399.

Moreover, we have already seen that many classicists reject the claim of diffusion from Scythia to Greece. And, on other end of Eurasia, Mair has argued that the *wu*, who he claims were *magi* from Iran, were *not* shamans:

It has been customary for students of Chinese civilization to translate \**myag* [i.e., *wu*] as "shaman," but this is wrong on several counts. In the first place, the shaman was the leading representative of a specific type of religious system practiced by Siberian and Ural-Altaic peoples. Perhaps the most characteristic feature of this tradition was the shaman's ecstatic trance-flight to heaven during initiation and other rituals. The shamans also served the community as a whole by retrieving the errant souls of sick people and escorting the spirits of the dead to the other world. This is in contrast to the \**myag* who were closely associated with the courts of various rulers and who were primarily responsible for divination, astrology, prayer, and healing with medicines.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, the figure in Chinese studies who has most strongly argued for Iranian influence on China rejects the shamanism hypothesis. The apparent parallel with Dodds's view does not arise at all: although Mair argues for a significant diffusion of Iranian ideas and practices into China, just as Dodds argues for a significant diffusion from the same source into Greece, Mair does not see this diffusion as involving anything that might be called shamanism. Chang and Ching, of course, would disagree with Mair's opposition to the shamanism hypothesis. But since they argue that shamanism was an inheritance from China's primitive past, they, too, would strongly deny any claim that shamanism was diffused into China from Siberia via Iran.

The diffusion hypothesis thus faces severe problems on all fronts. But what interests me more at this point is the opposite ways that shamanism is employed as an explanatory principle by Dodds, on the one hand, and Chang and Ching, on the other. For Chang and Ching (and, to a lesser degree, Graham), shamanism is the causative factor behind the dominance of a monistic worldview in China. For Dodds, shamanism was behind the emergence of dualism in Greece. Once again, we see the same basic contrast of China and Greece, with China defined by monism and Greece by dualism.

When the same phenomenon (in this case, shamanism) is credited with such opposite ramifications in two traditions, the adequacy of the hypothe-

16. Mair, "Old Sinitic \**Myag*," p. 35.

ses should at least be questioned. However, variation in itself does not refute the hypotheses; it is, after all, possible that the same phenomenon can have decidedly contrary ramifications in two cultures, particularly if, as so many scholars have tried to argue, the two cultures are based on different guiding assumptions. So, a full reconsideration of these issues requires that we look at the evidence in detail.

I first turn to a discussion of Empedocles—the figure who plays such an important role in Dodds's argument. I first critique Dodds's use of diffusion as an explanatory principle to understand Empedocles and will offer an alternative approach. I then analyze the relevant material from early China. I will argue that the shamanism hypothesis, as well as the larger contrastive framework for studying China and Greece, should be rethought. I will conclude by suggesting a different approach to this material, as well as to the larger issue of comparing China and Greece.

### Humans and Gods in Early Greece

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle discusses what it means for one to practice the theoretical life:

Such a life would be superior to the human level. For someone will live it not insofar as he is a human being, but insofar as he has some divine element in him. . . . Hence if understanding is something divine in comparison with a human being, so also will the life that expresses understanding be divine in comparison with human life. We ought not follow the proverb-writers, and "think human, since you are human."<sup>17</sup>

A philosopher is one who has risen above the human and become, at least in part, divine.

This claim came out of traditions of self-divinization beginning at least a full century earlier and, as is clear by the polemic at the end of Aristotle's statement, was made in opposition to numerous other views at the time concerning the nature of divinities and humans and the proper demarcation between the two. As is well known, the importance of maintaining a strict separation between humans and gods is a recurrent theme in early Greek

17. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.7, 1177b26–34, in *Aristotle: Selections*, pp. 441–42.

writings, as is the injunction to avoid the hubris of trying to get too close to divinity.<sup>18</sup> In the *Iliad*, Apollo warns Diomedes:

Take care, give back, son of Tydeus, and strive no longer  
to make yourself like the gods in mind, since never the same is  
the breed of gods, who are immortal, and men who walk groundling.<sup>19</sup>

Or, as Pindar wrote:

It is a dispensation of the gods that gives men their might.  
And two things only tend life's sweetest moment:  
when in the flower of wealth, a man enjoys both triumph and good fame.  
Seek not to become Zeus.  
All is yours if the allotment of these two gifts has fallen to you.  
Mortal thoughts befit a mortal man.<sup>20</sup>

The theme also plays an important role in the Hesiodic cosmology and view of sacrifice discussed in the previous chapter.

Much of early Greek philosophy, however, involved attempts to break this demarcation, to criticize the ritual specialists of the day, and to emphasize the abilities of humans to gain direct access to divine powers. One of the earliest figures to make this argument was Empedocles,<sup>21</sup> as in, for example, this fragment on the golden age of man:

They did not have Ares as god or Kydoimos, nor king Zeus nor Kronos nor Poseidon but queen Kypris. Her they propitiated with holy images and painted animal figures, with perfumes of subtle fragrance and offerings of distilled myrrh and sweet-smelling frankincense, and pouring on the earth libations of golden honey. Their altar was not drenched by the slaughter of bulls, but this was the greatest defilement among men—to bereave of life and eat noble limbs.<sup>22</sup>

18. See the excellent discussion by Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 58–59. I am indebted to Rosen for the quotations from Aristotle, Homer, and Pindar.

19. Homer, *The Iliad*, V.440–42, in *The Iliad of Homer*, p. 140.

20. Pindar, *Isthmians* 5, v.11–16, in *Pindar's Victory Songs*, p. 309.

21. My understanding of Empedocles has been greatly enhanced by Kahn, "Religion and Natural Philosophy in Empedocles' Doctrine of the Soul"; and Panagiotou, "Empedocles on His Own Divinity."

22. Diels fragment 128; in *Empedocles: The Extant Fragments*, #118, p. 282; hereinafter cited in the text in the form D128; #118, p. 282.

Empedocles is explicitly attacking the religious practices of his day—practices based on sacrificial offerings to a pantheon of anthropomorphic deities. Prior to this world, Empedocles argues, was a period ruled by Kypris, or Love.

This opposition to sacrificial practice is a recurring theme in Empedocles: "Will you not cease from the din of slaughter? Do you not see that you are devouring one another because of your careless way of thinking?" (D136; #122, p. 285). Below I consider why Empedocles attributed sacrifice to a "careless way of thinking." Here, I delineate why an opposition to the world of anthropomorphic deities and to sacrificial practice is so important to Empedocles. To do so, it is necessary to situate Empedocles within a series of contemporary claims being made in opposition to the sacrifices carried out in the name of the polis. As discussed in the previous chapter, Greek polis sacrifices involved claims of ritual separation between man and god. It was this ritual separation that figures like Pindar were supporting and that several movements in the sixth and fifth centuries BC were trying to break down. One example among many of these groups is the Orphics. As a series of startling paleographic finds has demonstrated, the Orphics were a presence in the fifth century BC.<sup>23</sup>

In explicating the Orphic critique of sacrifice, Vernant and Detienne turn to a narrative concerning humans, the Titans, and Dionysus.<sup>24</sup> The narrative recounts how the Titans dismembered and devoured Dionysus. But Dionysus was then reconstituted, and Zeus punished the Titans by killing them with a thunderbolt. Humans were then born from the Titans' ashes. As a consequence of this history, humans possess within themselves both the guilt of the Titans' crime and a divine spark from the devoured Dionysus. To erase this crime and cultivate the divinity within, man is called on to follow Orphic practices and renounce the sacrificial meat of the polis. Orphic

23. See Burkert, "Orphism and Bacchic Mysteries"; and Fritz Graf, "Dionysian and Orphic Eschatology."

24. Vernant and Detienne fairly uncritically accept the antiquity of this narrative. Although I accept their dating, there is an enormous body of secondary literature on the topic. Prior to the recent paleographic discoveries, the scholarly world was split on this question. See, e.g., Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion*; and Linforth, *The Arts of Orpheus*. For convenient summaries of the paleographic evidence for the antiquity of the narrative, see Kahn, "Was Euthyphro the Author of the Derveni Papyrus?" pp. 57–60; and Fritz Graf, "Dionysian and Orphic Eschatology," pp. 239–45.

practices, including vegetarianism, should thus be understood as an attempt to reject the sacrificial practices of the polis and its tragic separation of humans and gods and to instead strive to join with the gods once again. As Vernant argues:

By consenting to sacrifice a living animal to the gods in the Promethean manner, as official worship requires, men only repeat the Titans' crime indefinitely. By refusing this sacrifice, by forbidding the bloodshed of any animal, by turning away from fleshy food to dedicate themselves to a totally "pure" ascetic life—a life also completely alien to the social and religious norms of the city—men would shed all the Titanic elements of their nature. In Dionysus they would be able to restore that part of themselves that is divine. By returning to the god in this way each would accomplish, on the human level and within the framework of human existence, this same movement of reunification that Dionysus himself knew as a god during the torment in which he was first dismembered and then reconstituted.<sup>25</sup>

The rejection of sacrifice by the Orphics was thus based on a larger rejection of the ritual separation of humans and gods maintained in the practices of the polis.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, one of the paleographic discoveries, a series of gold leaves from Thurii, includes the statement "Happy and blessed one, you will be god instead of mortal."<sup>27</sup> The Orphics were claiming the ability to transcend the discontinuity of gods and humans found in the sacrificial system and become divine themselves.

This gives us some context for understanding the quotation from Pindar given above. Pindar's call to humans to stop seeking to become gods was hardly a rhetorical flourish. The sacrificial practices of the day strongly asserted the radical separation of man from god, and movements that attempted to reject this separation and proclaim the potential of humans to divinize themselves had sprung up. Pindar was thus reacting to growing trends of his day.

25. Vernant, "At Man's Table," p. 51; see also Detienne, "Culinary Practices and the Spirit of Sacrifice," pp. 7–8.

26. A different interpretation has been given by M. L. West (*The Orphic Poems*, pp. 144–50), who reads the Orphic narrative of Dionysus as a shamanistic initiatory ritual. Like Meuli and Dodds, West reads shamanism as having entered Greece from Central Asia during the classical period, and he sees Orphism as a part of this diffusion. For the reasons provided below, I find the hypothesis of a diffusion of shamanism unconvincing.

27. Graf, "Dionysian and Orphic Eschatology," pp. 246, 254.

Empedocles, like the Orphics, strongly opposed this ritual separation of humans and gods. In direct contrast to the tragic cosmology encoded in the sacrificial practice of the polis, Empedocles proposed a system in which humans and the gods are inherently linked. Empedocles began by redefining the deities as the roots underlying all that exists: "Hear first the four roots of all things: bright Zeus and life-bringing Hera and Aidoneus and Nestis, whose tears are the source of mortal streams" (D6; #7, p. 164). The gods are not anthropomorphic deities separate from the world yet in direct control of it; on the contrary, they are the elemental bases of the world. Empedocles elsewhere defines these roots as fire, water, earth, and air (D17, #8, p. 166) and explains the cosmos in terms of their interaction:

All these are equal and of like age, but each has a different prerogative, and its particular character, and they prevail in turn as the time comes round. . . . These are the only real things, but as they run through each other they become different objects at different times, yet they are throughout forever the same. (D17; #8, p. 167)

The cosmic process is then defined in terms of the interaction of these roots:

Under strife they have different forms and are all separate, but they come together in love and are desired by one another. From them comes all that was and is and will be hereafter—trees have sprung from them, and men and women, and animals and birds and water-nourished fish, and long-lived gods too, highest in honor. For these are the only real things, and as they run through each other they assume different shapes, for the mixing interchanges them. (D21; #14, p. 177)

In such a cosmology, everything—from gods to humans to objects—is composed of the same roots. Not only are humans and gods not separated, they are in fact inherently connected. Indeed, differentiated things exist at all only because of the strife that breaks apart the proper harmony of love.

Hence Empedocles' contempt for sacrifice: sacrifice incorrectly assumes a division between animals, humans, and gods—wherein animals are sacrificed by humans for the sake of the gods—when in fact all three of these are linked. In contrast to a theistic understanding of the universe, Empedocles calls for a "divine understanding": "Happy the man who has gained the wealth of divine understanding, wretched he who cherishes an unenlightened opinion about the gods" (D132; #95, p. 252).

Here we arrive at the crucial points. Having denied the Hesiodic claim of a division between humans and gods, Empedocles makes an argument as to



the potential of thought or divine understanding. A hint of what Empedocles means by this can be found in another set of fragments: "For he is not equipped with a human head on a body, [two branches do not spring from his back,] he has no feet, no swift knees, no shaggy genitals, but he is mind alone, holy and inexpressible, darting through the whole cosmos with swift thoughts" (D133; #97, p. 253). This description of mind is quite close in language to another fragment that describes the sphere of Love: "There the swift limbs of the sun are not distinguished . . . in this way it is held fast in the close covering of harmony, a rounded sphere, rejoicing in encircling stillness" (D27, #21, p. 187). And to another that appears to describe either Love itself or the state achieved by a wise man: "For two branches do not spring from his back, he has no feet, no swift knees, no organs of reproduction, but he is equal to himself in every direction, without any beginning or end, a rounded sphere, rejoicing in encircling stillness" (D29/28; #22, p. 188). The implication of these fragments would appear to be that Love as well as thought is the state of perfect harmony for the four roots. Divinity, therefore, is located in harmony, not in anthropomorphic deities. Accordingly, divinity is fully achievable by humans through understanding, which is itself the divine harmony of Love.

Such ideas are expanded in Empedocles' discussion of daimons. As he argues in the *Katharmoi*, a daimon is one in whom the four roots are properly combined, and one, therefore, "to whom life long-lasting is apportioned" (D115; #107, p. 270). But, through error, the daimons, like everything else, fall into strife:

He wanders from the blessed ones for three times countless years, being born throughout the time as all kinds of mortal forms, exchanging one hard way of life for another. For the force of fire pursues him into sea, and sea spits him out onto earth's surface, earth casts him into the rays of blazing sun, and sun into the eddies of air; one takes him from another, and all abhor him. (D115; #107, p. 270)

Empedocles has discovered himself to be one such fallen daimon: "I too am now one of these, an exile from the gods and a wanderer, having put my trust in raving strife" (D115; #107, p. 270). For this reason, he is now a mortal man, just as before he has been various other mortal creatures: "For before now I have been at some time boy and girl, bush, bird, and a mute fish in the sea" (D111; #101, p. 261). Empedocles himself, then, is striving to reach the divine understanding of the daimon, just as all humans should do.

Humans, therefore, are simply a transitory form, but the thought of humans can be divine. And this understanding grants the practitioner the ability to control the strife of the roots:

You will learn remedies for ills and help against old age, since for you alone shall I accomplish all these things. You will check the force of tireless winds, which sweep over land and destroy fields with their blasts; and again, if you wish, you will restore compensating breezes. After black rain you will bring dry weather in season for men, and too after summer dryness you will bring tree-nourishing showers (which live in air), and you will lead from Hades the life-force of a dead man. (D115; #107, p. 270)

Overall, then, in direct opposition to the claims of a separation between humans and gods, Empedocles proposed a cosmology in which a basic substrate unites all things. Moreover, he defined thought as divine and as thus potentially capable of controlling natural processes themselves. As such, he denied the theistic conceptions on which the dominant sacrificial activities of his day were based. For Empedocles, sacrifice was wrong because it involved a destruction of what is inherently linked, and it was unnecessary anyway because humans, properly cultivated, can attain powers over natural phenomena on their own. Empedocles was thus substituting for the religious practices of the day a new regimen whose followers would no longer supplicate the gods but would, ultimately, become divine. This regimen, in short, was being proposed in full opposition to the civic culture of the day.

These attempts to propose methods of self-divinization became increasingly important during the fifth and fourth centuries BC. Plato, for one, appropriated and reworked such ideas in his formulation of the academy, an institution in which disciples would be trained in a rigorous process of self-cultivation. As he argues in the *Timaeus*, explicitly appealing to a vocabulary of the daimon:

As concerning the most sovereign form of soul in us we must conceive that heaven has given it to each man as a guiding daimon—that part which we say dwells in the summit of our body and lifts us from earth toward our celestial affinity, like a plant whose roots are not in earth, but in the heavens.<sup>28</sup>

Plato's ultimate call, of course, was for those who underwent such self-cultivation to lead the state.<sup>29</sup>

28. *Timaeus* 90a; in *Plato's Timaeus*, p. 114.

29. The argument is laid out most clearly in the *Republic*.

It is beyond the bounds of this chapter to trace the ways that such ideas were developed and reformulated in the later Greek tradition. Suffice it to say here that these claims of self-divinization became a crucial aspect of early Greek philosophy, which in part explains the uneasy relation that philosophers had with the polis culture of their day.

This historical explanation for the emergence of self-divinization movements in Greece is, I think, more convincing than the shamanism hypothesis offered by Dodds. As Bremmer has noted, there are significant problems with the hypothesis itself: there is no evidence of contact in Greece with shamanistic currents among the Scythians, and, indeed, there is no evidence that shamanistic ideas of this sort existed among the Scythians at all. Moreover, Dodds's attempt to interpret the philosophers in question according to a shamanistic vision leads to forced readings. For example, Empedocles does not discuss shamanic spirit journeys,<sup>30</sup> and, although Empedocles does posit a dualism of body and spirit, his ultimate position on the cosmos is monistic. Far more significant for my argument, however, is that Dodds is mistaken in trying to use diffusion as an explanatory principle. Even if evidence for diffusion existed, the basic questions that need to be asked are: What claims were figures like the Orphics, Empedocles, Plato, and Aristotle making? Why were they making them, and What were the implications of such claims? These questions can be answered only through a historical analysis of early Greek cultures, not through a purported diffusion from Scythia. I have therefore situated these figures in their historical context, have seen their claims of self-divinization in relation to an ongoing debate, and have shown how and why they were responding to the ritual specialists, as well as the entire polis organization, of the day.

### Comparing China and Greece

In turning to China, one might at first think that we confront a culture that witnessed no comparable debate concerning gods and humans. If K. C. Chang is correct, one would not expect a debate about the relationship between humans and spirits in early China. On the contrary, one would expect that spirits, like humans, would be conceptualized as part of a larger

30. For spirit journeys, see Chapter 5 of this book.

monistic system. In other words, the type of cosmological system that Empedocles was presenting in opposition to the dominant views of the time in early Greece would be, if Chang is right, a starting assumption in early China.

Indeed, one could go a step further and argue that some of what we have seen in Empedocles might support Chang's views concerning shamanism. With a few revisions, it could even be portrayed as supporting Dodds's hypothesis as well. If Empedocles is a monistic, rather than a dualistic, thinker, then monistic notions of the cosmos might be linked with shamanism, and monism may have come to Greece only when shamanism entered through diffusion: because of its continuing shamanistic foundations, Chinese civilization adhered to a monistic cosmology as an assumption, whereas Greece developed this idea only when it became influenced from outside by shamanism. Thus, both Chang's thesis that shamanism should be associated with a monistic cosmos and Dodds's thesis that Empedocles was influenced by shamanistic currents from Central Asia would be confirmed.

As the analyses in this chapter and the preceding one have shown, both hypotheses are unconvincing. In this chapter I will question any linkage between monistic notions and shamanism and will argue that, in both China and Greece, monistic notions emerged at the same time as claims of self-divination—of the ability of humans to become like spirits—and that this occurred in opposition to the ritual specialists of the day. I will argue, in other words, that notions of monism and of the continuity of the human and divine realms were not foundational in early China but were, rather, as in Greece, consciously formulated ideas designed to critique beliefs and practices dominant at the time. The fact that some of these cosmological notions became dominant at the imperial court during the Han should not mislead us into thinking they were common assumptions in the pre-imperial periods. Instead, these cosmological notions grew out of a debate not unlike that which developed in early Greece. This is not to say, of course, that the positions taken within the two cultures were identical or that the course of the debates was similar. My argument is, rather, that the debates are comparable in terms of the motivating concerns and tensions. The interesting issue from a comparative perspective lies in discovering how and why the debates worked out as they did in the two cultures.

### Humans and Gods in Early China

These new cosmological notions developed in reaction to the religious and political contexts of early China.<sup>31</sup> The first point to emphasize is the degree to which, just as in early Greece, a highly theistic vision of the world continued to pervade elite religious activities throughout the period discussed in this book. Although Mote admits that "it is true that in the vulgarized versions of this rather philosophical conception [of naturalism], spirits sometimes began to resemble 'gods,'"<sup>32</sup> I would argue that such notions were not vulgarizations of a more pervasive naturalistic orientation. On the contrary, many of the religious orientations seen in the Bronze Age continued through the Warring States period.

Crucial to this cosmology was the notion that natural phenomena were governed by distinct, active deities. One example among many can be found in the "Ji fa" chapter of the *Liji*:

The mountains, forests, rivers, valleys, and hills that can send out clouds, make wind and rain, and cause to appear strange phenomena are called spirits (*shen*). He who possesses all under heaven sacrifices to the hundred spirits.<sup>33</sup>

Natural phenomena, the text is claiming, are under the direct control of particular spirits, to whom the ruler must make continual sacrifices.

And since natural phenomena were directly controlled by spirits—and potentially fickle spirits at that—a great deal of religious activity during the Warring States accordingly was devoted to charting which spirits controlled which domain of power, understanding their intentions through divination, and influencing them with sacrifices. It is in this context, for example, that we should understand claims such as those found in the *Zuozhuan* that one of the civilizing acts of Yu consisted of casting cauldrons with images of the spirits, an act that allowed the people to "know the spirits."<sup>34</sup> Similarly, the "Wuzang shanjing" section of the *Shanhaijing* contains an exhaustive description of, among other things, the various spirits of each mountain and the particular powers that each possesses. A typical passage reads: "As for the

31. For an excellent discussion of early Chinese religious practices, see Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare*.

32. Mote, *Intellectual Foundations of China*, p. 17.

33. *Liji zhengyi*, "Ji fa," 46.3a.

34. *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, Xuan, 3, 21.8b–9a.

appearance of their [i.e., these mountains'] spirits, they all have a human body and sheep horns. In sacrifices to them, use one sheep and, for grain offerings, use millet. These are the spirits. When they appear, the wind and rainwater make destruction."<sup>35</sup> The text then explains the types of sacrifices that dissuade these particular spirits from causing destructive winds and rains. Both of these texts make an argument for rulership through a control of local spirits: by gaining powers over enough divinities, the ruler can bring order to the world.<sup>36</sup>

Given the dominance of such notions, it is not surprising that several texts from this period present critical responses to the ritual specialists in charge of dealing with these spirits. I discuss four of these texts here: the *Lunyu*, early chapters from the Mohists, the "Chu yu, xia" chapter of the *Guoyu*, and the "Neiye" chapter of the *Guanzi*.

### Heaven and Man in the *Lunyu*

One of the most often-quoted passages from the *Lunyu* is: "Fan Chi asked about knowledge. The master said, 'To work on behalf of what is proper for the people, to be reverent to the ghosts and spirits and yet keep them at a distance, this can be called knowledge'" (6/22). Although Confucius is often presented, at least in the "religion to philosophy" framework, as marking a shift away from "superstition" and toward "rationalism,"<sup>37</sup> Confucius was not claiming that spirits do not exist. Indeed, he explicitly called on people to be reverent toward them. His point is, rather, to keep them at a distance and to focus on the human realm.<sup>38</sup>

It is within this context that we should understand Confucius' statements about spirits. As his disciples claimed: "He sacrificed as if present. He sacrificed to the spirits as if the spirits were present. The master said, 'If I do not participate in the sacrifice, it is as if I did not sacrifice'" (3/12). The passage is

35. *Shanhaijing jianshu*, "Dongshan jing," SBBY, 4.7b.

36. For a discussion of these texts, see Harper, "A Chinese Demonography," p. 479; and Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, 3: 503.

37. See, e.g., Fung, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, 1: 58.

38. "Confucius" here refers not to some historical Confucius but to a composite figure constructed from the *Lunyu* whose views are representative of a certain strand of late Chunqiu—early Warring States opposition to the dominant forms of religious practice. For an attempt to periodize the chapters of the *Lunyu* themselves, see Brooks and Brooks, *The Original Analects*.

a critique of contemporary sacrificial practice, in which one engaged a ritual specialist to perform sacrifices properly. The goal of such sacrifices was to transform the spirits so that they would act on behalf of humanity. Confucius' argument is that one should focus instead on the human realm: the point of sacrifice is not to persuade the spirits but to transform the human performing the ritual. Accordingly, one must perform the act oneself, and one must do so even though the spirits may not be present during the ritual. This position does not deny that spirits act in the world. Rather, it argues against the view that humans should attempt to control the spirits with sacrifices: the goal should be self-transformation.

Spirits, therefore, should not be the object of our concern: "The master did not speak of abnormalities (*guai* 怪), force, disorder, or spirits" (7/21). Here again, there is no claim that the items on this list do not exist. Nor is there any claim that they are insignificant. Clearly, disorder and force are subjects of obvious concern. The power of the passage, therefore, lies precisely in the implication that for most people these topics *would* usually be objects of great concern, yet Confucius did not speak of them at all. The sense running throughout these passages is that spirits do have great potency, but humans should not speak of them, should avoid worrying about them, and should perform ritual actions not to influence them but to cultivate themselves. And yet one must still revere them. Indeed, the highest way to revere them is precisely not to try to influence them.

In many ways this position heightens the tensions noted in Chapter 1. In the Western Zhou, a proper pattern for human life was emphasized. Heaven and the other spirits sometimes supported this pattern; at other times they did not. But ritual specialists could, to a limited extent, keep the divine powers within this pattern. But Confucius, by decrying the instrumental use of sacrifices by ritual specialists, denied the powers that were used in the Bronze Age to mollify divine forces and to make them work for the living. Instead, he urged that we simply cultivate ourselves and accept whatever the divine powers do.

This stance explains both the reverence that Confucius expressed toward Heaven, the greatest of the divine powers, as well as his view that we must not attempt to influence Heaven but accept whatever Heaven sends at us. Thus, for example, Confucius strongly embraced the idea that humans must follow the mandate of Heaven. Indeed, esteeming the mandate of Heaven was one point of difference between a gentleman and a lesser man:

Confucius said, "As for the gentleman, there are three things he esteems. He esteems the mandate 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 disrespectful to great men, and he ridicules the words of sages." (16/8)

And Confucius famously defined understanding the mandate of Heaven as one of the achievements of his life:

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 mandate of Heaven; at sixty my ear accorded; at seventy I followed what my heart desired without transgression." (2/4)

For Confucius, however, the mandate of Heaven was not a simple granting of moral norms, nor did it involve rewarding the worthy or punishing the unworthy. Although Sima Qian would later, in his biography of Bo Yi and Shu Qi,<sup>39</sup> critique Confucius for believing that the good are rewarded and the bad punished, Confucius in fact held no such position. Indeed, for Confucius, the mandate of Heaven appeared to involve no ethical calculus whatsoever, and this presumably is a part of why it took Confucius until age fifty to understand it. For example, when his favorite disciple, Yan Hui, died young, Confucius exclaimed, "Alas. Heaven is destroying me! Heaven is destroying me!" 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, since it is Heaven that controls the mandate.

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." (11/7)<sup>40</sup>

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

Indeed, Confucius often emphasized the degree to which events are out of the control of humans. When a certain Gongbo Liao defamed someone, and Zifu Jingbo asked Confucius if he should have Gongbo Liao killed, Confucius responded: "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?" (14/36). Even the question

39. *Shiji*, 120.2124–25.

40. A similar statement appears in 6/3.

of whether the Way will prevail is out of human hands: humans can put the way into practice only if Heaven wishes them to. 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 held strongly to the view that no one should resent Heaven:

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." (14/35)

Indeed, Confucius believed that human culture itself derives in part from Heaven and argued that cultural patterns emerged when the initial sages modeled themselves on Heaven and then transmitted those patterns to humanity:

The master said: "Great indeed was the rulership of Yao. So majestic—only Heaven is great, and only Yao modeled 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 (*wen zhang*)." (8/19)

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

When the master was in danger in Kuang, he said: "King Wen has died, but are his cultural patterns (*wen*) not here? If Heaven had wanted to destroy these cultural patterns, then those who died later would not have been able to participate in the cultural patterns. Since Heaven has not destroyed these cultural patterns, what can the people of Kuang do to me?" (9/5)

Heaven is thus granted a normative role. The patterns of human culture (*wen*) emerged from Heaven, and it is Heaven that allows those patterns to continue.

Thus, the patterns that should guide human behavior can be traced 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.

Such a position is a variant of the tensions present in the Western Zhou. Heaven is revered, and both living up to and accepting what Heaven ordains are man's highest goals. But since, in Confucius' view, man cannot influence Heaven through sacrifices (or, to be more explicit, through sacrificing to the spirits who then petition Heaven on behalf of the living), man must simply cultivate himself and accept whatever Heaven does.<sup>41</sup>

### The Moral Cosmos of the Mohists

If Confucius responded to the tensions between humans and Heaven by embracing them and denying the ability of humans to transform Heaven, the Mohists took the opposite approach and denied the tensions altogether. For them, Heaven was a moral deity who acted according to a clear moral calculus: "Heaven desires propriety and detests impropriety."<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, humans must model themselves on Heaven in order to act properly: "The gentlemen who desire to act with propriety must accord with the intent of Heaven" ("Tianzhi, xia," 7.11a). Moreover, Heaven actively intervenes in human affairs to reward the good and punish the bad. If, for example, someone kills an innocent man, Heaven sends down a calamity ("Tianzhi, xia," 7.11a-b), as do the ghosts and spirits arrayed below Heaven ("Minggui, xia," 7.2b). Absent here is any sense that either Heaven or the spirits are capricious. All of them always act according to a clear moral calculus.

The Mohist advice to the rulers of the day was thus to simply follow Heaven, just as, the Mohists claim, the sage-kings of the past did:

Therefore, in ancient times the sage-kings made manifest and understood what Heaven and the ghosts bless and avoided what Heaven and the ghosts detest so as to increase the benefits of all under Heaven and eradicate the problems of all under Heaven. ("Tianzhi, zhong," 7.6a)

Like Confucius, the Mohists believed that humans must follow the commands of Heaven, but, unlike Confucius, the Mohists saw those commands as ethical.

41. For a somewhat different reading of these issues, see Ning Chen, "Confucius' View of Fate (*Ming*)." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 1994, 21, 1-15.

42. Mozi, "Tianzhi, xia," 7.10a; hereinafter citations from the *Mozi* are given in the text.

Indeed, not only should humans follow the commands of Heaven, but it was Heaven itself who

made kings, dukes, and lords and charged them with, first, rewarding the worthy and punishing the wicked and, second, plundering the metals, wood, birds, and beasts and working the five grains, hemp, and silk so as to make the materials for people's clothing and food. ("Tianzhi, zhong," 7.7a)

Heaven instituted the political hierarchy and taught rulers how to rule and how to appropriate natural resources for the benefit of humanity. The hierarchy of the human world thus replicates the hierarchy of the cosmos, with the rulers rewarding the worthy and punishing the unworthy just as Heaven above does.

There is no sense here that humans, through their sacrifices, are transforming Heaven and the spirit world in order to persuade them to act on behalf of humanity, nor is there any sense that humans are utilizing sacrifices in order to make material resources available for human consumption. On the contrary, the hierarchy of Heaven and the spirits is a given, and that hierarchy is already predisposed to aid humanity. Indeed, it is Heaven that created the kings, and Heaven that directs humanity to appropriate the natural world. It is as if the goal of late Shang sacrifices became the foundation for Mohist thought.

Moreover, for the Mohists sacrifices are not transformative. Instead, they are simply a case of humans giving the spirits what the spirits need, just as the spirits give humans what humans need. It is with the Mohists, in other words, that one finds the bureaucratic vision of sacrifices that Keightley sees in the Shang. The Mohist narrative of the origins of sacrifices makes the point well. The narrative appears in a Mohist argument about the importance of identifying with one's superior. This is true at each level of the hierarchy, all the way up to Heaven. Thus, the argument goes, if one identifies with the ruler but fails to identify with Heaven, then Heaven will send down punishments. To prevent this, sacrifices were instituted:

Therefore, if it were like this, then Heaven would send down cold and heat without moderation, snow, frost, rain, and dew at the improper time, the five grains would not grow, and the six animals would not prosper. . . . Therefore, in ancient times, the sage-kings clarified what Heaven and the ghosts desire and avoided what Heaven and the ghosts detest. They thereby sought to increase the benefits of all

under Heaven and push away the problems of all under Heaven. They thereby led the myriad peoples under Heaven to purify themselves, bathe, and make libations and offerings to sacrifice to Heaven and the ghosts. ("Shangtong, zhong," 3.5a-b)

Heaven and the ghosts desire sacrifices, and the sage-kings of the past therefore instituted them. Thenceforth, "favours from Heaven and the ghosts could be obtained" ("Shangtong, zhong," 3.5b). If humans sacrifice properly, then the divine powers will send down blessings. In short, the Mohist view of sacrifices is precisely *do ut des*—precisely the view that Keightley and Poo Mu-chou, incorrectly in my opinion, tried to read into Shang sacrifices. Indeed, stories abound in the *Mozi* about the importance of gauging the correct amount of sacrifices to give in order to receive the proper amount of divine blessings in return. As one example among many:

The sacrificer of Lu sacrificed one pig and sought one hundred favours from the ghosts and spirits. Master Mozi said to him, "This is unacceptable. If you give to others sparingly and yet expect them [in response] to give generously, then they will be afraid of your giving things to them. Now, if you sacrifice one pig and expect one hundred favours from the ghosts and spirits, then they will be afraid of getting sacrifices of oxen and sheep." ("Luwen," 13.6b)

Like Confucius, the Mohists opposed the use of sacrifice to coerce or transform the spirit world. But, unlike Confucius, the Mohists asserted that sacrifices should be used to gain benefits from the spirit world. Not only is it a moral cosmos, but it is also one that operates according to a hierarchical *do ut des* framework. For this reason, the Mohists argued strongly against the notion of fate.<sup>43</sup> Since the highest power, Heaven, is moral, the only issue is whether the ruler models himself on Heaven and acts properly to those below. If he does, there will be order; if he does not, Heaven will send down punishments.

When men of propriety are above, all under Heaven will be ordered. The High God, as well as the ghosts and spirits of the mountains and streams, will have their master of sacrifices, and the myriad peoples will receive great benefits. ("Feiming, shang," 9.3a)

Sacrifice, in short, is simply a part of the proper hierarchical functioning of the cosmos. It is not that sacrifices transform the spirits; rather, humans give

43. See the "Feiming" chapters, all of which, as their title implies, contain lengthy critiques of the notion of fate.

their superiors what they need. Indeed, when the Mohists argue that Heaven loves universally, they even give as one of their examples the fact that Heaven accepts sacrifices from all—and, if he accepts sacrifices from all, he will send down blessings to all (“Tianzhi, xia,” 7.11a).

Like Confucius, the Mohists deny that sacrifices can transform Heaven and the spirits. But, for Confucius this meant that one simply had to accept the capriciousness of those powers. For the Mohists, on the contrary, it is unnecessary to transform Heaven or in any way act to coerce it; Heaven is explicitly the source of propriety, and, indeed, of all things that the Mohists deem good. And humans are simply called on to follow Heaven’s commands and thus achieve the order that Heaven has made possible. For the Mohists, the cosmos is moral and is controlled by a moral deity and a moral pantheon of spirits, and humans should simply submit themselves to that deity in order to achieve a proper order. The tensions between humanity and divine powers are denied by arguing that Heaven and the spirits are not capricious and already act on behalf of humanity, and that the cosmos is already hierarchically structured and therefore not in need of human sacrifices to so order it. All humans need to do is follow the commands of Heaven, and those commands will always lead them properly.

### Separating Humans and Spirits and Dividing Heaven and Earth: The “Chu yu, xia” Chapter of the *Guoyu*

Confucius and the Mohists, albeit for different reasons, rejected the use of sacrifices to coerce and transform the divine realm, but others attempted to define more carefully the relations that ritual specialists should maintain with the spirits. A clear example of this can be found in the “Chu yu, xia” chapter of the *Guoyu*, which critiques its own age by looking back to an earlier period when ritual specialists behaved properly.

This section includes a passage widely cited in the sinological literature on shamanism. Indeed, K. C. Chang’s argument for shamanism in early China is based to a significant degree on his reading of this passage. Chang followed Derk Bodde’s paraphrase:

Anciently, men and spirits did not intermingle. At that time there were certain persons who were so perspicacious, single-minded, and reverential that their understanding enabled them to make meaningful collation of what lies above and below, and their insight to illumine what is distant and profound. Therefore the spirits

would descend into them. The possessors of such powers were, if men, called *xi* (shamans), and, if women, *wu* (shamanesses). It is they who supervised the positions of the spirits at the ceremonies, sacrificed to them, and otherwise handled religious matters. As a consequence, the spheres of the divine and the profane were kept distinct. The spirits sent down blessings on the people, and accepted from them their offerings. There were no natural calamities.<sup>44</sup>

Chang calls this “the most important textual reference to shamanism in ancient China.”<sup>45</sup>

Fung Yu-lan understood this passage in a similar way. However, Fung, reading the passage according to his general “religion to philosophy” argument, denigrated the link between humans and gods that Chang celebrated:

What is said here shows in a general way the forms of superstition of the early Chinese. From the fact that sorcerers and witches were considered necessary to regulate the dwelling places, positions at the sacrifices, and order of precedence of the spirits, we may see how numerous these spirits were. The fact that the spirits were supposed to be able to bestow happiness, receive sacrifices, and to enter into human beings, shows that they were regarded as anthropomorphic beings. And the statements that “people and spirits were confusedly mingled,” “people and spirits held the same position,” and “the spirits followed the customs of the people,” show us that the actions of the spirits were looked upon as being quite indistinguishable from those of human beings. The Chinese of that time were superstitious and ignorant; they had religious ideas but no philosophy; so that the religious ideas and spirits which they believed in were exactly like those of the Greeks.<sup>46</sup>

I will follow David Keightley in arguing that the passage in fact has little to do with shamanism.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, far from referring to a mixing of humans and spirits, the text is explicitly oriented toward defining humans and spirits as, normatively, separate. Like Pindar, the writers of this text were arguing against any attempt to weaken the boundary between humans and spirits.

The text revolves around King Zhao of Chu (r. 515–489 BC) and his minister Guan Yifu:

44. K. C. Chang, *Art, Myth, and Ritual*, p. 44. For Bodde’s paraphrase, see his “Myths of Ancient China,” p. 390.

45. K. C. Chang, *Art, Myth, and Ritual*, p. 45.

46. Fung, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, 1: 23–24.

47. Keightley, “Shamanism, Death, and the Ancestors,” pp. 821–24. The particular passage in question here is discussed in detail in Keightley’s unpublished “Shamanism in *Guoyu*: A Tale of the *xi* and *wu*.”

King Zhao asked Guan Yifu: "What does the *Zhoushu* mean when it refers to Chong and Li causing Heaven and Earth to have no communication? If this had not happened, would the people be able to ascend to Heaven?"<sup>48</sup>

The precise reference here is unclear. However, the "Lü xing" chapter of the *Shangshu* mentions the activities of Chong and Li in its description of the creation of punishments by the San Miao.<sup>49</sup> Di, heeding the cries of the people, decided to intervene:

Those who were oppressed and terrified and facing execution announced their innocence to the powers above. The high Di surveyed the people, but there was no fragrant virtue, and the punishments sent out a smell that was rank. The august Di pitied and felt compassion for those among the multitudes who, though innocent, were facing execution. He requited the oppressors with terror and put an end to the Miao people so that they had no descendants. He thereupon ordered Chong and Li to break the communication between Heaven and Earth so that there would be no more descending and reaching up.<sup>50</sup>

The passage clearly represents the interruption of communication between Heaven and Earth as a good thing: Di did so in order to establish a proper hierarchy. The sense would appear to be that the San Miao, in creating punishments, had usurped privileges that belonged to the god alone. The San Miao, in short, had transgressed the limits of what is permitted for humans.

In the "Chu yu" chapter, however, King Zhao asks if the passage perhaps had the opposite meaning: that the breaking of communication between Heaven and Earth was now preventing humans from ascending to the heavens. Guan Yifu immediately opposes such a reading: "This is not what it means. In ancient times, the people and the spirits did not mix" (18.1a). People and spirits were separated in antiquity, and, as Guan Yifu explains, a proper ritual separation was maintained between them. More specifically, ritual specialists were responsible for maintaining the proper sacrifices:

Those among the people whose essence was bright and never divided and who were able to be proper, reverential, correct, and rectified, their wisdom was capable of comparing the propriety of what was above and what was below; their sagacity was

48. *Guoyu*, "Chu yu, xia," 18.1a; hereinafter cited in the text.

49. For a detailed discussion of the "Lü xing" chapter, see my *Ambivalence of Creation*, chap. 3.

50. *Shangshu zhengyi*, "Lü xing," 19.10b-11b.

able to glorify what was distant and display what was bright; their clear-sightedness was able to glorify and illuminate it; their keen hearing was able to listen and discern it. As such, the illuminated spirits descended to them.<sup>51</sup> As regards males, they were called *xi* [male ritual specialists]; as regards women, they were called *wu* [female ritual specialists]. They were employed in order to regulate the placement, positions, precedence, and ranks of the spirits and to prepare the sacrificial victims, vessels, and seasonal garments. (18.1a)

The ritual specialists were rectified and proper, and the spirits thus descended to accept their sacrifices. The duties of these ritual specialists involved granting spirits their proper rank and precedence. Guan Yifu's argument parallels the views ascribed to ritual specialists in the Shang and early Zhou texts (see Chapter 1): the duty of such specialists was to order the spirits and grant them their proper position.

Because the ritual specialists performed their duties correctly, the tasks of humans and spirits were defined properly:

The people and spirits had different tasks. These were respected and not transgressed. Thus, the spirits sent them good harvests, and the people used the produce to sacrifice. Disasters did not come, and there were no deficiencies in what they sought for use. (18.1b-2a)

The ritual specialists regulated the positions of the spirits correctly, and the spirits in turn granted good harvests. The people then used the products of the harvest to sacrifice to the spirits. In short, because the ritual specialists observed their appropriate tasks, the worlds of humans and spirits were correctly demarcated and no disasters occurred.

Clearly, this is far removed from shamanism. The text is not describing the descent of spirits into humans, and its only reference to humans ascending is a negative one: it argues against any such attempt. Contrary to Chang's interpretation, the text is claiming that spirits and humans should be separated and placed within a proper hierarchy of functions. *Wu* here thus seems best translated as "ritual specialists"; I would agree with Mair's argument (see pp. 84-86) that the *wu* are not shamans at all.

51. This is the passage that Bodde read as "the spirits would descend into them" and that Chang used to build his argument for shamanism. In fact, however, the wording *jiang zhi* simply means "to descend and arrive"—which is exactly what spirits are supposed to do when effective ritual specialists entice them with the proper blandishments.



Guan Yifu continues:

When it came to the declining period of Shao Hao, the Jiu Li brought disorder to the power (*de*). The people and spirits were mixed up. Things could not be assigned to their proper categories. People made their own offerings, and each family had a ritual specialist (*wu*) and a scribe. There was no demand for substance. The people exhausted themselves in sacrifices and yet knew no good fortune. They made offerings without proper moderation. The people and the spirits occupied the same position. The people profaned the proper covenants. There was neither respect nor reverence. The spirits had improper intimacy with the people; they did not purify their behavior. Bountiful harvests were not sent down, and there was no produce for use in making offerings. Misfortunes and disasters repeatedly came. No one used up their *qi*. (18.2a)

The ritual differentiation that had characterized the earlier period broke down, and humans and spirits became mixed. Each family employed its own ritual specialist, and the order and precedence of the offerings collapsed. Even though sacrifices increased, good harvests ended and disasters arose.

When Zhuan Xu took power, the situation was finally rectified:

Zhuan Xu succeeded him [Shao Hao]. He thereupon ordered Chong, the rectifier of the south, to supervise Heaven and thereby assemble the spirits. He ordered Li, the rectifier of fire, to supervise Earth and thereby assemble the people. He made them revive the old rules. There were no more mutual usurpations and encroachments. This is what was meant by breaking the communication between Heaven and Earth. (18.2a)

When Chong and Li were assigned the tasks of supervising Heaven and Earth, respectively, each was demarcated properly, and this, Guan Yifu argues, was the meaning of breaking the communication between Heaven and Earth. Unlike King Zhao, Guan Yifu clearly sees this rupture as a good thing.

A similar problem arose when the San Miao appeared, but Yao was able to rectify things by supporting the descendants of Chong and Li:

After this, the San Miao restored the power of the Jiu Li. Yao turned again to nurturing the descendants of Chong and Li. Those who had not forgotten the old were made to revive their regulating. From that point, down to the Xia and Shang, the Chong and Li families accordingly placed Heaven and Earth in order and distinguished their proper spheres of management. (18.2a-b)

This situation continued into the Zhou dynasty:

With the Zhou, Bo Xiufu of Cheng was their descendant. In the time of King Xuan, he lost his office and became part of the Sima clan. Esteeming his ancestors as spirits so as to hold the awe of the people, he said: "Chong truly raised heaven, and Li truly lowered Earth." (18.2b)

But, with the decline of the Zhou, the proper demarcation of Heaven and Earth was lost again:

But when they met the disorders of this age, none was able to withstand it. If such had not been the case, then Heaven and Earth would be complete and not altering. How can they be joined together? (18.2b)

The implication is that the problem confronting Guan Yifu and his contemporaries was the loss of the proper distinction between Heaven and Earth.

Far from being a shamanistic text, the "Chu yu, xia" is a call for a ritual separation of humans and spirits and a critique of any intermingling of the two. The goal is harmony through ritual separation. The text is defending a position much closer to that of Pindar.

#### Becoming Like a Spirit: The "Neiye" Chapter of the *Guanzi*

If the *Lunyu* reveals a concern with keeping spirits at a distance, if the Mohists asserted an absolute, pre-given hierarchy of humans and spirits, and if the "Chu yu, xia" chapter represents an attempt to maintain a ritual separation of humans and spirits, the "Neiye" chapter of the *Guanzi* is representative of attempts to break down the barriers between humans and spirits altogether.

The "Neiye," chapter 49 of the *Guanzi*,<sup>52</sup> builds its argument around three interrelated terms: *qi*, essence (*jing* 精), and spirit (*shen*). *Qi*, which I here leave untranslated, is the energy and substance of all things. In its most refined form, *qi* becomes essence: "Essence is the essence of *qi*."<sup>53</sup> Spirit is then defined as a refined *qi* as well; as we shall see, it becomes another name in this text for essential *qi*.

52. For an excellent translation and analysis of the "Neiye," see Roth, *Original Tao*. See also the invaluable discussions by Roth, "Psychology and Self-Cultivation in Early Taoistic Thought"; and Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, pp. 100-105. Also extremely helpful is Qiu Xigui, "Jixia Daojia jingqi shuo de yanjiu." For a discussion of the dating of the "Neiye," see Roth, *Original Tao*, pp. 23-30; idem, "Redaction Criticism and the Early History of Taoism," pp. 14-17; and Rickett, *Guanzi*, 2: 32-39.

53. *Guanzi*, "Neiye," 16.2b; hereinafter cited in the text.

The text opens up with one of its more provocative renderings of this argument:

As for the essence (*jing*) of all things (*wu*), it is this that is life. Below it generates the five grains; above it becomes the arrayed stars. When it floats between Heaven and Earth, we call it ghosts and spirits; when it is stored within a person's chest, we call that person a sage. (16.1a)

As the life force, essence generates all things on earth and in the heavens. Spirits are simply the essence floating between Heaven and Earth, and sages are those who have such essence within. Human sages, in other words, contain within themselves the same essence found in spirits.

Indeed, the only significant difference between humans and spirits is that spirits are pure essence (and thus float between Heaven and Earth), whereas humans are a mix of essence and form:

As for the birth of humans: Heaven brings forth the essence, and Earth brings forth the form. They combine these to make humans. When they harmonize, there is life; when they do not, there is not life. If we examine the way of harmony, its essence cannot be seen, its signs cannot be classified. When there are arrangement and regulation in the mind, this thereby gives long life. If hatred and anger lose their measure, one should make a plan for them. Moderate the five desires, and expel the two evils. If one is not joyous and not angry, balance and correctness fills the chest. (16.5b)

Humans thus occupy a unique place in the cosmos because they combined the essence received from Heaven and form received from Earth. By harmonizing these, humans can attain longevity.

Harmonizing the essence and form requires one to live properly with Heaven and Earth:

Heaven values correctness; Earth values levelness; man values calmness and stillness. Spring, autumn, winter, and summer are the seasons of Heaven. Mountains, hills, streams, and valleys are the branches of Earth. Happiness, anger, taking, and giving are the schemes of man. For this reason, the sage alters with the seasons but is not transformed, follows things but is not changed. (16.2b)

The sage must recognize the proper values of Heaven, Earth, and man—correctness, levelness, and stillness, respectively. The sage must be still and not be transformed or changed by the alterations of Heavenly seasons, the shifts in the earthly landscape, and the schemes of other humans.

Doing so will allow him to have a settled heart and ultimately become a resting place for essence:

Only he who is capable of being correct and still is capable of being settled. If he has a settled mind within, ears and eyes that are keen of hearing and sight, and four limbs that are durable and strong, then he can be the resting place of the essence. Essence is the essence of *qi*. When the *qi* follows the Way, there is life. When there is life, there is thought. When there is thought, there is knowledge. When there is knowledge, one stops. In all cases, the forms of the mind are such that transgressive knowledge leads to a loss of life. (16.2b)

By becoming settled, the sage is able to develop a form that can bring essence to rest within himself. This grants him life and knowledge. The concern of the authors thus becomes clear. The problem is that our essence tends to dissipate from our form because of the changes, alterations, and schemes of Heaven, Earth, and man. Our goal, therefore, should be to keep our essence within our form and thus maintain the proper balance of Heaven and Earth within us.

Essence is the most refined state of *qi*. Moreover, *qi* that follows the Way allows for life—the very thing said about essence. The implication is that one refines one's *qi* by following the proper Way. If this is done, one's form becomes correct, one obtains longevity, and one's actions meet with success:

The Way is that about which the mouth cannot speak, the eye cannot see, the ear cannot hear. It is that with which one cultivates the mind and corrects the form. If men lose it, they die; if they obtain it, they live. If, in performing tasks, [the Way] is lost, one will fail; if it is obtained, the tasks will be completed. (16.2a-b)

To do this, however, the Way itself must be brought to rest, since it, too, has no fixed place. Thus, one must render one's mind still and bring one's *qi* into accord with the normative pattern (*li*): "Now, the Way is without a fixed place, but a good mind will bring it to rest and care for it. If the mind is still and the *qi* patterned (*li*), the Way can thereupon be brought to a stop" (16.2a). One's goal is to bring the Way to rest within one's form. Here again, change and movement are dangers, and longevity rests with stillness.

However, insofar as the Way fills all under Heaven, he who can bring it to rest within himself gains access to the entire cosmos:

The Way fills all under Heaven. It is everywhere that people reside, but people are unable to understand. With the liberation (*jie* 解) of the one word, one explores

(*cha*) Heaven above, reaches to Earth below, and encircles and fills the nine regions. (16.3b.)

The Way pervades everything. Accordingly, he who can grasp it with the one word (i.e., the "Way") can be liberated and is able to explore Heaven and Earth and fill the world. The claim here is not that the adept actually explores the cosmos in person; the point is rather that the adept can gain these powers by grasping the one word that pervades the cosmos. As the text explicates:

What does it mean to be liberated by it? It resides in the stability of the mind. If one's mind is regulated, one's senses are thereby regulated. If one's mind is stabilized, one's senses are thereby stabilized. What regulates them is the mind, and what stabilizes them is the mind. The mind therefore stores the mind; within the mind there is also a mind. In this mind of the mind, tones precede words. Only after there are tones are there forms; only after there are forms is there the word; only after the word is there control; only after there is control is there regulation. If there is no regulation, there will inevitably be disorder. If there is disorder, there will be death. (16.3b-4a)

The process occurs entirely within the adept himself. The adept must stabilize his mind and thereby regulate his senses. The mind within his mind responds and hence experiences the inherent resonance that exists in musical tones. Only through this resonance can one grasp the one word—that which pervades everything. And by grasping that which pervades everything, one is thereby liberated.

Similarly, by obtaining the one word that pervades everything, all under Heaven will submit:

If a regulated mind resides within, regulated words will issue from one's mouth and regulated tasks will be applied to men. As such, all under Heaven will be ordered. When the one word is obtained, all under Heaven will submit. When the one word is determined, all under Heaven will obey. (16.3a)

The one word is the fulcrum of the cosmos. By obtaining the one word, the adept is able to make himself the fulcrum of the cosmos as well, and all under Heaven will submit itself to him.

The author make these same points about *qi* itself. A proper utilization of *qi* allows humans to possess within themselves the same qualities found in the rest of the cosmos: "Therefore, the *qi* of the people is bright as if ascending to Heaven and dark as if entering into an abyss; vast as if residing in the

ocean and constricted as if residing in the self" (16.1a). The claim again is not that humans actually ascend to Heaven and encompass distant regions (claims, as we will see, that were indeed made later within comparable frameworks). The argument is rather that *qi* is what enables humans to have access, through something within themselves, to the rest of the cosmos.

And, since *qi* thus pervades the cosmos, an understanding of it allows the adept to make all under Heaven submit: "Rewards are not sufficient to encourage goodness, and punishments are not sufficient to correct the transgressive. When awareness of the *qi* is obtained, all under Heaven will submit. When awareness of the mind is settled, all under Heaven will obey" (16.4b). Indeed, if one can hold fast to the *qi* and not let it escape, one gains power over things:

Therefore, this *qi* cannot be stopped with force, but it can be made to rest through power (*de*); it cannot be called through sound, but it can be welcomed through musical pitch. Reverently hold fast to it and do not lose it. This we call "completing the power." When the power is complete and knowledge emerges, then the myriad things (*wu*) can be fully obtained. (16.1a-b)

By holding fast to that *qi* and not letting it escape, one can obtain the myriad things. Since *qi* pervades the cosmos and exists in the forms of all things, the ability to make the *qi* rest within oneself gives the adept an ability to control those things.

In short, the monistic cosmos posited by the authors allows them to make great claims for the potential powers of those who follow the teachings of the text. Not only is the adept able to transform with the changes of the world without altering his own *qi*, but he is in fact able to gain control of things:

To unify things and be able to transform them is called spirit (*shen*). To unify affairs and be able to alter them is called craft. Transforming but not altering the *qi*, altering but not changing one's craft: only the superior man holding fast to the One is able to do this. By holding fast to the One and not losing it, he is able to rule over the myriad things. The superior man controls things (*shi wu*); he is not controlled by them. He obtains the pattern (*li*) of the One. (16.3a)

Since the cosmos is monistic, it follows that there is an inherent pattern (*li*) to the oneness of the world. If the adept brings his *qi* into accord with this pattern and holds fast to it, then he can achieve mastery over the things (*wu*) that populate the world.

Indeed, he who can fully gain such powers and fill himself with essence, the most refined state of *qi*, is able to avoid all disasters and harm:

When the essence exists, it gives life of itself. On the outside, all will be settled and flourishing. Internally, one can store it so that it acts as the source of a fountain. Floodlike, harmonious, and tranquil, it acts as the depths of the *qi*. If the depths do not dry up, the nine apertures will thereupon open. They are thereby able to exhaust Heaven and Earth and cover the four seas. If within one has no delusions, then outside there will be no disasters. If the mind is complete within, the form will be complete on the outside. One will not encounter Heavenly disasters nor meet with injuries from others. This person we call the sage. (16.42)

Since the essence pervades everything, access to it grants the adept full powers to penetrate everything, exhaust Heaven and Earth, and avoid disasters.

At times, the text refers to this essence as "spirit" (*shen*):

There is a spirit that of itself resides within the body, at times leaving, at times entering. No one is able to contemplate it. If you lose it, there will be disorder; if you obtain it, there will be order. Carefully clean its resting place, and the essence will of its own enter. Refine your thoughts and contemplate it; make tranquil your memories and bring it to order. Be reverent, generous, dignified, and respectful, and the essence will come and settle. Obtain it and do not dispense with it. Your ears and eyes will never go astray, and your heart will have no other designs. When a correct mind resides within, the myriad things will obtain their standard. (16.32-b)

Each person, therefore, has a spirit—refined *qi*—within his own body. The goal of self-cultivation is then to keep this spirit within oneself.

By doing so, the adept is able to gain an understanding of the things of the world:

The extremity of divine illumination (*shen ming*)—so brilliant, it knows the myriad things. Hold it fast within, and do not be excessive.<sup>54</sup> Do not allow things to disorder the senses, and do not allow the senses to disorder the mind. This is called obtaining it within. (16.32)

The adept is able to understand all things because he does not allow his senses to be disordered by things and holds fast to the divine illumination within.

Indeed, the text argues, self-cultivation allows the sage to gain the powers of the spirits—without resorting to the arts of the religious specialists of the day:

Concentrate the *qi* as if a spirit (*ru shen* 如神), and the myriad things will all reside within. Can you concentrate? Can you unify? Can you not engage in crackmaking and milfoil divination and yet understand auspiciousness and inauspiciousness? Can you stop? Can you reach an end? Can you not seek from others and obtain it in yourself? Think about it, think about it, and think about it again. If you think about it but do not penetrate, the ghosts and spirits will penetrate it. This is not due to the power of the ghosts and spirits; it is due to the ultimate point of essential *qi*. (16.52)

The argument here rests on the claim that the universe is composed of *qi*, and that change is a product of the alterations and transformations of this *qi*. *Shen*, the most highly refined form of *qi*, is able to understand the proper movements of the universe, and, since humans have this form of *qi* within themselves as well, they ultimately can attain the same comprehension through their own efforts.

The claim, in other words, is that there exist substances within oneself that, properly cultivated, can gain one the powers of a spirit. Thus, self-cultivation allows one to understand auspiciousness and inauspiciousness without resorting to divination. This understanding is attained not because the ghosts and spirits have given one information, and not because self-cultivation allows one to ascertain the intentions of particular spirits, but because one has attained sufficient refinement on one's own to understand the workings of the universe.

Thus, since all things consist of *qi*, that which possesses the most refined *qi* (as do the spirits) possesses both knowledge about and power over that which possesses less refined *qi*. By accumulating essence within himself, man becomes like a spirit: able to understand the changes of forms, avoid being harmed by them, and even gain control over them. In other words, the cosmology of the "Neiye" is one of hierarchical monism, and one's goal is to gain ever more potency over the world of forms by becoming ever more refined.

Man's powers and limitations are defined by the resulting hierarchy of Heaven and Earth. At his weakest, he is a thing like other things; at his strongest, he is capable of gaining the potency of the essence possessed by Heavenly powers like the spirits. The authors of the "Neiye" are thus teach-

54. Following Wang Niansun in dropping the *yi* as excrement.

ing humans how to usurp powers that otherwise belong to spirits and to usurp abilities that ritual specialists claim as their own. Indeed, the text is a denial of the very distinctions argued for so strongly in the *Guoyu*.

Far from internalizing a shamanistic practice, the "Neiye" is rather an attempt to bypass the work of ritual specialists. Power and knowledge, the authors argue, can be gained by cultivating oneself and becoming like a spirit: this allows one to know the patterns of the cosmos and to be able to control things. I therefore disagree strongly with the reading of the "Neiye" offered by A. C. Graham. As mentioned above, A. C. Graham compares the text with the *Guoyu* passage quoted above. But Graham accepts a shamanistic reading of the *Guoyu* passage and then reads the "Neiye" as an attempt to shift shamanic practices toward self-cultivation. I have argued here for a different reading of both texts.

The point of the *Guoyu* passage was not to discuss the shamanistic linking of man and spirit but to emphasize the importance of maintaining a distinction between the two: properly trained ritual specialists, the text argues, will keep the worlds of man and spirit separate. This separation was presented as a prerequisite for an orderly world. The "Neiye," in direct contrast, is claiming that humans potentially possess the same essential *qi* as spirits and that humans can thus, through cultivation, achieve the powers of spirits. If the point of the *Guoyu* passage was to maintain a proper ritual separation between humans and spirits, the point of the "Neiye" is to argue that humans can overcome the distinction. And the *Guoyu* passage claims that disasters can be avoided only through such a separation; the "Neiye" that disasters can be avoided by the sage who crosses such boundaries.

Like Empedocles, the authors of the "Neiye" presented a cosmological model that redefines both humanity and spirits in a way that divine powers are obtainable by humans. By claiming to be in possession of techniques that allow the practitioner to obtain the powers of spirits without resorting to the arts of divination patronized at the courts, the authors were making an argument for their own authority: instead of trying to divine the intentions of the spirits and to control them through sacrifices, they claim the ability to divinize themselves.

These ideas were promulgated by figures outside the major courts, in an attempt to displace the ritual specialists by denying the theistic underpinnings of their practices. Far from being an assumption emerging from a

shamanistic substratum, monistic cosmology in China—just as in Greece—was a language of opposition.

### Conclusion

I have sketched the emergence, in early Greece and China, of claims of self-divinization. In both cultures, these claims emerged within religious and political contexts dominated by theistic beliefs and practices. Indeed, an analysis of the two traditions reveals beliefs that spirits control natural phenomena, that spirits are potentially capricious, and that humans and spirits therefore have a potentially agonistic relationship. The major courts in both regions maintained ritual specialists to influence, mollify, and gain information from the spirits through divinatory and sacrificial arts. And, I have argued, one of the main reasons that notions of a monistic cosmology, of continuity between human and divine realms, and of the ability of humans to gain the powers of divinities arose in both cultures was precisely that such practices were seen by those outside the ritual system as an effective response to the practices dominant at the courts of the day.

In neither case should shamanism be seen as the wellspring of fifth- and fourth-century BC thought—whether as a fifth-century diffusion (in the case of Greece) or as a deep-seated cultural practice (in the case of China). The fact that the shamanism hypotheses of Dodds and Chang point in different directions should be enough in itself to give cause for thought. For Dodds, shamanism explained the emergence of dualism in Greek thought, and for Chang the dominance of monism in China. In any case, the hypothesis is unconvincing for either culture.

In Greece, the emergence of claims that humans could become gods was a response to the practices of the ritual specialists. Although Greek thought is often—in the sinological literature, at any rate—presented as having been based on a tragic cosmology and as assuming an inseparable barrier between humans and gods, the notion of humans becoming divine is in fact a crucial motif in early Greek thought, and it developed precisely in opposition to a tragic cosmology. In Greece, every bit as much as in China, there were competing cosmologies.

For China, there were at least four different responses to ritual specialists. The *Lunyu* supports ritual specialists but opposes an instrumental reading of

ritual actions. Sacrifices should be performed for the purposes of cultivation, not in order to influence the spirits. Heaven, the highest divinity, is granted normative status, but in a specific sense: sages, those humans who cultivate themselves properly, understand the proper aspects of Heaven and model themselves on it. The latter-born should then follow the sages' model in cultivating themselves. However, with no ability to influence Heaven or the spirits, man simply has to accept whatever Heaven sends.

The early Mohists argued that the realm of Heaven and the spirits has its own innate hierarchy, and that hierarchy is not created through human rituals. Humans should simply follow the dictates of Heaven, who created the human political order, provided natural resources for human appropriation, and, along with the spirits, actively intervenes in human affairs to reward the good and punish the bad. The Mohists denied the ordering power of human ritual vis-à-vis the divine realm. The divine realm was already properly ordered; indeed, the divine realm was ordering the human realm. Sacrifice was thus defined within a hierarchical, *do ut des* framework.

The "Chu yu, xia" chapter of the *Guoyu* supported ritual specialists as a means of maintaining a proper hierarchy between humans and spirits and thereby obtaining a harmonious world for humans. The text was written in opposition to the attempt to overturn the proper distinction that, according to the authors, should prevail between humanity and the divinities. The authors thus took a position comparable to that found in the "Sheng min" poem discussed in the previous chapter; in the "Chu yu, xia," however, this position is clearly being asserted against those who might transgress the boundaries between humans and spirits. The "Chu yu, xia" is thus comparable to Pindar's attempt to maintain a distinction between humans and spirits against contemporary critiques.

Finally, the "Neiye" claims that humans have within themselves the ability to gain powers like those held by the spirits. Although the "Neiye" accepts the hierarchy of Heaven, Earth, and man, it holds that humans can gain the ability to control things and understand fortune and misfortune without resorting to ritual arts to divine the intentions of spirits. In short, the "Neiye" is asserting precisely the sort of position that texts like the *Guoyu* are rejecting.

Thus, not only were the claims of continuity between human and divine powers not an assumption in early China, but such claims were made in explicit opposition to ritual specialists of the day. Moreover, such claims were

only one of a field of responses to such specialists that developed during the fifth and fourth centuries BC.

Monistic cosmology, far from being an assumption of the times, was initially a form of critique, based on an attempt to bypass the dominant modes of orientation toward the world of spirits. The advocates of these practices began articulating new definitions of the nature of spirits, the nature of humanity, and the relationship between the two. More precisely, these articulations involved attempts to reduce the distinction between humans and spirits, and to argue that, through proper practices, one can attain divine powers.

In other words, in China just as in Greece, monism was a later development, and in both cultures monistic cosmologies were formulated in opposition to the dominant practices supported by the state. The attempt to contrast these two cultures in terms of the claim that one assumed a tragic disjunction between humans and gods that the other, due to its shamanistic substratum, never possessed is unconvincing. Such a contrast requires taking particular texts out of context and reading them as assumptions of an entire culture. Some of the texts that are often cited in such contrastive frameworks were written within debates that were in fact quite similar in Greece and China. Certainly the "Neiye" offers a cosmology completely different from, say, that found in the *Theogony*, but it is far less different from that in Empedocles. And both Empedocles and the "Neiye" contain attempts to formulate a cosmological model with self-divinization claims in order to question the modes of authority dominant at the time.

There are, of course, significant differences in the monistic cosmologies proposed in these two cultures. In terms of the examples discussed in this chapter, Empedocles was dealing with numerous ideas—such as reincarnation—not found in the early Chinese material. But the more significant difference lies in the social claims of the figures in question. In the case of Empedocles, the emphasis of self-divinization was part of an attempt to form an alternative way of life and ultimately an alternative community—a claim that certainly holds true for Plato as well. Claims of self-divinization in early Greece, in other words, tended to be made by those groups in opposition to the polis.

In early China, such appeals were similarly made by figures who opposed the political and religious structures of the time, but they were rarely used in the attempt to build alternative communities. On the contrary, many such appeals were made in the form of advice to kings—calling on rulers to follow

their practices and advice as opposed to those of the divinatory and sacrificial specialists dominant at court. Indeed, it was not until the Eastern Han that such self-divinization practices (in a very different form) were appropriated and utilized by religious Daoist communities to formulate the basis of an alternative political order.

The interesting comparison between Greece and China lies in the different ways that such claims were debated, the different groups that appealed to self-divinization practices, and the historical consequences of the ways in which such debates played out. The comparative approach that I advocate, therefore, is one in which the analyst attempts first to locate similar tensions and concerns in the cultures in question and then traces the varying responses to those tensions and concerns.

Such an approach has two advantages. First of all, it allows us to avoid the tendency in comparative frameworks to deny the individual as well as the differences that exist within cultures. If we focus on discovering common tensions rather than on contrasting different assumptions, then it is possible, once one has isolated the political and cultural tensions, to study the ways in which particular individuals, in particular contexts, try to deal with the perceived problems. The comparison then revolves around the attempts of individuals in other cultures to deal with similar political and cultural concerns. Second, by making explicit the tensions with which figures were grappling, it becomes possible to analyze particular statements as reflective of an attempt at solving a given problem and not as necessarily indicative of assumptions of the larger culture as a whole. It thereby helps the analyst avoid the tendency, for example, to read a given statement concerning the correlation of humans and spirits made in a single text as necessarily reflective of the beliefs of the time.

In this chapter, for example, I suggest that at least one of the ideas often promoted in comparative studies—the contrast between the “tragic” cosmology of early Greece and the “continuous” cosmology of early China—is based on a misreading of specific claims that were made within larger political and cultural conflicts. Rather than focus on a claimed difference between Greece and China, we should instead attempt to read these claims in a contextual and historical manner—as claims being made in particular contexts—and to ask why such claims were being made and against whom they were being made. Many of the interesting comparative issues then lie in

discovering the different ways that these conflicts and debates unfolded historically.

In the next three chapters, I continue to explore claims about relations between humans and divinities made in the Warring States period. I trace what happens when the claims concerning the potentially divine powers of humans become more and more common over the course of the fourth and third centuries BC, as well as the historical implications of how such claims were received.