

48. An early example of such extrapolation can be seen in the “*Qifa*” 七法 chapter of the *Guanzi*. See W. Allyn Rickett translation (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 129.

49. See Graham, *Mohist Logic*, pp. 44–46, 320 ff., 389 ff.

50. Gregor Paul, “The Idea of Measure: Speculations on the Ancient Chinese and Greek Philosophers’ Concepts of Measure,” in *Harmony and Strife*, ed. Liu Shu-hsien and Robert E. Allinson (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1988), pp. 293–302. See Graham, *Mohist Logic*, pp. 36, 328, 435; and Christopher Cullen, *Astronomy and Mathematics in Ancient China: The Zhoubi suanjing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 89.

51. Aside from certain parts of “Legalist” texts that are properly “legalistic” and the literature of the Qin and Han law codes, we see a striking example of interest in the courtroom analogy in chapter 4 of the *Daxue* with its pointed citation from the *Analects* 12:13. I speculate that the Greek term *δικαιοσύνη* derives from such a context, and not the other way around.

52. See discussion in Tracy, p. 229 ff. Cf. Graham, *Mohist Logic*, pp. 177 f. on the Mohist use of the term *zhi* 止.

53. See *De Caelo*: 290a–291a (pp. 478–79). For a good discussion of the distinction between *zaizhong* and *yongzhong*, see Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, *Zhongguo renxinglun shi* 中國人性論史 (Taizhong: Donghai University Press, 1963), p. 125ff.

54. See *Magna Moralia*, Book I, 4.1184b–1185a (pp. 1873–74). Cf. Plato’s *Republic*, Book VI.486a (p. 722).

55. A crucial term in the Confucian discourse on this subject is *zide* 自得 (literally, ‘self-containment’), which appears in the *Zhongyong* in chapter 14. Cf. Sima Guang’s highlighting of this idea in his essay on the *Zhongyong*: “*Zhonghe lun*” 中和論, in *Sima Wenzheng gong chuanjia ji* 司馬文正公傳家集, *Guoxue jiben congshu* series, vol. 280 (Taipei: Shangwu, 1968), p. 794.

10

Fatalism, Fate, and Stratagem in China and Greece

LISA RAPHALS

Questions on the nature of fate or destiny and how it could be realized, negotiated, or averted informed a wide range of reflective thought in both China and Greece. Despite their importance to Warring States and Han political and philosophical thought, there has been relatively little study of Chinese views of fate and fatalism that predate Buddhist influences that informed both neo-Confucian and later popular culture. It is well known that determinism (asserted and denied in both physical and ethical contexts) became a central problem of post-Aristotelian Greek philosophy, but with some exceptions, the Hellenistic debate has tended to eclipse the questions of fate, fatalism, and necessity that engaged earlier Greek speculative thinkers since Homer. Also worth noting is that a common metaphor of division or allotment informs the semantic fields of both Chinese *ming* 命 and Greek *moira* μοῖρα. I approach this problem by exploring some of the complex semantics of *ming* and *moira* before either was assimilated into later hegemonic discourses: Confucian, Buddhist, neo-Confucian, Hellenistic, Christian, and so forth. Let me begin with a few methodological considerations.

An initial obstacle to comparative study of beliefs in fate or fatalism is simply the modern tendency to give both short shrift as objects of serious consideration. Some of this disrepute may come from histories of religion that situate belief in fate (undistinguished from fatalism) as early stages in a teleological evolution toward Christianity. Consider the following schema from the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*: (1) religions with no coherent notion of fate; (2) notions of uniformity of nature; and

(3) religions in which fate is a dominant factor (China, Egypt, Babylon, Greece, and Rome); (4) the Divine Will of supernatural theistic religions, where chance is equated with necessity (Judaism and Islam); and (5) Christianity in which

Belief in Fate is transcended only when men come to regard themselves as free, as called by the Deity to a responsible moral life, and when the Deity is regarded as ordaining all things in His wisdom and providence, to the end that man may enjoy the liberty of the children of God in a Kingdom of God, so realizing not merely his essential independence of Nature, but his actual lordship over it. Fate, in fact, is transcended when—ever dependence upon God becomes the spring of free action.¹

Here, belief in fate is artificially (and incorrectly) opposed to free will, a cornerstone of modernity.² In *The Consequences of Modernity* the sociologist Anthony Giddens suggests yet another explanation: that new notions of risk and trust are a distinctly modern development that supplants earlier notions of fate, fortune, and *fortuna*. Giddens notes that “trust” appears frequently in everyday language, but some uses invoke deeper meanings of “faith,” insofar as trust presupposes a relation to risk and the unanticipated results of action. Nowadays, the unexpected comes not from divine intervention, but from risk.³

Giddens’s displaced notions of fate and fortune are in turn distinct from fatalism, the idea that whatever happens must happen. Fatalism has been an object of discussion and critique from the first Mohist attacks on Ruist “fatalism” in the *Fei Ming* 非命 chapters of the *Mohist Canon* to modern attacks on theological fatalism and scientific determinism. Even more than belief in fate, it seems to enjoy particular disrepute in the modern world:

If time confers respectability on philosophical problems, there are few issues in the history of philosophy with more right to be carefully and charitably considered than fatalism. Yet in the twentieth century, at least, this approach has certainly not been adopted. Contemporary discussions of fatalism have been scattered and perfunctory, almost always concluding with a summary dismissal of the fatalist’s argument. Typically, the fatalist is seen as making some rather sophomoric blunder—mistaking a tautology for a substantive thesis about necessity, misunderstanding the scope of a “model operator,” misrepresenting facts about the future as facts about the past, and the like.⁴

A second obstacle is the tacit premise that all theories that employ the same term addressed the same question. Univocal and undifferentiated

formulations of “fatalism” or “belief in fate” ignore the contexts in which concepts of fate, fatalism, and necessity arose, the problems they were intended to address by the people who developed them, the systems of metaphors of which they were elements, and the systems of beliefs and metaphors toward which they stood in relations of contrast or opposition, for example, notions of luck and fortune (both good and bad).⁵

In short, the premises of philosophers and historians of religion who study the history and substance of arguments about fate and fatalism may present obstacles to a comparative study of these concepts in China and Greece. To these difficulties we may add an equally problematic tendency to overgeneralize China and Greece as univocal “imagined communities” for comparison—notions of “Greek medicine” or “Chinese political thought” for example. Consider the truism that free will (and rationality) are peculiarly Greek and that Chinese philosophy is passive, quietistic, or fatalistic.⁶ If such generalities can be made at all, the label of fatalism may better fit the Greek evidence than the Chinese. Homer presents a fair consensus that fate cannot be gainsaid—whatever we make of the relation between *moira* (Fate) and the will of Zeus. By contrast, the accounts of fate in pre-Buddhist texts share a slightly unnerving focus on strategy, efficacy, and “setup.”⁷ Put in such overly general terms, strategies toward fate may be an area of considerable *difference* between Chinese and Greek philosophical speculation (to the extent that such generalities can be used at all), and notions of strategy may be alternatives to fatalistic accounts of destiny.

Given these difficulties, I start from the premise that “fate” is not a unified, univocal, or unchanging notion. By fate or destiny I mean the notion that the world has a set or immutable pattern: whether humanly knowable or ultimately inscrutable; whether personified as a God (e.g., the Greek *Moirai* or Latin *Fortuna*), under the power of one (*Si Ming* 司命, Director of Destinies, or the will of Zeus), or as an agency or power independent of, and beyond, the wills of gods (Homeric *moira* and, arguably, *Tian Ming* 天命, the Mandate of Heaven), including the constancies of Nature.

Chinese “Lots”: Or, Six Ways to Use Ming in the *Zhuangzi* and *Xunzi*

Like the English “fate,” which derives from the Latin *fatum*, something spoken or ordered, Chinese *ming* 命 —fate, life, mandate, or destiny—

entails notions of both speech (*kou* 口 mouth) and command (*ling* 令 command).

The semantic range of *ming* includes: allotted life span, fate or destiny, and fate as inevitable change in the universe. The sense of life span includes the suggestion that a life span is short and unknown, and notions of cherishing (thus fulfilling and not wasting) or preserving one's allotted time, by not engaging in self-destructive activities, such as seeking honor and rank, displaying knowledge and cleverness, and so forth. "Fate" includes notions of Great (*da ming* 大命) and Small (*xiao ming* 小命) fates (such as the *Zhuangzi*'s "Great" and "Small" knowledge and language), and notions of specifically individual and personal mandates. Unlike Greek or later Buddhist notions of fate and what one might hesitate to call "Western" notions of destiny, these early Chinese texts seem to hold that a virtuous person can understand and master fate, and, by harmonizing with it, contrive to live out his or her own. Fate is variously linked with hardship or poverty, to the times (*shi* 時), which could have its own fate (*shi ming*), to duty (*yi* 義), to purpose or cause (*gu* 故), and to the inevitability of change (*bian* 變), and the cycles of life and death and the seasons. One passage states that things had form, they had allotments (*fen* 分) called "fates" (*ming*).

Thus operative notions of fate included: (1) fate and timeliness (*shi*); (2) fate and the force of human effort; (3) the possibility of knowing fate (*zhi ming* 知命); and (4) fate as simply life and death, the extent of one's life span, but not what is in it. To clarify what was potentially at stake, some early Chinese notions of fate include the revolutionary possibility that any man (gender intended) who genuinely cultivated virtue stood a chance of being spotted by Heaven and given the decree—*ming*, and here the link with "ordering" is quite evident—to assume political control, the so-called mandate of heaven (*tian ming* 天命).

In China, as elsewhere, notions of fate and fatalism are linked to macrocosm-microcosm theories that link the pattern of the cosmos to the destiny of individuals or states. It is also linked to a wide range of practices that assume various degrees of human agency: "passive" prediction and divination, theories for aligning individuals (or states) with the pattern of the cosmos, and out-and-out attempts to avert it. Fate is thus linked to notions of astrology, divination, and geomancy (e.g., *feng shui*), and military strategy, as well as to discourses of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. These early notions informed a range of practices that assumed varying degrees of human agency, ranging from relatively "passive" divination to more "proactive" attempts to align individual destiny

with the pattern of the cosmos, and out-and-out attempts to avert the force of destiny.

I concentrate on the *Zhuangzi* and *Xunzi* because of their philosophical stature, the variety of their accounts of fate, and the range of strategies they describe for negotiating both personal fate and the "fate" of the times. I address their discussions of fate under six headings: (1) *fen* 分, fate as an allotment, variously understood as life span, longevity, prosperity, or specific individual destiny, to be used and cherished, including by the force of human effort; (2) *jie* 節, fate as decree or opportunity; (3) *bian* 變, fate as inevitable change in the world, including the cycles of life and death and the seasons; (4) *shi* 時, timeliness or *shi ming* 時命, the fate of the times, the idea that personal destiny is linked with the times; (5) *zhi ming* 知命, the possibility of understanding fate; and (6) *sui ming* 遂命, following or mastering fate, something the virtuous can accomplish by effective response. Life span may be fated, but not what is in it; a virtuous person might understand and master fate, and by harmonizing with it contrive to live out his or her own.

Despite Confucius's notorious reluctance to discuss gods, spirits, and fate, the *Zhuangzi* and the *Xunzi* both attribute discussions of fate to him. Both emphasize the importance of fate but reject fatalism, albeit in very different ways. The *Zhuangzi* stresses the importance of alignment with inevitable change in the fates of peoples and times. *Xunzi* de-emphasizes inevitability and attempts to counter the charge of fatalism by stressing free will and the importance of individual action. For both, fate can in different senses be mastered; human destiny is not "on the knees of the gods."

Life and Death as Fated Span

Zhuangzi and *Xunzi* agreed with their contemporaries that people were born with an allotted life span, *ming* or *fen*, but gave somewhat different accounts of it. According to *Zhuangzi* 6: "that life and death are decreed (死生命也), that there are regularities of night and day, this is Heaven. Everything in which people cannot intervene, this is the nature of living things."⁸ This "lot" of time has no predetermined contents and can be nurtured. The Discourse on Swords in chapter 30 describes the short, unknown lives of those who wield "the sword of the commoner"; like fighting cocks, their fates may be cut off any morning.⁹ But fated span can be used and cherished through "uselessness." Robber Zhi upbraids Confucius for the folly of the so-called sage kings who "adhered to

reputation, made light of death, and did not remember their origin or cultivate their fated span (*shou ming* 受命).¹⁰ In contrast, the tree that is too gnarled for the carpenter is left on the mountains to live out its allotted fate.¹¹

Xunzi also considers life and death to be an allotted span, but emphasizes the importance of human effort and understanding the timely moment. He quotes Confucius's remark to his disciples when they were hard beset that

夫賢不肖者材也。爲不爲者人也。遇不遇者，時也；死生者，命也

Whether one is worthy is a question of talent and whether one can take action is a question of the person; whether one meets with opportunity is a question of timeliness and life and death are matters of fate.¹²

Its point is that even the worthy may fail because the time is not right, not that fate is inevitable.

The "Debate on Principles of Warfare" presents both positive and negative examples of how the flexibility of fate and the opportunities it provided could bring destruction or benefit. In the positive sense, a true king did not punish the people. His military regulations

服者不禽，格者不殺，奔命者不獲

do not seize those who offer allegiance, do not leave in place those who resist, and do not imprison those who flee for their lives (literally, who flee for the sake of their *ming*).¹³

Similarly in his punitive expeditions:

順刃者生，蘇刃者死，奔命者貢

those who submit to the sword he allows to live, those who resist, he kills, and those who flee for their lives (for their *ming*), he treats as precious tribute.¹⁴

In summary, a just ruler does not blame people who try to preserve their allotted life spans. The negative example is vicious rulers such as Zhou of Shang, who do not employ *li* and *yi*; Zhou's subjects and ministers were in such terror that "none could feel certain of his fate" (臣下櫛然莫必其命).¹⁵

The Decrees of Fate

A second sense of fate is something decreed. It appears in *Zhuangzi* 4 in the persona of Confucius, who uses the familiar family-state analogy to

link two "commands" in the world. "Zhong Ni said: In the world there are two great commands (*da jie* 大戒): one is destiny (*ming*); the other is duty (*yi* 義). Children loving their parents is a matter of destiny; it cannot be split off from their heartminds. Subjects serving rulers is duty, there is nowhere you can go where there will not be a ruler." In addition to the ultimate in service to parents and rulers, those who attain the ultimate in virtue and power (*de* 德) "serve their own heartminds, do not vacillate back and forth between joy and sorrow, know what things cannot be avoided, and are at peace with them as with what is decreed (*ruo ming* 若命)."¹⁶

The passage continues: "Yet for people who are offspring or subjects there are sometimes situations in which they cannot win (*bu de* 不得) so they must serve the heart of the matter and forget their own persons."¹⁷ Yet not all children are filial nor all subjects loyal; the commands of destiny and duty are not always obeyed. Rather, the virtues of filiality and loyalty are chosen and cultivated. Confucius ends by advising Zigao that

莫若爲致命，此其難者

nothing is as good as bringing about what has been decreed; this is what is truly difficult.¹⁸

Xunzi uses the term *jie* 節, literally a node or joint of bamboo, but more broadly, unexpected circumstance or opportunity, to *define* fate:

性傷謂之病。節遇謂之命

Harming one's nature is called illness (*bing*);

meeting the node is called fate (*ming*).¹⁹

This rhyming pair definition ends the series at the beginning of *Zheng ming* (Xunzi 22). It seems to respond to the Mohist formulation in *Names and Objects*, which builds from the innocent claim that "reading a book is not a book but to like reading books is to like books" to the more controversial claim that:

[執]有命非命也，非執有命非命也

[The doctrine of] fatalism is not fate, but to reject the doctrine of fatalism is to reject [the reality of] fate.²⁰

The passage continues: "The latter claims are the same as the former; the world does not think itself wrong to hold the former, yet condemns the Mohists as wrong for holding the latter." The *Analecets* contains clear notions of fate as the span and circumstances of one's life, including whether one would enjoy wealth and honor or suffer poverty, and

whether one would live in safety or danger.²¹ The Mohists criticized these ideas as fatalistic, and further attributed to the Ruists the notion that *ming* determined whether a state would enjoy wealth or poverty, large or small population, and order or chaos.²²

Mohist *fei ming*, rejecting fate, rejects the strong claims that Heaven determines the length and conditions of life. Xunzi's definition rejects the weaker claims of (deterministic) fatalism, but accepts fate, by emphasizing the agency of the person who encounters opportunity (like Greek *kairos*, the timely moment). Happenstance provides an alternative to inevitable submission to adverse fate.

Fate as Inevitable Change

Zhuangzi 12 describes the ontogeny of decrees as part of the origin of the world: "In the far beginning there was nothing and nothing had no name. Then One arose from it and there was One but it had no form (*wei xing* 未形). [Living] things acquired it in order to come alive, and it was called power (*de*). The formless had allotments (*fen* 分) but they were still not divided out, and they were called decrees (*ming*)."²³

Zhuangzi, like Xunzi, seems to accept fate not fatalism; he describes the scope of free will not as happenstance (*jie*) but as the inevitability of change in the world (*bian hua*) and the ability of sagacious individuals to respond to it. In *Zhuangzi* 5, Confucius describes the mutilated sage Wang Tai: "Death and life are truly great, but he does not transform with them. Even if Heaven and Earth were to collapse, he would not be lost. He sees through the counterfeit and does not shift with things; he takes it as fated that things change (*ming wu zhi hua* 命物之化) and holds fast to his ancestor."²⁴ In *Zhuangzi* 14, Lao Dan admonishes Confucius that the Five Classics are only the worn-out paths of the former kings because:

性不可易，命不可變，時不可墜，

Essential nature cannot be changed, fate cannot be transformed, the moment cannot be paused, dao cannot be obstructed.²⁵

The Fate of the Times

This notion of destined portions is not restricted to people. In the *Zhuangzi* times also have fates. "Fate" involves both individual destiny and the fate of the times. When the dao was in decline and false morality in the ascent, the "so-called hidden elite of ancient times" (*gu zhi shuo*

wei yin shi zhe 古之所為隱士者) were at a loss: "The fate of the times (*shi ming* 時命) was too skewed. Had the fate of the times been opportune, they could have done great deeds in the world, returned to unity, and left no trace. But the fate of the times was inopportune and they were greatly beset in the world, so they deepened their roots, rested on the pivot and waited. In this way they preserved the dao through the survival of their own persons."²⁶ The *Zhuangzi*'s Confucius echoes this sentiment when he tells Zilu that: "I have tried to avoid poverty for a long time, and that I could not avoid it is a matter of fate. I have sought success for a long time, and that I could not achieve it is a matter of the times."²⁷

He explains that the wise prosper under good rule and suffer hard times under tyrants, not because of their wisdom or lack of it, but because of the times. Thus, the courage of a sage differs from that of the fisherman, hunter or loyal retainer in that the sage "understands that hardship is a matter of fate and success is a matter of the times." He ends: "My fate has been decided for me."²⁸ This destiny is distinctly personal, and is guided by Confucius's choice to aspire to sagehood rather than wealth or reputation. Similarly, he fears that Yan Hui, by going to Qi, will fail to understand (and thus control by strategic choices) his personal fate.²⁹

Whereas Zhuangzi contrasts individual destiny with the fate of the times, Xunzi contrasts it with the destiny of a state itself:

人之命在天，國之命在禮

A person's fate lies with Heaven; a country's fate lies in its rites.³⁰

For Xunzi the locus of agency vis-à-vis fate is not the individual but the state, in the person of the ruler who guides the state's destiny through timely use of ritual.

Understanding Fate

How do Zhuangzi and Xunzi address the possibility that sages (or rulers) can understand destiny? Zhuangzi seems to be a bit of a skeptic on this point. He attributes to Confucius the view that life, survival, success, wealth, competence, praise and all their opposites as well as hunger, thirst, and heat and cold—

是事之變，命之行也

These are the transformations of affairs, the movements of destiny.³¹

In other passages, the *Zhuangzi* questions even whether we can know whether our lives are fated: "Since we do not know the end of things,

how can we say they have no fates? Since we do not know the beginning of things, how can we say they have fates?"³² Xunzi is more confident:

自知者不怨人，知命者不怨天。

Those who understand themselves do not begrudge others; those who understand fate do not begrudge Heaven.³³

People who begrudge others fail, and people who resent fate do not learn from experience. They fail to understand that Heaven has constant regularities that befall all alike. Similarly, in the condemnations of "Contra Twelve Philosophers" (*Fei shier zi*), Xunzi contrasts the ignorant officials of the present with the scholar recluses of the past, who flourished with power (*de sheng* 德盛), achieved tranquillity (*neng jing* 能靜) cultivated uprightness (*xiu zheng* 修正), understood what was decreed (*zhi ming* 知命) and manifested rightness (*zhu shi* 著是).³⁴

Mastering Fate

In what sense did the *Zhuangzi* or *Xunzi* hold that a sage could master, follow, or conform to fate? According to *Zhuangzi*'s mutilated sage Shentujia, only people of real virtue "recognize what cannot be altered and are at peace with it as with fate." As he puts it: to wander into the course of Archer Yi's arrows and not get hit is fate.³⁵

Other passages from the Outer Chapters echo the theme. Daimonic people (*shen ren* 神人) make their daimonic energy rise, mount the light, and disappear. "This is called illuminating vastness. They live following their essential natures to the endpoint of what has been decreed and rejoice in Heaven and Earth so that their myriads of concerns disappear."³⁶ *Zhuangzi* explains to Hui Shi that if he mourned for his dead wife, it would only show that he did not understand (acquiesce to) the decree of fate.³⁷ Master Yu, suffering from hunger after ten days of rain, asks, "Why would Heaven and Earth be so partial as to impoverish me? . . . It is surely fate!"³⁸ And when Liezi refuses the grain sent by the prime minister of Zheng, his wife attributes it to fate.³⁹

Fate is in part a matter of strategy; the wise assess their times and decide how to act:

達生之情者，不務生之所無以爲；達命之情者，不務知之所無奈何

Those who comprehend the essential nature of life do not trouble about what life cannot bring about; those who comprehend the true nature of fate do not trouble about what knowledge cannot remedy.⁴⁰

Huang Di plays music in the wilds to the tune of spontaneity, creates a chaos that some call death and some call life, and explains that those who are sages

達於情而遂於命

comprehend into essential nature and bring things to completion with regard to fate.⁴¹

For someone who understands it, fate is a means to let things come to completion, for example the adroit swimmer, who explains his skill to Confucius:

吾始乎故，長乎情，成乎命

I begin with what is inborn, grow it by essential nature, and complete it by means of fate.⁴²

The passage continues: "I was born on land so I feel at ease on land; that is inborn. I grew up on the water so I feel at ease on water; that is essential nature. I don't know why I do what I do; that is fate!"⁴³

Both this passage and another in "Autumn Floods" (chap. 17) link naturalness and fate with heaven, and artifice and intentionality with human action. It warns:

無以人滅天，無以故滅命

Do not use the human to destroy Heaven. Do not use what is inborn to destroy fate.⁴⁴

The clear implication is that overly purposeful action *can* circumvent the "natural" outcome of fate, but with destructive results. Other passages also counterpose "natural" fate to artificial and destructive ambition. *Zhuangzi*'s Confucius advises Yan Hui to steer clear of destructive ambition: "My fate is outside of this. A noble does not steal; a sage does not steal."⁴⁵ Elsewhere, he is less certain about his own destiny: "Having once received a complete body I will not transform it until it is exhausted [before my death]. My movements follow the model of other living things, day and night without break, but I do not know at what point they will end. A complete body is like a whiff of scent, I know my destiny but I cannot perceive what preceded it."⁴⁶ *Zhuangzi* seems to put understanding and responding to fate above any other competence:

達生之情者 儻 To grasp the essence of life is an enormity;

達於知者 肖 to grasp at wisdom is petty.

達大命者 隨 To grasp great fate is true conformity;

達小命者 遭 to grasp small fate is happenstance.⁴⁷

Sages who return to fate and take heaven as their teacher become models for others.⁴⁸ People who do not follow their destinies distort their natural abilities and ruin their lives.⁴⁹ Finally, the opening of the *Tian xia* chapter describes the “sages” of antiquity in the following terms:

願天下之安寧以活民命，人我之養畢足而止，以此白心，古之道術有在於是者

Wishing the world peaceful and safe enough to preserve people's allotted lives, enough food and only enough for others and themselves, using these things whiten their hearts, some of the ancient art of the way consisted in these things.⁵⁰

Xunzi also acknowledges individual fate that must be obeyed, but can be understood and guided. He compares the regularity of the heavens to the dignity of the *junzi*, who

夫此順命，以慎其獨者也

conforms to the decrees [of destiny] and thereby preserves his authentic singularity.⁵¹

Xunzi characterizes a (true) lord as someone who is good at causing the formation of (human) society, in which domestic animals propagate and

群生皆得其命

every thing alive achieves its allotted span.⁵²

This brief treatment of two texts indicates the polyvalence of pre-Buddhist Chinese discourse on fate, which combines strong antifatalism, acceptance of fate, and various accounts of maneuvering room within its decrees. Life and death may be matters of fate, but everything within that space—and a “share” delineates a “chunk” of space, or time—was changing and flexible. Everything not necessary by essential nature was open to the scope of human strategy and ingenuity. Personal fate was linked to one's times, but also to individual and deliberative “timeliness” in responding to its configuration. One's personal share of longevity and good auspice (whether understood as wealth or recognition for, and use of, one's abilities) was fated and unknowable, but could be cherished and cultivated. They were thus open to the activity of knowledge and sagacity; sages “completed” fate and were not deemed hubristic for doing so.

The term *ming*/fate is conspicuously absent from Militarist texts, as compared to either “Confucian” works (such as the *Analec*s, *Mengzi*, and *Xunzi*), critiques of early Confucians such as the Mohists (*Mozi*), and “Daoist” texts such as the *Zhuangzi*.⁵³ The *bingfa* or military strategy

manual tradition is not about circumventing fate, but most early Chinese ethical writings show sages giving considerable thought to taking some kind of control over their personal destinies by being able to recognize, and profit by, the opportunities offered by fate, however conceived.

Fate, Moira(i) and Daimons in Homer, Parmenides and Plato

Greek accounts of fate fall into two fairly distinct historical strata, before and after the fourth century.⁵⁴ Pre-fourth-century texts, beginning with Homer, describe “fate” in several fairly distinct terms and metaphors: (1) μοῖρα or αἶσα, transparent metaphors of division, lots or portions, of destiny, death or of allotted life span. Over time, these were replaced by (2) metaphors of spinning and binding in which fate is a thread spun about the “spindle” of each life. In later works, *moira* increasingly becomes personified as the “Spinners,” the Three Fates or *Moirai*; (3) the attribution of misfortune to δαίμονες, who variously gave out misfortune or guided individual destinies; (4) the problem of the relation of fate and the gods; (5) most specifically the relation of fate to the will of Zeus, king and most powerful of the gods.⁵⁵ To these we may add (6) the appearances of the *Moirai* or Fates as objects of cult ritual as birth goddesses (Hesiod, Pausanias, etc.). (7) After the fourth century, fate was viewed as principle ruling both the world overall and the lives of individuals, expressed by the term εἰμαρμένη. Finally (8) Latin *Parcae* (“child-bearing”) was equivalent to the *Moirai*.

This very preliminary survey of the Greek semantic range of words, images, and metaphors for fate concerns only the first five categories. Even here, “fate” answers several very different problems and questions. The present inquiry samples three strata of the pre-fourth-century picture: Homer, Parmenides, and Plato. Each text defines one or more “problems of fate”; they precede, inform, and significantly differ from later uses of fate as a dramatic element in tragedy and Hellenistic debates on fate and fatalism. The Homeric corpus first poses, and conspicuously does not resolve, problems of fate and fatalism. The relation of fate to both the will of Zeus and the free will of mortals is ambiguous. Pre-Socratic philosophy “is divided into two halves by the name of Parmenides” (b. 515–510), who abandons cosmogony in favor of divine instruction on the “true” world of unchanging reality (including fate), and makes fate a vivid aspect of unchanging being. Fate figures in Plato's (427–347) account

of the soul and the defense and self-representation of the Platonic Socrates. As an aspect of divination and discourses of prognostication, it is also an indirect issue in the history of Greek medicine, the “inquiry concerning nature,” and the creation of the category of rationality. These texts, images, and metaphors precede Hellenistic rejections of determinism by Aristotle (384–322) and Epicurus (341–270) and defenses of it by the Stoa for whom fate assumed central prominence as a philosophical problem.⁵⁶

Fate as Portion

The oldest terms for fate, μοῖρα (from μέρομαι, “to receive a portion”) and αἶσα, referred to a share, lot, or portion, most immediately of death; hence, destiny as allotted life span. These shares could be simple fact or special destiny, the result of the anger of a specific god or a decree of fate beyond the will of the gods, or a combination thereof. Thus Achilles tells Thetis that once he has killed Hector he will accept his own death at the hands of Zeus and the other immortals because even Herakles was conquered by his fate (*moira*), and the anger of Hera: “and so, too, shall I lie, if a like fate (*moira*) has been worked for me when I die.”⁵⁷

To be ἄμορος, ἄμοιρος or ἄμμορος is to be bereft of a thing, unfortunate, or to be without a lot or share.⁵⁸ And ἀμορία (or ἀμμορία) is to be “fate-less,” as, for example, in the statement that Zeus knows well “the portions and bereftnesses of mortals” (μοῖράν τ’ ἀμμορίην τε καταθνητῶν ἀθρώπων).⁵⁹

For the most part, *moira* occupies a place apart from social status, the share of wealth, rank, and privilege that results from birth, although *Iliad* 3 describes Agamemnon as “born of good *moira* and happy in [the protection of] a *daimon*” (μοιρηγενές, ὀλβιδάμιον).⁶⁰

Nor is *moira* the share that results from the “just deserts” of virtuous or unvirtuous action. It referred rather to sudden reversals and situations that threaten the order decreed by the gods. As Hector boasts to Andromache that no man can kill him prematurely because fate is a power that cannot be gainsaid by god or man: “No man will hurl me to Hades beyond my portion (ὑπὲρ αἶσαν), but fate I say no one of mankind can flee.”⁶¹

This passage raises the problem of how or whether action “beyond fate” could occur. The phrases κατὰ μοῖραν “according to fate” and κατ’αἶσαν “according to measure” occur frequently in the Homeric corpus; “beyond fated measure”—ὑπὲρ μοῖραν and ὑπὲρ αἶσαν—are

relatively rare. More important, they are always counterfactual in one of several senses with a range of meanings from physical to moral “impossibility.”⁶² The one instance of the phrase ὑπὲρ μοῖραν in the Homeric corpus occurs when Poseidon intervenes to save Aeneas from Achilles, ostensibly to avoid the wrath of Zeus because he is fated (μόριμον) to survive the war.⁶³ Poseidon uses an appeal to destiny to deter him from any further encounter with Achilles “lest, beyond fate (ὑπὲρ μοῖραν), you go down to the house of Hades.”⁶⁴ Apollo also intervenes to prevent the Argives from winning victory “beyond the portion of Zeus” (ὑπὲρ Διὸς αἶσαν).⁶⁵ We may read these instances in two ways. Taken at face value, the gods intervene to preserve the decreed order and prevent mortals from acting outside it. Read rhetorically, appeals to fate provide a powerful rationale for the gods to intervene according to their own wishes (presumably, within the limits of fate).

In battle, “beyond fate” or “beyond measure” clearly refers to premature and violent death. In other contexts, “beyond measure” has the broader connotations of impropriety or even impiety. On two occasions, Paris agrees that Hector’s reproaches are “according to measure” (κατ’αἶσαν) and “not beyond measure” (οὐδ’ ὑπὲρ αἶσαν).⁶⁶ Excess also can verge on impiety. After a pitched battle, the Greeks prevailed “beyond measure” (ὑπὲρ αἶσαν), when they captured the body of Kebriones and stripped him of his armor.⁶⁷ In these cases, “beyond measure” labels an act as morally, rather than physically “impossible.”

In all these instances, it is noteworthy that *moira* does not seem to be linked to either divination—attempts to understand and perhaps conform to a fated future—or to μῆτις, the skills and wiles that Greek society so prized for dealing with unpredictable and rapidly shifting situations.⁶⁸ *Metis*, it appears, was not used to thwart the decrees of fate.

Fate as Spun Bonds

The fates appear infrequently in Homer as three figures who spin the thread of destiny around each individual. Alkinoos describes the fates as “Heavy Spinners” Κλωθες when he speaks of the unusual destiny (*aisa*) of Odysseus, who, once he returns safely to Ithaka, “will bear as much as his destiny (*aisa*) and the Heavy Spinners spun for him at birth with thread, when his mother bore him.”⁶⁹

This “spinning” takes place primarily at birth, but also at marriage,⁷⁰ where the *Moirai* could be bearers of good fortune, and in some accounts, sing for the bridal couple.⁷¹ In Homer, the gods are also “spinners” of

fate. In *Iliad* 24 “the gods spun life thus for afflicted mortals” (ὥς γὰρ ἐπεκλώσαντο θεοὶ δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσι).⁷² The *Odyssey* begins when “the gods had spun for him his return home” (τῷ οἱ ἐπεκλώσαντο θεοὶ οἰκόνδε νέεσθαι).⁷³ The gods spun the destruction of Troy,⁷⁴ the fate of Odysseus,⁷⁵ and his beggar persona.⁷⁶

The division and personification of *Moirai* into the Three Fates or Μοῖραι, who spin, weave, and cut off the thread of each life, first appears in Hesiod.⁷⁷ Here the Fates are the daughters of Zeus and Themis: Clotho, Lachesis (“getting by lot”), and Atropos (“from which one cannot turn”), and only reappear together in Plato.

In the climactic passage of fragment 8, Parmenides uses specifically Homeric language and diction to describe “what-is” (ἔστιν) and to frame the claim that the truly real is unchanging and immobile.⁷⁸

κρατερὴ γάρ Ἀνάγκη
πείρατος ἐν δεσμοῖσιν ἔχει, τό μιν ἀμφὶς ἔέργει
For strong Ananke holds it in bonds of chain that binds it all
around.⁷⁹

οὐδεν γάρ <μ> ἔστιν ἢ ἔσται
ἄλλο πάρεξ τοῦ ἔόντος, ἐπεὶ τό γε Μοῖρ' ἐπέδησεν
οὐλον ἀκίνητόν τ' ἔμμεναι.
For <there is> nothing <that> exists or will exist
other than what is, since Moira has fettered it
so as to be whole and immovable.⁸⁰

Here the powers of *Moirai* and *Ananke* come together to bind reality in strongly Homeric diction: *krateros* (used of Zeus) and *peiratos en desmoisi*.

Plato's fullest account of the *Moirai* is in the *Republic*,⁸¹ where they sing in harmony at a common task. Their activity is likened to *Ananke* and to the *daimons* that guide the fates of individuals. In the passage, Socrates explains how souls choose their lives in the order of the lots they draw. They are then brought before Lachesis, first of the *Moirai*, who “sends forth a *daimon* for each [soul] to guard his life and to bring to pass what he has chosen.”⁸²

The *daimon* next leads the soul to Clotho. The turning of her spindle ratifies the destiny (μοῖραν) the soul has chosen. Finally, the *daimon* leads the soul to Atropos, “she who cannot be turned,” who “fixes the web so as to be irreversible” (ἀμετάστροφα τὰ ἐπικλωσθέντα ποιοῦντα). From there, with no look back, it goes beneath the seat of Necessity (ὑπὸ πόν πῆς ἀνάγκης ἰέναι θρόνον) and finally to the Plain of Lethe (ὁ τῆς Λήθης πεδίον).⁸³

Daimons

Δαίμωνες (from the root da- δαίω, δατέομαι) were originally “sharers” who shared out allotments to humankind. As such they are linked to the metaphor of apportionment that underlines the terms *moira* and *aisa*. Like them, they were powers beyond human will, older than the anthropomorphic Olympian gods and incomprehensible, δαίμονιος.⁸⁴ They are not major presences in Homer, where they usually cause illness,⁸⁵ and such misfortunes as Odysseus's imprisonment on Ogygia: “only my unhappy self did the *daimon* lead to her hearth.”⁸⁶

To some extent, the activity of *daimons* can be contrasted to that of the gods (θεοί) as thwarting and aiding human purposes, respectively.

In the poem of Parmenides, by contrast, it is a beneficent *daimon* who guides the possibly shamanic journey of a young man toward discovery of truth:⁸⁷

ἵπποι ταί με φέρουσιν, ὅσον τ' ἐπὶ θυμὸς ἰκάνοι,
πέμπον, ἐπεὶ μ' ἐς ὁδὸν βῆσαν τολύφημον ἄγουσαι δαίμονος
The mares that bear me as far as my heart aspires
sent me on, when once they set me on the much-spoken road of
the *daimon*.⁸⁸

He reaches the gates of the paths of Night and Day, filled with huge doors, and Dike the avenger (Δίκη πολύποινος) holds the keys.⁸⁹ A goddess welcomes him and tells him,

χαῖρ', ἐπεὶ οὔτι σε Μοῖρα κακὴ προὔπεμπε νέεσθαι
Rejoice, for it is no ill Fate that sends you to travel here.⁹⁰

Daimons play a major role in the self-representation of the Platonic Socrates, who claimed repeatedly that a *daimon* guided his destiny, which he describes as unusual and remarkable. His *daimon* figures in his defense in the *Apology*, where he says that “ever since my early childhood a voice of sorts would come to me, which, when it came, always turned me back from what I was intending to do, and turned me toward what I was not.”⁹¹ Socrates referred to this voice as something divine (θεῖόν) and daimonic (δαίμονιον).

He remarks to the jury that something marvelous (θαυμάσιον) had happened to him. That very morning, he had met with the approval of “the mantic voice of the *daimon*, to which I had become accustomed” and which “was always close at hand to oppose the smallest thing I might intend in error.”⁹²

Socrates's account is reflected in the *Euthyphro*, which gives a quasi-humorous account of these charges: "Socrates, it is because you say that something daimonic is always in attendance upon you."⁹³

The *Theaetetus* also makes clear that Socrates' *daimon* attends to the fine details of his life. In his account of the midwifery of the soul, he describes how he chooses his association: "with some, the daimonic [presence] comes and forbids me to associate, with others, it permits it."⁹⁴

Daimons also figure prominently in Plato as guides of the soul before birth and after death. In the *Phaedo*, individual *daimons* appear as psychopompoi after death: "It is said that, when each person dies, the *daimon* of each, who had charge of him while he was alive, this same one tries to lead him to a certain place."⁹⁵

The wise soul follows the guide, but a soul overly attached to the body lingers and "only after much resistance and much suffering, and with excessive force, can it be led away by its guiding *daimon* (τοῦ προστεταγμένου δαίμονος),⁹⁶ who leads it to judgment "when the dead come to the place to which the *daimon* leads each."⁹⁷

Fate and the Gods

Homer never resolves the question of the relation of *moira* to the will of the gods, and they coexist ambiguously.⁹⁸ Human affairs "lie on the knees of the gods."⁹⁹ The "destructive plan of the gods" (θεῶν ὀλοὰς διὰ βουλάς) causes the suffering of Oedipus,¹⁰⁰ and "the will of the gods" (θεῶν ἰότητι) causes the death of Patroklos,¹⁰¹ the toils of Odysseus,¹⁰² and the Trojan War.¹⁰³ Yet the gods acknowledge a fate beyond their power to alter. For example, Poseidon grudgingly acknowledges that it is Odysseus's *aisa* to escape death.¹⁰⁴

Although fate appears not to be a problem for the gods in general, it poses a more particular, and also unresolved, problem for the plan of Zeus (Διὸς βουλή). As king of the gods, Zeus is more powerful than all the other gods combined, and his will has a unique status. The beginning of the *Iliad* makes clear that the will of Zeus is brought to completion with the sack of Troy. In the *Odyssey* Zeus is more accommodating to the will of the other gods (e.g. in the return of Odysseus). Nevertheless, Zeus has no more power than the other gods to determine the span of an individual life. Zeus, as the "steward of war for mankind,"¹⁰⁵ may weigh the fates of antagonists in battle and may even attempt to defer the *moira* of a hero in battle,¹⁰⁶ but his will inevitably and seamlessly conforms to

the fate of that individual. As Terence Irwin observes, Zeus and the fates point to two distinct notions of (partial) order within the Homeric universe: the impersonal, inexorable, amoral (and usually inscrutable) order of the fates, and the intelligent, moral, justice-based rulership of Zeus.¹⁰⁷ The moralizing retrospective accounts of Hesiod, Pindar, and Aeschylus linked the power of the *Moirai* with government of Zeus and led to the worship of Zeus as Μοιραγέτης ("leader of the *Moirai*") in the fifth century. After the fourth century, the term *heimarmene* increasingly replaced the *Moirai*.

In summary, the activities of *Moira*, the *Moirai*, *daimons*, the gods, and the will of Zeus form not a progression or evolution, but a net or web of images and metaphors in which several consistent elements emerge. First, the idea of unalterable fate, however described, seems to have been unquestioned. Mortals could choose and deliberate over many things, but fate determined the span of individual life. Epic warriors used all the force or guile at their disposal to thwart their enemies, but none, even the wily Odysseus, ever tried to thwart their fates.

Nor did special foreknowledge of destiny change the situation. Cassandra tries to warn the Trojans against what is to come, but knows that she cannot avert the sack of Troy or her own subsequent death in Argos. Only Achilles seems to have a real choice between two destinies that entail, among other things, very different life spans. But we, if not he, know what he will do. Were he to relinquish early death and immortal glory for a long life in fertile Phthia, Troy would not be taken and the plan of Zeus would not be fulfilled.

The outstanding counterexample, Oedipus's vain attempt to thwart fate, provides an unforgettable image of hubris. As is well known, Laius's efforts to avert the oracle that his son will kill his father and marry his mother prove disastrous for himself and his wife. Oedipus himself follows in his father's footsteps when he disregards the warnings of Teiresias not to reveal the workings of destiny.

One can argue that these stories are all dramatic, whether in tragedy (our source for Oedipus and the later history of Cassandra), in Homer (Achilles and Cassandra), or even in the Homeric echoes of the Parmenides poem. Is inexorable fate in the pre-Aristotelian world merely a uniquely Greek dramatic device in epic and theater? I think not. The *Republic* makes clear that once destiny is fixed, the metaphors shift from shares to spun thread and the guidance of a *daimon*, but the overall account of fate is consistent with Homeric and immediately post-Homeric accounts. Fate (however described) is ἀμήχανος, a power against which

there is no recourse. As such, it is not subject to *metis*, strategy, fore-knowledge, or appeals for divine intervention. These various accounts of fate, the soul, and necessity are remarkably consistent in what is absent from them.

Polyvalent “Fates” in Greece and China

Fate is clearly not a single concept in either the Chinese or Greek context. An apparent semantic similarity between *ming* and *moira* masks important differences: semantic, metaphoric and philosophical.

Metaphors for Ming and Moira

Both *ming* and *moira* portray fate as a lot or allotment of life span and as an autonomous power of destiny. Both words partake of a root metaphor of division and allotment, from which it is tempting, but dangerous, to overgeneralize. What was apportioned, by whom, to whom, and to what end differed both between and within the two cultural contexts. The Greeks described the *moira* of epic heroes and dramatic figures. Homer tells us little about what commoners believed about fate. By contrast, Chinese *ming* appears in discussions of the lives of commoners, as soldiers fleeing battle or as ordinary people trying to live out their life spans undisturbed; some are even attributed to the commoners themselves, albeit in texts of elite authorship.

Chinese metaphors concern the division and allotment of shares according to the commands of the gods (or ancestors) whose orders had the force of fate. Greek fate metaphors shifted from shares to spinners, who spun and bound the courses of individual human lives with the threads of fate. Other more general senses of fate, such as punishment, retribution, the fruit of past actions (in this and former lives), and more abstract notions of causality and constancy in nature, seem absent from both China and Greece.

Fate and Change

The specific association of fate with inevitable change in the universe seems particular to the pre-Buddhist Chinese accounts, where fate or allotment includes life span, wealth and fortune in explicitly changing times. Fate in this sense may apply to individuals, families, nations, empires or polities.

By contrast, Parmenides uses fate as a metaphor for the specifically unchanging and immobile nature of “what-is.” Other Greek thinkers associated change with the action of fate (in association with justice, necessity, and retribution), but in rhetorical and intellectual contexts very different from the Chinese. Anaximander describes a balance between coming into and passing out of being based on necessity and mutual “penalty and retribution” (δίκην καὶ τίσιν), but it is based not on fate, but on “the assessment of time” (κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν).¹⁰⁸ Heraclitus speaks of all things “undergoing alteration” (ἀλλοιοῦται) and of even the sun being subject to the retribution of the Fates, the handmaidens of Dike, but his focus is the integrity of the order of nature and the physical world.¹⁰⁹ References to the action of fate or justice became part of the rhetoric of appeals to Nature (φύσις), expressed in legal and moral language, that appealed to a wide range of fifth-century Greeks. These were used to justify diverse positions.¹¹⁰ Pre-Buddhist Chinese accounts, by contrast, include but do not emphasize notions of causality and constancy in nature.

Fate and Fatalism

This preliminary Chinese and Greek evidence suggests some common notions of fate, but very different attitudes toward fatalism. Pre-Buddhist Chinese accounts combine acceptance of fate with strong antifatalism and well developed notions of strategy or maneuvering room within its decrees. Life span may be fated, but within it, free will reigns. Change and resilience are the order of the day and open to human strategy and ingenuity. A wide range of texts stress the importance of timeliness (*shi* 時) and configuration or “setup” (*shi* 勢) in response to one’s times and to one’s fate. Thus longevity and good auspice were fated and unknowable, but could be cherished and cultivated through knowledge and sagacity. In this sense, both the *Zhuangzi* and the *Xunzi* take “strategic” attitudes toward omnipresent *ming*.

Greek accounts of fate contain a significant fatalist element. Greek fates were variously personified: as *Moira*, the *Moirai*, the power of *Themis* or *Dike*, as the will of Zeus or the activity of *daimons*. These divinities alternatively hold fate in their power and coexisted with an autonomous “fate” beyond their control. The decrees and commands of these divinities and divine agencies were consistently portrayed as fixed, binding, and inexorable.

Directions for Future Inquiry

In this very preliminary study I have examined a few texts and metaphors for fate in China and Greece, and have focused on the elucidation of root metaphors used to describe fate in what are commonly called philosophical texts. Exploring the relations of concepts of fate to several other related clusters of concepts, such as the relation between word (including command) and reality, skepticism (the limits of what could be known), and notions of both risk and luck is beyond the scope of this chapter.¹¹¹ Also beyond the scope of this chapter are a wide range of practical activities of crucial import for any society that took seriously some kind of belief in fate or fatalism, as the Greeks and Chinese clearly did.

Probably most important is the use of ritual and divination to ascertain the will of the deities whose decrees constituted the power of fate in the earliest accounts. Divination is part of a spectrum of possible responses to known fate, such as conformity, negotiation, strategy, or control. Both Chinese *ming* and Greek *moira* offer a shifting palette of “divine associations.” At times each is associated with the activity of a specific god, but the identity of the god and the nature of the divine agency varied across time and region. Chinese divination techniques include the cracking of oracle bones to ascertain the command of a specific deity, the use of the *Yi jing* for milfoil divination, and the reading of a wide variety of evidence, including the sky and physiognomy.

In particular, Shang oracle-bone inscriptions and evidence from recent archaeological excavations suggest the antiquity of belief in fate in China. In the Shang, fate was associated with the high god Di 帝, who has the sole power to issue commands or decrees (*ling* 令). Divination covered a wide variety of subject matter: sacrifice, military campaigns, hunting, excursions, calendrics, agriculture, weather, illness, childbirth, dreams, construction, tribute, and requests for divine or ancestral approval and assistance.¹¹² In these inscriptions *ming* was written with the graph for its homonym *ling*.¹¹³ Fate was not an independent category represented by a unique word, but the absence of an independent word does not imply the absence of a concept. Indeed, the volume of Shang dynasty oracle-bone inscriptions as well as the ancient and elaborate model of the changing lines of the *Yi jing* hexagrams suggest that Chinese “fate” may have been considered to act with more regularity or predictability than Greek.¹¹⁴ Warring States and Han accounts of divination by women provide indirect evidence of how widespread the practice was.¹¹⁵

A wide range of less obvious activities also impinged on belief in fate, or its absence. For the believer, what could be more important than

understanding, conforming to, manipulating, or even frustrating the requisites of fate? In this sense, fate was a fundamental problem confronting the survival of any individual or polity and appropriate response to it was an organizing feature of both societies. Thus we might look for the effects of such beliefs in the areas of life most closely linked to problems of life and death: medicine, warfare and military strategy, finance, and politics.

Notes

1. James Hastings, with John A. Selbie and Louis H. Gray, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Scribner. Original ed. 1875, rev. ed. 1961), p. 774.
2. Both fate and fatalism must be distinguished from determinism, the doctrine that every event has a cause, which implies neither fatalism nor that events can be predicted.
3. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 29–31.
4. Mark H. Bernstein, *Fatalism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p. 1.
5. For metaphor see George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). For Chinese metaphorology see Jean-Paul Reding, “Light and the Mirror: Elements of Comparative Metaphorology” (Paper presented at the Association for Asian Studies; Honolulu, Hawaii, April 11–14, 1996) and “L’Utilisation Philosophique de la Métaphore en Grèce et en Chine,” *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 129 (1997): 1–30.
6. In his discussion of comparative method, G. E. R. Lloyd refers to these points as “anti-generalization” and “anti-piecemeal,” respectively, in *Adversaries and Authorities. Investigations into Ancient Greek and Chinese Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 3–6.
7. For Chinese notions of efficacy see François Jullien, *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone Books, 1995), originally published as *La propension des choses: Pour une histoire de l’efficacité en Chine* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1992).
8. *Zhuangzijiishi* 莊子集釋, ed. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961) 6.241 (henceforward Zz). Translations of this and other works are my own unless otherwise specified. I use both the terms *decree* and *fate* to translate *ming* to avoid introducing a kind of crypto-fatalism into the texts.
9. Zz 30.1022.
10. Zz 29.998. According to Robber Zhi, the six “worthy men” were

Bo Yi and Shu Qi 伯夷叔齊, Bao Jiao 鮑焦, Shentu Di 申徒狄, Jie Zitui 介子推 (a retainer of Chong Er of Jin), and Wei Sheng 尾生 (Zz 29.998–99).

11. Zz 20.667.

12. *Xunziyinde* 荀子引得 (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1986) 103/28/39 (henceforward X).

13. X 55/15/60.

14. X 55/15/61.

15. X 57/15/85.

16. Zz 4.155.

17. Zz 4.155.

18. Zz 4.160. This phrase could also be translated as “Nothing is as good as following one’s destiny.”

19. X 83/22/6.

20. *Moziyinde* 墨子引得 (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1982) 79/46/20–21 (henceforward Mo). See Angus C. Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, and London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1978), pp. 489–90 for discussion of the chapter “Names and Objects.” The *Lü Shi chungiu* chapter “Living Out One’s Lot” (*Jin shu* 晉書) provides an apt example of this argument. It describes how sages use knowledge of *yin* and *yang* to understand what benefits the myriad creatures and five out their allotted lifespans without either augmenting or cutting them off. See *Lü Shi chungiu* 呂氏春秋 attributed to Lü Buwei 呂不韋 in *Sibu beiyao* 四部備要 (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1927–35) 3.2, pp. 3b–5a.

21. For example, Confucius, *Analects* 12.5 and 16.8.

22. Mo, chaps. 35 (*Fei ming* I), 39 (*Fei Ru*).

23. Zz 12.424.

24. Zz 5.189. In his translation of this passage, Angus C. Graham takes *ming* as naming rather than as ordering destiny: “he does his own naming of the transformations of things.” See *Chuang-tzu: The Inner Chapters* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), p. 76.

25. Zz 14.532.

26. Zz 16.555.

27. Zz 17.596.

28. Zz 17.596.

29. Zz 18.620.

30. X 58/16/4. This passage appears in “Strengthening the State” (*Jiang guo*). The same passage also appears in the “Discourse on Heaven” (*Tian lun*, X 64/17/43).

31. Zz 5.212.

32. Zz 27.958. The translation of this passage depends on whether we read 其所終 and 其所始 as referring to the cycles of heaven and earth

described earlier in the passage or to the span of human lives. I have taken it in the former sense. In the latter sense the passage would read: “Because we do not know our ends, how can we say we are not fated [to die]; because we do not know how we began, how can we say we are fated?”

33. X 9/4/21.

34. X 17/6/36–37.

35. Zz 5.199.

36. Zz 12.443. Compare Zz 4.160 earlier: “Nothing is as good as bringing about what has been decreed; this is what is truly difficult.”

37. Zz 18.615.

38. Zz 6.286.

39. Zz 28.973.

40. Zz 19.630.

41. Zz 14.507.

42. Zz 19.657.

43. Zz 19.658.

44. Zz 17.590–91.

45. Zz 20.692.

46. Zz 21.707.

47. Zz 30.1059.

48. Zz 25.880.

49. Zz 19.663.

50. Zz 33.1082.

51. X 7/3/30.

52. X 29/9/76.

53. University of London–Academia Sinica (ULAS) database of 29 pre-Han philosophical texts (London and Taipei).

54. These themes appear consistently in treatments of the subject in several disciplines. For Classics see William Chace Greene, *Moirai: Fate, Good, and Evil in Greek Thought* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1944). For history of philosophy see W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vols. 1–6, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962–1981); and Terence Irwin, *A History of Western Philosophy, Vol. 1: Classical Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 16, 157, 171 and 180. For religion see Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffan (London: Basil Blackwell, 1977), pp. 129–30.

55. These include *Themis* (or *Dikē*) and ἀνάγκη (Necessity), revealed by oracles, omens, prodigies, and signs. In addition to their later roles as deities of Justice and Punishment, *Dikē* is associated with an orderly flow of time, as is *Moirai* with the orderly division of space.

56. For Parmenides’s dates see Guthrie, 1962–1981, vol. 2, pp. 1–2, based on Plato’s (Parm. 127a–c) description of a meeting between the old Parmenides and the young Socrates. For the inquiry concerning nature see G. E. R.

Lloyd, *The Revolutions of Wisdom Studies in the Claims and Practice of Ancient Greek Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 1–4, 38–49. Conspicuously absent from this preliminary study are medical and other scientific works. For discussion of fate as an area of speculation that offers “some of the greatest problems for, or the maximum resistance to, any scientific takeover,” see Lloyd, 1987, pp. 4, 38–49. As he points out, much of the discourse on prediction in medicine and astronomy concerned prognosis of the course of disease or the prediction of the positions of the sun, moon, and planets. These predictions did not significantly involve the operative notions of fate.

57. Hom. *Il.* 18.1190–2 l.

58. Demosthenes (*On the Halonnesus* 7.40) refers to a piece of land as “no man’s land” (ἄμμορῖος).

59. Hom. *Od.* 20.76.

60. *Il.* 3.182.

61. *Il.* 6.487–89.

62. Of the 101 instances of *moira* in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, only one is in the phrase *huper moiran*. *Huper aisan* occurs five times out of forty instances of *aisa*.

63. *Il.* 20.301–2.

64. *Il.* 20.336.

65. *Il.* 17.321.

66. *Il.* 3.59, 6.333.

67. *Il.* 16.780.

68. Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1978). For “metic intelligence” in China, see Lisa Raphals, *Knowing Words: Wisdom and Cunning in the Classical Traditions of China and Greece* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

69. *Od.* 7.197.

70. *Od.* 4.207.

71. For example at the marriages of Peleus and Thetis, and Zeus and Thernis.

72. *Il.* 24.525.

73. *Od.* 1.17.

74. *Od.* 3.208.

75. *Od.* 11.139.

76. *Od.* 16.64.

77. Hes. *Theog.* 904–6.

78. Parmenides also wrote in Homeric hexameter and began his poem, in the Homeric manner, with a claim for divine inspiration.

79. Parm. fr. 8.30–3 l.

80. Parm. fr. 8.36–38.

81. Plato *Rep.* 617b–621a.

82. *Rep.* 620e.

83. *Rep.* 621a.

84. Greene, 1944, p. 12.

85. *Od.* 5.396.

86. *Od.* 7.248. For other examples see *Il.* 9.600 and *Od.* 3.166, 5.396, 12.295.

87. Guthrie considers the *daimon* to be Helios, the sun; Austin takes her as “the goddess.”

88. Parm. fr. 1. 1–3.

89. Parm. fr. 9. For discussion see Scott Austin, *Parmenides: Being, Bounds and Logic* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 156–57 and Guthrie, 1962–1981, vol. 2, pp. 7–9.

90. Parm. fr. 26.

91. Plato *Apol.* 31 d.

92. *Apol.* 40a.

93. Plato *Euth.* 3b.

94. Plato *Th.* 151a.

95. Plato *Phaed.* 107d.

96. *Phaed.* 108b.

97. *Phaed.* 113d.

98. For example, *Il.* 1.5, *Od.* 11.297. *Od.* 1.267.

100. *Od.* 11.276.

101. *Il.* 19.9.

102. *Od.* 1.214.

103. *Od.* 12.190, 17.119.

104. *Od.* 5.288ff.

105. *Il.* 19.224.

106. *Il.* 16.431–43, 22.167–81.

107. Irwin, 1989, pp. 16–17.

108. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), no. 103; H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 5th, 6th and 7th eds., ed. and augmented W. Kranz. Berlin.N.p., 1934–54), no. 12A9.

109. Kirk and Raven, 1957, nos. 207, 229; Diehls-Kranz, 1934–54, nos. 22B9, 94.

110. According to Greene (1944, p. 228), these included naive individualists, super-patriots (in defense of the state’s right to exist), democrats (in defense of the status quo), aristocrats (in defense of a reactionary coup), and the Athenian empire itself (in defense of the conscription of Melian neutrals).

111. I am indebted to the remarks of participants in the “Thinking through Comparisons” conference and to Geoffrey Lloyd for discussion of these points.

112. David N. Keightley, *Sources of Shang History: the Oracle-Bone Inscriptions of Bronze Age China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 33–35.

113. See Ning Chen, “The Genesis of the Concept of Blind Fate in Ancient China,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 25 (Fall 1997): 141–67.

114. I am indebted to David N. Keightley for this observation. For discussion of the volume and range of Shang cracks see Keightley, 1978.

115. Some of these are discussed in Lisa Raphals, *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 223–33.

11

Cratylus and *Xunzi* on Names

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This chapter presents the result of a preliminary investigation. In 1982 T. P. Kasulis began the specific comparative study of the Platonic understanding of language—more precisely, of the relation between linguistic names (*onomata*) and objects (*pragmata*)—with an East Asian language philosopher, and William S-Y Wang did so briefly in 1989.¹ In a recent volume of Joseph Needham’s *Science and Civilisation in China*, Christoph Harbsmeier makes constant and telling comparisons with Greek and Sanskrit at various points of his magisterial survey of Chinese language and logic.² Despite that scholar’s compendious review of virtually all the major relevant issues pertaining to the Chinese language, the sort of modest but focused exercise attempted here is still valuable. I am aware that the *Cratylus* occupies only one stage of the Platonic view of language, but the dialogue undoubtedly represents the most concentrated and sustained discussion of the subject. Similarly, experts have praised chapter 22 (in traditional editions) of the *Xunzi*, “On the Right Use of Names,” as “the most disciplined, coherent, and by the far the best-organised discussion of naming that has come down to us from ancient China.”³ Although my discussion focuses on the Platonic dialogue and the *Xunzi* chapter, some references to other texts and figures cannot be avoided. What follows is a treatment of three salient issues that I want to highlight for comparative consideration of the two texts: the meaning of names, the purpose of names, and the maker of names.

(For David Grene)