慎到註譯

SHEN DAO

Text, Translation, and Study

John Emerson

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SHEN DAO:  
MYSTIC AND BUREAUCRAT 
I 

Shen Dao is said to have been a member of the Jixia Academy in Qi during the Hundred Schools era, sometime between 350 BC and 275 BC. Xunzi criticized him, Xunzi’s student Han Feizi acknowledged him as one of three masters of Legalism (along with Shang Yang and Shen Buhai), and the author of the Tianxia chapter of Zhuangzi discussed him at some length. Details about his life are scanty and uncertain, but we can probably conclude that he existed and was not purely legendary.

The Hundred Schools era was perhaps the most fertile period in the history of Chinese philosophy, but because of censorship and the destruction of war, few of its texts survive, usually in heavily-edited late versions, and many figures are known only as names attached to anecdotes. In the case of Shen Dao, the available material consists of a late text called the Shenzi, the three discussions mentioned above, and scattered quotations and anecdotes of widely differing value. Thompson has carefully compiled and edited the materials that remain, and I have used the text he produced.

Shen Dao is classified sometimes as a Daoist, sometimes as a Legalist, and sometimes as a follower of Huanglao, but these late retroactive classifications are not very helpful. There were no organized Daoist, Legalist, or Huanglao schools comparable to the Mohist and Confucian schools, and these classifications mostly just serve to lump tendencies. Insofar as these three labels mean anything, they are probably all applicable to Shen Dao.¹

Given the decimation of the sources, it’s hard to discuss the history of Chinese philosophy during that era without the help of speculative assumptions. The dates of the DDJ are even more uncertain than Shen Dao’s, but it seems that at the time when the
Guodian texts were interred, the 81-chapter DDJ had not yet been compiled, and that parts of it may not yet have been written. We aren’t sure of the date of the Guodian tomb either (probably around 300 BC), but it is notable that none of the passages in the DDJ which seem to have been influenced by Shen Dao (in chapters 5, 27, 49, 60, 62, and 81) are found in the Guodian text. In general, I have assumed that Shen Dao was earlier than or contemporary to the authors of the later layers of the DDJ and that they were aware of his work and were responding to and adapting it. This seems more likely than the other way around, but back-and-forth communication might have been possible too -- during the debates of that period, the free-lance “persuaders” freely adapted, borrowed, and stole one another’s ideas.

In addition to the question of “schools”, there’s also the question as to whether Shen Dao was a mystic, a political philosopher, or the author of a management handbook. Most of the fragments edited by Thompson are on the political management side, shading towards political philosophy, but in the “Tianxia” chapter of Zhuangzi Shen Dao seems more like a mystic. This is probably just the result of accidents of preservation, and the answer may again simply be “all three”. During the three centuries or so between Confucius’ era and the establishment of the Qin empire, Chinese government and society underwent a revolutionary transformation, and China’s tiny literate elite of that era was so committed to government service that, in effect, a new kind of man had to be produced to serve the new kind of state (or, in the case of Yang Zhu and Zhuangzi, to withdraw from it).2 Shen Dao’s new man was a bland, faceless civil servant who was just doing his job, but he may also have been a mystic of sorts. The Warring States political and social transformation included the rationalization and modernization of government. Already in Confucius’ time, rulers advised by obscure proto-Legalists were taking steps to improve agriculture, increase the efficiency of tax collection, and increase state revenues, which would be spent either on on wars meant to gain the ruler even more taxpaying territory. or else on the pleasures of the ruler and the splendors of the court. This transformation was
the social background of Hundred Schools philosophy. "Legalists" favored military over luxury spending but generally supported the transformation. Mohists supported the improvement of agriculture and the rationalization of government, but not the militarization, the extraction of taxes, or the luxury spending. Confucians opposed most of it, even the improvement of agriculture, and concerned themselves entirely with maintaining the traditional ways, albeit in a reformed and moralized form (*Analects XI-16, XII-7, XII-9, XIII-4*).

The authors of the *Daodejing* also generally distanced themselves from this modernization, either in favor of an idealized primitive state of society, or else in favor a reclusive sort of mysticism, and the Confucian ritualism and the moralistic, interventionalist Mohist and Confucian reforms were equally unappealing to them. However, Shen Dao was clearly among the modernizers and for that reason can be called a Legalist (though this does not mean that he advocated the brutal methods with which Legalism has come to be identified;), but at the same time, several passages in the *Daodejing* closely resemble passages from Shen Dao. This problem will be discussed below.

There are two pitfalls to be avoided when discussing these reforms. On the one hand, modernization and rationalization sound like good things, but when you understand that they can be summarized as “Squeeze as much tax money as you can out of the miserable peasantry so that you can afford to live high while sending large numbers of them off on endless bloody wars of conquest”, they don't seem so wonderful. From that point of view it is tempting to identify the new rationalized, centralized Chinese states (and Empire) with modern European totalitarian states -- or at least with the absolutist states of the early modern age. At the same time, however, while there was a murderous dark side to this modernization, the previous state of affairs had not been as idyllic as traditionalists portrayed it to be, and the improvements to agriculture and some of the administrative and economic improvements were quite positive. Many of the institutional and legal innovations made in China during that era (regarding the
selection and supervision of government officials, the direct, non-feudal legal and tax obligations of commoners, or the alienability of land) are now standard policy almost everywhere in the world. For better or worse, both public administration and business management today usually operate on what could be called Legalist principles.

II

Much of Shen Dao’s thinking about government (as well as that of Confucius) focuses on the principal / agent problem: how do you ensure that an official in charge of a government bureau, or a local administrator in a place remote from the capital, will actually work for the public interest (or for the ruler’s interest) rather than using his office to enrich himself and attain his own personal goals? This question was and is central for all political and organization philosophy, and it was necessary to find ways of answering it before large-scale organizations of any kind could develop.³

Confucius’ answer to this question was that the ruler should appoint men of the highest excellence (xian 贤 “worthies”), eminent and widely-admired gentlemen who kept to a high ethical standard and governed their actions according to models deriving from their deep knowledge of the ancient traditions, men who could be expected to do the right thing and need not be closely supervised. In the traditionalist system idealized by Confucius, each official shared in the prestige of government. The king, the lesser officials, and the local lords were all gentlemen -- honored personages organized in a ritual hierarchy of respect and deference. The king consulted his officials about important decisions, and they, drawing on their mastery of the traditional precedents, would give him their judgments; if an official thought that the king’s decision was in error he would remonstrate with him. Confucian gentlemen were principals and not agents or tools, versatile and not limited to a single purpose, and they were not disposable, interchangeable units. They acted according to their own principles, and the ruler
had confidence in them because he knew their principles were good. Confucius’ philosophy was reactive, an idealized traditionalist response to the transformation of government into a military and fiscal machine, and the transformation of officialdom into servile underlings of the ruler, and while many Confucians served honorably as officials during the Warring States period, and while some rulers may have tempered their behavior in response to the Confucian preaching, it is unlikely that any ruler ever even tried to put Confucius’s precepts fully into effect.

Confucius’ ideal was criticized by Mozi and his followers. The Mohists also believed that only worthies should be appointed, but they also held that officials should be chosen for their abilities rather than for their virtues and cultural knowledge, and they held that officials should direct their actions toward getting results rather than simply following traditional precedents, and they also believed that the splendid traditional rituals (and even family funerals) were useless and wasteful. They put into place the beginnings a chain-of-command hierarchy governed by reward and punishment, contrasting sharply with the essentially feudal Confucian hierarchy of semi-autonomous noblemen. But the Mohist goal was still to make everyone good: ideally, the subordinates would do good because they were themselves good, but if they strayed their (also good) underlings would report them and their wise and virtuous superiors would discipline or remove them.

Like the Mohists, the Legalists governed for results rather than following tradition, and for them economic growth was also a primary goal. However, they de-emphasized goodness and excellence entirely. The excellent and good cannot be trusted, because their obedience is not certain: either from personal pride or from ethical scruples, there would be some orders they would not obey. Instead of the excellent (賢 xian), the Legalists employed the capable (能 neng), supervising them closely. As long as a man was good at his job, his personal qualities were irrelevant; it was not important if he was in some inessential respect mediocre or flawed, and the fear of punishment would keep him honest. (To a degree, flawed human beings were even
preferred, since they would be grateful for the opportunity, totally dependent on their masters, and willing to do almost anything).

According to this philosophy of government, government officials are employees assigned specific tasks and are to be rewarded only after they have successfully completed their assignments. Personal cultural and moral excellence are not of concern to the state and are not to be rewarded or recognized. Officials are merely cogs and should not allowed to use their own judgment about important questions; they should be faceless and need not serve as shining examples of goodness and excellence for lesser subjects. They should just do their jobs and live their lives, enjoying the rewards of success and suffering the penalties of failure. No matter how powerful and wealthy they might become, and regardless of their origins, these new officials were underlings and not aristocrats, and they served at the pleasure of the ruler. They were expected to be subservient in a way that aristocrats could never be.

If the Chinese tradition had in fact been capable of giving unambiguous, workable answers to every question, and if all Chinese noblemen had all been perfectly excellent and good, the Confucian system might have worked. As it happened, however, this system of personalized government by men of excellence proved highly susceptible to graft, nepotism, and ultimately usurpation, if an excellent minister was able to convince a large enough group of supporters that he was more excellent than the actual king. Confucius’ men of excellence (worthies, xian) were really just idealized versions of the proud, greedy, ambitious, contentious, brawling nobles (or later, ambitious parvenus) characteristic of court life in every society, and in order to find his model society Confucius had to look to scanty records of the early Zhou written more than five centuries before his own birth.
The details of Shen Dao’s philosophy of government, organization, and management can be summed up under five heads: differentiation and delegation, incentives, impersonality and impartiality, hierarchy and rank, and circumstance (ši).

**Differentiation and delegation.** Shen Dao described an organization within which everyone has a clearly defined role and where each official is working on a clearly defined task assigned by his superior. The ruler must not be hands-on and must not rely on his own abilities, and he should never jump in to do an official’s work. Likewise, officials should never be allowed to perform tasks which properly should be performed either by other officials or by the ruler. There should be no overlapping areas of responsibility, and two officials should never be assigned the same task without one being put in command of the other. Officials also should not be allowed make themselves indispensable by taking on multiple responsibilities, and they should not be allowed to take the initiative by going beyond the specific orders that they’ve been given. Most of these rules are for the purpose of establishing accountability and a clear chain of command, but some of them are also intended to prevent officials from becoming over-powerful and capable of usurping the throne (a danger that also preoccupied Confucius).

**Incentives** The Legalists all proposed that reward and punishment be relied on for motivation, rather than exhortation, moral preaching, and moral example. (In this they differ from the Confucians and substantially from the Mohists). Shen Dao states this principle very clearly, pointing out that if you can use incentives to align what your subjects want with what you want, you will be successful, but when you ask them to forget what they themselves want and instead do what you want, you will fail. This realism led to accusations of amorality, but it produced a system which did not require the moral reform of the whole nation in order to work. Of the Legalists, Shang Yang is known for advocating moderate rewards and harsh penalties (e.g. mutilation,
torture, death, and the extermination of whole families) but there’s no positive evidence that Shen Dao proposed this, and his fragments on the topic of punishment (108, 116, and 117) are inconclusive, if anything tending toward the relatively merciful side.

**Impersonality and impartiality** Like Mozi, Shen Dao advocated impartiality, but he developed the implications of impartiality more fully than Mozi did. Not favoring friends and relations and not diverting state resources to private and family ends were just the beginning. An impartial minister also will not allow his own social goals or his own feelings of right and wrong divert him from the fulfillment of his assigned tasks (no “private good”). There are certainly problems with this principle, but it is no different than the ethic of the contemporary business world (“I’ve got a job to do”; "a man’s gotta do what a man’s gotta do”) or the ethic of contemporary professionalism, according to which lawyers or civil servants must do their jobs regardless of their personal feelings about their clients or about desired social outcomes; this is what it is to be an agent rather than a principal. To disagree with Shen Dao here is to make a fundamental criticism of contemporary institutional organization.

Shen Dao’s depersonalization of government amounts to the rejection of the great man theory of politics and history and the the development of a rudimentary theory of society:

*The reason why the virtue of the Three Emperors and the Five Hegemons matched that of Heaven and Earth, reached the ghosts and the spirits, and embraced all living creatures was that their helpers (助) were many.*

If a prince brings his state to ruin, it’s not just the error of a single man; if a prince brings his state to order, it’s not just the effort of a single man. Thus Yao could not have survived what destroyed Jie, but he is credited with unsurpassed goodness while Jie’s name is notorious for all-pervading evil. One was served well by his men, and the other was not. Thus the timber in the Great Hall of State is not cut from a single tree; a white fox-fur coat is not
made of the fur of a single fox; and order and disorder, security and peril, glory and disgrace do not come from the efforts of one man (55-56).

In other words, states are organizational and institutional, with their own inner dynamic, and history is not just the acts of Emperors, good or bad.

**Hierarchy and rank** Almost all Chinese philosophers affirm the principle of hierarchy or rank, which is required for there to be any political organization larger and more complex than the hunter-gatherer band. Some are leaders, most are led; some command, most obey. Shen Dao goes a step further by requiring that every relationship be hierarchal: whenever two are working together, one shall be in command. Between them Shen Dao and Mozi have provided a rationale for the principle of rank:

*In the beginning of human life, when there was yet no law and no government, the custom was “everyone according to his own justice”. Accordingly each man had his own idea of justice, two men had two different ideas and ten men had ten different ideas – the more people, the more different ideas of justice. (Mozi, Ch. 11, “Shang Tong I”, p. 110; I have adapted Mei’s translation.)*

*There can be many worthies, but there cannot be many rulers; there can be no worthies, but there cannot be no ruler. (Shen Dao #109).*

This corresponds to the transition between primitive egalitarianism and rank society, or early state society:

*The essential criterion of egalitarian societies is the social recognition of as many positions of valued status as there were individuals capable of filling them.... Ranking exists when there are fewer positions of valued status than persons capable of filling them. A rank society has means of limiting access of its members to status positions that would hold on the basis of sex,*

The problem with egalitarianism and natural leadership is not so much that you don’t get good leaders that way, because often you do, but that you often have more than one individual capable of leadership and eager to lead, but without there being a mechanism for deciding between them. The common outcomes in such cases are either the splitting of the group or civil war. The restriction of the number of available positions of power is thus not primarily because of differences of ability; the motive is the attainment of unified leadership; there must be a single final "decider", no more and no less.

Leadership is not granted because of ability or merit. Someone is a leader because they have been given that position by a recognized process. The purpose of having a leader is to give the group a leader, not to reward the person chosen. (The emperor is enthroned for sake of the empire; the empire is not established for the sake of the emperor: Shen Dao #22). The purpose of naming a single leader is to make it possible for the group to coordinate its actions while avoiding infighting. (This is the “captain of the ship” justification for government). The most important thing about the leader is just that he is the leader (has shi 勢); preferably he should also be talented and virtuous, but he does not have to be the most talented and virtuous of all, and if a member of the community happens to be more talented and virtuous than the leader, that does not give him any authority. He must obey, just like anyone else. (It should be mentioned that, while the Chinese commitment to hierarchy and unity did make empire possible and did give China considerable periods of peaceful unity, it also stood in the way of the Chinese acceptance of multinationalism and individual rights).

Position. Hanfeizi’s interpretation emphasized Shen Dao’s concept of shi 勢 -- a theory of power. Shi has been translated as “energy”, “position”, “strategic advantage”, “political purchase”, “circumstance”, “situation”, “disposition”, and “propensity”. The
concept is probably military in origin but plays a role in many areas of Chinese thought. In general it means the dynamic tendencies and instabilities already there in a given situation, which an actor can use to his advantage if he is able to perceive them and position himself favorably to them. Sunzi uses the metaphor of potential energy -- force multipliers like cocked crossbows which can be activated with the mere touch of a trigger. In military affairs, anyone who understands the shi of a situation when his opponent doesn’t has an enormous advantage, because he can let the natural development of the situation does most of his work for him.

In Hanfeizi and Shen Dao this term is more narrowly used. Shen Dao’s point is that the ruler gets his power, not from his personal qualities or from anything he does himself, but from his position as ruler, which allows him to get others to do the work for him. He makes his point hyperbolically, saying that the most wonderful of the great Sage Kings of legend were powerless before they became kings, whereas the worst of the legendary kings had enormous power despite their entire lack of any personal merit. Beyond this, he says that rulers are best served by ordinary, imperfect, closely-supervised men whose strengths and weaknesses are known. He’s not really advocating total indifference to personal character, but is merely making a vivid statement of the analytic distinction between personal power and the power of position, and emphasizing the realistic awareness that government administration is not the achievement of goodness by the good, but is the use of realistic methods to achieve specific practical goals.

In practice, the Legalist application of the doctrine of shi was to organize government in such a way as to ensure that the shi was always with the ruler. Procedures ritualized the ruler’s remoteness and overwhelming power and prevented officials from building their own shi by minimizing their ability to initiate actions, forbidding them to take public credit for beneficial acts while forcing them to take the blame for cruelty and failure, limiting their range of operations, concealing the full scope and
ultimate goals of operations, and having spies everywhere. By these methods the ruler would be able to maintain complete control of policy and protect himself against usurpation.

IV

The Shen Dao of the Thompson fragments does not much resemble Zhuangzi’s Shen Dao, though there are a few exceptions, notably #84 and #A5:

84: The virtue essence (德精 de jing) is subtle and invisible, acute and inexhaustible. Thus external things do not clog its interior.

A5: Just attain the mindlessness of a thing, and avoid eminence and sageliness: a clod does not depart from the Dao.

Zhuangzi’s Shen Dao seems to be a mystic or a Stoic in search of ataraxia or equanimity:

Proceed only when pushed,
Start off only when dragged,
As the whirlwind spins,
As the feather turns,
As the grindstone revolves,
Being perfect you will have no flaw,
Moving or still you will not err;
Never will you be blamed for anything...

A thing without knowledge does not have the troubles which come from establishing selfhood or the ties that come from utilizing knowledge; whether moving or still it does not depart from pattern....

“Simply attain to being like a thing without knowledge. Have no use for excellence or sagehood; a lump of soil does not miss the Way”

Graham, Zhuangzi, p. 279-80).
In most passages where Xunzi mentions Shen Dao the orientation is governmental, but there’s also this:

*Shen Dao had insight into “holding back” but none into “leading the way”…*

*Xunzi, vol. II, p. 553*

Shen Dao also had a cosmology and a philosophy of the self, though in what we have these are not well developed. The interpenetration of cosmology, spirituality, and principles of government that we see in many of the Chinese philosophers seems strange to us, but the Chinese state was not secular: it was supposed to be the focus of all value, including spiritual value, and for those permitted to participate in government, government service was supposed to be the most meaningful part of their life. Like Yang Zhu, Shen Dao showed his audience a way to attain detachment from government service, but what he showed was a way to attain an emotional detachment while still serving in government -- by becoming an impassive "thing".

The detachment proposed by Shen Dao for the ruler was the detachment of Heaven, and his argument here was not traditional and may have been original to him. The Sage King, whose normal activities bring us prosperity, peace and order even though he does not concern himself with us but only with the machinery of government, is compared to the detachment of Heaven and Earth, who likewise do not concern themselves with us, but by their normal activities warm us and feed us just the same. Shen Dao’s universe was as mechanistic and indifferent as his governmental system, but good things could be found within them, and ultimately the serene detachment of Heaven, Earth, the Sage, the mystic, and the neutral bureaucrat became the model for everyone.⁶
Notes


With the understanding that I’m referring to tendencies rather than schools, I will continue to use the terms “Legalist” and “Daoist” to designate the same thinkers that they always have. Rather than to deny that Shen Dao and Shen Buhai are Legalists, I would describe the Legalist school differently -- as a group of political realists, only some of whom were ruthless and cruel.

2. Probably not a new kind of woman: this social transformation didn’t change women’s roles much.

3. Graft, nepotism, and usurpation have been constant problems throughout history, and the problem is found not only in government but also in the business world. In the development of trade in early modern Europe, for example, it had to be decided whether the captain of a trading ship financed by someone else was his funder’s debtor, employee, or partner, what his specific obligations were, what were his shares of the risk and the profit, and above all, how he could be kept honest.

4. *Analects* II-12: “The accomplished scholar is not a tool” 器 qi. Originally a qi was a man-made metal object intended for a specific purpose – a sacrificial vessel, weapon, or tool. Later vessels made of clay were also called qi (*Laozi* ch. 11). Other appearances of qi in the *Analects*: III-22-1: “Kuan Chung was a vessel of small capacity”; XIII-25: “uses them according to their capacity”; V-4 “You are a vessel – a sacrificial vessel”; XV-9 “a craftsman must first sharpen his tools”.

6. Chad Hansen has compared Shen Dao to the Stoics. Marcus Aurelius’s universe was modeled on the state:

> The universe should be regarded as a kind of constitutional state (4.3)

> If that be so, the world is a kind of state. For in what other common constitution can we claim that the whole world participates? (4.4)

Perhaps Shen Dao’s cosmology was also like this, and the “unthinking clod” was his version of Marcus Aurelius's unperturbed *ataraxia* in a mechanical, naturalistic universe.
About the translation

In 1979 P. M. Thompson published *The Shen Tzu Fragments* (Oxford, 1979), a careful attempt to separate the actual words of Shen Dao from the legendary and pseudoepigraphical accretions. For reasons of his own, however, when Thompson published his textual reconstruction he chose not to publish the translation which was part of the PhD dissertation from which his book was taken (*A Translation of the Shen Tzu Fragments*, vol. 3 of unpublished dissertation, U. Washington, Seattle). As a result, the recovered Shen Dao text has so far been available only to those who can read classical Chinese.

In this translation I have used Thompson’s edited text (inserting some of his suggested emendations) and have generally followed Thompson’s interpretations, noting the cases where I have disagreed with Thompson. The greater part of the Shen Dao corpus is unproblematic and can be straightforwardly translated. There are also a number of passages which are difficult only because of a single obscure word or phrase, but Thompson has satisfactorily decided most of these cases. (In cases where I was uncertain I sometimes followed Thompson’s version *faute de mieux*, which is not quite fair since he chose not to publish his translation. But his guesses were probably better than mine would have been).

The genuinely problematic passages are of two kinds. First, there are a number of fragments which are so brief and so lacking in context that it’s hard to tell what they are trying to say, or in some cases, even to construe them at all. I originally intended simply to omit these fragments, but in the end I decided to include them for the sake of readers for whom the complete Chinese text will be useful. Second, there are a number of important passages whose Chinese text is hard to construe, though the meaning seems clear enough. In these cases I have slid past the subtleties and rough spots and have written what I think that Shen Dao was trying to say. This is a risky method, but sometimes it the only way to make sense of a passage, and our understanding
of the most ancient Chinese philosophy relies on this kind of reading more than we would wish.

This translation is more readerly than scholarly. Its primary purpose is to make the thought of Shen Dao available to readers of English. However, I have included Thompson’s Chinese text for those who can read Classical Chinese, and they will be able to see where my translations are conjectural. I have translated out some of the specifics of Chinese culture — catties become pounds, kings are enthroned rather than elevated, gambling is done with dice rather than with belt buckles, and so on.

The translation below is labeled three ways. Each fragment is preceded by the number Thompson gave it (#1 - #123 and SP1-SP5). Fragments #1-#67 comprise sections I-VII of Shen Maoshang’s 16th century *Shenzi* (that is to say, the parts of the *Shenzi* accepted by Thompson), and I have divided the text following the Chinese text and have given these sections their Chinese titles. Finally, I have divided the text further into thematic groups A-Q, of which groups A-K comprise sections I-VII, some of which have been divided. The first 67 fragments are given in order, but I have appended to my own groups A-K whichever later fragments (from #68-123, SP1-SP5) seem appropriate. Of these, #73-#78 form a coherent group and comprise group L. The remaining 23 fragments have been roughly sorted by theme into groups M-Q.

Every passage can be located both in my translation and in Thompson’s text by two letters, e.g. “B7” or “G107.” (Following the translation I discuss the text in more detail and provide finding lists).
慎到

Shen Dao: Text and Translation

Section I: Respect Virtue

威德

I: A

#1-#6

1. 天有明，不憂人之闇也；地有財，不憂人之貧也；聖人有德，而不憂人之危也。

2. 天雖不憂人之闇也，開戶開牖必取己明焉，則天無事矣。

3. 地雖不憂人之貧也，伐木刈草，必取己富焉；則地無事矣。

4. 聖人雖不憂人之危也，百姓順上而比於其下，必取己安焉；則聖人無事矣。

5. 故聖人處上，能無害人，不能使人無己害也；則百姓除其害矣。

6. 聖人之有天下也，受之也，非取之也；百姓之於聖人也，養之也，非使聖人養己也；則聖人無事矣。
Impartiality and wuwei

1. Heaven has light and does not care that men are in darkness; Earth is fruitful and does not care that men are impoverished; the sage (聖) has virtue (德) and does not care that men are imperiled.

2. Although Heaven does not care that men are in darkness, if they open their doors and windows, they will assuredly get light for themselves; but Heaven does nothing (無事).

3. Although Earth does not care that men are impoverished, if they fell the trees and harvest the plants, they will assuredly get wealth for themselves; but Earth does nothing.

4. Although the Sage does not care that men are endangered, if the people (百姓) conform to the superior and accept their lower status, they will assuredly get peace for themselves; but the Sage does nothing.

5. So the Sage in high position does not harm (不害) men, though he cannot keep men from harming each other. It is the people themselves who eliminate the harm.

6. The Sage possesses the world (天下 = “Empire”) as something he has been given, not as something he has taken; the people take care of the sage, and are not cared for by him; for the sage does nothing.
1: Laozi Ch. 5: *Heaven is not humane: it treats the myriad creatures as straw dogs. The sage is not humane: he treats the people as straw dogs.* Xunzi also stresses the indifference of Heaven and Earth to human concerns.

2: “Does nothing” translates the phrase *wushi*, 無事, which has much the same meaning as *wuwei*, 无为. It might also be translated “is not involved” or "does not concern itself”.

4. I have replaced 準 with 順, following Thompson.

“The Sage” is the standard English translation of the phrase 聖人 *sheng ren*. However, in Chinese philosophy the Sage is not merely a wise man, but a man of power, the wise founder and ruler of a political unit -- usually an empire or kingdom, though in the *Daodejing* it seems to be a stateless utopia. "聖人" is a contested term, and the Daoist Sage is different than the Confucian or any other Sage. (The American Sages would be the Founding Fathers, perhaps including Lincoln).

5: *The Sage in high position does not harm* (不害) men. In chapter 60 of *Laozi* it is said that when the Empire follows Dao "the spirits 鬼神 do not harm men, nor does the Sage harm men"; in *Laozi* 81, it is said that the Way of Heaven benefits and does not harm. In the *Nei Ye* chapter of *Guanzi* (thought to be from the same tradition as *Laozi*; p. 75, Roth) it is said that the sage is not harmed by men nor vulnerable to others’ harm; sageliness is here identified with the vital
essence 精 jing, which is manifested in the world as the spirits, and in men as sageliness. (不害 buhai “does not harm” is Shen Buhai’s given name; this term is found in the Shijing)

These assurances of innocence suggest that the Sage historically traces back to intimidating shaman-like figures who were in communication with the unseen world and possessed of spiritual powers, and thus capable either of benefit or of harm; the Daoist sage, by contrast, is purely benevolent.
7. 毛嫱，西施，天下之至姣；衣之以皮倛，則見者皆走；易之以玄錫，則行者皆止。

8. 由此觀之，則玄錫色之助也，姣者辭之，則色厭矣。

9. 走背跋躍窮谷，野走千裏，藥；走背辭藥則足廢。

10. 故騰蛇遊霧，飛龍乘雲；雲罷霧霽，與蚯蚓同矣，則失其所乘也。

11. 故賢而屈於不肖者，權輕也；不肖而能服賢者，位尊也。

12. 堯為匹夫，不能治其鄰家，而桀為天子，能亂天下。
Vehicles and helpers

7. Mao Qiang and Xi Shi were the loveliest women in the world. If they had dressed in demon garb, passersby would have fled from them; but when they changed into fine black linen, passersby gathered to look.

8. From this we can see that fine black linen is a helper (助) of beauty: if lovely women fail to wear it, their beauty will not please.

9. If porters can cross mountain valleys and walk hundreds of miles through the wilderness, it’s because they salve their feet; if the porters fail to salve their feet, their feet will be hurt.

10. Thus

The serpent soars with the mists, the dragon rides the clouds;
but if the mist and the clouds clear, they both become crawling worms

-- because they’ve lost their vehicle (乘).

11. So, if a worthy (賢) bows down to mediocre man (不肖) it’s because the worthy’s authority (權) is not weighty; if a mediocre man submits to a worthy, it’s because the worthy’s position (位) is honored.

12. When the sage Yao was a peasant, he could not govern even his neighborhood; but when the villain Jie was Emperor, he could disorder the whole world.
由此觀之，賢未足以服眾，而勢位足以屈賢也。

故無名而斷者，權重也；彌弱而矰高者，乘於風也；身不肖而令行者，得助於眾也。

故舉重越高者，不慢於藥；愛赤子者，不慢於保；絕險歷遠者，不慢於御。此得助則成，釋助則廢矣。

夫三王五伯之德，參於天地，通於鬼神，周於生物者，其得助博也。
13. From this we can see that worth (賢) is not enough to make the multitude obey, whereas a favorable situation (勢) and high position are enough to make even the worthies submit.

14. So if a nobody (無名) makes the decisions, it’s because his authority (權) is weighty; if a weak crossbow shoots high, it’s because the bolt is carried by the wind; and if a man is mediocre (不肖) but his orders bring results, it’s because the multitude (眾) is helping (助) him.

15. Thus, if you carry heavy loads and climb high you are careful about the salve. If you love an infant you are careful about its nurse. If you cross mountain passes and travel far you are careful about your coach. With the help you need (助), you succeed; without it you fail.

16. The reason why the virtue of the Three Emperors and the Five Hegemons matched that of Heaven and Earth, reached the ghosts and the spirits, and embraced all living creatures was that their helpers (助) were many.

燕鼎之重乎千鈞，乘于吳舟則可以濟；所託者浮道也。

A tripod in Yan weighs thousands of pounds, but loaded on a Wu boat it can cross the water. What bears it up is “the floating road”.

118.
By sea you can travel to Yue sitting down, if you have a boat. On land you can travel to Qin standing, if you have a chariot. Qin and Yue are far away; what makes it possible to sit at ease and go there is a mechanical device.

Yao taught at Lishu and the people did not listen, but when he reached the throne and ruled the empire, his commands were followed and his prohibitions were respected.

By this we know that a favorable situation and a high position are enough to rely upon, and that worth and wisdom are not.
Shen Dao, like most Chinese philosophers, uses legendary examples to illustrate his points. These examples are usually strictly conventional; all you need to know about Mao Qiang and Xi Shi, for example, is that they were legendary beautiful women. Most of those mentioned are legendary sage-kings and founders: in chronological order, Fu Xi, Yao, Shun, and Yü (founder of the Xia dynasty) -- the last three of these are the Three Emperors. (Jie was the final emperor of the dynasty founded by Yü, and is held responsible for the fall of the dynasty just as Yü is given credit for founding it). The Five Hegemons were latest of all, and were of lesser status, since they protected the weak Eastern Zhou dynasty without being able to restore it to power.

From the more recent Shang and Zhou dynasties (both of which was canonical for Confucians) only a late bad emperor and a ruler of a lesser state are named. Whether as a Daoist or a Legalist, Shen Dao wanted to separate himself from the Confucian tradition.

9: The fourth graph of Thompson’s text includes a rare graph (足 on left +龠 on right) not found in Karlgren or in the Ciyuan. Its phonetic,龠, is in the 樂 rhyme class. Other graphs in this rhyme class with the 足 classifier are 躦 and 躍, both of which mean “jump” -- perhaps extendable to “jump over “ or “cross over”. I have inserted 躣 into the text.

13: “Favorable position” 势 and “power” 權 are key terms in Chinese philosophy. The translations here are adequate for this passage but don’t capture the full meaning of either term.
14: “Nobody” = “nameless person”. “Name” indicates fame or membership in an eminent family. In a well-ordered state, reputation and family connections will not get you a government job. See also section F below, and #87: *When Dao is supreme, names do not dazzle.* Worthies 贤 xian aspired to fame and high position and were famous almost by definition.
17. 古者, 工不兼事; 士不兼官。工不兼事則事省, 事省則易勝; 士不兼官則職寡, 職寡則易守。故士位可世, 工事可常。

18. 百工之子不學而能者, 非生而巧也, 言有常事也。

19. 今也, 國無常道官無常法; 是以國家日繆。

20. 教雖成, 官不足。官不足則道理匱, 道理匱則慕賢智, 慕賢智則國家之政要在一人之心矣。
Responsibilities

17. In ancient times, craftsmen had only one trade and officials (士) held only one position. With craftsmen practicing only one trade, the specific tasks are few, and if tasks are few, the trade is easy to master. If officials hold only one office, the specific responsibilities (職) are few, and if the responsibilities are few, the position’s demands are easy to satisfy. Thus official positions could be passed down in the family, and crafts could be made standard (常).

18. The sons of the craftsmen do not become competent without schooling because they are born skilful; it is because their crafts had been made standard (常).

19. But today, the state has no standard Dao, and the officials have no standard rule (法); thus the state steadily falls into confusion.

20. Even if their training is good, the officials cannot fulfill their responsibilities; if the officials cannot fulfill their responsibilities, the principles (理) of government are lost; when the principles of government are lost, the people look to the worthies (賢) and the wise (智) for rescue; if the people look to the worthies and the wise, the state’s major decisions are left to the discretion of single individuals.
21. 古者，立天子而貴之者，非以利一人也；曰：天下無一貴，則理無由通，通理以為天下也。

22. 故立天子以為天下也，非立天下以為天子也。立國君以為國也，非立國以為君也。立官長以為官，非立官以為長也。

23. 法雖不善，猶愈於無法。
21. Of old, emperors were not enthroned and honored in order to reward a single man. It is said:

If the world does not have one man who is the most honored, then there will be no way for the basic principles (理) to be proclaimed. The basic principles are proclaimed for the sake of the world.

22. So the emperor is enthroned for sake of the empire; the empire is not established for the sake of the emperor. A prince is enthroned for the sake of a state; a state is not established for the sake of the prince. Officials are established for the sake of their offices; offices are not established for the sake of the officials.

23. Even bad rules are preferable to no rules at all.

17: Confucius, Analects, VIII-14: Do not concern yourself with matters of government unless they are a responsibility of your office. (See also XIV:26). Shen Buhai #22: The governmental responsibilities of an official do not extend past the office to which he has been appointed. Even though he may know about matters outside his sphere, he should not talk about them. (Creel p. 383).

19, 23: Fa法 is normally translated “law”, and the Legalist school, Fajia法家, is the school of fa. However, fa can mean “rule” or “method” in addition to law, and I have translated “rule” or “law” according to context. Law, rule, and method are all preexisting standard procedures known in advance and used by everyone; the contrast is with the use of individual judgment on a case by case basis.
24. 夫投鉤分財，投策分馬，非以鉤策為均也；使得美者不知所以德，使得惡者不知所以怨。此所以塞怨望也。

25. 明君動事分職，必由慧；定罪分財，必由法；行德制中必由禮。

26. 故欲不得干時，愛不得犯法；貴不得踰規，祿不得踰位；士不得兼官，工不得兼事。

27. 以能受事，以事受利；若是者，上無羨賞，下無羨財。
Standards

24. Lots are drawn to divide up property, and dice are thrown to distribute horses, not because the lots and the dice are fair, but so that those who get the better shares have no one to thank (德), and those who got the worse shares have no one to blame. That way resentment and presumption (望 = “hope”) do not arise.

25. The discerning ruler must initiate projects and assign responsibilities only according to aptitude; he must judge crimes and distribute property only according to law (法); and he must show generosity (德) and exert control only according to protocol (禮).

26. Thus personal desires will not cause violations of the state calendar, and favoritism will not violate the rule; honors will not exceed the limits, and rewards will not surpass those due the position; the officers will not hold multiple offices, and the craftsman will not practice two trades.

27. If tasks are assigned according to ability, and rewards given according to the tasks completed, the elite will not dream of preference and the commoners will not dream of largesse.
27: My interpretation is different than Thompson’s and is based on my overall interpretation of Shen Dao’s thought. 羨 xian can mean either “hope for” or, as Thompson translated it, “excessive.”

70. 折券契，屬符節，賢不敎由之。物以此得而不託於信也。

The division of deeds and the joining of contract tallies are followed both by the worthy and the mediocre. If you have these objects, you do not need good faith (信).

70: See also J 63. In ancient China each party of a contract held one half of a tally stating the mutual obligations, and the two tallies fit together like lock and key, or like pieces of a puzzle.

102. 有權衡者，不可欺以輕重；有尺寸者，不可差以長短；有法度者，不可巧以詐偽。

If you have a scale you cannot be cheated about heavy and light; if you have a yardstick, you cannot be mistaken about long and short; and if you have rules and standards, you cannot be tricked by sophistry and fakery.

113. 國有貴賤之禮，無賢不肖之禮；有長幼之禮，無勇怯之禮；有親疏之禮，無愛惡之禮也。

A state has protocols to distinguish the noble (貴) from the commoner (賤), but not to
distinguish the worthy from the mediocre; there are protocols distinguishing young from the old, but none distinguishing the brave from the cowardly; there are protocols distinguishing near from distant kin, but none distinguishing the loved from the hated.

113: Noble / commoner, young / old, and near/distant are all objective, verifiable, permanent statuses formally recognized by the state. Worthy/mediocre, brave/cowardly, and loved/hated are all subjective judgments of character, and character is transient and can change; such personal qualities should not be taken into consideration when hiring officials and granting rewards. Officials should be appointed on the basis of what they are able to do and rewarded based on their success in fulfilling their assignments.

When calibrating heavy weights, if the great Yu were asked to correct them to a fraction of an ounce, he could not be sure that they were accurate; but if they were put on a balance, no one would go wrong by as much as a hair. There is no need to wait for an intelligence as great as Yu’s; the intelligence of the most ordinary man is sufficient for this.
120: Shen Buhai 3: *The ruler must have discriminating methods and correct and definite principles, just as one suspends a weight on a balance in order to weigh lightness and heaviness; by this means you unify the assembly of ministers.* (Creel p. 352-3.)
Section II
Accommodation

因循

E

#28-#32

28. 天道，因則大，化則細；因也者，因人之情也。

29. 人莫不自為也；化而使之為我，則莫可得而用矣。

30. 是故先王不受祿者不臣，祿不厚者不與入難。

31. 人不得其所以自為也，則上不取用焉。

32. 故用人之自為，不用人之為我，則莫不可得而用矣。此之謂因。
Self interest


29. All men act for their own interests (自為). If you try to reform them (化) to instead act for your interest, there will be no one you can successfully employ.

30. Thus the ancient kings did not appoint anyone who would not accept pay, and when in adversity did not rely on anyone whom they did not pay well.

31. If men do not get what they themselves want, their superiors will not be able to employ them successfully.

32. If I rely on men’s working for themselves, and not on their working for me, I can employ any man. This is what is called “accommodation”.

28: Shen Buhai 1-9: “The ruler’s method is complete acquiescence (“accommodation” 因). He merges his own concerns with the public good, so that as an individual he does not act (無事: Creel, p. 352).

The translation 人情 “human actuality” is used here instead of “human nature”, because “human nature” 人性 is a major and much-embattled topic both in Chinese philosophy and in Western philosophy. What Shen Dao says is only distantly part of that discussion. In his
“Background of the Mencian theory of human nature” A.C. Graham argues that 情, now usually translated “passions and emotions”, originally meant something like “fundamental reality”. The translation “human feelings” would probably be OK too; human feelings are a key human reality.

29: Acting for your own interest, rather than self-sacrificingly, was Yang Zhu’s teaching. Mencius thought that Yangist egoism would lead to anarchy and chaos, whereas Shen Dao developed forms of administration and government appropriate to a more individualistic age.

Shen Dao, like Laozi, proposed to govern people as they are, without improving or transforming them. By contrast, transformation 化 hua was a key part of the Confucian program. Without the benign influence of the sages, people are uncultivated and crude:

*Only he who is entirely true to himself can transform the world (Doctrine of the Mean, # 23, my translation)*

*Wherever the superior man passes through, transformation follows; wherever he abides, his influence is of a spiritual nature. From day to day they make progress toward what is good, without knowing what makes them do so. (Mencius VII A 13 3)*
81. 為毳者患塗之泥也。

The maker of mud-boards maintains that muddy roads are calamitous.

81: The point might be the same as in the case of the coffinmaker in #103 below, though I find the line hard to interpret.

99. 家富則疏族聚，家貧則兄弟離；非不相愛，利不足相容也。

If a family is rich distant relatives arrive; if a family is poor brothers live apart. It’s not that they don’t love one another, but that their wealth is not enough to include them all.

101. 海與山爭水，海必得之。

When the sea and the mountain fight for water, the sea always wins.

101: The downward tendency of water is a central theme of the Daodejing and is frequently seen elsewhere in Chinese philosophy. Here this means that the lower / material / selfish motives the higher / moral / noble motives.

Mozi: Therefore the big rivers do not despise the little brooks as tributaries (Ch. I, “Qin Shi”). This introductory chapter is quite eclectic and presumably late.
Shang Yang: For people’s attitude toward profit is just like the tendency of water to flow downwards, without preference for any of the four sides (Book V: 23, Duyvendak tr. P. 316).

Confucius and Mencius thought quite differently about low-lying areas, which is where filth gathers: "The superior man hates to dwell in a low-lying position" (Analects XIX-20) – see also #55 below.

103.
匠人成棺，不憎人死，利之所在，忘其醜也。

A coffinmaker is not bothered by death; where there’s profit, uncleanness is forgotten.

110.
河下龍門，其流駍如竹箭，騏馬追之不能及。

Where the river comes down through the Dragon Gate, its current is as fast as a bamboo arrow; even four horses in hot pursuit cannot over take it.

110: The Dragon Gate is near the great bend in NW China where the south-flowing Yellow River turns east. Perhaps this is just a metaphor for the power of shi (勢), “situation”, which in Sunzi is compared to potential energy which is irresistible once unleashed. In the context of this section the irresistible force of shi would be human reality or human feelings (人情) which will do your work for you if you accommodate (因) them.
Section III

The people are various

民雜

#33-#37

33. 民雜處而各有所能；所能者不同。此民之情也。

34. 大君者大上也，兼畜下者也；下之所能不同而皆上之用也。

35. 是以大君因民之能為資，盡苞而畜之，無去取焉。

36. 是故不設一方以求於人；故所求者無不足也。

37. 大君不擇其下，故足也；不擇其下則易為下矣。易為下則下莫不容，莫不容故多下；多下之謂大上。
Skills

33. The people (民) in their various circumstances all have their own abilities, and these abilities are not the same. This is the reality of the people.

34. The greatest of rulers take care of (畜) all their subjects; the subjects’ capacities are various, and all of them are useful to the sovereign.

35. So the great ruler accepts (因) the people’s capacities as his material (資), and treasures (苞 = 葆) and cares for (畜) all of them without favoring or rejecting any.

36. He does not have just a single criterion for what he looks for in men, so everything he finds is good enough.

37. The great ruler is not particular, and his subjects are all good enough; because he is not particular, becoming his subject is easy; since becoming his subject is easy, none will be excluded; if none is excluded, the subjects will be many. A ruler with many subjects is called a high sovereign.

37: Thompson (p. 527) recognizes the relationship between Shen Tao F 35 and chapters 27 and 61 of Laozi. Ch. 27: Hence the sage is always good at saving people, and so abandons no one.... the bad man is the material 資 for the good man. Ch. 61: Thus all the great state wants is to care for 畜 men” (my tr.).See also Chs. 49 and 62. Ch. 49: Those who are good I treat as good. Those who are not good I also treat as
good. Ch. 63: [Tao] is the treasure 葆 bao of the good man and that by which the bad man is protected 保 bao.... Even if a man is not good, should he be abandoned? It seems likely to me that Laozi draws on Shen Dao here; these ideas fit into Shen Dao's thinking very neatly, whereas in Laozi they represent a distinct strain of thought not present in the earliest layers.

68.
治水者，茨防決塞，雖在夷貊；相似如一；學之於水，不學之於禹也。

In channeling water you raise the embankments and remove the blockages — even among the barbarians it is the same. You learn this from water, not from the Great Yü.

68: The Great Yü was one of the Three Emperors and the founder of the Xia dynasty and is credited with the first flood control projects. In some legends he’s a superhuman figure, but most Chinese philosophers treat these legendary figures as purely human, though almost unimaginably great and good.

71.
離朱之明，察毫末於百步之外；於水，尺而不能見淺深；非目不明也，其勢難覩也。

Li Zhu’s eyesight was so sharp that he could distinguish the tip of a hair at more than a hundred paces; but beyond one foot he couldn’t tell if water was shallow or deep. This was not because his eyes were not sharp, but because the situation made it hard to see.
71: All you need to know is that Li Zhu was the stock example of sharp eyesight.

79.  
以力役法者，百姓也；以死守法者，有司也；以道變法者，君長也。

Those who use their strength in the service of the law are the common people (百姓); those who defend the law to the death are the officeholders (有司); the one who adapts the law according to Dao is the ruler and leader.

86.  
夫道所以使賢，無奈不肖何也，所以使智，無奈愚何也。若此則謂之道勝矣。

The Dao of employing the worthy does not leave out the mediocrity out; the Dao of employing the intelligent does not leave out the dull. When this is the case then Dao may be said to be supreme.

87.  
道勝則名不彰。

When Dao is supreme, names (名) do not dazzle.

87: See also B 14. “Names” refers to fame and family status, which ideally do not influence appointments and rewards.

89.  
臣下閉口，左右結舌。

Servants and inferiors keep their mouths shut, attendants bite their tongues.
96. 小人食於力，君子食於道。

An ordinary man supports himself with his strength, a superior man supports himself with Dao.

106. 勁而害能則亂也，云能而害無能則亂也。

If the strong harm the capable, there will be chaos; if those thought capable harm those who are less capable, there will be chaos.

114. 公輸子巧用材也，不能以檀為瑟。

Gongshu Zi was a skilled woodworker, but even he could not make a lute out of spindlewood.

114: Gongshu Zi was the stock example of a great craftsman. This fragment is presumably a warning against overdoing it. While Shen Dao generally advises that a prince’s agents need not be men of great excellence, he seems to be reminding us here that some men are worthless for any purpose.
38. 君臣之道，臣事事而君無事。君逸樂而臣任勞。臣盡智力以善其事而君無與焉，仰成而已。故事無不治。治之正道然也。

39. 人君自任而務為善以先下，則是代下負任蒙勞也；臣反逸矣。

40. 故曰：君人者好為善以先下，則下不敢與君爭為善以先君矣。

41. …皆私其所知以自覆掩；有過，則臣反責君；逆亂之道也。

42. 君之智未必最賢於眾也。以未最賢而欲以善盡被下，則不贍矣。
The Role of the Prince

38. The Dao of the prince and the minister: the minister performs his task and the prince has no task; the prince is relaxed and happy and the minister takes on the labor; the minister uses all his knowledge and strength to perform his job satisfactorily, and the prince does not share in the labor, but merely waits for the job to be finished. As a result, every task is taken care of. The correct way of government is thus.

39. When a ruler of men takes tasks onto himself and competes in benevolence (善) with his subordinate officials, he encroaches on the officials’ responsibilities, and the officials become lax.

40. Thus it is said:

If the ruler of men contests with his subordinates in benevolence, then the subordinates will not dare to compete with the prince’s efforts.

41. [In such a case every subordinate] will try to avoid attention by hiding things he knows, and if there is an error the minister shifts the blame to the prince. This is the way of disobedience and chaos.

42. The prince’s understanding need not be the most excellent. If his understanding is not the most excellent but he still tries himself to do everything for his subjects, he will be insufficient to the task.
43. 若使君之智最賢，以一君而盡贍下則勞；勞則有倦，倦則衰，衰則復反於不贍之道也。

44. 是以人君自任而躬事，則臣不事事矣。是君臣易位也，謂之倒逆，倒逆則亂矣。

45. 人君任臣而勿自躬，則臣皆事事矣。是君臣之順，治亂之分，不可不察也。
43. But even supposing that the prince’s understanding were the best of all, for a prince singlehandedly to take on all the subordinate responsibilities would be toilsome; toil leads to fatigue, fatigue leads to exhaustion, which then brings him again to insufficiency.

44. Thus if a ruler of men takes tasks on himself and does the job in person, the ministers will not do their jobs. Ruler and minister have switched places; this is called “topsy-turvy”. When things are topsy-turvy, chaos follows.

45. The ruler of men assigns tasks to his ministers and does not himself work; the ministers do the work. This is the normal pattern of prince-minister relations and marks the difference between order and chaos. We cannot fail to attend to this principle.

41: Thompson marks this passage as incomplete.

45: Shen Buhai 1-4, 1-7, and 17-1 (Creel pp. 346-8, 350, and 367-70) are too long to cite here but make many of the same points.

107.
棄道術，舍度量，以求一人之識識天下，誰子之識能足焉？

To reject Tao and rules (法) and ignore standards and measures, and seek through a single man’s knowledge to understand the world – what man would be capable of doing this?
111. 昔者，天子手能衣而宰夫設服，足能行而相者導進，口能言而行人稱辭，故無失言失禮也。

In ancient times the Emperor was able to dress himself, but his chamberlains would put on his robes; he was able to walk, but his master of protocol would lead the guests in; he was able to speak, but his diplomatic representatives would proclaim his words. As a consequence, his actions and court speech were never in error.

121. 君臣之間，猶權衡也。權左輕則右重，右輕則左重。輕重迭相橛，天地之理也。

The relationship between a ruler and his minister is like a balance. If the left arm is light the right is heavy, if the right arm is light the left is heavy. The light and the heavy are mutually defining; this is a principle of Heaven and Earth.

111, 121. The point in these passages is that even the ruler is being watched and is counterbalanced, though he still retains ultimate power.
Section IV

Understanding loyalty

知忠

IV H (p.1)

46. 亂世之中，亡國之臣，非獨無忠臣也；治國之中，顯君之臣，非獨能盡忠也。

47. 治國之人，忠不偏於其君；亂世之人，諂不偏於其臣；然而治亂之世，同世有忠諂之人。

48. 臣之欲忠者不絕世，而君未得寧其上也；無遇比干，子胥之忠，而毀瘁於貙墨之中，遂染溺滅名而死。

49. 由是觀之，忠未足以救亂世，而適足以重非。何以識其然也乎？曰：父有良子而舜放瞽叟；桀有忠臣而過盈天下。

50. 然則孝子不生慈父之家，而忠臣不生聖君之下。
Loyalty

46. The ministers of a doomed state in a disordered age are not all disloyal; the ministers of a well-ordered state who bring renown to their prince are not necessarily all devoted (忠).

47. The men of a well-ordered state are not exclusively loyal to their prince; the men of a disordered era are not exclusively deceivers. Either in a well-ordered or in a disordered era, both loyal and treacherous men are to be found.

48. In every age there have been ministers who intended to serve loyally, but whose princes could not rest easy on their thrones. Even princes with ministers as courageously loyal as Pi Kan or Wu Tzu-hsu could go to their deaths amid darkness, infamy and evil.

49. This shows us that loyalty is not enough to save a chaotic age, but instead can be something that multiplies its evils. How do we know that this is so? It is said:

A father had a worthy son, but Shun banished Gusou;
Jie had loyal ministers, but crime filled the empire.

50. Thus:

An obedient son is not born to an indulgent father;
loyal ministers do not arise under a sage prince.
51. 故明主之使其臣也，忠不得過職，而職不得過官；是以過修於身而下不敢以善驕矜。

52. 守職之吏，人務其治而莫敢淫偷，其事公正以敬其業，和順以事其上；如此則至治已。

53. 亡國之君，非一人之罪也；治國之君，非一人之力也。

54. 將治亂在乎賢使任職，而不在於忠也。故：智盈天下；澤及其君；忠盈天下，害及其國。

55. 故桀之所以亡，堯不能以為存；然而堯有不勝之善，而桀有運非之名；則得人與失人也。

56. 故廊廟之材，蓋非一木之枝也；狐白之裘，蓋非一狐之皮也。治亂安危存亡榮辱之施，非一人之力也。
51. When an enlightened prince employs his officials, their loyalty (忠) is not allowed to go beyond their assigned tasks, and their assigned tasks do not go beyond those of their office. In this way their errors can be individually remedied, and subordinates do not dare to aggrandize themselves by their benevolence (善).

88. 趨事之有司，賤也。

Overeager officeholders are unworthy.

52. When the officers assigned to their positions maintain order, none of them daring to exceed their assigned tasks, and when they with impartial and correct diligence obediently and harmoniously serve their superiors, perfect order has been attained.

53. If a prince brings his state to ruin, it’s not just the error of a single man; if a prince brings his state to order, it’s not just the effort of a single man.

54. The ordering of disorder lies in worthy (贤) officers accepting their assignments, and not in their loyalty (忠). Thus:

If knowledge fills the world, prosperity comes to the prince; if loyalty fills the world, disaster comes to the state.
55. So Yao could not have survived what destroyed Jie, but is credited with unsurpassed goodness while Jie’s name is notorious for all-pervading evil. One was served well by his men, and the other was not.

56. Thus the timber in the Great Hall of State is not cut from a single tree; a white fox-fur coat is not made of the fur of a single fox; and order and disorder, security and peril, glory and disgrace do not come from the efforts of one man.

47. Pi Kan and Wu Tzu-hsu were ministers famous for their rectitude; both served evil emperors and were executed when they tried to remonstrate with these emperors about their failings. Thompson has difficulty with this passage, and my translation is somewhat conjectural. Originally tao 諧 here was written dao 道, and I have accepted Kuo Jingfan’s suggestion (cited but rejected by Thompson) that the latter was just a phonetic substitution for the former, which I inserted into the text. I get about the same interpretation of the passage as Thompson, but without his far-fetched reading of the word dao 道 (dissertation, p. 531).

Shen Dao’s overall argument is that when a state cannot fall into chaos or be saved from chaos merely by the corruption or dedication of single individuals, whether princes or ministers. A well-ordered state does not rely on single individuals but has disciplinary structures in place which maintain its order. Heroic individuals cannot save a poorly-ordered state, and corrupt individuals cannot destroy a well-ordered state.
In the process of making this point he exaggerates somewhat, since an all-powerful sovereign can destroy these disciplinary structures. But he’s arguing that the fall of Xia cannot be assumed to have been simply the consequence of Jie’s evil, and that Jie might have inherited an already-disordered state.

49: Jie was the evil final emperor of the Xia dynasty. This shows us that dedication is not enough to save a chaotic age, but instead can be something that multiplies its problems.... If dedication fills the world, harm comes to the state.

忠 is usually translated “loyalty”, on the model of absolute military loyalty and obedience. That is often but not always its meaning (see Goldin, 2008). In many contexts it means something like “conscientiousness” or “diligence” or “attentiveness”; the best single translation might be “dedication / dedicated”, which includes conscientiousness and loyalty.

The general point being made is not dependent on the translation: The problem with loyalty / diligence is that it cannot save a badly-ordered state, so that if such a state relies on loyal or heroically diligent ministers to save it, it will fail. (Laozi 18:When the state has fallen into confusion and disorder, then there are loyal ministers.) A well-run state does not need to rely on exceptional efforts: if ordinary men correctly do their assigned tasks, that will be enough.
49, 50: Shun, the second of the Three Great Emperors, was the son of a worthless father, Gusou, whom he banished. The message is that rulers cannot rely even on their kin to be virtuous.

51: My interpretation here is significantly different than Thompson’s. “Errors can be individually remedied” is a guess.

54. The ordering of disorder lies in worthy (賢) officers accepting their assignments. Shen Dao is generally not friendly to the worthies. Perhaps his point is that when worthies quietly accept their assignments rather than contending for honor and position, disorder will cease. But would worthies who quietly accepted their assignments really be worthies? It would seem that they would thereby be transformed into underlings, which is in fact what Shen Dao wants.

55: Yao was the first of the three great founding emperors, whereas Jie was the evil final emperor of the Xia dynasty. The point is that without help neither could have done what they did, for good or evil. A similar case: Tzu-kung said “Chou [the evil last emperor of the Shang dynasty] was not as wicked as all that. That is why the gentleman hates to dwell downstream, for it is there that all that is sordid in the Empire finds its way. (Analects XIX-20, Lau tr.)

56: Mozi, “Qin Shi”: The fur coat that is worth a thousand yi is not composed of the white fur of a single fox. (Probably a late chapter).
Section V: I
Virtue Established
德立

#57-#60

57.
立天子者，不使諸侯疑焉；立諸侯者，不使大夫疑焉；立正妻者，不使嬖妾疑焉；立嫡子者，不使庶孽疑焉。疑則動，兩則爭，雜則相傷；害在有與，不在獨也。

58.
故臣有兩位者，國必亂。臣兩位而國不亂者，君猶在也。恃君而不亂矣，失君必亂。

59.
子有兩位者，家必亂。子兩位而家不亂者，親猶在也。恃親而不亂矣，失親必亂。

60.
臣疑其君，無不危之國；孽疑其宗，無不危之家。
Ownership

57. An Emperor is crowned so that the Great Lords will not question (疑) his status; a great lord is crowned so that the lesser nobles will not question his status; the primary wife is established so that the concubines will not question her status; the crown prince is established so that the sons of concubines will not question his status. Where there is questioning there will be instability; where there are two contenders there will be trouble; where there are many contenders there will be harm. Trouble comes from sharing, but not from sole possession.

58. Thus, if two ministers share an appointment, the state must fall into chaos. If two ministers share an appointment without throwing the state into chaos it will be because the prince is still alive. Order depends on the prince; without him there would be chaos.

59. If two sons are of the highest status, the house must fall into chaos. If two sons are of the highest status and the house does not fall into chaos it will because the parents are still alive. Order depends on the parents; without them there would be chaos.

60. If a minister questions (疑) his lord’s position, the state will necessarily be endangered. If a concubine’s son questions the succession, the house must necessarily be endangered.
57: Thompson translates an emended version of #57, but I think that the original “doubt”, in the verbal sense of “question, cast doubt upon”) is good enough. “Covet” or perhaps "undermine" is the idea. Hanfeizi XVII: 44 develops these ideas at length (tr. Liao, “On Assumers”, pp. 216-229).

58: Shen Buhai 1-1 seems to make the opposite point: *When one wife gains excessive influence with the husband, all the wives are thrown into disorder.* (Creel, p. 343). But Shen Dao is talking about the unique certainty of succession and unique responsibility for specific tasks, whereas Shen Buhai is talking about one wife’s or one minister’s monopoly of influence over the ruler, which might allow the wife or minister to supplant the ruler entirely (as the Japanese Shogun did the Mikado, and as the Persian Sultan did the Caliph) . (On the other hand, in 17-5, p. 377 Shen Buhai seems to speak favorably of Guanzi’s total control of Duke Huan’s government, apparently contradicting his statement in 1-1).

82. 一 兔 走 街 , 百 人 逐 之 ; 非 一 兔 足 為 百 人 分 也 , 由 未 定 分 也 。 分 未 定 , 堯 且 屈 力 而 況 稱 人 乎 ？ 積 兔 滿 市 , 過 者 不 顧 ; 非 不 欲 兔 也 , 分 已 定 矣 。 分 已 定 , 人 雖 鄙 不 爭 。 故 治 天 下 及 國 , 在 乎 定 分 而 已 矣 。

If a rabbit runs down the street, a hundred men will chase it: while one rabbit is not enough for a hundred men, ownership (分 , lit. “division, portion”) has not yet been assigned. If ownership is unknown, even the sage king Yao would run after it, and how much more so the
multitude? But if rabbits are heaped in the market, passersby don’t even look: it’s not that they don’t like rabbit, it’s that ownership has been established. If ownership has been assigned, even a beggar won’t grab one. From ruling the empire down to a state, the establishment of ownership is all you need.

98. 兩貴不相事；兩賤不相使。

If two are equally honored, neither will serve the other; if two are equally lowly, neither will work for the other.

98: Shen Buhai 10: Those whose intelligence is equal cannot command each other; those whose strength is equal cannot overcome each other. (Creel, p. 360).

109. 多賢，不可以多君；無賢，不可以無君。

There can be many worthies, but there cannot be many rulers; there can be no worthies, but there cannot be no ruler.

109. Mozi, Chapter 11, “Shang Tong I”, p 110: Accordingly each man had his own idea of justice, two men had two different ideas and ten men had ten different ideas – the more people, the more different ideas of justice.
Section VI
Prince and Subject

君人

J

#61-#65

61. 君人者，舍法而以身治，则誅賞奪與從君心出矣。然則受賞者雖當，望多無窮，受罰者雖當，望輕無已。

62. 君舍法而以心裁輕重，則是同功殊賞，同罪殊罰也；怨之所由生也。

63. 是以分馬者之用策，分田者之用鉤也，非以鉤策為過人智也；所以去私塞怨也。

64. 故曰：大君任法而弗躬為，則事斷於法矣。

65. 法之所加，各以其分蒙其賞罰，而無望於君也。是以怨不生而上下和矣。
Favoritism

61. If the ruler of men ignores the rules and governs in person, then punishment and reward, exactions and grants are decided according to the ruler’s moods. Thus, someone who has been properly rewarded will still hope (望) for more, and someone who has been justly punished will always hope (望) for remission.

62. If the prince ignores the rules (法) and personally assigns merit and demerit according to his mood, then identical services will receive differing rewards, and identical offenses will receive differing punishments. This breeds grievances.

63. So when lots are used when dividing up horses, and dice are used when apportioning land, it’s not because the lots and the dice are wiser than men, but because this is a way to exclude favoritism and preclude grievances.

64. Thus it is said:

*The great prince relies on rules (法) and does not act on his own; cases are decided by rule.*

65. When the rules are applied, with each receiving his allotted reward or punishment, no one hopes for anything (望) from the prince. Therefore grievances do not arise and the ruler and his subjects are in harmony.

63: On dividing by lot, see D 24 and D70. On 望, see B 24.
Section VII
Prince and Minister
君臣
K

#66-#67

66. 為人君者不多聽；據法倚數以觀得失。

67. 無法之言，不聽於耳；無法之勞，不圖於功；無勞之親，不任於官。官不私親，法不遺愛；上下無事，唯法所在。
Counsel

66. The ruler of men does not listen to many voices; he relies on rules and methods to survey the advantages and disadvantages.

67. Do not listen to unlawful advice; do not plan unlawful exploits. Do not appoint lazy relatives to office, and do not let officials favor their own relatives: the law should not recognize affection and attachments. The avoidance of problems between high and low comes only from law.

100. 諺云：不聰不明，不能為王；不瞽不聾，不能為公。

A proverb says:

*Without sharp eyesight and acute hearing, you cannot be Emperor; without deafness and blindness, you cannot rule justly.*

100: Mencius V B-1: *Po Yi would neither look at improper sights with his eyes nor listen to improper sounds with his ears.*

Shen Buhai 17-2: *By what can I know that he is deaf? By the keenness of his ears. By what can I know that he is blind? By the clarity of his sight* (Creel, pp. 383-4).

Shen Buhai 1-5: *Therefore the skillful ruler*
avails himself of an appearance of stupidity.... He hides his motives and covers his tracks (Creel, p. 348-349).

Shen Buhai 16: If the ruler’s intelligence is displayed, men will prepare against it; if his lack of intelligence is displayed, they will delude him (Creel, p. 364-6). See also Shen Buhai 23-24 (Creel pp. 283-5).

Both Shens advise the ruler to be aloof. Shen Dao is warning the ruler not only against paying attention to inappropriate requests, but also against getting lost in the weeds of detail. Shen Buhai’s first passage warns against micromanagement, but the second and third passages recommend that the ruler be secretive in order to prevent presumption and scheming (Shen Dao makes these points in K61, K67 and D24.)
73 故蓍龜，所以立公識也；權衡，所以立公正也；書契，所以立公信也；度量，所以立公審也；法制禮籍，所以立公義也。凡立公，所以棄私也。

74 禮從俗，政從上，使從君。

75 法之功，莫大於使私不行；君之功，莫大於使民不爭。

76 今立法而行私，是私與法爭；其亂甚於無法。立君而尊賢，是賢與君爭；其亂甚於無君。

77 故有道之國，法立則私善不行，君立則賢者不尊；民一於君，事斷於法，國之大道也。

78 故治國，無其法則亂；守法而不變則衰；有法而行私，謂之不法。

*Fragments #73-#78 (from the I Wen Lei Chü, Thompson’s Group XI) were not part of Shen Maoshang’s Shenzi but can be read consecutively as a coherent group, so I have translated them as group L.*
Private interests

73 Thus divination is the means by which a public (公) understanding is established; scales are the means by which a public measure is established; written documents are the means by which public good faith is established; units of length and volume are the means by which public criteria are established; legal procedures and books of protocol are the means by which public justice is established. In every case a public (公) form is established, and private (私) codes rejected.

74 Ceremonial protocols follow custom, administration follows the sovereign, state agents follow the prince.

75 The greatest accomplishment of the law is to prevent the advancement of private interests (私); the greatest accomplishment of the prince is to prevent conflict among the people.

76 Yet today those who establish the law also advance private interest. This means that private interests contend with the law, which is a greater disorder than having no law. Those who establish the prince also honor the worthies. This means that the worthies contend with the prince, which is worse than having no prince.
In a state following Dao, the law is established so that private benevolence (私善) does not develop; the prince is established so that the worthies are not honored; the people are united with the prince, and cases are decided according to law. This is the great way of states.

Thus a state governed without law falls into chaos; law maintained unadapted (不變) leads to decline; the pursuit of private interests within the law is called lawlessness.

“Private” (私) can also mean “secret” or even “indecent” and has an implication of selfishness.

Those who establish the prince also honor the worthies. This means that the prince contends with the worthies, which is worse than having no prince. This is one of the key points made by the Legalists against the Confucians. In public service, too much is as bad as not enough — as Confucius also did say.

“Worthies” are ambitious and competitive, devoted to the pursuit of honor and reputation and reluctant to limit themselves to a specific assigned task. A worthy in government service might use government funds to benefit the people, thus depriving the government of revenue while gaining himself a reputation for benevolence. (This is the private benevolence 私善 spoken of).
When this happens, the ruler has lost control of the government (lost his situational advantage, 勢), and in the worst case the worthy relies on his popularity to usurp the throne. (The Zhou dynasty was founded exactly this way.)

Shang Yang II:7: *The benevolent always take concern for others as their aim, but the worthy make it their way to excel each other….When they established a ruler, elevating worth was abandoned for honoring rank.* (Duyvendak tr. P. 226; Graham, *Disputers of the Dao*, p. 272; my adapted translation).

*Daodejing* 3: *Do not honor men of worth, so that the people do not contend.* 19: *Make the selfish interests 私 few.* In Chapters 75 and 77 the worthy is also seen as competitive; this competition is renounced in 77.
Scattered Fragments (M-Q)

Groups M-Q consist of 23 fragments in #68-123 and SP1-SP5 which I was not able to fit into groups A-L. These fragments are isolated and often very brief and I have found them hard to interpret (or even translate) with any assurance -- though I have speculated about several of them. I originally intended simply to leave them out, but decided to include them for the sake of completeness. I have divided them thematically into groups M through Q.

M. War

92
眾之勝寡，必也。

That the many will overcome the few is a certainty.

104
藏甲之國必有兵遁。

A state which keeps armed men will inevitably have desertions from the battlefield.

104: A rather doubtful translation. I have replaced 道 with 遁, following Thompson.

105
市人可驅而戰；安國之兵不由忿起。

“We can round men up in the marketplace and fight” – this means that arms which make the state secure are not raised up in rancor.
If one possesses courage one does not act in anger but behaves as though one were cowardly.

112: Without more context it’s hard to be sure what these passages are getting at. #112 and perhaps #105 seem to reject bellicosity, making Shen Dao seem more anti- than pro-war -- though he could equally likely merely be advocating a disciplined military and a cool-headed foreign policy.

N. Punishments

In the penal code of the Yu dynasty, the drawing of strange designs on the face represented the staining of facial incisions; the wearing of a hatstring made of washed mourning cloth represented the cutting off of the nose; the wearing of grass sandals represented the amputation of the feet; the cutting off of a piece of the front-skirt represented castration; a hemp-cloth jacket without a collar represented capital punishment. Such was the penal code of the Yu dynasty.
Confucius said: The great Yu neither rewarded nor punished; the Xia Dynasty rewarded but did not punish; the Shang dynasty punished and did not reward; the Zhou dynasty both rewarded and punished. Punishments prevent action, and rewards encourage action.

Among punishments, to cut off men’s limbs or pierce their flesh is mutilation; to mark their caps or alter their robes is called shaming. In previous ages shame was used and the people did not rebel; in the present age punishments are used and the people do not obey.

117: This may be an indication that Shen Dao, like the Confucians and the authors of Daodejing (but unlike Shang Yang, Hanfeizi, and Xunzi) opposed excessively severe punishments. In poorly managed states which rely on the heroic loyalty of their servants rather than on a disciplined body of well-trained officers fulfilling their assigned tasks, failure is often interpreted as disloyalty or lack of diligence and brutally punished, and it is also in states of this description that usurpation is most to be feared. In well-ordered states such severity is not required.
O. Mysticism

Some of these passages may be “mystical” just because I don’t understand them.

When beasts hide they go into the weeds.

The virtue essence (德精) is subtle and invisible, acute and inexhaustible. Thus external things do not clog its interior.

84: Daoist in feeling, and perhaps also Yangist.

Water is produced by one who drinks beyond measure. Gluttony is produced in one who eats beyond measure.

No tasks in the daytime, no dreams at night.

To know is not to know: despise knowledge and work to destroy it and get rid of it.
SP1: Ascribed to Shen Dao in Zhuangzi’s “Tianxia” chapter.

*Analects II-17*: To say that you know when you know, and to say that you do not know when you do not know, that is knowledge.

Laozi, 71 (Lau tr.): To know yet to think that one does not know is best; not to know yet to think that one knows will put one in difficulty.

SP2

至於若無知之物而已，無用賢聖，夫塊不失道。

Just attain the mindlessness of a thing, and avoid sageliness and eminence; a clod does not depart from the Dao.

SP2: Also from Zhuangzi.

SP5

匠人知為門，能以門，所以不知門也。故必杜然後能門。

A carpenter might know how to make a door, but if he made one that opened but wouldn’t shut, he wouldn’t know doors.

SP5: Not translated by Thompson; my translation is highly conjectural.
Tian Pian’s personal name was named Guang.

69: Tian Pian was an associate of Shen Dao’s. Almost nothing else is known about him.

Cang Jie lived earlier than Fu Xi.

80: Fu Xi was one of the earliest of the Chinese cultural heroes, before Yao and Shun; Cang Jie, of whom this may be the earliest surviving reference, was the man who invented writing and presumably the god or culture hero of scribes and bureaucrats. Most of the other sages and culture heroes referred to in Shen Dao are stock examples, but Cang Jie is seldom mentioned by anyone, so the priority given Cang Jie in this fragment tells us something about Shen Dao, though I'm not sure what.

The world exalts gentlemen of strict virtue.
If a ruler remains free of error for a long while, the general public will finally obey him.

Confucius said: When I, Qiu, was young I loved study, and when old heard the Dao; it is for this reason that his knowledge was comprehensive.

Q. History

Yao offered to abdicate to Xu You, and Shun offered to abdicate to Shan Zhuan, but both declined to become Emperor and retreated to live as peasants.

This story is most of what we know about Xu You and Shan Zhuan.
昔周室之衰也，厲王擾亂天下，諸侯力政，人欲獨行以相兼。

Of old during the decline of the Zhou dynasty Emperor Li led the empire into chaos, and the Great Lords governed by force, each wanting to act independently and appropriate the other’s land.

91: The Zhou Dynasty was regarded by the Confucians as the golden age; it’s probably significant that Shen Dao mentions their worst ruler.

魯莊公鑄大鐘，曹翽入見曰：今國褊小而鐘大，君何不圖之？

Duke Zhuang of Lu was casting a great bell, and Cao Gui went before him and said “Your state is small but your bell is large; why did you not consider this?”

95: Lu was Confucius’ state, which by Shen Dao’s time it had been absorbed by a larger state. It’s probably also significant that the Lu ruler does not look good here.

詩，往志也；書，往誥也；春秋，往事也。

The Book of Poetry is bygone aspirations; the Book of History is bygone exhortations; the Chunqiu Annals are bygone events.
Textual note

Thompson’s recovered text consists of 121 fragments of varying length (#1-123: there are only 121 fragments in all because of Thompson’s late deletion of #93 and #94 as spurious). He divides these fragments into 20 sections based on textual origin. These 121 fragments were followed by 5 additional passages (SP1-SP5) which are attested in ancient sources but not found in Thompson’s corpus, thus totaling 126 fragments in all. Thompson’s first seven sections are made up of the 67 passages from the seven chapters of Shen Maoshang’s Shenzi which were accepted as valid by Thompson; these read quite coherently in the sequence in which they appear. I have further subdivided two sections according to their themes, producing groups A-K.

The remaining 59 passages (from 16 different sources) are quite various. A number of them are clearly relevant to the Shenzi material, but there are also many aphorisms and scraps whose significance is uncertain. I have appended 30 of these 59 fragments to those of groups A through K to which they seem relevant, and I have designated #73 - #78 (which can be read consecutively) as group L. The 23 remaining hard-to-interpret fragments have been put into groups M-Q, which are loosely categorized by theme.
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