ASIAN STUDIES AT HAWAII 29

Experimental Essays on Chuang-tzu

Edited by Victor H. Mair

Asian Studies at Hawaii, No. 29

Experimental Essays on Chuang-tzu

Edited by Victor H. Mair

Asian Studies at Hawaii
University of Hawaii
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII PRESS

Printed in the United States of America

02 01 00 99 98 97 8 7 6 5 4

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Main entry under title:

Experimental essays on Chuang-tzu.

(Asian studies at Hawaii ; no. 29)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
Contents: Taoist spontaneity and the dichotomy of "is" and "ought" / A. C. Graham — A Tao of Tao in Chuang-tzu / Chad Hansen — Chuangtse, the happy fish / Hideki Yukawa — [etc.]
1. Chuang-tzu. Nan-hua ching—Addresses, essays, lectures. I. Mair, Victor H., 1943– . II. Series.
DS3.A2A82 no.29 950s [299'.51482] 83–3615
[BL1900.C567]
ISBN 0–8248–0836–3 (pbk.)

"Chuangtse" and "The Happy Fish" are reprinted from *Creativity and Intuition: A Physicist Looks at East and West* by Hideki Yukawa. Reprinted by permission of Kodansha International/USA.

University of Hawai'i Press books are printed on acid-free paper and meet the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Council on Library Resources

Contents

Foreword

BURTON WATSON

When Victor Mair first kindly invited me to contribute to a volume of essays on Chuang-tzu, I felt that, interesting as the proposal sounded, I had better say no. For one thing, whenever I sit down and try to write seriously about Chuang-tzu, I seem, somewhere in the back of my head, to hear Chuang-tzu cackling away at the presumption and futility of such an endeavor. More to the point, I felt that I had said all I had to say about Chuang-tzu, or the book called *Chuang-tzu*—I use the two terms interchangeably, since they cannot really be separated—in the introduction to my translation of the *Chuang-tzu*. I doubted that I had any fresh insights or observations that would be worth offering.

Later, when it was suggested that I might contribute something in the nature of an informal foreword rather than a scholarly article, however, I did not think I could refuse the invitation any longer. If attempting to write about the *Chuang-tzu* is an unsettling experience, it is in some ways a peculiarly rewarding one, too, for it compels one to look at and consider anew that brilliant and demanding text, and in doing so one can perhaps hit on ways to help others to see the work in a new and more revealing light. Since my own relationship to the text is somewhat different from that of the ordinary reader, I would like to speak in particular about my experiences as a translator of the *Chuang-tzu*.

Some years ago, I undertook to prepare for the Committee on Oriental Studies of Columbia College a series of selected translations from the works of four early Chinese philosophers: Mo-tzu, Hsün-tzu, Han Fei-tzu, and Chuang-tzu. I give the names in that order because that is the

order in which I translated these highly varied thinkers. As the reader will note, I left Chuang-tzu until the last. In part this was done in the pious hope that, by the time I got to the *Chuang-tzu,* my ability to read classical Chinese and my powers as a translator would have advanced to the point where I could do justice to that difficult text. At the same time, I was motivated by the same feelings as those that counsel a prudent diner to get his hash and potatoes out of the way before starting on his lemon pie. *Chuang-tzu* was to be the lemon pie that would lure me on through the duller fare preceding it.

In spite of the invaluable experience I acquired in the course of translating the works of the three other philosophers, my ability to read classical Chinese—or at least Chuang-tzu's variety—was regrettably still not what it should have been by the time I got to the fourth work. On the other hand, the text turned out to be as delicious a finale to the project as I could have anticipated. It is the special pleasures that accrue to the Chuang-tzu translator that I would like to speak about first, leaving gloomier matters to be touched on later.

Most early Chinese philosophical works are marked by a single and fairly consistent voice that runs throughout the book. Mo-tzu drones along in his repetitive and preachy manner; Mencius argues in a tone of sweet reasonableness; Hsün-tzu is all lofty manner and rhetorical flourish; Han Fei-tzu is tough and acerbic. All illustrate their arguments with historical anecdotes, and these serve effectively to vary the tone and pace of the discourse. Mo-tzu's anecdotes in particular, since they deal so often with vengeful ghosts, are at times delightfully spooky, though his intention was assuredly not to delight his readers but rather to terrify them into virtue. But such anecdotes, lively as they may be, represent no more than ornaments to the argument, momentary detours from the expository highroad.

With Chuang-tzu the case is quite different. If Mo-tzu, Hsün-tzu, and the others each speak in a voice distinctively his own, Chuang-tzu speaks in a babble of voices. With him the anecdote is no longer an appendage to the argument but the argument itself. One historical or pseudo-historical figure, one talking creature after another appears on the scene, each representing a different personality and outlook, and as a result the tone of the discourse keeps shifting constantly. And though the anecdotes are at times preceded by or enclosed in brief passages of argumentation, we have no way of knowing whether the voice in such passages is meant to be that of the author himself or is yet another player in the cast of thousands.

The trick in understanding the *Chuang-tzu* is to perceive, among all these shifting voices, just who is being parodied, who is being taken off in

any given passage. Like the Japanese *senryū*, those deft sketches of human folly compressed into a mere seventeen syllables of verse, the *Chuang-tzu* anecdotes confront us with a parade of wits and nitwits, fools and philosophers, and we must learn to recognize each personage from the merest gesture or turn of speech, and judge his words accordingly.

Assuming that the translator can make these identifications correctly, he is then in the enviable position of being able to take on each of these personalities and voices in turn. When one translates a work of Confucian philosophy, he is given ample opportunity to play the moralist, delivering wise maxims in neatly balanced periods or pausing to cite some cautionary page from history. But the *Chuang-tzu* (along with its kindred texts, the *Lieh-tzu* and *Huai-nan tzu*) allows him to assume a dozen different roles, to be solemn or quizzical, rhapsodic or paradoxical by turns, to speak in the voice of a madman or a millipede, a long-winded sea god or a ruminative skull.

Not only does the *Chuang-tzu* permit the translator to put on a variety of faces and participate in a wealth of droll and fanciful dramas, the very language of the text is marked by a range and vividness unmatched by anything else in early Chinese literature. At one moment the writer is poking about in the grubby minutiae of everyday life, the next he is soaring off on flights of language so rapturous that they threaten to go beyond the borders of meaning. Passages of this last type allow the translator—indeed compel him—to employ language with a daring and inventiveness that he would never venture when translating more conventional texts.

And finally there is the incomparable wit and humor that lie at the very heart of the *Chuang-tzu*. Han Fei-tzu may at times treat the reader to a sardonic chuckle, but humor is on the whole a rare element in most Chinese philosophical writing. In the *Chuang-tzu*, on the contrary, it is the single most potent device employed by the writer to jar the reader out of his mundane complacencies and waken him to the possibility of another realm of experience. The translator of the *Chuang-tzu* thus has opportunities to display his talent as a humorist such as would be unimaginable if he were working with any other philosopher. And, as I can state from personal experience, when he manages to get an amusing passage from some two thousand years ago over into language that sounds funny even today, he feels a deeper sense of gratification and accomplishment than if he had translated a whole volume of lamentations.

These, then, are the special pleasures that await the translator of the *Chuang-tzu*. And of course, looked at from a somewhat different point of view, these too are the special headaches that await him, for each poses severe demands upon his skill and ingenuity. In the introduction to my

translation of the *Chuang-tzu* I have discussed at some length the problem of textual corruption, and I will not go into it again here. It is enough simply to note that, with a text that uses language in such unconventional ways and that makes such frequent references to the daily life, customs, and folk beliefs of ancient China, the possibilities for misunderstanding and misinterpretation in later centuries are manifold. Errors have no doubt been introduced into the text by confused or baffled copyists, while other passages remain opaque because we lack the data needed to unlock the sense. All of this means that the translator must constantly be consulting commentaries, which often vary wildly in their interpretation of a given passage, and deciding which interpretation to follow, which emendation to adopt, aware all the time that one false turning may lead him into a forest of difficulties.

And even when the wording of the text does not seem to offer any particular perplexities, there is the larger question of whether one is catching the tone of the passage correctly. When an author spends so much time mocking and satirizing, how can we tell when he means to be taken seriously? If he parodies so many others, is it not possible that he parodies himself as well? Where then is the real Chuang-tzu? At this point, the text turns into a hall of mirrors where a frightening succession of images recedes into infinity and illusion becomes indistinguishable from reality. One reviewer of my *Chuang-tzu* translation remarked that, although I had translated the text in full, I had failed to throw any light on it. One might be tempted to ask in indignation just what translation *is* if not a process of throwing light on a text. And yet in the case of the *Chuang-tzu,* I'd have to say that I know what he means.

When I was translating the *Chuang-tzu,* I would customarily sit down each evening with the day's work, usually two or three pages of typescript. (I accustomed myself to translate prose directly on the typewriter some years ago when I was working on the *Shih chi,* in part because my handwriting, particularly if any appreciable period of time elapses after writing, is likely to be unintelligible even to me.) The main decisions concerning interpretations had been made during the day and could not easily be reviewed or reconsidered without tracing back through the labyrinth of commentary that led to them. But there was an almost infinite amount of tinkering that could be done with the language of the translation, and this was where the real enjoyment came in. I would put a pan of water on the stove, heat some sake (I was living in Japan at the time), place the original and the translation side by side, and methodically question the latter to see whether there was not some better, briefer, or more effective way to convey the meaning and impact of the Chinese. At times, determined to discover just the right diction and euphony to match

the eloquence of the original, I would go along rapping on each word of the translation to see if it was sound, while at others I mulled over the question of just how I would express myself if I were an English-speaking oak tree. I knew I would never again face such challenges or have such opportunities as a translator, and I was determined to make the most of the experience. And now it remains with me as a very important memory—those evenings when I sat by the kerosene stove and listened to the wind whistling in the Kyoto night, struggling to conjure up the kind of language that would do justice to Chuang-tzu's magic.

But if I recall the pleasures of translating the *Chuang-tzu,* I also remember the doubts and apprehensions that troubled me at the time, and to some extent continue to trouble me still. That may be one reason why I always feel a greater reluctance to read over my *Chuang-tzu* translation than I do in the case of the other philosophical works I translated. And though in idle moments I sometimes imagine what it might be like to come face to face with Ssu-ma Ch'ien or Su Tung-p'o or some of the other authors I have worked on—would they be pleased with what I've done? angry? or, worst of all, indifferent?—the prospect of such an encounter with Chuang-tzu would scare the life out of me. He would undoubtedly see through me in an instant.

The problem, I think, is that so much of the time I seem to be way down here, while Chuang-tzu is way up there, and I can see no way to get from here to there. Perhaps because I am a rather timid and unimaginative person by nature, all Chuang-tzu's ecstatic talk of spontaneity , of soaring and carefree excursions, exciting as it may be, seems hardly to pertain to any realm of being that is within my reach. Though he does not mean to be, I'm sure, I cannot help finding him somehow forbidding and unapproachable.

The "way up there" from which Chuang-tzu so often speaks, and in which he so persistently urges the reader to join him, is, of course, the realm of nondualistic thinking. But, as the Buddhists noted long ago, it is one thing to talk about nondualism and quite another actually to experience it as a conviction or outlook. Buddhism offers certain practices such as meditation, chanting, or koan study that are in effect exercises in nondualistic experience, and through these the student can gradually initiate himself into the state of mind he is seeking. I cannot help thinking that the *Chuang-tzu* must have had some similar practice or set of practices that were meant to accompany the book and assist the student. And, as anyone knows, if you merely read the book but do not do the exercises, you cannot hope to get anywhere in the subject.

Perhaps I am being misled by the recurring journey metaphor, which certainly suggests that there is a great deal of ground to be covered before

one can get to Chuang-tzu's realm. Chuang-tzu would no doubt retort that one is already in it, since in a nondualistic universe, "there" cannot be any place other than "here." But once more I would ask, how can I really come to know this? Though the journey, like that described in koan study, may be a circular one, ending exactly where it began, shouldn't one have undergone the experience of the journey in order to understand once and for all that there is indeed nowhere to go?

But in raising such questions, I am perhaps venturing into areas that will be covered more competently by some of the experts in the essays that follow. Certainly one would have to admit that Chuang-tzu exhausts every literary and rhetorical device in his efforts to liberate his readers, to pry their hands loose from their fierce grip on dualism. If his message is ultimately beyond one's grasp, it is not because he has not sincerely tried again and again to state it in terms that are comprehensible. And, the ultimate kindness, he even warns us that mere words are inadequate to the task, so that we need not unduly tax ourselves for our failure.

And yet I open the *Chuang-tzu* and read about all these crookbacks and lamegaits and robbers and idiots who are disporting themselves on Chuang-tzu's level and I can't understand why I can't get there too. I suppose I should learn to resign myself to the situation, and in time perhaps I will. Meanwhile, writing about the text is one way of trying to make my peace with it.

Burton Watson
April, 1980

Preface

The purpose of this volume of essays is to introduce Chuang-tzu to a larger audience than he now enjoys. Currently, knowledge of the *Chuang-tzu* in the West remains almost entirely restricted to sinologists and a few students of comparative religion. This is grossly unfortunate, especially in light of the fact that the *Chuang-tzu* is superior to many other Chinese works that have received much wider recognition and circulation abroad. The *Chuang-tzu* is profoundly entertaining and edifying at the same time. As imaginative literature, there is no other Chinese work that even remotely compares to it before the introduction of Buddhist narrative and dramatic traditions. The *Chuang-tzu*'s use of language is exquisitely sui generis and has had a far-reaching effect on many types of belles-lettres in later periods. Chuang-tzu, furthermore, is honored as one of the founders of philosophical Taoism and is even considered by many to have had a formative influence on the development of Zen. Regardless of his significance for the past, however, Chuang-tzu still speaks to us today with an authentic voice of intelligence and good sense. The *Chuang-tzu* adumbrates an intellectual attitude that is both engaging and compelling.

Admittedly, the *Chuang-tzu* confronts us with monumental textual and authorial problems. Intellectual historians and stylistic analysts are only now beginning to attack seriously, systematically, and rigorously the difficult questions of which parts of the book belong together and which parts ought to be considered as interpolations, additions, and so on. The fact that apparently contradictory or seemingly incompatible positions emerge from the *Chuang-tzu* (such as whether there is one overarching

Tao/Way or only many discursive taos/ways) is evidence that we are dealing with a composite text. We are gradually coming to discover that the *Chuang-tzu* developed out of a series of dialogues with a number of other schools over a considerable period of time. Hence what may hold true for chapter 2 (or part of chapter 2) may not be directly applicable to chapter 5 and vice versa. Yet most of the book does cohere; those portions which do not fit at all are readily recognizable and can be rejected by the sensitive reader. Chuang-tzu himself, as a historical personage, largely remains an enigma. But an identifiable personality does emerge from the core of the book and it reveals him as a man of great wit and wisdom.

The experimental nature of these essays needs to be emphasized. These are attempts to see Chuang-tzu in ways that sinologists have not been accustomed to viewing him. Indeed, it is for this reason that several nonsinologists were invited to participate in the writing of this volume. We hope thus to have demonstrated that Chuang-tzu is not the sole preserve of the specialist. Philosophers, pyschologists, game theorists, and those who simply have a broad interest in the humanities should all feel welcome to venture inside the covers of the *Chuang-tzu*. If they do, they are certain to be richly rewarded. The following essays are indicative of the broad range of responses that are possible to an encounter with the *Chuang-tzu*. Perhaps one day we will have the ruminations of a jurisprudent, a neural physiologist, or a poet on the *Chuang-tzu*. Already we can read what it meant to a nuclear physicist (Hideki Yukawa), a Catholic monk (Thomas Merton), and a Hasidic sociologist-theologian (Martin Buber). There is no authoritative and final explanation of the "meaning" of Chuang-tzu. He is too puckishly protean to submit docilely to any single approach. Only a variety of interpretations, such as those attempted herein, can begin to do justice to this marvelous anthology.

We do not pretend to have attained a unanimity of opinion about our favorite Chinese philosopher. To force such a consensus now would be, we feel, presumptuous in the presence of a work of multifaceted genius. Instead, we have essayed to view Chuang-tzu from many different vantage points while using diverse methodological approaches. On the other hand, occasionally when we may appear superficially to be at odds with each other, such as in discussing the notion of "hsin/heart-mind," there is actually deeper agreement in terms of our appreciation of Chuang-tzu's intent. A large part of coming to understand the *Chuang-tzu* consists of realizing the limitations and prejudices both of our own initial positions and of traditional Chinese expositions.

The present volume is offered in the spirit of eliciting interpretations of the *Chuang-tzu* from people in many different walks of life. We believe

that it bears testimony to the vital power of Chuang-tzu's words and ideas to stimulate thought in our own time. It also demonstrates that a provocative mind, no matter what age or place it speaks from, does not go unheeded.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Nathan Sivin, who carefully and critically read the entire manuscript of this book. Thanks are due as well to the other readers who examined it in various stages of completion for the many helpful suggestions they have offered.

Usages

References in the form "(21/8/11)" are, respectively, to the page, chapter, and line of the text of the *Chuang-tzu* found in *A Concordance to Chuang-tzu,* Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series, Supplement no. 20 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956). Those in the form "(W38)" are to the page number of Burton Watson, tr., *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968).

The abbreviations B.I.E. and I.E. in this book stand for "Before International Era" and "International Era." They are derived from the Chinese notion of a "public calendar" (*kung-li* 公曆). Dates in this system are compatible with those of the Christian era (A.D., B.C.) and the common era(C.E.).

Experimental Essays on Chuang-tzu

Taoist Spontaneity and the Dichotomy of "Is" and "Ought"

A. C. GRAHAM

Even among the philosophies commonly called "mystical," there can hardly be one more resistant to an analytic approach than Taoism. By mocking reason and delighting in the impossibility of putting his message into words, the Taoist seems to withdraw beyond reach of discussion and criticism. No doubt one may try to pin him down by translating "Live according to the Way" into some more manageable imperative such as "Live spontaneously," and then laboriously explain to him that *either* he is expressing a taste for spontaneity which others may not share, *or* he is making a covert inference from "I am spontaneously inclined to do X" to "I ought to do X," an instance of that illogical jump from "is" to "ought" to which Western philosophers have been objecting ever since Hume. But since all the great Taoists are poets as much as they are philosophers, would it not be more to the point to approach Taoism as a view of life to be imaginatively explored and approved or rejected to the extent that one finds it fruitful? However, in the present essay I shall refuse to be deterred from trying to run down that elusive imperative behind the denial of imperatives, the implicit logic behind the derision of logic, in the most sophisticated of the Taoist writers, Chuang-tzu. Instead of accepting him on his own terms—as a poet only incidentally interested in logic, who by aphorism, verse, and anecdote guides us towards his view of life—I shall perversely insist on confronting him in Western terms. The enterprise has turned out, for me at least, to be a more stimulating experience than might be anticipated. It will be seen that, instead of ending up with a take-it-or-leave-it imperative or a trivial

example of a fallacious inference, I find myself colliding with an unexpectedly firm logical structure which forces me to approach the fundamental problems of moral philosophy from an unfamiliar direction.

It is unlikely that Chuang-tzu, who lived in the times of King Hui of Liang (370–319 B.I.E.) and King Hsüan of Ch'i (319–301 B.I.E.), wrote more of the book that bears his name than the *Inner Chapters* (chap. 1–7) and some of the fragments assembled in certain of the *Mixed Chapters* (chap. 23–27, 32). However, we are exploring a structure common to all Taoist thought (and perhaps to much of Oriental philosophy), so that questions of authorship do not much concern us. We may note in the first place that what logic there is in *Chuang-tzu* is directed against reason itself, in particular against rational choice between one course of action and another. The book goes counter to the whole trend towards increasing rationality which had begun with Mo-tzu late in the fifth century B.I.E. Confucius (551–479 B.I.E.) had never needed to give reasons for his dicta; he presented himself simply as a man of mature judgment trying to restore the moral and cultural tradition of the dying Chou dynasty. But Mo-tzu's doctrines, universal love, rejection of fatalism, opposition to aggressive war, promotion on grounds of merit rather than of birth, were novelties which it was necessary to defend in public debate. With the emergence of Mohism, and soon of other rivals to Confucianism, debate intensified, and it became habitual to argue one's case, define one's terms, look beyond moral and political disputes to metaphysical problems such as the relation between morality and human nature, and at last, among sophists such as Hui Shih and Kung-sun Lung, to ponder logical puzzles for their own sake. Chuang-tzu was himself a disciple or younger friend of Hui Shih; he himself displays an intermittent delight in logical subtleties, and in his turn he becomes the target of criticism in the most logically sophisticated document which survives from the period, the *Canons* of the Later Mohists (ca. 300 B.I.E.).[1] Chinese civilization, for the first and last time, was independently envisaging the prospect which unknown to it was already being opened up by the Greeks, that in the last resort all differences of opinion might be resolved by appeal to indisputable principles of reason. It did not sustain this vision, and to the extent, little or great as it may be, that individual thinkers do affect the course of history, much of the responsibility is Chuang-tzu's.

In his time the crucial debate was still between Confucians and Mohists, and the issues on which it centered were moral. Confucians understood the word *yi*[a] ("righteousness, duty") in terms of the customary "appropriateness" (another and etymologically related *yi*[b]) of conduct to status, as ruler or subject, father or son, elder brother or younger brother. Thus it is appropriate for a son to mourn his father for

three years. The Mohists exposed all traditional standards to the tests of whether or not in practice they benefited the people; in the case of mourning, they argued in detail that such a long period is not beneficial but harmful to everyone concerned. In the *Canons*, which start with seventy-five definitions and twelve analyses of ambiguous words, *yi* is given a radically new definition: "To be 'righteous' is to benefit."[2] But with increasing care in definition, it became all the more obvious that every argument started from definitions which might be peculiar to the school. It happens that the Chinese words which established themselves as technical terms attract attention to this point, since the art of *pien*[c] ("disputation, arguing out alternatives") was conceived in terms of fitting names to objects, and the customary words for judging between alternatives were basically demonstrative, *shih*[d] ("that's *it*" [an ox, a horse]) and *jan*[e] ("that's *so*" [that the horse is white, that one rides it]). Clearly, whether one is talking about oxen and horses or about morality, no argument can prove that something is *it* without agreement as to what the name refers to.

Chuang-tzu has plenty of reasons for denying reason, but let us concentrate on his point that all disputation founders on the fact that words mean what the debaters choose to make them mean:

> Saying is not blowing breath, the sayer says something; the trouble is that what he is saying has never been fixed. Has he really said something? Or never said anything? If you think it different from the twitter of fledglings, can disputation show the difference? Or can't it show the difference?[3]

He takes full advantage of the demonstrative nature of the key words in disputation, which show that the argument always depends on the initial choice of standpoint:

> *It* is also Other, Other is also It. There they say "That's it, that's not" from one point of view, here we say "That's it, that's not" from another point of view. Is there really It and Other? Or really no It and Other?[4]

When I choose a name, am I not free to call anything or everything "X" and therefore to affirm or deny of anything whatever that it is X? When the sophist Kung-sun Lung went to such trouble to prove that "The meaning is not the meaning" and "A white horse is not a horse," he was wasting his time:

> Rather than use the meaning to show that the meaning is not the meaning, better use what is not the meaning; rather than use the horse to show that the horse is not a horse, better use what is not the horse. Heaven and earth are the one meaning, the myriad things are the one horse.[5]

As far as factual questions are concerned, Chuang-tzu's skepticism is

well answered in one of the Mohist *Canons*. Provided that different things are indicated differently, it does not matter which of them is picked out as "this" or "that" (or as "horse" or "nonhorse"); the debaters, if they understand how each is using the words, will recognize that they are saying the same thing.[6] However, both Chuang-tzu and the Mohist are primarily concerned with issues of conduct; and in the case of moral terms the disputants cannot simply agree to differ, they must insist that their definitions are the right ones. To understand Chuang-tzu's criticism of disputation, it may be useful to stick to the instance of a Confucian and a Mohist debating whether it is one's duty to mourn a father for three years, each knowing that they disagree over the definition of "righteousness" yet compelled to insist on his own:

> You and I having been made to engage in disputation, if it is you not I that wins, is it really you who are on to it, I who am not? If it is I not you that wins, is it really I who am on to it, you who are not? Is it that one of us is on to it and the other not, or that both of us are on to it and both are not?[7]

We cannot break out of the deadlock unless we can find an independent standpoint from which to judge whether the righteous is the appropriate or the beneficial, but there is none:

> Who shall I call in to decide it? Suppose that someone of your party decides it, already being of your party how can he decide it? Suppose that someone of my party decides it, already being of my party how can he decide it?

Nor are we on any firmer ground if we appeal to someone whose general position differs from or agrees with both of ours (in the former case, we would simply reject his principles; in the latter, he would share principles of ours by which the issue could be settled for us both, but not necessarily for others):

> Suppose someone of a party different from either decides it, already being of a party different from either how can he decide it? Suppose someone of a party embracing both decides it, already being of a party which embraces both how can he decide it?

Elsewhere Chuang-tzu goes several dizzying steps further. He concedes, as an *argumentum ad hominem,* that the search for an independent standard might indeed arrive at something on which there is universal agreement:

> "Would you know something of which all things agreed 'That's it?' "
> "How would I know that?"
> "Would you know what you did not know?"
> "How would I know that?"

"Then does no thing know anything?"

"How would I know that? However, let me try to find words for it. 'How do I know that what I call knowing is not ignorance, how do I know that what I call ignorance is not knowing?' "[8]

Universal agreement that the righteous is the appropriate or is the beneficial would merely eliminate finally the possibility of an independent standpoint from which to judge. I would not know whether the righteous is really the beneficial, but would not I at least know what I did not know? That, however, would be a contradiction (or so Chuang-tzu thinks, a position also found in Plato's *Meno*; the Mohist *Canon* takes him up on this point).[9] But then at any rate surely I know that no thing in the world knows anything? Another contradiction. One can never get further than the doubt expressed in the form of a question, "How do I know . . . ?"

Skepticism and relativism as extreme as Chuang-tzu's are not in themselves unfamiliar to a modern reader, far from it. What is perhaps strange to him is that there is no vertigo in the doubt, which pervades the most rhapsodic passages of a philosophical poet who seems always to gaze on life and death with unwavering assurance. But there is anguish in ethical skepticism only if one feels bound to choose in spite of having no grounds to choose. For Chuang-tzu, to pose alternatives and ask "Which is beneficial, which harmful?" or "Which is right, which wrong?" is the fundamental error in life. People who really know what they are doing, such as cooks, carpenters, swimmers, boatmen, cicada-catchers, whose instruction is always available to any philosopher or emperor who has the sense to listen to them, do not go in much for analyzing, posing alternatives, and reasoning from first principles. They no longer even bear in mind any rules they were taught as apprentices. They attend to the total situation and respond, trusting to a knack which they cannot explain in words, the hand moving of itself as the eye gazes with unflagging concentration.

A craftsman is not of course "thoughtless" in the sense of "heedless"; on the contrary, he is attentive in the highest degree. As the cicada-catcher is represented as saying to Confucius:

I settle my body like a rooted stump, I hold my arm like the branch of a withered tree; in all the vastness of heaven and earth, in all the multitude of the myriad things, it is only the wings of a cicada that I know. I don't fret or fidget, I would not for all the myriad things exchange the wings of a cicada.[10]

Indeed the craftsman may do a lot of hard thinking before he makes his move. Although Chuang-tzu detests *pien*, the arguing out of alternatives, there is another word for a kind of thinking, *lun*[f] ("sort out, grade,