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1.1 Naturalism vs. Supernaturalism

Chinese model of ethics

Dominant metaphor: 道 **dào (path)**

Ethics is about *guidance.*

Paths are **natural** physical structures that we can use for guidance.

Paths don't issue commands; they are just there, **part of the natural world**.

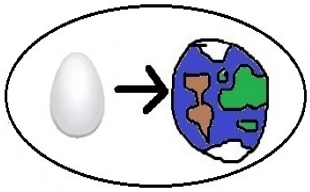
So there is nothing about ethics that should make us think that there is anything beyond the natural world. Hence the **default view** for classical China is **naturalism.**

Naturalism: the view that there is only **one** kind of reality, which consists of the natural world around us, which we can see, touch, and hear.

According to the naturalist, the world around us which we investigate with science, **is all there is**.

But this doesn't mean the Chinese naturalists cannot have creation stories. It's just that their creation stories are **natural** creation stories.

"**The universe was hatched from an egg**": this story is still naturalistic, so long as the egg is part of the natural (scientifically investigable) world.

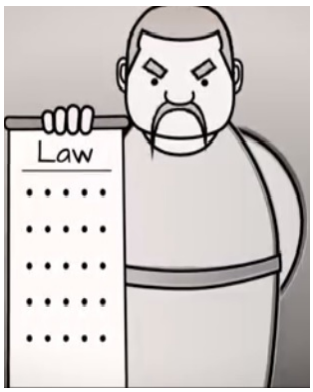


the natural world

(The West also has **naturalistic** accounts of creation, such as the scientific theory of the Big Bang.)

Western model of ethics

Dominant metaphor: **law**



Ethics is about *commands.* ("Thou shalt not steal.")

Laws are commands requiring that everybody behave in a certain way; violating these laws results in punishment.

Laws presuppose a **lawgiver**.

And a **lawgiver** must have **authority** if his laws are to be *truly* binding.

(After all, some commands are uttered by those whose words have no genuine binding force.)

*So where does the **authority** of the ethical lawgiver come from?*

Traditional Western answer: The lawgiver's **supernatural status** gives him the authority to make laws; the ethical lawgiver is **God**.

This pushes the West towards **supernaturalism**: a view of the world in which there are **two** levels of reality:

(1) the supernatural (typically, God)
(2) the natural world (the everyday world we live in)

Something to consider: can a Western philosopher be an ethical naturalist, i.e., can he explain the authority of ethical laws *without* believing there exists something outside the natural world, such as God?