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8.4 Xunzi's naturalism

Here we'll see how Xunzi's naturalism draws on Zhuangzi's:
First, seeing 天 tiān as a **non-prescriptive** context of normative guidance.

Xunzi's naturalism shares much with Mozi's, except that Xunzi's **nature** is completely **depersonalized**, which is more like Zhuangzi. For Xunzi,

天 **tiān** (nature)	… does not guide us, tell us or care how we behave.
	... does not have desires (e.g., for human or life benefit).
	… is not the source of normative authority.

*So then why, according to Xunzi, does Mozi think that 天 **tiān** (nature) cares about us?*

Xunzi's explanation: We human beings have adapted modes of behaviour (social *dào*s) that fit into the natural *dào*. These benefit us, so we treat 天 **tiān** (nature) as caring about us.

So Xunzi teaches that in place of 天 **tiān** *(nature)* caring about our well being, we humans should invent **social, organizing** dàos that adapt to 天 **tiān** (nature). If we follow the right social dàos, we get 利 **lì** (benefit). If we don't, we get 害 **hài** (harm) as a natural, unintended outcome.

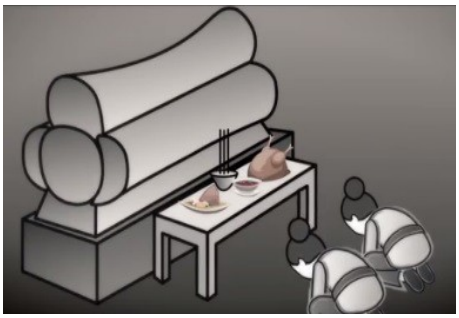
How do we find these right forms of social organization?

Xunzi's view is that they have been found already—by the **sage kings.** They pondered and invented an artificial morality in the form of **禮 lǐ**, the **Confucian rituals**. That is why he rejects Mozi's proposals to consider reforms to **past traditions** that are **more beneficial**. Great danger awaits those who deviate from established paths that have worked in the past. Don't encourage **people to think that conventional morality can be reformed—**stop doing social-political philosophy and debating about ethics.

The importance of ritual

Ritual 禮 **lǐ** plays important roles in managing our unruly human nature. Part of the wisdom of the sage kings was their understanding of human nature and the ritual means to constrain it.

Example: the funeral ceremony



One of Xunzi's key examples is the funeral ritual. When a family member dies, relatives are consumed with grief, anger, despair and denial. The funeral ritual provides outlets that guide these feelings and aid us in processing them. They bring us together with others to support us and reinforce our social solidarity.

Both rituals and music help us manage our emotions. They enable us to go on in cooperative and productive social enterprises by preventing disruption from powerful human feelings.