

Article

In Search of the Dao: Process Cosmology, Epistemology, and Ritual in the *Xunzi* and the *Xici zhuan*

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Abstract: This paper investigates, in a comparative fashion, the common quest for the Dao by authors of the *Xunzi* and the *Xici zhuan* of the *Book of Changes* to come to terms with political and social crises in Warring States China. Since the two texts adopt both similar and divergent methodologies in their search of the Dao, this paper first examines their similarities in terms of process cosmology, epistemology, and practice of ritual, and then analyzes the divergences in their approaches to the Dao. In particular, the practice of ritual is unveiled as the marker of the Dao within the philosophical framework of both texts, albeit with differing connotations. In the final analysis, this paper discusses both the underlying pragmatic applications of the two approaches in the nuanced philosophical insights they provide into the coordination of human beings with the processes of the cosmos, and their implications in understanding what A.C. Graham calls “the disputers of the Dao”.

Keywords: *Xunzi*; *Xici zhuan*; *Book of Changes*; Dao; ritual

1. Introduction

In the Warring States period (戰國 ca. 475–221 B.C.E.), an era of monumental significance in Chinese history, the Zhou dynasty was allegedly bogged down in the Sargasso sea of tumultuous social, political, and intellectual upheaval, which A.C. Graham terms “the breakdown of the world order decreed by Heaven” (Graham 1989, pp. 9–105). Such a phenomenon provides a fertile context for the development of multifarious philosophical schools in the quest for the Dao to smooth out strife because “the political and economic turmoil of the declining centuries of the Zhou dynasty upset the whole complex of Zhou culture—customs, rituals, ethics, family relations, political authority, religion” (Perkins 2022, p. 2). On the political level, this time of political fragmentation was largely due to a fact that “the tenuous hold of the ethico-religious authority of the dynasty had completely receded” (Schwartz 1985, pp. 56–57). The disintegration of the Zhou dynasty’s centralized power led to increasingly incessant warfare among contender states. More specifically, “internecine wars among the Zhou nobility following the monarchy’s loss of power and the eastward shift of the capital in 770 B.C.E. had put pressure on Qi 齊 and Jin 晉 to increase the size of their armies” (Lewis 2007, p. 30). On the societal level, the breakdown of the nobility exerted considerable influence on the existing social order. The social order was transformed by “the disappearance of the old aristocracy, the rise of a large class land-owning peasants and a substantial increase in the urban classes devoted to trade and handicraft production” (Lewis 1990, p. 5). The chaos and instabilities caused by constant warfare engendered a social and cultural milieu in which traditional values collapsed and conventional morality was questioned. This political turmoil and moral disorder triggered a common quest for order and stability, which stimulated a rich tapestry of intellectual vibrancy: Confucianism, Legalism, Daoism, Mohism, etc. As Franklin Perkins writes, “This crisis led to an explosion of philosophical and religious views, with each thinker offering advice for how to live in and make sense of this seemingly chaotic and cruel world” (Perkins 2022, p. 2). Gradually, on the intellectual level, an abundance of philosophical schools, the so-called “the Hundred Schools of Thought 諸子百家”, blossomed with their respective ideas



Citation: Zhao, Wei. 2024. In Search of the Dao: Process Cosmology, Epistemology, and Ritual in the *Xunzi* and the *Xici zhuan*. *Religions* 15: 178. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15020178>

Academic Editors: Huaiyu Chen and Minhao Zhai

Received: 29 December 2023

Revised: 29 January 2024

Accepted: 29 January 2024

Published: 31 January 2024



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to find a final solution to the social turbulence, which is what the present essay terms “in search of the Dao (Way)”. What does “in search of the Dao” imply? Brook Ziporyn has suggested that “Dao originally meant a set of practices designed to guide one’s behavior in some specific way so as to promote the attainment of some predetermined value or objective: social harmony, personal contentment, material benefit” (Ziporyn 2020, p. xxiii). As such, “in the search of the Dao” carries an implicit quest for the all-encompassing Way that governs the whole world, be it from the perspective of cosmology, socio-political order, or individual life, etc. Such a quest for the Way signals a direct response to the collapse of moral and social order during their times. As A.C. Graham claims, “Their whole thinking is a response to the breakdown of the moral and political order which had claimed the authority of Heaven; and the crucial question for all of them is not the Western philosopher’s ‘Where is the truth’ but ‘Where is the Way?’, the way to order the state and conduct personal life” (Graham 1989, p. 3). In their search for the Dao, there emerged a myriad of philosophical disputations among these numerous schools of thought, which collectively constituted a pivotal epoch in the formulation of intellectual discourse in the annals of Chinese history. As is reflected by Scott Cook, the Warring States era is “arguably the most decisive period in the formation of Chinese thought” (Cook 2012, p. 1).

Among the thinkers of this decisive period, Xunzi 荀子 (ca. 313–238 B.C.E.)¹ was deemed as “the first systematic philosopher” (Berkson 2016, p. 230) “occupying a place of importance in classical Chinese philosophy comparable to that of Aristotle in Greek thought” (Knoblock 1988, p. vii). As Tang Siufu 鄧小虎 comments, “He holds the key to a systematic reconstruction of Confucianism” (Tang 2016, p. 6). Cheng Chung-Ying 成中英 portrays Xunzi as “a systematic philosopher” as well, “who follows Confucius in trying to reach a thread of penetrating unity of my way” (Cheng 2008, p. 9). As regards the philosophy of Xunzi, Sato Masayuki 佐藤将之 argues that the main characteristic of Xunzi’s ideas is the synthesis of pre-Qin thought due to Xunzi’s eclectic incorporation of preceding thought (Sato 2003, pp. 37–38). Another contemporaneous text named *Xici zhuan* 繫辭傳² from the highly venerated Confucian classic, the *Book of Changes* 周易 (or *I Ching*, *Yijing*, hereafter *Changes*), is known to have transformed the original *Changes* from a divinatory text into a Confucian classic (Smith 2008, pp. 31–56), is “perhaps the most important source we presently have for thinking through the assumptions of early Chinese cosmology” (Ames 2023, p. 92), and is widely regarded as “one of the most influential pieces of writing in all of Chinese philosophical expression” (Shaughnessy 2022, p. 475). Though coeval with the *Xunzi*, the *Xici zhuan* is not often compared with it in existing scholarship due to the fact that the two texts are usually employed in differing discourses of intellectual development in China: *Xunzi* mainly for the Xunzi philosophy alone or the Xunzi-Mencius tension within the Confucian tradition, and *Xici zhuan* for the canonization of the *Changes* by formulating metaphysical framework (Smith 2008, p. 38). Yet, as Michael Puett has pointed out, “contrary to the usual interpretation, *Xici zhuan*’s argument is in some ways comparable to that found in portions of the *Xunzi*” (Puett 2002, p. 189). In particular, there is a striking similarity between the two texts when it comes to their common pursuit of following “the teachings of the past sages” (Puett 2002, p. 195): the Dao. In light of the above, this paper adopts a differing approach to the two texts by focusing the comparison of them on the cultural phenomenon of “their common pursuit of the Dao” from aspects of cosmology, knowledge, and practice. But, as Michael Puett mentioned, the comparable portions are limited to “some ways” (Puett 2002, p. 189). Therefore, this paper aims not to conduct a comprehensive comparison of the two texts in totality. Instead, the comparison is situated within selected chapters in the *Xunzi* and selected passages in the *Xici zhuan*.

2. The Similarities in Their Quest for the Dao

As per Michael R. Slater’s summary of Anglophone Xunzi scholarship, “Xunzi conceived of Heaven (*tian* 天) along impersonal rather than personal lines, and regarded Heaven—together with Earth—roughly as the orderly and indifferent forces of Nature” (Slater 2018, p. 887). That is to say, Heaven is non-deistic but represents the orderly forces

of Nature. Furthermore, Edward J. Machle has suggested that Xunzi's "cosmic dance is the celebration of order, of harmony, of perfect teamwork, wherein all is aligned and each thing has its place" (Machle 1993, p. 183). Such a cosmological view resonates with that of the process cosmology most notably developed by Alfred North Whitehead (Whitehead [1929] 1978). Intriguingly, Roger T. Ames identifies the cosmology of the *Changes* as "a process cosmology" (Ames 2023, pp. 90–119) as well. Therefore, in the first place, by comparing the cosmological construction in both texts, the present essay argues that the *Xunzi* and the *Xici zhuan* display similar orientations in formulating their understanding of cosmology on the regularity of the universe.

2.1. Process Cosmology: The Regularity of the Universe

Process cosmology is a philosophical terminology coined by Alfred North Whitehead that emphasizes the dynamism, organism, and orderliness of reality, wherein the cosmos is considered as an evolving, interconnected web of processes rather than a collection of immutable objects (Whitehead [1929] 1978). The cosmology of the *Xunzi* is reflected across chapters because to understand Xunzi "requires us to read through and think through all his essays in totality and to recognize the major theses he has developed through a train of thinking" (Cheng 2008, p. 9). The *Xici zhuan* is known to be most philosophical and thereby most suitable to validate the authority of the *Changes* (Redmond and Hon 2014, p. 153), and is also "one of the most oft-cited texts in discussions of correlative cosmology in China" (Puett 2002, p. 188). As Richard J. Smith puts it, "Taken as a whole, the *Ten Wings* elucidate the basic text of the *Changes* and provide it with an explicitly metaphysical framework. This is particularly true of the 'Great Commentary [Xici zhuan]'" (Smith 2008, p. 38). In what follows, the present essay will examine the cosmological organism, dynamism, and orderliness in the two texts. As for the *Xunzi*, the following excerpts are revealing:

"When Heaven has its proper seasons. Earth has its proper resources. And humankind has its proper order—this is called being able to form a triad and wish instead for those things to which we stand as the third is a state of confusion. The arrayed stars follow each other in their revolutions, the sun and the moon take turns shining, the four seasons proceed in succession, *yin* and *yang* undergo their great transformations, and winds and rain are broadly bestowed. Their harmony keeps the myriad things alive. Their nurturing helps the myriad things to thrive. What is such that one does not see its workings but sees only its accomplishments—this is called spirit-like power [天有其時，地有其財，人有其治，夫是之謂能參。舍其所以參而願其所參，則惑矣。列星隨旋，日月遞炤，四時代禦，陰陽大化，風雨博施，萬物各得其和以生，各得其養以成，不見其事而見其功，夫是之謂神。]" ("Tianlun"; Hutton 2014, p. 176).³

"There is a constancy to the activities of Heaven. They do not persist because of Yao. They do not perish because of Jie. If you respond to them with order, then you will have good fortune. If you respond to them with chaos, then you will have misfortune. If you strengthen the fundamental works and moderate expenditures, then Heaven cannot make you poor. If your means of nurture are prepared and your actions are timely, then Heaven cannot make you ill. If you cultivate the Way and do not deviate from it, then Heaven cannot ruin you [天行有常，不為堯存，不為桀亡。應之以治則吉，應之以亂則凶。疆本而節用，則天不能貧；養備而動時，則天不能病；修道而不貳，則天不能禍。]" ("Tianlun"; Hutton 2014, p. 175)

"If the fundamental works are neglected and expenditures are extravagant, then Heaven cannot make you wealthy. If your means of nurture are sparse and your actions are infrequent, then Heaven cannot make you sound in body. If you turn your back on the Way and act recklessly, then Heaven cannot make you fortunate [本荒而用侈，則天不能使之富；養略而動罕，則天不能使之全；倍道而妄行，則天不能使之吉。]" ("Tianlun"; Hutton 2014, p. 175)

As Cheng Chung-ying states, “the *Changes* is an integrative system because it integrates experiences and concepts into an organic unity and enriched order” (Cheng 2020, pp. 328–29). By stressing that “There is a constancy to the activities of Heaven” and “If you turn your back on the Way and act recklessly, then Heaven cannot make you fortunate”, the *Xunzi* is proclaiming the indifferent yet regular attributes of the Dao of the cosmos: it is a perennial pattern that transcends time and space. Additionally, this pattern weaves together all the cosmic realms, which suggests the unity of a cosmic dance wherein human affairs must align with the Dao of the cosmos, otherwise disorder and chaos will come about. And the first excerpt demonstrates three regular properties of the cosmos in the *Xunzi*: orderliness, dynamism, and organism. The orderliness of the cosmos is delineated by the proper seasons dictated by Heaven, proper resources by the Earth, and proper order by humankind. Specifically, as is stated in the excerpt, the arrayed stars revolve in sequential patterns; the sun and the moon shine in turns; the four seasons operate successively. Furthermore, as stipulated in the second excerpt, there is constancy to the activities of Heaven and they are indifferent to human realms. As the Qing dynasty scholar Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (1842–1918) writes in annotating the first sentence, “Heaven has its own Way [天自有常行之道也]” (Wang 1988, p. 362).⁴ In light of the above, it can be seen that Heaven follows fixed patterns in its flow, which represents a clear manifestation of the orderly cosmos. By the same token, the cosmos runs in dynamic patterns with the successive procession of seasons, the sequentially revolving stars, and the alternating cosmic forces of *yin* and *yang*. The dynamism of the cosmos is evident in this incessant cosmic flow. In forming a triad, the harmony of the orderly cosmos nurtures the myriad things, which illustrates the interconnected and organic nature of the cosmos. This probably involves an implicit objective in the *Xunzi*—“humans fulfill their proper duty through artifice and thereby bring order to that which Heaven generated” (Puett 2002, p. 184). During the organic cosmos, every part of the cosmos jointly constitutes an organic totality, a group dance that never stops (Hon 2023). These three properties are similarly conveyed in the *Xici zhuan*:

“The *Changes* contains the measure of Heaven and Earth; therefore it enables us to comprehend the Dao of Heaven and Earth and its order. Looking upward, we contemplate with its help the signs of the heavens; looking down, we examine the lines of the earth. Thus we come to know the circumstances of the dark and the light. Going back to the beginnings of things and pursuing them to the end, we come to know the lessons of birth and of death [《易》與天地准，故能彌綸天地之道，仰以觀於天文，俯以察於地理，是故知幽明之故。原始反終，故知生死之說。]”. (‘Xici’ I: 3; Wilhelm [1967] 1977, pp. 581–82, with modifications)

“The *Changes* is a book from which one may not hold aloof. Its *dao* is forever changing—alternating, movement without rest, flowing through the six empty places; rising and sinking without fixed law, firm and yielding transform each other. They cannot be confined within a rule; it is only change that is at work here. They move inward and outward according to fixed rhythms. Without and within, they teach caution. They also show care and sorrow and their causes. Though you have no teacher, approach them as you would your parents [《易》之為書也不可遠，為道也屢遷，變動不居，周流六虛，上下無常，剛柔相易，不可為典要。唯變所適。其出入以度，外內使知懼，又明於憂患與故。無有師保，如臨父母。]”. (‘Xici’ II: 7; Wilhelm [1967] 1977, pp. 657–58)

“Heaven is high, the earth is low; thus the Creative (Qian) and the Receptive (Kun) are determined. In correspondence with this difference between low and high, inferior and superior places are established. Movement and rest have their definite laws; according to these, firm and yielding lines are differentiated. Events follow definite trends, each according to its nature. Things are distinguished from one another in definite classes. In this way good fortune and misfortune come about. In the heavens phenomena take form; on earth shapes take form.

In this way change and transformation become manifest. Therefore the eight trigrams succeed one another by turns, as the firm and the yielding displace each other [天尊地卑，乾坤定矣。卑高以陳，貴賤位矣。動靜有常，剛柔斷矣。方以類聚，物以羣分，吉凶生矣。在天成象，在地成形，變化見矣。是故剛柔相摩，八卦相盪。]". ('Xici' I: 1; Wilhelm [1967] 1977, pp. 562–67)

By establishing that "The *Changes* contains the measure of Heaven and Earth", the *Xici zhuan* is affirming the penetrating function of the *Changes* in revealing the Dao of the cosmos, and, as Puett states, the changes in the hexagram are thus "a microcosm of the processual changes of the universe itself" (Puett 2002, p. 191). By claiming "Its *dao* is forever changing—alternating, movement without rest, flowing through the six empty places; rising and sinking without fixed law", the *Xici zhuan* is explicitly depicting the dynamic nature of cosmic forces reflected in the *Dao* of the *Changes*: the cosmic force is flowing through the *yin* and *yang* hexagram lines without ceasing, rising and sinking, firm and yielding. Symbolically, the 64 hexagrams of the *Changes* are patterned on the vicissitudes of this-worldly realities, which are signified by the waxing and waning of the *yin* and *yang* cosmic forces. As Michael Puett summarizes, the *Xici zhuan* "places its emphasis on a spontaneous, self-generating cosmos which the sages should strive to understand and pattern themselves on" (Puett 2002, p. 188). Although the cosmic forces are in constant movement, fixed rhythms can be discerned in order to teach ourselves caution, which exemplifies the order of the cosmos. This order and dynamism of the cosmos is further elucidated in the succession of eight trigrams by turns and the displacing of the firm and the yielding with each other. By the same token, the orderly and dynamic cosmos is expressed in the definite laws of movement and rest, the establishment of inferior and superior places, and the differentiation of firm and yielding lines, as things are distinguished from one another in definite classes. Likewise, the cosmos is organic as the cosmic forces like the *yin* and *yang* are interconnected and interdependent because they complement each other; the firm and the yielding are mutually symbiotic as they displace each other.

2.2. Epistemology: The Limitation in Understanding the Universe

In epistemology, human finitude is the acknowledgment of human beings' finite capacities in terms of cognitive abilities, sense-making, visions, experiences, and other aspects (Dreyfus 1991; Blattner 2006). Human finitude is of focal importance in Martin Heidegger's philosophy. "Human finitude figures centrally in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, a treatise some interpreters have called a 'philosophy of finitude'" (Magid 2016, p. 657; Brockelman 2008, pp. 481–99). But what constitutes human finitude? Martin Heidegger himself says, "Dasein dispels the danger that it may, by its own finite understanding of existence, fail to recognize that it is getting outstripped by the existence-possibilities of Others, or rather that it may explain these possibilities wrongly and force them back upon its own, so that it may divest itself of its ownmost factual existence". In light of this, human finitude is pertinent to one's own finite understanding of existence; failure to recognize one is getting outstripped by the existence-possibilities of Others, and wrong explanation of these possibilities. Additionally, "In such Being-towards-its-end, Dasein exists in a way which is authentically whole as that entity which it can be when 'thrown into death'. This entity does not have an end at which it just stops, but it exists finitely" (Heidegger [1962] 2001, p. 378). In this sense, human finitude does not mean an end of one's stopping. But rather, it means "exists finitely" or "the finitude of one's existence", which refers to human beings' limitations due to the limits of our cognitive abilities (Hon 2023). As such, "human beings must accept their limitations" in that "human beings cannot fully understand the cosmos because it is an organismic process. As part of the great flow, human beings are bound by specific time and space" (Hon 2023). It is on this basis that human beings obtain "courage and flexibility to actively involve into our lives" (Hon 2023). In the words of Martin Heidegger, acknowledging the finitude of one's existence brings one into the simplicity of one's fate: "Once one has grasped the finitude of one's existence it snatches one back from the endless multiplicity of possibilities which offer themselves as closest to one—those of com-

fortableness, shirking, and taking things lightly—and brings Dasein into the simplicity of its fate” (Heidegger [1962] 2001, p. 435). This dimension of philosophy is reflected both in the *Xunzi* and the *Xici zhuan*, respectively, in the following:

“What is such that everyone knows how it comes about, but no one understands it in its formless state—this is called the accomplishment of Heaven. Only the sage does not seek to understand Heaven [皆知其所以成，莫知其無形，夫是之謂天。唯聖人為不求知天。]”. (‘Tianlun’; Hutton 2014, p. 176)

“One who understands clearly the respective allotments of Heaven and humankind can be called a person of utmost achievement. That which is accomplished without anyone’s doing it and which is obtained without anyone’s seeking it is called the work of Heaven. With respect to what is like this, even though he thinks deeply, a proper person does not try to ponder it. Even though he is mighty, he does not try to augment it by his own abilities. Even though he is expertly refined, he does not try to make it more keenly honed. This is called not competing with Heaven’s work [故明於天人之分，則可謂至人矣。不為而成，不求而得，夫是之謂天職。如是者，雖深，其人不加慮焉；雖大，不加能焉；雖精，不加察焉。夫是之謂不與天爭職。]”. (‘Tianlun’; Hutton 2014, p. 175)

As is illustrated in the first excerpt, the *Xunzi* apparently delimits the constrained scope of human beings’ cognitive understanding of the cosmos. As the Qing dynasty scholar Wang Xi-anqian comments, “It discusses the difficulty in knowing the Way of Heaven [言天道之難知]” (Wang 1988, p. 365). Thus, human beings cannot fathom it in its formless state, which is the accomplishment of Heaven. The *Xunzi* further claims that only the sage does not seek to understand Heaven because “since the Way of Heaven is nearly unfathomable, the sage opts to grapple with human affairs rather than undertaking the energy-consuming pursuit of knowing Heaven [既天道難測，故聖人但修人事，不務役慮於知天也]” (Wang 1988, p. 365). The *Xunzi* continues to place an emphasis on the allotment of respective allotments of Heaven and humankind because the work of Heaven is constant, self-generating processes without anyone’s doing it or seeking it, e.g., the succession of seasons and generating of the myriad things. In light of this, human beings are in no position to compete with Heaven’s work based on the fact that the Way of Heaven is almost beyond fathoming [天道雖深遠，至人曾不措意測度焉] (Wang 1988, p. 364). Here the *Xunzi* is addressing the significance of both human finitude in knowing the cosmos and the orderliness of the cosmos, because human beings and Heaven have their divergent but proper places based on their respective allotments. In the *Xici zhuan*, human finitude is analogously revealed:

“The holy sages instituted the hexagrams, so that phenomena might be perceived therein. They appended the judgments, in order to indicate good fortune and misfortune. As the firm and the yielding lines displace one another, change and transformation arise. Therefore good fortune and misfortune are the images of gain and loss; remorse and humiliation are the images of sorrow and forethought. Change and transformation are images of progress and retrogression. The firm and the yielding are images of day and night. The movements of the six lines contain the ways of the three primal powers [聖人設卦觀象，繫辭焉而明吉凶。剛柔相推，而生變化。是故吉凶者，失得之象也；悔吝者，憂虞之象也。變化者，進退之象也；剛柔者，晝夜之象也。六爻之動，三極之道也。]”. (‘Xici’ I: 2; Wilhelm [1967] 1977, pp. 573–75)

“Therefore it is the order of the *Changes* that the superior man devotes himself to and that he attains tranquility by. It is the judgments on the individual lines that the superior man takes pleasure in and that he ponders on. Therefore the superior man contemplates these images in times of rest and meditates on the judgments. When he undertakes something, he contemplates the changes and ponders on the oracles. Therefore he is blessed by heaven. “Good fortune. Nothing that does not further [是故君子所居而安者，《易》之序也；所樂而玩者，爻之辭

也。是故，君子居則觀其象而玩其辭，動則觀其變而玩其占。是以自天祐之，吉无不利。】” (‘Xici’ I: 2; Wilhelm [1967] 1977, pp. 576–77)

“The time at which the *Changes* came to the fore was that in which the house of Yin 殷 came to an end and the way of the house of Zhou 周 was rising, that is, the time when King Wen and the tyrant Zhou 紂 were pitted against each other. This is why the hexagram statements of the book so frequently warn against danger. He who is conscious of danger creates peace for himself, he who takes things lightly creates his own downfall. The Dao of this book is great. It omits none of the myriad things. It shows worry and anxiety from beginning and end, and it is encompassed in the words “without blame.” This is the Dao of the *Changes* [《易》之興也，其當殷之末世，周之盛德邪？當文王與紂之事邪？是故其辭危。危者使平，易者使傾；其道甚大，百物不廢。懼以終始，其要无咎，此之謂《易》之道也。】” (‘Xici’ II: 11; Wilhelm [1967] 1977, p. 663, with modifications)

The authors of *Xizi zhuan* claim that “the holy sages instituted the hexagrams, so that phenomena might be perceived therein”. The underlying philosophy of this claim is the implicit acceptance of human finitude in perceiving the nuances of the cosmos because human beings perceive the intricacies of the phenomena with the aid of the hexagrams developed by holy sages. Additionally, the mention of images of good fortune, misfortune, remorse, and humiliation itself unravels human finitude in a deeper sense in dealing with contingencies or even regular affairs. In actuality, if we delve into the epistemological dimension, the philosophy embedded within the practice of divination contains lines of human finitude at the outset. Properly speaking, turning to the practice of divination means admitting human beings’ finitude in sense-making, which in the words of Hon Tze-ki is “underlying the practice of divination was the notion that human beings must accept their limitations” (Hon 2023). Based on this limitation, human beings optimize their cognitive ability in understanding the reality through the lens of six lines of a hexagram. Even the superior man has limitations as he himself turns to the *Changes* as well: with devotion to the order of the *Changes*, while pondering on line judgments, the superior man attains tranquility and pleasure. What is even more revealing is the fact that his blessings from Heaven and good fortune are garnered by seeking assistance from contemplating the images and the changes, meditating on judgments and pondering on oracles. From the third excerpt, the milieu of the prevalence of the *Changes* was grounded in the chaotic era, between the demise of Shang dynasty and the genesis of Zhou dynasty. During this dynastic transition, constant warfare created great danger and anxiety, which some took seriously and others lightly. The Dao of the *Changes* is located in worry and anxiety from beginning to end, which is the key to enter the realm of “without blame”. In view of this account, human beings should be on constant alert regarding the finitude inherent within us in order to obtain an auspicious result. This illustrates that finitude is an intrinsic characteristic of human beings. In illustrating human finitude in the *Changes*, Hon Tze-ki makes an inspiring and insightful analogy, “Like a drop of water in an ocean, we are conditioned by the totality of the ocean and its dynamism. We act, react, push, and pull, but we never know the vastness and depth of the ocean” (Hon 2023).

2.3. Ritual: The Practice of Ritual as the Marker of the Dao

Confucian ritual propriety represents “a superior understanding of human goodness, and represents constitutive norms through which a person achieves an integral self and a unified life and a harmonious communal life as well” (Tang 2016, p. 137). Ritual in the *Xunzi* is of central significance to the Xunzian philosophy, which has therefore attracted considerable attention among academia (Graham 1989; Cook 1997; Goldin 1999; Puett 2002; Sato 2003; Hagen 2003; Cheng 2008; Perkins 2014; Kline and Tiwald 2014; Hutton 2014). Sato Masayuki maintains that “Xunzi’s synthesis of the pre-Qin thought is attained by his concept of *Li* (ritual), which is also the foundation of his argumentation” (Sato 2003, p. 424). Antonio S. Cua has categorized the *li* (ritual) in the *Xunzi* into three dimensions: the moral dimension, the aesthetic dimension, and the religious dimension (Cua 2005, pp. 39–62).

But the central connotation of ritual in the *Xunzi* is more than those three dimensions. In particular, the *Xunzi* reveres ritual itself by constantly exalting ritual (*longli* 隆禮). As Mark Berkson has pointed out, “Whereas every religious tradition has rituals in which participants express reverence for that which is sacred, Confucianism (especially in its Xunzian form) is arguably more than most other traditions, at the same time reflects on and reveres ritual itself” (Berkson 2016, p. 233). The fundamental reason behind it lies in the fact that Xunzi deems rituals as the markers of the Dao (Way). To quote two edifying excerpts:

“Those who order the people mark out the Way, but if the markers are not clear, there will be chaos. The rituals are those markers. To reject ritual is to bemuddle the world, and to bemuddle the world is to create great chaos. And so, when the Way is in no part unclear, and that which is within the bounds and that which is outside the bounds have different markers, and that which is inglorious and that which is illustrious have constant measures, then the pitfalls of the people will be eliminated [治民者表道，表不明則亂。禮者，表也。非禮，昏世也。昏世，大亂也。故道無不明，外內異表，隱顯有常，民陷乃去。]”. (‘Tianlun’; Hutton 2014, p. 181)

“Those who order the people mark out what is chaotic, to make it so that people will not err. The rituals are their markers. The former kings used rituals to mark out what would make the whole world chaotic. Now if one discards the rituals, this is getting rid of the markers. And so, the people become lost and confused and fall into disasters and troubles. This is why punishments and penalties become profuse [治民者表亂，使人無失。禮者，其表也，先王以禮表天下之亂。今廢禮者，是去表也。故民迷惑而陷禍患，此刑罰之所以繁也。]”. (‘Dalue’; Hutton 2014, p. 291)

As expatiated in the above excerpts, the Way has to be clearly marked out by the rulers in order to avoid great chaos and maintain social order. Otherwise, society will be chaotic, and people will err. Former kings appropriately utilized rituals to mark out what made the world chaotic, and thus disorder was dispelled. Notably, discarding the rituals is tantamount to abandoning the markers of the Way, and thus is exactly why the people fall into disasters and penalties become pervasive now. In other words, it is only when the Way is marked out clearly by rituals that the calamities of the people can be relinquished, and social order can be achieved. However, not all rulers can clearly mark out the Way, except the sages. As P.R. Goldin vividly comments, “The rituals, it turns out, are the equivalent of helpful signposts. Just as those who ford rivers mark treacherous spots, the sages marked the Way by means of rituals, so that people would no longer stumble” (Goldin 2018). In the search of the Dao, Xunzi has attached much importance to ritual as it is the marker of the Dao. Ritualization is the path to reach the Dao. As A.C. Graham puts it, “although Xunzi puts the main stress on the ordering and refining of the passions, he does see ritual as rooting man not only in family and state but also in cosmos” (Graham 1989, p. 259). One excerpt pertaining to this aspect stands out:

“By ritual, Heaven and Earth harmoniously combine; By ritual, the sun and the moon radiantly shine; By ritual, the four seasons in progression arise; By ritual, the stars move orderly across the skies; By ritual, the great rivers through their courses flow; By ritual, the myriad things all thrive and grow; By ritual, for love and hate proper measure is made; By ritual, on joy and anger fit limits are laid. By ritual, compliant subordinates are created. By ritual, enlightened leaders are generated; With ritual, all things can change yet not bring chaos. But deviate from ritual and you face only loss. Is not ritual perfect indeed! It establishes a lofty standard that is ultimate of its kind, and none under Heaven can add to or subtract from it [天地以合，日月以明，四時以序，星辰以行，江河以流，萬物以昌，好惡以節，喜怒以當，以爲下則順，以爲上則明，萬物變而不亂，貳之則喪也。禮豈不至矣哉！立隆以爲極，而天下莫之能損益也。]”. (‘Lilun’; Hutton 2014, pp. 204–5)

Here, in order to give prominence to ritual, *Xunzi* employs parallelism of lines for rhetorical effect. Through ritual, the Way of Heaven, the Way of Earth, and the Way of human beings are all achieved, which constitutes a cosmic dance wherein Heaven, Earth, and human beings are aligned with the Way and run in proper fashion. To use Machle's words, "Thus, the inherited *li* are, as it were, the echoes of the cosmic music, transcribed by the sages to be the choreography of humans' part in the cosmic dance" (Machle 1993, p. 182). Since rituals are the markers of the Dao instituted by the sages, by following all the necessary markers, the ultimate Dao can be achieved. In other words, ritualization is the ultimate path to reach the Way (Dao). "The ritual of the sage, in its ideal form, is a canon of behavioral practices through which harmony may be achieved" (Cook 1997, p. 36). By the same token, because ritual itself is the ultimate lofty standard of its kind, any addition to it or subtraction from it is impossible to bring about, which is exactly why the *Xunzi* keeps exalting ritual across the whole chapters. As Tang Siufu succinctly puts it, "Ritual propriety represents a normative framework telling us what sort of human actions make the best of our native conditions" (Tang 2016, p. 136). Another case in point in the "Discourse on Ritual" chapter is the line "Ritual is the ultimate of the human Dao [禮者，人道之極也]". Here, the *Xunzi* holds that ritual represents the ultimate standard of the human Way, marking explicit signposts normatively and prescriptively signaling the Dao of humanity because ritual itself encompasses all it takes to form the human Dao. As Sato Masayuki observes, "Consequently, it was *Li* (ritual) which was considered the invisible power which could attain order in human society. In this way, the role of *Li* in human society is comparable to the role of the Way (Dao) in the natural world and in a human body" (Sato 2003, p. 425). In the *Xici zhuan*, although ritual is not exalted manifestly across chapters as it is in the *Xunzi*, the underlying principle embodying ritual as the marker of the Dao is unveiled implicitly:

"The holy sages were able to survey all the confused diversities under Heaven. They observed forms and phenomena, and made representations of things and their attributes. These were called the Images (*xiang* 象). The holy sages were able to survey all the movements under Heaven. They contemplated the Way in which these movements met and became interrelated. In performing a proper ritual, they appended judgments (*ci* 辭), to distinguish between the good fortune and misfortune indicated. These were called the Lines (*yao* 爻) [聖人有以見天下之賾，而擬諸其形容，象其物宜，是故謂之象。聖人有以見天下之動，而觀其會通，以行其典禮，系辭焉以斷其吉凶，是故謂之爻。]". (*Xici* I: 6; Wilhelm [1967] 1977, pp. 596–97, with modifications)

"Thus the *Book of Changes* consists of images. The images are reproductions. The decisions provide the material. The lines are imitations of movements on earth. Thus do good fortune and misfortune arise, and remorse and humiliation appear [是故《易》者，象也；象也者，像也。彖者，材也；爻也者，效天下之動者也。是故吉凶生而悔吝著也。]". (*Xici* II: 3; Wilhelm [1967] 1977, pp. 640–41, with modifications)

"The number of the total is fifty. Of these, forty-nine are used. They are divided into two portions, to represent the two primal forces. Hereupon one is set apart, to represent the three powers. They are counted through by fours, to represent the four seasons. The remainder is put aside, to represent the intercalary month. There are two intercalary months in five years, therefore the putting aside is repeated, and this gives us the whole. There are five heavenly numbers. There are also five earthly numbers. When they are distributed among the five places, each finds its complement. The sum of the heavenly numbers is twenty-five, that of the earthly numbers is thirty. The sum total of heavenly numbers and earthly numbers is fifty-five. It is this which completes the changes and transformations and sets demons and gods in movement [大衍之數五十，其用四十有九。分而為二以象兩，掛一以象三，揲之以四以象四時，歸奇於扚以象閏，五歲再閏，故再扚而後掛。天數五，地數五，五位相得而各有合。天數二十有五，地數三十。凡天

地之數五十有五，此所以成變化而行鬼神也。]”。(‘Xici’ I: 8; Wilhelm [1967] 1977, pp. 604–5)

As for the *Xici zhuan*, it was “written in support of the art of divination” (Puett 2002, p. 189), but divination can be seen as “a ritual that the sage must experience for its ritualistic importance” (Cheng 2020, p. 103), because “the very practice of divination associated with the *Changes* has its own philosophical and metaphysical significance and need not be explained on the basis of superstition or mysticism, as is commonly assumed” (Cheng 2020, p. 273). As Hon Tze-ki summarizes, “instead of seeing divination and philosophy as categorically exclusive, we see them as a continuum. It is from divination that we develop an acute sensitivity to the combined effects of temporal and spatial factors that determine our judgment” (Hon 2023). In aligning the ritual of divination with philosophical implications in the *Changes*, the dispute about whether the *Changes* is a book of divination or a book of wisdom is at least alleviated, or even resolved. In this sense, the divination-based ritual in the *Xici zhuan* can equally be regarded as the marker of the Dao. In the coherent steps of divination practice, a strict and proper ritual is followed with numerical formulations to discern the changes and derive transformations. This is established in that “since change is based on a definable series of processes, the alternation of *yin* and *yang* can be formulated numerically” (Puett 2002, p. 189). In view of this, the numerical formulation mirrors cosmic forces in which forms, phenomena, confused diversities, and movements have all been surveyed by the holy sages through the lens of divination-based ritual. As regards the divinatory ritual itself, it is certainly not arbitrarily framed because during the divination process, the action of performing a divination is part of the “continual unfolding the universe” (Hon 2023). The images, hexagrams, judgments, and lines are all symbols pertinent to the Way, and the Way of the myriad things has been contemplated and revealed by holy sages through the symbols derived from divination-based ritual. As Cheng Chung-ying explicates, in the *Xici zhuan*, for the most part, the authors are arguing for “taking the Way of changes directly and using the Yi (change 易) symbols as tools or mediums to fathom the subtle changes” (Cheng 2020, p. 103). In light of this, divination in the *Changes* is in essence a cosmological ritual capitalized upon by the sages to disclose the minute workings of the cosmos, upon which human beings base decisions to their own advantage.

3. The Divergences in Their Quest for the Dao

While the *Xunzi* and the *Xici zhuan* share a similar tendency in their search for the Dao as a response to the breakdown of the Zhou dynasty’s political order and the rampant social tumult, they demonstrate differing implications in terms of the Dao-marker: ritual. This paper argues that, in their search of the Dao, the implications of the ritual-marked Dao of the *Xunzi* are at least twofold, concerning political and social domains, whereas the ritual-marked Dao of the *Xici zhuan* involves correlative cosmology or correlative thinking and it functions based on a case-by-case scenario in which individuals seek to make inquiries in order to optimize their situational decisions and create balances between human affairs and the cosmos.

Regarding the political aspect, the purpose of Xunzi’s search of the Dao is deeply rooted in the reconfiguration of the socio-political domain through the establishment of a robust government and the attainment of social order. To quote from Cheng Chung-ying, “Xunzi is responding to issues of his times in order to reach a better solution of these issues in light of his political ideal for well-ordered society” (Cheng 2008, p. 9). The reason behind establishing a robust government lies in the dreadful fact of collapsed governmental ruling leading to anomie among society during the Warring States period. For instance, during Xunzi’s visit to the southern state of Chu 楚, “he would witness the dismaying spectacle of a great and extensive country constantly forced to do Qin’s bidding, demoralized by decades of bad government and weak and ineffective rulers, and slowly being devoured” (Knoblock 1988, p. 7). Hence, Xunzi is advocating for a strong government to restore social order by expending a whole chapter entitled “The Strong State” (‘Qiangguo’; Hutton 2014, pp. 163–74) discoursing upon how to make a strong state. Additionally, Xunzi is empha-

sizing the importance of a state across chapters. For example, he claims that “the state is the most efficacious instrument in the world, and to be ruler of men is the most efficacious power in the world” [國者，天下之制利用也；人主者，天下之利勢也] (‘Wangba’; Hutton 2014, p. 99). In Xunzi’s search of the Dao, as T.C. Kline III has indicated, the ritual provides a shelter under a sacred canopy of social order from the encroaching fear and chaos of the situation: “(1) The ritual reconstitutes and maintains the social order because of its religiously significant ability to provide shelter from the anomic events of life that threaten to disrupt the social order; (2) The Confucian sages created the ritual, the Dao, for the purpose of providing this shelter and bringing human culture into existence; (3) The sage, in turn, exemplifies the person who embodies the Dao, who lives life completely under the shelter of the sacred canopy” (Kline 2014, pp. 173–74).

In the social respect, an implicit objective of Xunzi’s quest for the Dao is inherently meant to defend the Confucian Way against heterogeneous thought, considering the intellectual milieu of the Warring States era mentioned in the foregoing discussion, wherein diversified schools of thought competed against and even attacked each other. According to Mark Berkson, Xunzi’s new Confucian interpretation was intended to defend the Confucian tradition from various intellectual challenges: “(1) Xunzi took up the task of defending Confucian ritual from philosophical attacks by the Mohists and the Daoists who tried to undermine the bases of participation in Confucian ritual; (2) Xunzi was disturbed by the beliefs in ghosts and spirits that motivated many individuals’ participation in ritual with a supernaturalist understanding; (3) Xunzi rejects Mencius who argued that the Confucian Way is grounded in human nature with its ultimate source in Heaven” (Berkson 2016, pp. 230–31; cf. Berkson 2014, pp. 107–8). For instance, “The work of Confucius was opposed by Mozi (墨翟 ca. 450–390 B.C.E.). Mozi rejected the primacy of the family, and the spontaneous but biased affections that come with it, as a model for social organization ... Rituals such as lavish funeral services and musical ceremonies, which Confucians saw as important expressions of family sentiment and methods for harmonious social consolidation, were seen by Mozi as a useless waste of resources” (Ziporyn 2020, p. xxiii). Similarly, Lee H. Yearly has extended the intellectual challenges of up to six different positions that Xunzi deemed as flawed: “three attacks on ritual and three defenses of it” (Yearly 2014, p. 91). In view of these challenges, as Mark Berkson remarks, Xunzi’s reinterpretation of ritual is a hermeneutic defense of the Confucian Way (Berkson 2014, pp. 107–32). The defense of the Confucian Way is mainly reflected in the “Against the Twelve Masters” (‘Feishierzi’; Hutton 2014, pp. 40–46) where Xunzi castigates six philosophical positions and twelve representative figures including Mencius, because “they confuse the world with false notions of right and wrong and of what produces order and what anarchy” (Knoblock 1988, p. 212). In contrast, Xunzi lauds Confucius and Zigong (子弓) because “Xunzi thought Zigong transmitted the true doctrines of the master” (Knoblock 1988, p. 220). Notably, Xunzi draws clear lines of demarcation between the Confucian Way and heterodoxy by claiming that “Now what does the person of *ren* strive for? At his greatest, he models himself on the controlling order of Shun and Yu, and at the least, he models himself on the *yi* of Confucius and Zigong, and he thereby strives to extinguish the teachings of the twelve masters. If one manages to do this, then the harm to the world will be eliminated, the work of the person of *ren* will be completed, and the accomplishments of the sage king will be made manifest [今夫仁人也，將何務哉？上則法舜禹之制，下則法仲尼、子弓之義，以務息十二子之說。如是則天下之害除，仁仁之事畢，聖王之跡著矣]” (Hutton 2014, p. 42). In light of the above analysis, a conclusion can be properly drawn that Xunzi’s quest for the Dao carries an implicit goal: to defend the Confucian Way against heterogeneous thought.

With respect to the *Xici zhuan*, the ritual-marked Dao involves the use of the symbols of the Dao (rituals, hexagrams, lines, judgements, etc.) to institute situational models patterned on the cosmos in which human beings can consult and optimize life situations in the ever-changing world, especially in the face of uncertainties or instabilities. As Roger T. Ames contends, “the main axis of the *Changes* is the coordination of the relationship between the changing world and the human experience in pursuit of optimal effect. It pur-

ports to address what is perhaps life's most pressing question: What kind of human participation in the natural processes can optimize the possibilities of this world in which natural and human events are its two inseparable, mutually shaping aspects" (Ames 2023, p. 67)? This involves "correlative cosmology, or correlative thinking in which things behave in certain ways because they resonate with other entities and forces in a complex network of associations and correspondences" (Smith 2008, p. 32). Such correlative cosmology has been discussed previously in the second part of this essay, and it is embodied telegraphically in the following lines: "Whatever goes beyond this indeed transcends all knowledge. When one investigates the spirituality of the myriad things to the fullest and understands the processes of transformation, he lifts his nature to the level of the miraculous [過此以往，未之或知也。窮神知化，德之盛也]" ('Xici' II: 3; Wilhelm [1967] 1977, p. 644, with modifications). This is to say, when two requirements are met, namely the investigation of the spirituality of the myriad things to the fullest and understanding the processes of transformation, one's nature is elevated to the miraculous: the sages. With the sages' penetrating contemplation and observation of the workings of the cosmos and human beings, the correlative cosmology between the cosmos and human beings is reflected in the symbols (rituals, hexagrams, lines, judgments, etc.) in the *Changes* patterned on the organic, dynamic, and orderly cosmos. In view of this alignment, it can be fairly stated that the *Changes* is a symbolic system of integrated communication because it can be said to define a paradigm for communication of understanding and it aims at understanding the self and the world as well as the relation between the two by way of its symbols, which makes this understanding possible (Cheng 2020, p. 328). In summary, the ritual-marked Dao in the *Xici zhuan* is mainly aimed more on an individual level at tackling situational predicaments. In the case of the Warring States period, it is about facilitating individuals to make judicious decisions at pivotal junctures in their lives as a response to life anxieties caused by political and social chaos in this period. As is summarized by Hon Tze-ki, "This quest to be at peace with the complicated world is central to the philosophy of the *Book of Changes*" (Hon 2023).

To recapitulate, the two texts exhibit divergent connotations concerning the Dao-marker: ritual. It can be discerned that, within the pursuit of the Dao, the implications of the ritual-marked Dao in the *Xunzi* are multifaceted, encompassing both political and social dimensions. In the political realm, the ritual-marked Dao in the *Xunzi* is emphasized with the implicit purpose to reconfigure the socio-political domain through the establishment of a robust government and the attainment of social order. In the social realm, an implicit objective of Xunzi's quest for the Dao is inherently meant to defend the Confucian Way against heterogeneous thought. In contrast, the Dao marked by ritual in the *Xici zhuan* engages correlative cosmology or thinking, operating within a context-specific framework. In this paradigm, individuals employ inquiries to optimize their situational decisions, seeking a delicate equilibrium between human affairs and the cosmic order. In short, the ritual-marked Dao in the *Xunzi* is meant for political and social visions, whereas the ritual-marked Dao in the *Xici zhuan* is meant mainly for individual vision. The differing implications may provide insights for contemporary society, especially in the post-Covid context.

4. Concluding Remarks

The Warring States period of China witnessed the "Hundred Schools of Thought" in full blossom, laying a solid intellectual foundation for generations to come. As A.C. Graham notes, "China, like the other civilizations of the Old World, draws its basic ideas from that time of awakening between 800 and 200 B.C.E which Karl Jaspers has called the Axial Period, the age of Greek and Indian philosophers, the Hebrew prophets and Zarathustra" (Graham 1989, p. 1). This paper has conducted a comparative analysis of two infrequently compared texts written during this period, the *Xunzi* and the *Xici zhuan* from the *Changes*, aiming to provide insights into the intellectual landscape of later Warring States China. In response to political and social unrest, the authors of the two texts jointly opted to search for the Dao to smooth out the disorder. In their common quest for the Dao, the two texts

share, to say the least, three similar attributes that manifest a profound concern during the Warring States period with the affective responses of humans toward uncertainties or instabilities, particularly the apprehension stemming from an incessantly dynamic world capable of unpredictably and dramatically disrupting the cadence of one's existence. With regard to their divergences mainly embodied in their objectives, the ritual philosophy of the *Xunzi* is deeply rooted in the reconfiguration of the socio-political domain through the establishment of a robust government and the attainment of social order. As Sato Masayuki concludes, "The ultimate purpose of Xunzi's socio-political theory was the termination of disorder and the recovery of order in human society" (Sato 2003, p. 425). In contrast, the ritual philosophy of the *Xici zhuan* is mainly aimed on an individual level at tackling situational predicaments and facilitating individuals in making judicious decisions at pivotal junctures in their lives as a response to life anxieties caused by political and social chaos in this period, which in the words of Roger T. Ames is "to effectively coordinate the experience of the human being with the processes of nature, and in so doing, to optimize the creative possibilities of the cosmos" (Ames 2023, p. 69).

In actuality, both approaches to the Dao shed edifying light on addressing problems in this complex society, one on the societal level and the other on the individual level. In this era marked by accelerated societal changes and sporadic conflicts leading to heightened life intricacies and psychological displacement, the manifold repercussions experienced by individuals or even nations necessitate a calibrated equilibrium at both the societal and individual strata. On the societal level, the establishment of a proper social order or even international order via the practice of ritual is conducive to the common well-being of humanity, and such practice can be equally applied to individuals as the practice of inner order. On the individual level, the practice of divination-based ritual contributing to the optimization of life choices facilitates smoothing out anxieties or inner instabilities. Likewise, such practice can be utilized in the furtherance of a nation's decision making, as was frequently exercised in ancient China. Thus, a balance of the two approaches shall exert an enlightening effect on modern society in the face of pressing issues. Last but not the least, there exists a notable base tenet embedded within the two approaches that merits special mention. Though the two approaches have both similarities and differences, they share a common quest for the Dao based on one common belief: Dao, the ultimate principle of the cosmos, was once found by the sages and is bound to be found by us. Perhaps this is why A.C. Graham called it the "Disputers of the Dao": "The parallel with the West, limited as it is, may suggest why Chinese thinkers, while appealing to the authority of the ancient sage kings, display such variety and originality: there is no greater stimulus to discovery than the belief that the truth was once known and so can be known again" (Graham 1989, p. 5).

Funding: This research was funded by Postgraduate Scientific Research Innovation Project of Hunan Province (湖南省研究生科研创新项目), grant number QL20220108.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study.

Acknowledgments: My deepest gratitude to Hon Tze-ki and the anonymous reviewers for their invaluable advice on an earlier version.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ As regards Xunzi's life span, there is no fixed consensus. See Hutton (2014, p. xix). See also Knoblock (1988, p. 3).

² The *Ten Wings* dates roughly back to the fifth to the second century B.C.E. See Smith (2008, pp. 37–48). In this essay, when I quote from the *Changes*, I adopt the Richard Wilhelm-Cary F. Baynes translation.

³ In this essay, when I quote from the *Xunzi*, I follow Eric Hutton's translation unless otherwise noted.

- ⁴ While this quotation is excerpted from the influential commentary of the *Xunzi* which sheds light on expounding the text, there could be nuanced discrepancies between the original *Xunzi* and the commentary. Other citations from later commentaries to pre-Qin texts in this essay apply to this note as well.

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