

# *The Three Interpretations of Xunzi's Heavenly Way*

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**Abstract:** Based on the standpoint of experience, Xunzi opened up a Confucian relationship between heaven and man that was different from Confucius and Mencius. As for the philosophical category of "Heaven", it has multiple meanings. First, the meaning of nature of heaven has become a consensus, but the definition of the concept of "nature" has different tendencies in the academic community. "Nature" should be the unity of objective nature and scientific nature; second, Xunzi said that "clear from the distinction between heaven and man", but he also certainly "can participate", and the two do not conflict with man and society; third, studying Xunzi's thoughts of heaven is born and made by man, and in this perspective, "knowing the heaven" and "not seeking to know heaven" are mutually unified.

## 1. Introduction

The debate between heaven and man is one of the most basic and important issues in ancient Chinese philosophy. As for the relationship between heaven and man, Confucianism has two dimensions: one is the division between heaven and man, and the other is the combination of heaven and man. The difference between the two dimensions lies in the different interpretations of the sky. Confucius said: "A gentleman has three fears: fear of the destiny of heaven, fear of the great man, and fear of the words of the saint." The heaven here of Confucius continued the concept of the Western Zhou Dynasty, putting "destiny of heaven", "destiny of heaven" and "saint" in the same position to construct the concept of unity of man and nature. Mencius said: "Those who have fulfilled their hearts and knew their nature, then they knew the heaven. Keeping their hearts and nourishing their natures will serve the heaven." Mencius said "Heaven" on the moral level, believing that the heart, nature and heaven are connected to each other, and that keeping their hearts and nourishing their natures can serve the heaven. Xunzi was incompatible with the natural level. He considered the "Heaven" according to certain laws and did not change according to human will. Then, it is proposed that "then it is clear about the distinction between heaven and man, then it can be said that the root cause of the Confucian view of heaven and man is different regulations on "heaven".

## 2. The first essence of "Heaven": the meaning of nature

The first essential meaning of "heaven" mentioned by Xunzi is the nature of heaven, and this statement is a consensus in the academic community. Feng Youlan believes that the concept of "heaven" has five different meanings in the history of Chinese philosophy, namely the heaven of

matter, the heaven of dominance, the heaven of fate, the heaven of nature, and the heaven of righteousness, and "the 'heaven' mentioned by Xunzi is the world of nature" [1]. Mou Zongsan also said, "Xunzi's heaven is not religious, metaphysical, or artistic, but natural, that is, the heaven in science is "what is it"" [2]. The above scholars all believe that Xunzi's heaven is the heaven of nature, but there are differences in the definition of the concept of "nature". Feng Youlan believes that nature is the natural world, that is, the objective world, and has objectivity. What Mou Zongsan believes is nature relative to religion, metaphysical nature, that is, nature with a certain scientific spirit. Both tendencies are reflected in the text.

The first sentence of Xunzi's "Theory of Heaven" is clearly stated in the beginning of the chapter "Theory of Heaven is always in normal, and it will not be for Yao to survive, and it will not be for Jie to perish". Yu Yue, a scholar of the Qing Dynasty, wrote annotation, saying that there is constant in heaven, that is, there is constant in heaven. It often expresses a law and law, that is, the operation of "Heaven" is based on certain laws and laws. According to Xunzi's argument, "Heaven" is not transferred by human subjective will. If you don't live for Yao, you won't die for Jie. Yao and Jie were both kings of ancient times, with the greatest human power. "Heaven" is not favored because Yao is a wise ruler nor hates Jie's atrocities. The same is true for nature. Heaven does not make people hate cold and stops winter. The year is spring, summer, autumn and winter. The sky will not cancel winter because people do not like winter, so the sky has a normal way. "Ordinary Tao" means the law of constant change. According to what Mr. Feng Youlan said, it is "nature". Its meaning emphasizes the unchanging principle that does not take human objective will as the transfer. The sky mentioned by Xunzi is a specific sky, so if you don't climb a high mountain, you won't know how high the sky is. The sky is placed physically and has only the physical property of height. The upper part is the sky, the lower part is the earth, and the lower part is the earth, and the barrier is between heaven and earth. Wang Xianqian made a note and followed the heavens to nourish the earth's wealth. Heaven is the time of heaven, and it appears as the laws of nature. If the sentence itself is not considered, the sky and the earth are opposite, the earth can be perceived by people, and the sky can also be perceived, all of which are metaphysical and similar to what Mr. Mou Zongsan discussed. What Mencius said about heaven is different from Xunzi, and it is a metaphysical heaven. Those who are optimistic about protecting the world, and those who are afraid of the sky protect their country. In Zhu Zi's view, heaven is the truth, and gladness is natural and reasonable; fearing heaven is the truth, it is not daring to violate the truth. After all, it is just a reason before heaven and earth. If this principle is there, there will be this world; if this principle is there, there will be no world, no one or nothing, and nothing should be carried! If it is reasonable, the air will spread and develop all things." Zhu Zi believes that reason is before qi and before all things. Rule is the beginning of all things and the origin of all things. From this reason, Zhu Zi believes that Mencius's heaven also has originality and supreme nature. Mencius also quotes the Book of Songs here: Fear the power of heaven and protect it at the time. The people of Zhou feared the heaven and prayed for the blessing of the Zhou country through sacrifices. Therefore, it can be said that Mencius talked about heaven in a religious sense. And Xunzi's heaven is only the natural heaven, right and not religious, not metaphysical. Xunzi and Mencius's heaven are both external manifestations of truth, and later The principle of this is the beginning of all things and is metaphysical. Xunzi's principle is the principle of nature, and the spirit of science is hidden in it. If you practice Taoism without being quasi-two, then the heaven will not be in trouble. Practice means conformity and means difference. If you follow the way but not wrong, you will not cause heaven to suffer. This Tao is the principle of nature. How to practice Taoism? Xunzi stood on the side of materialism and proposed specific methods to adapt to the principles of nature, to emphasize agriculture and sericulture, and to follow the heaven. This term undoubtedly had a strong scientific nature in that era.

### 3. The second essence of "Heaven": the meaning of being able to influence

Xunzi started from the nature of heaven and clearly advocated the separation between heaven and man. Xu Fuguan also believed that because Xunzi had an experienced personality, the heaven he recognized was not a natural nature of morality, so he advocated that heaven and man divide the path. There is no doubt that Xunzi has the distinction between heaven and man, but in which sense should we understand the distinction between heaven and man? "Therefore, understanding the distinction between heaven and man can be called the most man" Some scholars believe that divisions should be distinguished, and strictly distinguish between heaven and man; others believe that divisions refer to positions. These two statements are based on the source of the characters and are exemplified in pre-Qin literature, but from the perspective of meaning, I think the position is more in line with Xunzi's meaning. Xunzi believed that heaven has a duty, and everyone has a duty. Heavenly duties are accomplished without doing, and one can obtain without seeking. "The stars are spiraling, the sun and the moon shine, the four eras control, the yin and yang are transformed, and the wind and rain are spreading", etc., are all the functions of heaven. In this process, people do not need to intervene and do not compete with heaven for their duties. Heaven has its time, earth has its wealth, and man has its governance. Only those who can compare with this can be considered. Xunzi did not completely isolate man and heaven. As for the philosophical category of "Heaven", man still plays a certain role, which is the meaning of heaven's ability to influence it.

According to the text of "Xunzi Theory of Heaven", heaven has heaven's emotions, heaven's officials, heaven's kings, heaven's nourishment, and heaven's politics. First, Tianqing and Tianguan are the most direct manifestations of "capable participation". People's likes and dislikes, joys and angers, sorrows and joys are emotions, and hidden in heaven is called heavenly love. A person has five senses, ears, eyes, nose, mouth shapes. They can perceive the world of experience but do not replace each other. They are called Tianguan. "Heaven" does not completely isolate human nature and is still related to heaven. According to Mou Zongsan, heavenly love and heavenly officials are born and natural. Second, the Heavenly Lord is the heart, and the heart is located in an empty place in the middle, governing the five senses. Although it is originally cognitive (that is, wise), it has the meaning of morality. Xunzi's heart is based on experience, but it does not completely abandon moral meaning. In the text of "Xunzi", the concept of "Heavenly virtue" has also appeared many times. For example, if one is sincere in his mind, he will be rational, and if one is clear, he will be able to change. Changes and generations are called heavenly virtue. Here, the virtue of heaven is the same as that of heaven. It extends the changes of all things from sincerity, without losing the foundation of experience, and also falls into the meaning of sincerity. This is called heavenly virtue, and it is the rule of the king. Wang Xianqian said: Heaven's virtue is the virtue of heaven. The wise men are not waiting for second place, and the men are not waiting for necessary. If they do not belong to etiquette and righteousness, they will be returned to common people. If they can belong to etiquette and righteousness, they will be returned to the great officials. They will be rewarded and encouraged, and punished. Such things, it is undoubtedly a way of governance and a virtue of heaven. It can be seen that the heavenly king and heavenly virtue have moral meanings, but they do not express the root of experience. Mou Zongsan commented on the truth that the reason why it has moral meaning is born in nature and cannot be achieved by itself, but must be based on the thought of "it should be fulfilled" (this should be thought of, Xunzi cannot catch it). Therefore, Xunzi Tianjun, the virtue of heaven is the meaning of being able to understand, which is different from Mencius' pure moral form of "serving heaven". Third, heaven nourishes people, and uses all things (except human beings) to nourish people. Heaven governs, obeys it as a blessing, and opposes it as a rule. The evolution of heaven and earth is a process of purposeless participation. In contrast, the operation of society cannot be separated from the role of people themselves. As Yang Guorong said,

society cannot be separated from the role of man. Natural laws are the external form of heaven and are not changed by human subjective will, but man can act reasonably on heaven. If you respond to it with governance, it will be auspicious; if you respond to it with chaos, it will be auspicious. How to act on the sky? Governance is good, disruption is bad. It should be noted that heaven has its own way of doing things, and nature and society cannot escape the unchanging laws, but humans can act reasonably with this law, which is also the meaning of being able to influence.

#### 4. The third essence of "Heaven": the meaning of knowing the heaven

To understand Xunzi's thoughts, you must first understand his experience and character. That is, all his arguments are based on the scope of experience that the senses can obtain. Xunzi's thoughts must first be based on experience. The meaning of knowing heaven is to start from the standpoint of experience and be based on "natural success". When it is practiced, its nourishment is appropriate, and its birth is not damaged. This is called knowing the sky. In Xunzi's view, knowing the sky is based on individual behavior. If an individual's behavior is appropriate and can conform to the principles of nature, the needs can be met and life can be free from harm. Mencius also mentioned knowing the sky. Mencius said: "Those who do their hearts know their nature. If they know their nature, they know the sky. Mencius believed that knowing the sky should start from the original heart, from the heart to the nature, and then knowing the sky. The difference between the two lies in their different starting points. The former opens "knowing the sky" from the heart of experience, and the latter "knowing the sky" from the moral heart. The academic community has mixed praises and criticisms about the advantages and disadvantages of the two, and many people have said it. For example, Feng Youlan believes that Xunzi "has a clear-cut and clear-cut attitude, which can emanate the mind and liberate productivity..."[3], and Zhong Tai It is believed that people today do not believe in heaven, but have attacked Confucius and Mencius's destiny, and do not know that people know that destiny is in heaven. [4] But Mou Zongsan's evaluation seems to be more gentle. Although he believed that Xunzi could not explore the root of his words, he also affirmed the spirit of his construction and praised Taoism to cure the poor and weak later on. Xunzi's spirit of constructing was "controlling the destiny of heaven and using it." Wang Xianqian's note: It is benevolent and used. Later, some people interpreted that man conquered nature. Although it was an over-interpretation, Xunzi's empiricist tendency was completely renewed in the ideological world at that time, so that Mou Zongsan lamented that the dimness of learning was a misfortune of the Chinese nation.

Xunzi also said that the sage does not seek to know the heaven. So, is it contradictory to "knowing the sky" and "not seeking to know the sky"? Otherwise, if you don't seek to know the heaven, focus on human affairs, and "life", and know the heaven, focus on experience. Therefore, gentlemen think it is literary, while people think it is god. In Xunzi's view, natural phenomena such as rain were just natural laws and had nothing to do with sacrifices and divination. However, the people at that time believed that it was the role of gods. The purpose of not seeking to know the sky was to eliminate the mystical color and transcend the teleological imagination of the sky.

#### 5. Conclusion

To sum up, first of all, Xunzi's "Theory of Heaven" is definitely not simply attributed to "Heaven" to a kind of unwilling heaven, but behind it is more about expressing the "Heaven" in the philosophical sense. Secondly, Xunzi's ultimate goal is not to explore the specific functions of heaven and man, but to actively guide the "function" of heaven into the human world on the premise of clearly defining the difference between heaven and man, so that "ritual" can have the ultimate legitimacy and govern the human world. This is also the fundamental point that the

"division of heaven and man" wants to express. Therefore, "Theory of Heaven" is its philosophical basis in Xunzi's ideological system.

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