These handouts are for personal educational use only: do not copy, cite, or distribute.

1.10 The doctrine of 天命 tiān mìng (Mandate of Nature)

For the Shang, as we've seen, the presumed basis of **political legitimacy** was family authority and ancestral hierarchy.

Duke of Zhou's rival account: 天命 tiān mìng (Mandate of Nature)

The Duke of Zhou, on the other hand, emphasizes the **instability** of the situation: there's no guarantee of eternal rule.

*The **ancestor affiliation hierachy** (that depends on bonds of respect and veneration)*

may be overturned by

*the **unpredictable and awesome forces of nature**.*

The Shang lost the Mandate of Heaven, the mandate to rule, partly due to floods, famines and other natural disasters. The mandate thus passed to the Zhou. **One day the Zhou may also lose the mandate; that is unpredictable**. The Zhou can only try to preserve its natural mandate by guiding the social world with as much 德 **dé** (virtuosity) as possible.

The Duke of Zhou's doctrine justified their overturning and replacing the Shang, and implicitly predicts **the dynastic cycle**: the idea that 德**dé** (virtuosity) arises in a ruling family (producing stability and prosperity), then declines over generations (producing instability and ruin), before it collapses entirely and a new ruling family gains the natural Mandate as leader bringing order and prosperity to the country anew.

<u>People often draw parallels between</u>:

天命 **(the Natural Mandate)**	and	**the European "Divine Right of Kings"** (which asserts that a ruler's right to rule comes from the will of God)

However, the Duke of Zhou's doctrine of 天命 **tiān mìng** has nothing to do with a God-given **right** for a family to rule, but rather is about the **rise and decline of a ruling family's leadership virtuosity** and its relation to securing the natural ("Heavenly") mandate to lead. The two doctrines are both theories of political legitimacy but quite different in form and content.