

Two anonymous naturalist texts:

The Cyclical Dao and The First Month of Spring

What follow here are two brief texts that suggest the mix of cosmological and political interests that characterized early naturalistic thought. Both texts are chapters from an eclectic compilation known as *The Almanac of Lord Lii* (*Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋), which is traditionally dated to the mid-third century as a product of the western state of Qin, far from Qi. The first, “The Cyclical Dao,” presents an overview of the way in which the structure of the universe could be conceived as a context for human political order.

The Cyclical Dao

The Dao of Heaven is cyclical, the Dao of earth is a gridwork. The sage king emulates these; they are the means of setting what is above and below.

What do we mean by ‘the Dao of Heaven is cyclical?’ The pure essence and *qi* alternatively rise and fall, circulating everywhere and repeatedly intermixing, stopping in no place: hence we say that the Dao of Heaven is cyclical.

What do we mean by ‘the Dao of earth is a gridwork?’ The things of the world are of different species and different forms; each type has its allotted office and these do not mutually impinge upon one another, hence we say that the Dao of earth is a gridwork.

If the ruler grasps the cyclical and the ministers dwell within the gridwork, with the cyclical and the grid never changing places, the state will thereupon flourish.

The cycle of day and night is the cyclical Dao; the procession of the moon through the twenty-eight lunar mansions, the house of Zhen [#28] proximate to that of Jiao [#1]: this the cyclical Dao.* The essence proceeds through the four seasons, first rising then descending, each encountered in accord: this is the cyclical Dao. Things move and sprout up, sprouting they live, living they grow, growing they become large, growing large they mature, maturing they decline, declining they are killed, being killed they are stored up: this is the cyclical Dao.

The *qi* of clouds proceeds westward, always traveling, never ceasing summer or winter; the stream of the waters flows eastwards, never ceasing night and day, the

* The twenty-eight lunar mansions are an ancient zodiac. The point here concerns the fact that the last gives way to the first, forming the eternity of a ring.

upper reaches never exhausted, the lower reaches never full, the small streams becoming large, the heavy drops becoming light mist: this is the cyclical Dao.

The Yellow Emperor said, “The Lord has no constant place, where he is, thereupon he is not.” This describes his unobstructed movement: it is the cyclical Dao.

People have nine orifices. When one is at the focus, the other eight are vacated; if they are vacant for very long, the body withers. Hence when one responds and then listens, the responding stops; when one listens then looks, the listening stops. If we say that one of these is most pleasurable we do not want to stop long therein. To stop the successive motion is to be destroyed. This is the cyclical Dao.

The One is equal to the most honored:

None knows its source;

None knows its font;

None knows its beginning;

None knows its end;

Yet the things of the world take it as their ancestor.

The sage kings emulate it

To complete their natures,

To set what is upright,

To issue their ordinances.

The ordinances issue from the mouths of the ruler. The officers in their offices implementing these, night and day never resting, broadly penetrating below, entering the hearts of the people, through to the four quarters, circulating and returning again to the place of the ruler: this is the cyclical Dao. When the orders circulate, the permissible and impermissible, good and not good are all unblocked [from view]. When all are unblocked, the Dao of the ruler penetrates. Hence rulers take ordinances as their destinies and the means by which worth and unworthy, security and danger are determined.

People have a form and four limbs; their ability to employ these is because they are able to be stimulated and be aware of it. If they were to be stimulated but not be aware of it, then they would not be able to employ their bodies and limbs. It is also so of ministers: if they are not stimulated by commands and ordinances they could not be employed. If they are possessed but cannot be employed, it would be better not to have them at all. A ruler should be one who employs that which he does not possess: Shun, Yu, Tang, and Wu were all such rulers.

When the former kings set up high officials, they made sure they fit a gridwork. When they are a grid then their allotments are set and being set they do not conceal one another. Yao and Shun were worthy rulers, and both selected

worthies to succeed them, unwilling to pass their thrones on to their sons and grandsons: this is like making sure officials fit a gridwork when setting them up. The rulers of today's generation wish to pass the throne by heredity to their sons and grandsons without any break, and in setting up officials, they are unable to make them fit a gridwork because they are disordered by personal desires. Why is this? What they wish is distant, and what they know is what is close.

Now, none of the five tones fails to achieve resonance because their allotments have been investigated. Each of the tones, *gong*, *zhi*, *shang*, *yu*, and *jiao*,* occupies its place and their harmonies are evenly tuned: they never transgress upon one another, and thus there is no encroachment. The worthy rulers' appointments to office are of this nature. Each of the hundred officials occupies his duties and orders his tasks in service to the ruler: in none of these is the ruler unsettled. If one rules a state in this way, no aspect of the state will not profit. If one guards against crises in this way, crises will have no route by means of which to arrive.

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* The pentatonic scale included these five relative tones.

The second text, “The First Month of Spring,” is one of a set of twelve chapters, known collectively as “The Monthly Ordinances.” They describe in parallel fashion the activities properly suited to a ruler and a state during each month of the year. These chapters, which employ yin-yang and five-forces theories throughout, illustrate the way in which some naturalistic writers relied on these ideas to develop a detailed regulative map of human behavior. This intricacy takes this text (with its companion chapters) well beyond the general ideas of “The Cyclical Dao.” (I have not provided detailed annotations for the various types of references in this text; it is its general contour that is of interest.)

The First Month of Spring

In the first month of spring, the sun is in the constellation Yingshi. The constellation Shen [Orion] reaches the zenith at dusk, the constellation Wei [Scorpio], at dawn. Its cyclical signs are *jia* and *yi*, its divine ruler is Tai Hao, its attendant spirit, Gou Mang. Its creatures are scaly, its musical note *jue*, its pitch-pipe *taicu*, its number 8. Its taste is sour, its smell goatish; its sacrifice is at the inner door for which the spleen of the victim is essential.

The east wind dispels the cold, the hibernating insects and reptiles begin to stir, the fish rise up under the ice where the otter catches them to eat, and the wild geese fly north in season.

The Son of Heaven shall live in the apartment on the left side of the Green Bright Hall. He shall ride in a great belled chariot drawn by dark green dragon horses and bearing green flags. He shall wear green robes with pendants of green jade. His food shall be wheat and mutton, his vessels coarse and open to represent a coming forth.

During this month, spring begins. Three days before spring begins, the Grand Astrologer shall report to the Son of Heaven, saying: “On such and such a day spring will begin. The agent of wood is in ascendance.” The Son of Heaven shall then fast and purify himself and on the first day in person lead the chief ministers and feudal princes and officials to the eastern suburbs to greet the spring. On his return he shall hold court and bestow rewards upon them. He shall order the three chief ministers to publish abroad his good teachings and to relax the prohibitions of winter, to present awards and bestow alms to all, down to the common people, so that everyone who is deserving shall receive awards and gifts.

He shall order the Grand Astrologer to cherish the laws and publish the ordinances, to observe the sun and moon, the stars and zodiacal signs so that there will be no error in the calculations of their movements and no mistake in their courses, taking as a model the astronomical laws of ancient times.

In this month, on a favorable day, the Son of Heaven shall pray to the Lord on High for abundant harvests. Then, selecting a lucky day, he shall himself bear a plowshare and handle in his carriage, attended by the charioteer and the man-at-arms and, leading the chief ministers, feudal princes, and officials, shall personally plow the Field of the Lord. The Son of Heaven shall plough three furrows, the three chief ministers five, the feudal princes and officials nine. On their return, they shall assemble in the Great Hall where the emperor shall take a chalice and offer it to each of them, saying: "This is wine in recompense for your labors."

In this month the vital force of Heaven descends, the vital force of earth arises; Heaven and earth are in harmony and the grass and trees begin to burgeon.

The ruler shall order the work of fields to begin. He shall order the inspectors of the fields to reside in the lands having an eastern exposure, to repair the borders and boundaries of the fields, to inspect the paths and irrigation ditches, to examine closely the mounts and hills, the slopes and heights and the plains and valleys to determine what lands are good and where the five grains should be sown, and they shall instruct and direct the people. This they must do in person. When the work of the fields has been will begun, with the irrigation ditches traced out correctly beforehand, there will be no confusion later.

In this month, the Chief Director of Music shall be ordered to open school and train the students in dancing.

The rules for sacrifices shall be reviewed and orders given for offerings to the spirits of the mountains, forests, rivers, and lakes, but for these sacrifices no female creature may be spared. It shall be forbidden to cut down trees, to destroy nests, to kill young insects, the younger yet in the womb or new born, or fledgling birds. All young of animals and eggs shall be spared.

Multitudes of people shall not be summoned for any service, nor shall any construction be done on walls or fortifications. All bones and corpses of those who have died by the wayside shall be buried.

In this month it is forbidden to take up arms. He who takes up arms will surely call down Heaven's wrath. Taking up arms means that one may not initiate hostilities, though if attacked he may defend himself.

In all things one must not violate the way of Heaven, nor destroy the principles of earth, nor bring confusion to the laws of man.

If in the first month of spring the ruler carries out proceedings proper to summer, then the wind and rain will not come in season, the grass and trees will soon wither and dry up, and the nations will be in great fear. If he carries out the

proceedings proper to autumn, then a great pestilence will strike the people, violent winds and torrential rains will come in abundance, and the weeds of orach and fescue, darnel and southernwood will spring up together. If he carries out the proceedings of winter, the rains and floods will cause great damage, frost and snow will wreak havoc, and the first seeds sown will not sprout.

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