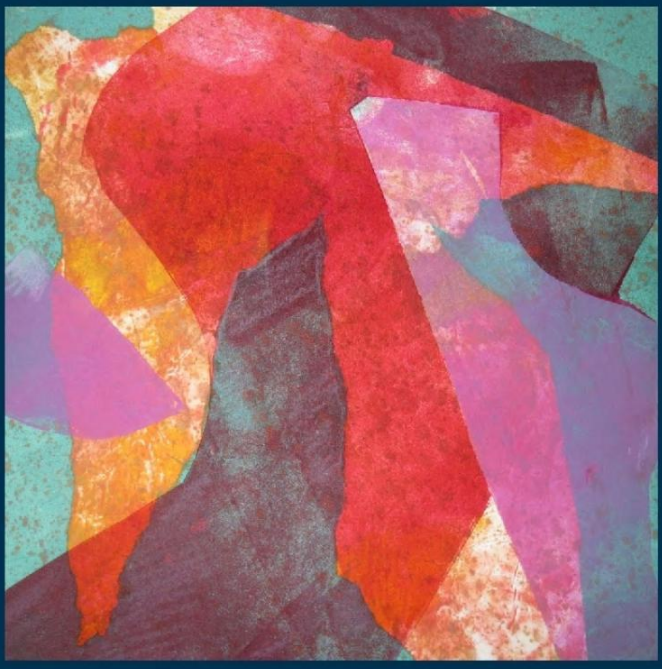
New Visions of the Zhuangzi



edited by

Livia Kohn

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Preface

LIVIA KOHN

This book grew out of the 9th International Conference on Daoist Studies, held at Boston University in June 2014. Having just published *Zhuangzi: Text and Context*, I sent out a call for papers to create a panel on the *Zhuangzi* and was astounded to receive a large number of submissions—all presenting fascinating, new, and insightful work that ended up filling all of four panels. The vibrancy of the response immediately suggested the compilation of a volume, and participants agreed to write their papers with publication in mind. In the end, not all presentations made it into the book, and three contributions joined the effort after the conference, but altogether the thirteen contributions here offer a new dimension of studying the ancient classic, looking at both the overall text and specific topics within it with new eyes and often highly creative methodology.

The first contribution, by Mercedes Valmisa, begins by repositioning the *Zhuangzi* as a whole within pre-Qin thought under the impact of newly excavated materials. Moving away from the traditional classification of texts according to schools, it focuses instead on varying approaches to life issues. Centering the discussion on life situations and changes we have no control over, including the unpredictable vagaries of fate (*ming* 命), it outlines several typical responses. One is adaptation, finding ways to go along with what life demands, and even avail oneself of the new opportunities it brings about. Another is a turning inward, a focus on the inner self, holding on to ethical and other standards and making sure one does the right thing regardless of the outcome of one's actions.

While the former appears in several chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, notably in chapter 6, the latter is central to the *Qiongda yishi* 窮達以時 (Failure and Success Depend on Opportunity), a manuscript excavated at Guodian. However tempting it may be to characterize one approach as Daoist and the other as Confucian, they both appear within the *Zhuangzi* together with a third approach to fate, showing the fluidity of philosophical discussion and the futility of thinking along the lines of traditional boundaries.

Taking a similar approach of focusing on themes rather than schools, Agnė Budriūnaitė discusses the problematic relationship between the notion of nature and the understanding of death, offering a new and more encompassing definition of both. Nature here includes *tian* 天 as the natural order of things, *xing* 性 as personal character tendencies, and *ziran* 自然 as the inherent flow of things. If nature is seen as part of the divine or-

der, death is understood as the transition from a temporary, incomplete existence to a higher and more perfect state. If nature is reduced to physical, psychological, and rational elements, death becomes the dissolution of the human being.

The article opens the multi-dimensional notion of death in the *Zhuangzi* and its relationship to its variegated perceptions of nature. From this perspective, it discusses various paradoxical relationships between the natural order of things and the immortality of the sage, the emotional nature of humanity and Zhuangzi's conception of mourning, as well as the relationship between individual and common nature. It culminates in a new vision of reducing the tension between nature and death through the philosophical notion of emptiness, the non-metaphysical concept of Dao, and the attainment of no-self.

Examining issues of control and adaptation in life from a position of contemporary ethical theory and adducing recent theories formulated by Thomas Nagel, Charles Larmore, and James Griffin, Chris Fraser next focuses on the heterogeneity of value in the *Zhuangzi*. He argues that this ethical position is at the center of Zhuangzi's vision of the overall fluidity of a flourishing life and that this outlook can make an important contribution to modern thinking. Rather than looking for permanent, stable values to follow, Zhuangzi emphasizes working with contingency, giving up all efforts at control, and adapting to each situation with a unique response. The ideal state that allows the most fluid adaptation is one of clarity or brightness (*ming* 明), creating a generalized "skill of living," the authentic, free exercise of agency, grounded in personal power (*de* 德).

Exploring the notion of clarity in more detail, Alan Fox understands it as an epistemological stance that sees through dichotomy to polarity, through the superficial to the subtle, from the manifold to the pluralistic, by privileging the concrete over the abstract. In the *Zhuangzi*, this stance is adopted to reconcile apparent contradictions. This emphasis on what might be called a "virtue epistemology" is consistent with Zhuangzi's particular presentation of acting in nonaction (*wuwei* 無為). Moving beyond the practical, he also explores the implications this has for linguistic theory.

Understanding the concept of power (*de*) as "health" Hans-Georg Moeller looks at its paradoxical illustrations—or parodies—in the *Zhuangzi*. The fifth chapter famously introduces a number of severely "crippled" characters as personifications of a supreme form of health or "complete power" (*quande* 全德). From a philosophical perspective, these passages may be seen as parodies of the Confucian ideal of matching social

constructs with a sincere commitment while at the same time also depicting a particular Daoist conception of health and power.

The same shaking up of conscious thinking through presentation of the human body is also at the center of the contribution by Lucia Q. Tang. She uses the cripple passages in the *Zhuangzi* to read a highly controversial work of avant-garde fashion that has long stumped Western fashion theorists. In 1997, the Japanese fashion house Comme de Garçons took to the Paris catwalks with an experiment in "designing the body," cutting through the fashion world's preoccupation with surfaces.

The collection showcased sheath dresses swollen with padding—burdening its models with humpbacks, tumors, and postpartum bellies. Perturbed fashion critics cried "Quasimodo," and the collection's meaning has been contested every since. Reconsidering it in light of the *Zhuangzi*, she emphasizes the text's aestheticization of the ugly and suspicion toward costume as a system of signification. Examining its reading of deformity as both a sign of power and a challenge to the Confucian virtue of social utility, in a highly creative new vision of the *Zhuangzi*, she places these axioms alongside Comme's subversion of what it means to create "fashion."

A somewhat different, more metaphorical take on the same passages appears in the work of Robert E. Allinson, who speaks of the deformed as "monsters" and argues that their appearance in the text serves two philosophical functions. First, they present a living counterexample to the norm, whether cultural, biological, or both; second, they represent a bridge between purely mythical creatures and historical or legendary characters. This occurs in several stages. First, there is pure fiction parading as fact (myth); second, there is a selected version of reality, portraying an unlikely story or ideal of reality; third, there are historically real figures from the past used unhistorically as myth, i.e., a blend of the past quality of myth and the real quality of history.

Within this framework, there are four kinds of deformities: crippled limbs or lameness, such as being one-footed or no-toed; miscellaneous deformities, i.e., hunchbacked, missing lips, and other physically contortions; simple ugliness, including simply being unbeautiful; and madness, mental deformity and social deviation. Figures representing these features, moreover, do not appear at random but present a systematic progress of understanding, expressed uniquely in the metaphorical language of the text. At the same time, his chapter provides a template how metaphors can be cognitive. If, and only if, metaphors are cognitive, then the goal of spiritual transcendence of the *Zhuangzi* can be achieved.

Similarly focusing on Zhuangzi's unique literary style, his extensive use of fables, humor, analogies, paradoxes, and generally the avoidance of direct clear-cut statements, Roy Porat examines the text's underlying "mistrust" of language. To him, a careful reading reveals that the various passages where Zhuangzi appears to denigrate and ridicule language actually manifest several distinct models of how language corresponds to the world, rooted in some different and even conflicting worldviews. His work presents a general typology of the problem of language as depicted in the different parts of the texts. After demonstrating some of these views, he analyzes the "Qiwulun," finding that the chapter's author held a rather unique view of the problem, i.e., that language is not merely a tool to convey reality, but essential in its conceptualization. The problem with language, therefore, is not simply that it fails to describe reality properly, but that it actively shapes the very reality it supposes to describe.

Taking a different approach and seeing language in the *Zhuangzi* as an art of persuasion, Jung Lee next examines the narratives that feature sages and true men. He argues that the *Zhuangzi* contains various modes of rhetoric to establish and legitimate normative authority and identifies three such modes. The first is "contextual authority," a situation where a character accepts the judgments of another as normative based on a context of shared norms. The second is Socratic influence: a speaker prods listeners to think along certain lines and come to their own conclusions, typically found in master-disciple interactions. The third are "epiphanic pointers." Here the speaker persuades the listener through a performance of some kind, which suddenly reveals the essence of the matter. All of these different modes of rhetoric, then, serve to establish the normative authority of Zhuangzi's moral vision.

Looking at the interaction between masters and disciples from a concrete point of view, in an effort to pinpoint what kinds of people actually undertook the practices Zhuang describes, Thomas Michael focuses on the mastery of a program of physical cultivation, often called *yangsheng* 養生, undertaken in organized groups linked by master-student relationships. He distinguishes reclusive Daoism centering on something like networks of mountain communities from individual practitioners who remained within society but liberated themselves through oblivion.

Unlike the recluses of the Confucian tradition, early reclusive Daoists left next to no historical records, finding expression only in stories of legendary sages who seem to spend a lot of time in mountains. Seeing the *Zhuangzi* as a documentation of the life and work of such mountain hermits and looking into their shared forms of behavior, with particular attention to common themes, images, and consequences cohering around

their textual episodes, he explores how the text reveals an early Daoist tradition of reclusion.

Boring even deeper to explore the minds of Zhuangzi hermits from the perspective of modern science, Livia Kohn examines the neurological and perception changes practitioners had to undergo to reach the ideal state, focusing on the key meditation practice of *zuowang* 坐忘, literally "sit and forget" or, more formally, "sitting in oblivion." As described in the classical passage in chapter 6, it involves actions of release: drop off, do away, separate, let go, and so on.

In actual reality, however, practitioners do not eliminate their cognitive or memory abilities. They are quite different from patients who have sustained injuries to their hippocampus and now experience "forgetfulness," the inability to remember what happened even a few hours ago. While this renders people detached and amused but also completely helpless and socially inadequate, the perfected in the *Zhuangzi* show enhanced skillfulness and capability.

Their neurological changes, it becomes evident, occur in emotional memory as processed in the amygdala. Normally leading to neuron loops of stress, amygdala processing can be altered and its responses controlled by a shift in attention, notably by focusing on a higher, more permanent value, like Heaven or life. This leads to the inhibition of automatization or, as psychologists call it today, emotion regulation. Neurologically, this is the core process of *zuowang*. In other words, rather than a dismantling of consciousness, the practice involves a conscious reprogramming and refinement of mental reactions.

The result is a childlike mind, an open curiosity and inherent radiance that connects the person to the world in exciting and stimulating ways. As Erin Cline shows, early Daoist texts present infants and children as models of what humans in their natural state look like, prior to the destructive interference of socialization, and as models for how we should live and act in the world. Examining what exactly the texts see in infants and children that is so admirable and why using cognition in its early stages is a good way of being in the world, she focuses particularly on early Chinese views on infants and children. Arguing that there is more to them than first meets the eye, she also opens the ancient understanding to contemporary relevance and argues that it has constructive value for us today.

The contemporary relevance of Zhuangzi's social and political philosophy is also at the heart of the work by Eske Møllgaard. Connecting it to Giorgio Agamben's *The Coming Community*, he argues that the *Zhuangzi* presents a clear picture of community, one that is just as substantial as the well-known Confucian conception. To him, Zhuangzi may offer a better vision of the coming community in our age of globalization than the wide-

ly promoted Confucian ideal, the Chinese dream of the rise of a splendid, prosperous, and powerful China, a nation to create a civilization that will outshine anything as yet seen in the modern world. Rather than falling in line with this ideology, Zhuangzi offers a way of life where we follow our particular existential situation without the shelter of a particular communal identity.

St. Petersburg, Fla., January 2015

Beyond Our Control? Two Responses to Uncertainty and Fate in Early China

MERCEDES VALMISA

> Like all men in Babylon, I have been proconsul; like all, a slave. I have also known omnipotence, opprobrium, imprisonment. Look: the index finger on my right hand is missing. Look: through the rip in my cape you can see a vermilion tattoo on my stomach. It is the second symbol, Beth. This letter, on nights when the moon is full, gives me power over men whose mark is Gimmel, but it subordinates me to the men of Aleph, who on moonless nights owe obedience to those marked with Gimmel. In the half light of dawn, in a cellar, I have cut the jugular vein of sacred bulls before a black stone. During a lunar year I have been declared invisible. I shouted and they did not answer me; I stole bread and they did not behead me. I have known what the Greeks do not know, incertitude."
>
> —Jorge Luis Borges, *The Lottery in Babylon*

Common approaches to early Chinese philosophy include distinguishing virtue ethics from deontology, metaphysics from political philosophy, religious versus secular views, Daoist versus Confucian thought, and other conventional categories of thinking that serve the purpose of classification.

The distinction between Daoism (*daojia* 道家) and Confucianism (*ruzhe* 儒者), the two most prominent ancient philosophical and religious traditions of China, has proven to be particularly resilient. Arguably invented in 2nd century BCE by Sima Tan 司馬談 or his son Qian 遷 and used in the *Shiji* 史記 (Historical Records; esp. 130.3289-92), it is still one of the main ways of classification and hermeneutical analysis of early texts today. Scholars place even newly found textual materials into either of these two traditions as soon as appear in print. Although they have associated some manuscripts discovered in the last decades with other philosophical categories, such as Legalism or Huang-Lao thought, they tend to rely on Daoism and Confucianism as the two pillars of thought central to early Chinese society.

Still, the study of excavated manuscripts has also persuaded many scholars not only that pre-imperial texts typically go back to compilation by different hands over long periods of time, but also that many works are composites of pre-existing materials. Texts surviving often did not have a stable or closed form until much later, and the book-and-chapter format they have today is misleading in that it invites the presumption of an un-

due degree of linearity, unity, identity, and coherence.[1] Therefore, we should not treat texts compiled under a single title as inherently sharing an intellectual identity and coherence by virtue of their purported authorship and subsequent ascription to a certain intellectual lineage. Neither should we consider a given text necessarily opposed to others that happened to be handed down in a different compilation and under the classification of a different school of thought.

The very notion of schools of thought is of dubious applicability for the pre-imperial and early imperial periods. The composite nature of pre-imperial texts begets textual variation and internal contradictions. More often than not, there is not one mind behind the text, controlling it. Instead, as has been argued, Warring States masters should be seen as a creation of the "author function" through the text, rather than a creation of a text by an author (see Lewis 1999a). In the process of inventing the masters, Han critics reflected their own factional disagreements, reconstructing philosophical ideas as lineages of the late Warring States that held different moral and political positions (Nylan 2000).

Although the *Shiji* hints at different schools or intellectual traditions (*jia* 家), the division of pre-imperial texts into text-centered lineages does not appear in full maturity until later. It is found in the imperial bibliographies of Liu Xiang 劉向 (ca. 77-6 BCE), Liu Xin 劉歆 (50 BCE-23 CE), and Ban Gu 班固 (32-92 CE), contained in the *Hanshu* 漢書 (History of the Han Dynasty) "Yiwenzhi" 藝文志 (Treatise on Literature). In the process of producing the bibliographies, editors typically identified the author of a text with the founding master (*zi* 子) or family lineage (*shi* 師) of the tradition, to which they assumed a specific set of texts belonged.

This held true for master texts as well as for commentarial traditions. On the other hand, editors seldom assigned technical writings (*shushu* 數術) to a particular author or tradition. Being aware of these limitations and the ways in which early texts have come down to us is fundamental in order to avoid erroneous judgments with regard to the status, production, and use of texts in pre-imperial China. These misconceptions are precisely what have led scholars to interpret pre-imperial texts as "master texts" and texts within a distinct intellectual lineage. However, authorship and intellectual affiliation ascription as a textual phenomenon did not emerge until the Western Han, and, thus, Confucian and Daoist are not useful classifications for pre-imperial and early imperial texts.

[1] See Boltz 2005; Nylan 2005; Nylan and Csikszentmihalyi 2003; Owen 2006; Richter 2013; Smith 2003; Yu 1985.

Textual Classification

The texts under discussion here are the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, notably its sixth chapter, "Dazongshi" 大宗師 (Great Ancestral Master), and a text excavated from Guodian tomb no. 1, the *Qiongda yishi* 窮達以時 (Failure and Success Depend on Opportunity). Scholars have ascribed them to Daoism and Confucianism respectively, each under different circumstances.

According to extant materials, the term "Daoism" (*daojia* 道家) first appears in *Shiji* 130 (Postface). Here, *jia* might best be read "specialist" rather than "intellectual tradition." Sima Tan did not refer to textual or intellectual lineages but rather to categories of methods and expertise—clearly reflected in that the "Postface" does not mention any canonical work or founder with regard to the different *jia*, but rather their different methods and techniques (Nylan and Csikszentmihalyi 2003). In the first extant reference to the *Zhuangzi* as a text, also in the *Shiji* (ch. 63), the text is said to have more than 100,000 words, although only three chapters are mentioned by name ("Quqie" 胠篋, "Daozhi" 盜跖, and "Yufu" 漁父).

The *Hanshu* "Yiwenzhi" says that the *Zhuangzi* consists of fifty-two chapters;[2] here it appears for the first time directly under the rubric "Daoist," an ascription that would mark it forever. In the 20th century, scholars have paid increasing attention to ideological contradictions and differences in writing style and literary quality; they have also attempted to match the various hands behind the work with different intellectual groups and/or philosophical trends (see Fischer 2007; Fraser 1997; Graham 2001; Hansen 2003; Klein 2011; Liu 1994a). Nevertheless, the *Zhuangzi* is still today, together with the *Daode jing*, largely and undoubtedly identified as a foundational Daoist text.[3]

The ascription of the *Qiongda yishi,* excavated in 1993 in Guodian (Jingmen City, Hubei Province), to Confucianism is not as old.[4] The tombs date from around 300 BC, the *terminus ante quem* the texts came into being. Early manuscripts generally come to us without title, authorship, date, or intellectual affiliation (see Giele 2003; Meyer 2009); yet modern scholars have developed efficient ways of inserting them into convenient, preestablished categories. Based on parallels with received texts and perceived intellectual affinities, ever since their first publication by the

[2] Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Hanshu buzhu* 漢書補註 30.1731 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji).

[3] Zhuangzi and Laozi are first associated with each other in the *Shiji* (see Barnwell 2012).

[4] For the excavation report, see Jingmen 1997. The most recent and complete account of the tomb discovery in English is found in Cook 2012, 1-96.

Jingmen City Museum (1998, 1), they have divided the texts of the Guodian corpus into Daoist and Confucian materials. The wave of studies that followed the publication of the manuscripts continued to employ these rubrics in organizing the texts (Li 1999; Li 2000). Moreover, Li Ling associates all Guodian "Confucian" works with Zisi 子思, and claims that they fill the gap in the transmission chronology between Confucius and Mencius; he and others have repeatedly linked the *Qiongda yishi* with this school (Li and Jiang 1999).

Paul Goldin identifies the Guodian manuscripts as the missing link in the transmission of Confucianism, specifically as anticipating ideas in Xunzi's 荀子 philosophy (2000, 113-46). He thus separates himself from those who ascribe them to Zisi, but also from those who would rather relate them to Mencius (Pang 1998; 2000). Recently Lai Chen (2010) opened a fourth path by arguing that the Guodian materials present a view on human nature previous to, and different from, those of both Mencius and Xunzi, and more in line with that of Confucius as represented in the *Lunyu*, which he thinks are earlier.[5] Other scholars have adopted a still different approach to the Guodian texts. Scott Cook (2012) argues that there is a higher degree of homogeneity among the Guodian "Confucian" texts than expected among Confucian texts in general; he concludes that they are the tomb occupant's personal and highly selective corpus of a particular philosophical orientation. Kenneth Holloway (2009) takes a more radical position; he argues that the texts of the Guodian corpus all share a consistent religious belief and, to some extent, political stance. He finds a principle of unity and homogeneity by virtue of a shared provenance, a means of classification different from the traditional one,[6] calling attention to the anachronism and fuzziness of the traditional classification into Confucian and Daoist categories.

We would do better to reject the notions of author, book, and school of thought as hermeneutic principles for the early period. Once all arbitrary categories retrospectively imposed on early Chinese texts—such as those of "master" as opposed to non-philosophical texts, Confucian as opposed to Daoist texts, or those written by Zhuangzi as opposed to ones by Mencius—are gone, we can openly face the domain of all formulations.

[5] For a critique of the traditional view that the *Lunyu* is the foundational work of Confucianism, written by subsequent generations of disciples of Confucius, see Hunter 2012.

[6] For reflection on the notion of "tomb library" and the possibility of the tomb to become a meaningful context for the interpretation of the objects found within it, see Meyer 2009. He argues against taking the tomb as a reference point to understand texts from a particular angle.

This domain can yet be defined (and needs to be defined) with a new classification. Indeed, understanding the different nature of each material is fundamental to define the kind of discourse we are dealing with in every instance, and hence to analyze the texts. We need to differentiate and classify the texts by types of discourse, intended audience, and targeted issues.

The difference between the old classification and the new is that the latter is upward or empirical, whereas the former was downward, imposed on texts on a theoretical, preconceived basis. Upward classification consists of studying the features of the formulations in their own context by paying attention to the divisions they call upon rather than starting from a set of fixed distinctions and then fitting materials into them (Bagley 2008). In order to accomplish this, the primary necessary step is "the project of a pure description of discursive events as the horizon for the search for the unities that form within it" (Foucault 1969, 29).

Facing the wide domain of all formulations, what new relations, connections, or regularities can we see? Some formulations appear related to others, even if not by the same author and even if the originally named authors were not aware of these connections. Some groups of formulations established as such reveal particular relations, even if they do not concern the same domains and if they do not share the same formal features. Some formulations and events of a different order show specific relationship—social, economic, political, and so on (see Foucault 2002). Looking at things afresh, we can reestablish new and meaningful connections, build new boundaries to map early Chinese thought.

When we know almost nothing about the history and society of a given period, as it is the somewhat case with the Zhou dynasty, the only context we can put texts in is textual, i.e., the plane of early Chinese textuality.[7] In this broad textual context, we can pursue patterns to establish connections and from there build new means of understanding. Willard Peterson (1988) has suggested mapping Chinese thought through the metaphor of "square and circular sources of knowing." Others, such as Mark Edward Lewis (1999b) and Donald Harper (1999), divide early Chinese texts by themes and expertise. Another option is to differentiate between performative and theoretical texts (see Yu et al. 2000).

[7] There is some material context for the pre-imperial period, invaluable to understanding society and intellectual affairs. For an analysis, see Bagley 1987; Rawson 1990; So 1995. On society, see Falkenhausen 2006; Chao 2003; 2011.

Coping with Fate

There are, therefore, many ways to divide and analyze early Chinese texts. Each might be useful for a particular purpose, but none replaces all others and can monopolize our understanding. For the purposes of this study, I would like to make a basic, broad attempt at creating a way of mapping early Chinese texts that does not employ notions of authorship, textual identity, ideological consistency, or the traditional idea of schools of thought. I will work from the assumption that there are texts with or without philosophical temperament and approach this distinction from the perspective of coping with fate. One of the most prominent early Chinese patterns of thinking in this regard is that of following calendrical and cosmic rules to ensure a proper way of action when dealing with potential future events, particularly distressing ones. That is to say, the individual accommodates his actions to some larger pattern and abides by the stable rules derived from it. To me, these practices are "non-philosophical" insofar as they do not entail personal reflection and thoughtful, creative responses.

It seems that the most common methods of dealing with daily life events and ordinary decision-making in early China involved calendars and divinations. Hemerology offers a conventional method for action patterns and ordered behavior. It creates routine in decision-making, calendrical rules that claim to apply the order of nature to the order of society offering an easy model for deciding when and how to act. Examples of this appear in the "Yueling" 月令 (Monthly Ordinances) chapter of the *Liji* 禮記 (Book of Rites) and the "Shize" 時則 (Seasonal Rules) chapter of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Book of the Master of Huainan) as well as in various excavated almanacs (*rishu* 日書) (see Loewe 1988). Divination by yarrow stalks, typically linked with the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes) and apparent in some anecdotes in the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Mr. Zuo's Transmissions), also involved the interconnection between the natural and human orders and helped people to decide among different courses of action in various situations. However, calendars and divination do not account for unpredictable and sudden (non-cyclical, non-patterned) changes, for turns of destiny such as sudden death, sickness, misfortune, punishment, or disgrace. Here the philosophical proposals I examine are at play, offering different programs for dealing with changes, fate, and the unpredictable. [8]

[8] Broadly speaking, "fate" in early China includes the following two categories: the set of capacities and features that one has by birth, i.e., whether one is born

It is not difficult to consult an almanac or the calendar to figure out an appropriate time to cut down the mulberry tree in the backyard without causing misfortune, such as the wife's death (Harkness 2013). However, it is not so easy to know how to react to, or to cope with, unexpected events that the calendar makes no allowance for, something we cannot control or prepare for in advance. When we see the unexpected as a positive and fortunate event, we never wonder how to deal with it: we simply welcome it and rejoice. However, how can and should we react to what we consider disaster or disgrace?

This paper presents two different philosophical answers to this issue. One works with "adaptation," a turning outward; the other is by means of self-vigilance, often called "being watchful over oneself" (*shenqidu* 慎其獨), which implies a turning inward. *Zhuangzi* 6 serves as the main example of adaptive behavior, whereas the *Qiongda yishi* presents an instance of self-vigilance.

Both texts call on the individual to develop a psychological response, as opposed to relying on something external, such as the calendar or divination, to restore mental peace and supply tranquility. In philosophically tempered texts, amelioration of the conditions of living comes from the individual's inner work rather than from an external technology that may provide an illusory sense of control. Only after dispensing with the artificial classification of these texts as Daoist and Confucian can we begin to establish a distinction between texts of philosophical temperament that emphasize reflection and self-cultivation and texts without philosophical temperament that focus on the establishment of fixed and predictable rules for conduct.

Zhuangzi, "Dazongshi"

Some parts of the *Zhuangzi* propose adaptive responsiveness as the best way to deal with changes and situations not under one's control. One needs to adapt purposively to changes, moving along with them and making best use of new opportunities. This response appears in the "death dialogues" in *Zhuangzi* 6, "Dazongshi," notably in the conversation between the four masters, who ask the core question, "Who can take nothingness as the head, life as the backbone, and death as the rump-bone? Who un-

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rich or handsome; and the opportunities or challenges one encounters in life, including social success, punishment, and sickness. Both are considered as "things that cannot be avoided" (*wuke naihe* 無可奈何). For extended studies, see Lupke 2004; as well as the recent issue of *Daoism: Religion, History and Society* (vol. 6, 2014), which focuses particularly on "Changing Fate in Daoism" (http://dao.crs.cuhk.edu.hk/ch/drhs_index.html).

derstands that life and death, existence and disappearance are one single body? I would become his friend."

Their friendship based on this attitude to life, they soon confront the unexpected. One of them, Master Yu, falls seriously ill, being deformed in a most hideous way. Still, he maintains a positive attitude.

> Why should I resent it? If [the maker of things] were to transform my left arm into a rooster, I would avail myself of this change to keep watch on the night. If he were to transform my right arm into a slingshot, I would avail myself of this change to shoot down an owl and roast it. If he were to transform my rump-bone into a cartwheel, and my spirit into a horse, I would avail myself of this change to mount it—why, I would never need another carriage! (see Wang 1982, 6:62)

The text continues with the general conclusion that one needs to recognize appropriate timing and accommodate to the various changes of body and world without allowing "sorrow or joy to enter." It calls this state "liberation from the bonds" and emphasizes that there is no way one can ever "win over Heaven."

The key teaching in this story is that, however big the changes, even if they involve terminal disease, we should not fear or hate them but adapt to them and see in them a window of opportunity. By adaptation, I mean the attitude of purposively adjusting oneself to match some outside tendency in order to successfully deal with it. The opposite would be to refuse taking the features of the object or situation into consideration and act either as if they were not there or in opposition to them. In other words, one would try to ignore reality or attempt to force the situation to one's will. One might also submit to it but in a resentful, grumbling manner, deploring fate and invoking the gods for help. The latter is reflective of traditional popular religion as reflected in hemerology and divination. Both supposedly offer a forewarning and provide time for preparation, and if caught unawares, one resorts to divine supplication as a remedy.

In contrast, the *Zhuangzi* proposes a thoughtful and creative personalized response, a mode of action that served as a relevant proposal for coping with fate in ancient China. Adaptation is about accepting a particular situation as it occurs—as opposed to its prediction—and deciding for and by oneself the course of action that suits the situation best. In this regard, it is also the opposite of following a pre-established set of rules or behavioral guidelines, and thus relates to freedom. Master Yu accordingly describes his attitude as "freeing of the bonds" (*xianjie* 縣解), as opposed to going against Heaven (fate, the unavoidable) and "being tied to things" (*wu you jiezhi* 物有結之).

The adaptive person liberates himself from all the prejudices engrained in conventional morality that qualify certain things, states, or situations as inherently bad and others as inherently good. Able to go along with whatever life, fate, or Heaven bring without making axiological judgments, he breaks the bonds that kept him tied to things "as they are supposed to be," that is to say, to his (and society's) acquired idea of things. Thus, he becomes open to changes and does not resent them. On the contrary, he may even see a new situation as an opportunity.

Adapting to life's changes as they come is the only reasonable and efficient response for the author of this passage. This is evident as the story continues, with Master Lai getting sick to the point of death. He says,

> The Great Clod loads me with form, labors me with life, eases me with old age, and rests me with death. Therefore, what makes good my life makes good my death. Now, if a great caster was casting metal, and the metal leapt up and said, 'I must be made a [famous sword] Moye,' the great caster must consider it to be inauspicious. (Wang 1982, 6:64)

Master Lai depicts the maker of things (Great Clod) as a caster and the non-adaptive person as a rebellious piece of metal. He explains how inadequate and useless any effort would be to go against fate, agreeing with his friends' sentiment that "nothing can ever win over Heaven." Nevertheless, this does not serve to invoke passive acceptance of the conditions of being and the vagaries of fate, nor does it support a resignation to the limits of reality. Partly because of this and similar passages, scholars have labeled the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* deterministic, conformist, and fatalist, seeing it as a philosophy of contentment with destiny rather than liberation (see Graham 1989; Liu 1994b; Slingerland 2003).

Instead, the story proposes acceptance of whatever comes and adaptation to any situations Heaven brings, so that nothing becomes a limitation. It shows the unforeseen and unavoidable as conditions of possibility, of new dimensions of being in this world. The reality of how things are and what they become always determines the way we can deal with them. Nevertheless, the goal of the philosophical proposal of adaptation is to understand that this determination can turn into conditions of success in life. Therefore, we should take advantage of those conditions rather than let them become limitations.

Adaptation as going along and accommodating to the timing and features of things requires the realization that we cannot force things to be different, but we are always able to modify our response. Moreover, it requires the acknowledgment that no conditions are *a priori* good or bad. Anything can be good or bad depending on our perspective. In this sense, the text presents an ontological and epistemological approach to reality

that leads to a particular philosophy of life. It combines the idea of phenomenal neutrality with epistemological equanimity, for only equanimity gives a person the opportunity to approach phenomena with an unprejudiced mind. The same set of given conditions can bear good, bad, or mediocre fruit, depending on how the person adapts to, takes advantage of, or deals with them. According to the *Zhuangzi*, there is no such thing as misfortune or disgrace. All situations are *a priori* axiologically equal. It is up to the individual to turn it into something beneficial. [9] Thus, Master Yu claims that, were the maker of things to transform his left arm into a slingshot, he, far from resenting the change, would use it to catch owls.

In chapter 1, Zhuangzi tells Huizi 惠子 a parable on making good use of things that illustrates this point. A Song-based family of silk dyers had developed a salve to prevent chapped hands. A stranger heard of this and bought the recipe for a goodly amount of cash, then he went to King Wu and suggested that he use to improve the performance of his navy. As a result, the navy won a major battle, the kingdom expanded, and the man received a fiefdom. Zhuangzi concludes, "The capacity of the remedy to prevent chapped hands was the same in both cases, but in one it led to a fiefdom, while in the other it did not go beyond bleaching silk. This is because the different use they made of it" (Wang 1982 1:6-7).

The first thing to note here is that it is a stranger who realizes the salve's potential and decides to use it for a different purpose. His mind is more open because he is not accustomed to the accepted use: he is unprejudiced in approaching the conditions of the object he is dealing with. The moral of the story is that the same set of conditions might bear different fruit, depending on the use we make of them. Taking the inevitable as the starting point, we can develop a creative approach to it, taking advantage of conditions, whatever they are, and using them in our favor. This works even when conditions seem to be bad, as in the case of Master Yu's tumor. In his reaction, he demonstrates the ability to turn what an apparently unfortunate situation into conditions of possibility for a new kind of life. Adaptation, then, is not passive resignation, but a creative attitude that allows the person to make the most of what is given and to retake control over what seems unassailable.

When it comes to coping with fate, this is the opposite of the *Qiongda yishi* message. The *Zhuangzi* chapter begins with a statement at first sight parallel to the opening lines of the *Qiongda yishi*: "Understanding what Heaven does, and understanding what man does, this is the ul-

[9] Many other passages throughout the *Zhuangzi* argue for the *a priori* non-axiological value of things (e.g., Wang 1982, 12:100).

timate" (Wang 1982, 6:55). Humanity and Heaven each have their particular task—true knowledge consists of knowing the difference. However, the illusion of similitude falls ends with the first paragraph, which asks how one can be sure what belongs to Heaven and what to humanity, given that they are not set. The true man (*zhenren* 真人) with true knowledge does not act against Heaven and does not rebel against what is beyond his control; therefore, nothing can affect or harm him. Indeed, the ideal state is "when Heaven and humanity do not defeat each other," that is to say, when the heavenly and the human are not separate.

The true man acts Heaven-like while keeping his humanity, thus he has a chance to overcome Heaven, precisely by not trying to overcome it. The only thing we can do to overcome the uncontrollable is to merge with it, to become one with it, "to hide the world in the world:" "The sage wanders in the realm of things that cannot be taken away from him, and by which they are all preserved. He considers youth and old age, beginning and end as equally good" (Wang 1982, 6:59). Opportunity, success, fame—all the things people tend to pursue—can be taken away, the text argues. Even consistently virtuous behavior does not guarantee a reward. While the *Qiongda yishi* proclaims this a calamity and proposes a self-reflective turn inward in order to overcome it, the *Zhuangzi* suggests embracing it in its full externality as a means to retake control over one's life, in other words, turning outward.[10]

The *Qiongda yishi*

According to the *Qiongda yishi*, when the unexpected happens, we should turn to our inner self, make sure that we are doing the right thing, and disregard the outcome. There are good and bad deeds, as well as good and bad outcomes, but good deeds do not always bear good fruit. There is an established axiological system but no moral justice. The way to regain control over the lashes of fate is to disregard them, focusing only on correcting what is in our hands, that is, our own actions. The text begins[11]:

[10] Other passages, e.g., the dialogue between Confucius and Laozi in ch. 14, propose adaptation as the most efficacious way to react towards destiny. *Zhuangzi jijie* 14:126-28.

[11] There are different arrangements for the *Qiongda yishi*. I follow the order of the manuscript in Meyer 2012, 53-76. For a reconstruction that follows Chen Jian and Chen Wei's emendations, see Cook 2012, 451-64. For Meyer's arguments, his arrangement, and criticism of the Chens, see Meyer 2005. For my translation and understanding of particular characters, I have also consulted the critical editions of Tu and Liu 2001; Liang 2003; and Li 2007.

There is Heaven and there is humanity, 有天有人
Heaven and humanity each have their lot. 天人有分
By examining the different lots of Heaven and humanity,[12] 察天人之分
we understand the actions we should undertake. 而知所行矣
If there is a person but it is not his appropriate time, 有其人無其世
even if he is a worthy he will not carry out. 雖賢弗行矣
In turn, if there is the appropriate time, 苟有其世
what difficulties can there be? 何難之有哉
(*Guodian chumu zhujian* 27:1-2)

Heaven and humanity are distinct entities with distinct lots or charges in life. Understanding this basic ontological difference is necessary so we can understand our role and field of activity in this world. The idea of an "appropriate time" relates to that of Heaven as expressed in the parallelism construction of the text. Heaven, understood as fate or the given, determines the appropriate time for actions to succeed. The individual must be ready for an appropriate time as it is bound to arise by cultivating himself and becoming virtuous. However, even for the virtuous ones, the coming of the appropriate time is not certain. Success and failure depend on opportunity, on meeting the appropriate time or person. The text clarifies this in a series of six illustrations. Here are the first two:

Shun used to plough at Li Mountain, 舜耕於厲山
and make pottery along the Gu River. 陶埏於河沽
He was established as Son of Heaven 立而為天子
due to his encounter with Yao. 遇堯也
Shao wore shabby clothing and a hemp blanket, 邵緌衣枲蓋
in a mourning hat, he covered his head with hemp clothes. 帽絰蒙巾
He was released from the task of building walls 釋板築
and became an assistant to the Son of Heaven 而佐天子
due to his encounter with Wu Ding. 遇武丁也 (Guodian 27:2-4)

[12] The separation between Heaven and humanity is a common *topos* in early China. The "Letter to Ren'an" 報任安書 attributed to Sima Qian also emphasizes the need to understand the boundaries between Heaven and man as the basis of theodicy (*Hanshu* 62.2735). There are also parallels in *Xunzi* 17.308: "He who is discerning in the difference between Heaven and man can be called a perfected person" (see Wang Xianqian, *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), and *Wenzi* 11.1a: "Laozi said: It is a fact that people of learning can discern the difference between Heaven and man, and understand the roots of order and chaos" (Du Daojian 杜道堅, *Wenzi zuanyi* 文子纘義; Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1989).

All six illustrations share a common structure: they show people standing in low positions whose fate changes by virtue of an encounter. A chance encounter at the right time with the right person is the turning point. As the text later suggests, an encounter is a timely opportunity.[13] As opposed to the *Zhuangzi*, which advocates the creation of opportunity through adapting to circumstances, the virtuous person here does not *create* opportunity, but merely *awaits* it. This notion of awaiting opportunity, moreover, resonates with the following passage from the *Zhanguoce* 戰國策 (Warring States Strategies; ed. Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1978):

> The sage cannot create opportunity, but when opportunity arrives, he should not miss it. Shun was virtuous, but had he not encountered Yao, he would not have become Son of Heaven. Tang and Wu were virtuous, but if not for the inappropriateness of Jie and Zhou they never would have reigned. Therefore, it is the case that the virtue of Shun, Tang, and Wu would have not made them rulers, had they not encounter the right opportunity. (5.171)

The *Qiongda yishi* further emphasizes the lack of correlation between correct moral behavior and high social standing, the rupture of the often assumed causal link between action and consequence.

> At first they lay low, 初韜晦
> then their names were elevated. 后名揚
> This is not because their virtue had increased. 非其德加
> Zixu started with many merits, 子胥前多功
> then he was put to death. 后戮死
> This is not because his wisdom had decayed. 非其智衰也
>
> The thoroughbred horse feared Zhang Mountain, 驥厄張山
> and the black-mottled grey horse halted at the Thorns of Shao. 騏控於邵棘
> This is not because they had lost their physical condition. 非亡體狀也
> They exhausted the four seas, reaching as far as a thousand *li* 窮四海至千里
> because they encountered Zao Fu. 遇造[父]故也
> To encounter or not to encounter lies with Heaven. 遇不遇天也
> (*Guodian* 27: 9-10)

The first stanza underlines the rupture of the causal link between virtuous conduct and social standing. The elevation of Shun, Shao, Tang, and other figures was not due to an increase in their virtue, as Wu Zixu's sentence

[13] As Cook notes, citing the *Lunheng* 論衡 (Balanced Discussions), "Feng yu" 逢遇 (Encountering Circumstances), "the term *yu* 遇 often carries the sense of random fate or unforeseeable circumstances" (2012, 430).

was not a response to moral failure. The second stanza uses the image of fine horses to represent the virtuous person and reaches the conclusion that whether he succeeds or fails depends not on his virtue but on the encounter of opportunity. Whether there is an opportunity to flourish or not depends upon Heaven, not humanity.

It is not clear what kind of Heaven the text depicts—natural or personal—but, no matter what, it is equal to fate. If natural, it is the same as fate; if personal, it is a deity that creates fate. Either one is different from Heaven in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions and the odes of the *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of Odes)—a god who actually rewards good deeds and punishes bad ones. The whole idea of the "mandate of Heaven" relates to a personal Heaven who oversees human action and responds to it accordingly.[14] Yet according to the *Qiongda yishi* there is no moral justice in the world. The philosophical program offered in this text indeed requires the nonexistence of moral justice. Because the realms of Heaven and humanity are separate and do not necessarily correspond, humanity must search his independence and self-control by himself, without depending upon the turns of Heaven-fate. The *Qiongda yishi* develops this idea:

> [The virtuous person] moves not in order to succeed, 動非為達也
> which is why he does not [resent] when he fails. 故窮而不[怨
> [The virtuous person] hides not in order to achieve a name, 隱非][15]為名也
> which is why he does not care when nobody knows him. 故莫之智而不吝
> The orchid grows in deep and secluded valleys. [芷蘭生于幽谷][16]
> It is not because there are no people to smell it [非為無人][17]
> that it is not fragrant.嗅而不芳
> The beautiful jade is covered in mountain stones, 荅堇愈寶山石
> It is not because no one knows its goodness 不為[無人知其]
> that it neglects itself.善負己也 (*Guodian* 27:11-14)

[14] Among classical passages, this is evident in the *Shuoyuan* 說苑 (Garden of Sayings; see Lu 1977, 17.580) and the *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 (Master Han's Outer Commentary to the Book of Odes; see Lai 1972, 7.282). For more detailed discussions, see also Lupke 2004.

[15] Li Ling adds the three graphs 怨隱非 where the bamboo strip is broken (2007, 114).

[16] Li Ling adds the six graphs 芷蘭生于幽谷, based on passages in *Xunzi* and *Hanshi waizhuan* (2007, 114).

[17] The graphs 非為無人 are added by Li Ling based again on *Xunzi* and *Hanshi waizhuan* according to context and following the pattern "failure, yet not x," visible throughout the passage (2007, 114).

Each item here, be it orchid or jade, misses an encounter of opportunity. The teaching is that, even if one does not encounter the opportunity (for someone to smell the flower or see for the stone), virtue remains undiminished. We can read this on two levels. First, the descriptive level speaks of virtue as an inherent quality, a permanent and inseparable element that belongs to the object and not the perceiver. Without external perception, the inherent qualities still shine, recalling the verse of the mystic poet Angelus Silesius: "The rose is without why; it blooms because it blooms. It pays no attention to itself, asks not whether it is seen" (Heidegger 1996, 35).

Much as the rose, the virtuous person does not engage in an action to achieve a particular result—"he moves not in order to succeed" —but simply because it is the right thing to do. His virtue is an inherent quality regardless of whether or not anyone sees it or what reactions it might provoke. Second, the normative level indicates that the virtuous person must never neglect his virtuous conduct even when he is certain that no one can appreciate it: "It is not because no one knows its goodness that it neglects itself." This idea connects with the last stanza:

> Failure and success depend on opportunity, 窮達以時
> Virtuous conduct may be constant, 德行一也
> Yet praise and slander rest on something else. 譽毀在旁
> If acuity reaches the one mother, 聽之一母
> black and white need not be distinguished. 緇白不釐
>
> Failure and success depend on opportunity, 窮達以時
> dark and bright do not get reiterated along with them. 幽明不再
> This is why the gentleman 故君子
> is committed to self-examination.敦于反己 (*Guodian* 27: 14-15)

The recalcitrant lack of control of the individual over the fruit of his actions leaves him in a state of absolute uncertainty and powerlessness. The only thing he can control is his actions. Hence, actions belong to humanity, while consequences belong to Heaven. Those who advocate the text as holding a Confucian idea of Heaven insist on the reading that humanity begins an action, but Heaven (fate) completes it. Therefore, humanity must await Heaven's decision and always depends upon it. Li Ling (2007) makes this argument alluding to the popular saying, "Humanity proposes but God disposes," attested for the first time in the Ming novel *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 (Romance of the Three Kingdoms).

In the "Confucian" vision, Heaven is as a rhetorical justification for the lack of success of the virtuous man. The gentleman must accept Heaven's order (fate), even when it seems unfair and incomprehensible. Robert

Eno (1990) represents this view when he argues that "early Confucians" legitimated both their moralizing worldview and their failure to change the world through the notion of Heaven. The idea of humanity's complete dependence on Heaven justifies failure and disgrace. It is as a means of creating contentment and acceptance in an unruly world. Scott Cook (2012) also emphasizes the role of Heaven as fate in the *Qiongda yishi*, although not as a means for self-justification. Rather, he reads the message as one of constant self-cultivation. Given that a life-changing chance encounter might happen any time, the gentleman must keep his virtue constant so he is ready when opportunity calls. In this reading, humanity depends on Heaven, and the line of separation between the two is not easy to determine.

In contrast, I read the *Qiongda yishi* to emphasize the moral autonomy of humanity with respect to Heaven. In the last stanzas, the individual does not await Heaven's judgment to prove him right. Instead, he acts with moral correctness without expecting any reward or return, keeping to virtuous conduct even in the face of slander and failure. Human responsibility turns back on the person: given that no exterior sign can be read as a direct reflection of his actions, he must become his own judge. Since the only thing the gentleman can control is his own actions, straightening his behavior and conducting himself in a morally right way is the only issue that preoccupies him.

Still, despite the fact that the text puts weight on Heaven's part when it comes to the outcomes of human action, it does not take away human autonomy. On the contrary, it reinforces it, saying that even if there is something that we cannot overcome, we may yet go beyond it by means of exercising our agency within the human sphere of activity. By acting purely as humans and not trying to accomplish a Heaven-like degree of control over outcomes, we can overcome Heaven in the sense of achieving autonomy from its charge, the lot it has assigned us, the fate it has in store for us. The *Qiongda yishi* gives humanity a sphere of moral autonomy that goes beyond human achievement. This represents a "turning inward." In this manner, the virtuous person copes with fate and uncertainty, and is able to (re)gain control upon what seemed far beyond it.

Approaches to Fate

The two texts present different philosophical approaches to fate and control. To me, they belong on the plane of philosophically tempered texts, as distinguished from texts that do not offer ontological or psychological means to reflect thoughtfully and creatively upon human behavior and

develop it in the world. Both present different philosophical programs as answers to the same issue: how to take control over our lives when they seem swamped by uncertainty. The *Zhuangzi* chapter has a "turning outward" approach by means of adaptation; the *Qiongda yishi* proposes a "turning inward" as the only way to overcome fate. Interestingly, other chapters of the *Zhuangzi* contain passages that contradict the teachings of chapter 6; they are in ideological consonance with the moral approach of the *Qiongda yishi*.

For example, the story of Confucius's sojourn between the two states of Chen and Cai.[18] Although he is in distress, expelled from his native state of Lu, lacking food and water, and driven to exhaustion, he keeps singing and playing the lute as if nothing had happened, provoking his disciples to accuse him of being "a complete failure." Confucius responds:

> What kind of talk is that! When the gentleman succeeds in penetrating the way, it is called "success"; when he fails in obtaining the way, it is called "failure." Now you see that I, Qiu, embrace the way of humanity and righteousness in order to face the intricacies of a chaotic age. How can this be considered failure? It is the case that I engage in inner reflection and do not fail in pursuing the way, that when I face difficulties I do not lose my virtue. When the cold weather arrives and the frost and dew fall, I understand how luxuriant pines and cypresses can be. This strait between Chen and Cai is my delight! (see Wang 1982, 28:257)

Redefining success and failure with a subjective turn, Confucius proclaims his moral autonomy. He is not dependent upon external conditions to prove his righteous moral conduct. He himself is his only judge, working through "inner reflection" (*neixing* 內省), another way of referring to self-examination (*fanji* 反己/ *shenqidu*). Instead of proposing to look outward as chapter 6 suggests, this passage matches the position of the *Qiongda yishi* in proposing an inward turn to overcome calamity by means of moral autonomy and independence from external conditions, including Heaven. The same holds true of the following passage in *Zhuangzi* 16:

> How can people of Dao raise themselves in this age! How can this age raise itself in Dao! When Dao has no means to rise in the age, and the age has no means to rise in Dao, although the sages are not hiding in mountains and forests, their virtue is obscure. . .

[18] The story of Confucius's journey between Chen and Cai is found in different versions in many early sources, including *Zhuangzi*, *Lüshi chunqiu*, *Xunzi*, *Lunyu*, and *Mozi*. Each version offers a different take on the story, Confucius' image varying accordingly from sage hero to hypocrite fool. See Makeham 1998; Chen 2004; Li 2011.

> If only the fate of the times were appropriate, [the sages] could carry out great moral actions in the world. They could bring back a state of unity without leaving a trace. Since the fate of the times is not appropriate, all they find is failure in the world. All they can do is to deepen their roots in tranquility and wait. This is the way to preserve oneself . . .
>
> With a sense of autonomy, they keep to their places and reflect on their nature. What else is there for them to do? . . . Therefore, we say, they simply rectify themselves. (Wang 1982, 16.136-7)

Other *Zhuangzi* passages, too, speak of taking control over fate through self-reflection and by improving the only thing we control, i.e., our own behavior. Examples include the stories of Shen Tujia who has lost a foot (ch. 5) and of Confucius traveling to Kuang (ch. 17), both representing an attitude in clear opposition to the position represented in chapter 6.

There is, moreover, a third position in the *Zhuangzi*. Chapter 11 links fate with inner nature so that "letting fate be" is a way of realizing our true nature. People lose their original nature and proper fate when they try to impose an external order upon things, which really should be self-regulating. Concerned with rewards and afraid of punishments, they lose their ability to act in accordance with their inner nature and fate. Therefore, it is best to live by non-constrictive or non-assertive action (*wuwei* 無為), also the best way for the ruler to govern his state. Only by "cutting off sageliness and abandoning knowledge," can we return to our original state and ultimately realize our proper fate. All attempts at control can only lead to chaos and artificiality. Therefore, "the sage comprehends Heaven but does not assist it" (Wang 1982, 11.98). This is yet a third view with regard to fate and the uncontrollable in the *Zhuangzi* where what is not under our control is always the best that can happen, and where all attempt to take control over it leads to chaos and artificiality.

A heterogeneous compilation, the *Zhuangzi* thus contains materials holding different and even opposing intellectual and philosophical positions. Unfortunately, the fact that both the ancient texts and the organized, religious tradition of Daoism are multifaceted and encompass a number of different views and perspectives, outlooks and positions, tends to bypass scholars in their desire—like the Dialecticians in the *Zhuangzi*—to create integrated systems, establish limiting classifications, and generally make traditional views conform to their expectations.

With regard to uncertainty and fate, notions of adaptation (turning outward) and self-vigilance (turning inward) widely permeate early Chinese texts, crossing traditional categories of schools of thought and intellectual affiliations. Looking at different philosophical proposals for coping with life's vicissitudes in various early Chinese texts unbound by lineage

structures provides a strong argument against all traditional distinctions and opens the doors to a new and more fluid vision of the *Zhuangzi* and other early sources.

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Joys of an Empty Skull: The Tension between Nature and Death in the *Zhuangzi*

AGNĖ BUDRIŪNAITĖ

> When Master Zhuang went to Chu, he saw an empty skull. . . . At midnight, the skull appeared to him in a dream and said, . . . "When you are dead, there is no ruler above and no subjects below. There are no affairs of the four seasons; instead, time passes leisurely as it does for Heaven and Earth. Not even the joys of being a south-facing king can surpass those of death." (*Zhuangzi* 18; Mair 1994, 170)

One of the most important philosophical problems of all times and in all cultures was and still is the relationship between life and death. Numerous philosophical questions arise from this issue or converge into it. Nature, freedom, our relationships with other people and the world, even the notion of life all depend on how we conceive of death.

On the other hand, the understanding of death depends on our notion of life and the nature of existence. The meaning of death, the validity of sorrow, and the purpose of mourning always connect to the notion of nature, human and otherwise. The question then becomes inevitable: What is nature? How does death affect it? Many different answers have appeared in the history of philosophy, but for our purposes here, we begin by defining death as the transition from a temporary incomplete state of life to a higher and more perfect state of nature as a part of a higher, possibly divine order. Accordingly, death is the dissolution of the human being as and when nature is reduced to its various physical, psychological, and rational elements.

Although nature is supposed to be the same all over the world, according to Franklin Perkins, "we will not find the equivalent for the European concept of 'nature' in the Chinese language and culture" (2005, 327-340). However, the philosophical notion of nature is one of the most important themes in Chinese philosophy—including Daoism—and particularly in the *Zhuangzi*. The text discusses various aspects of nature (or natures), using different stories and presenting it from different perspectives. Those include Dao 道 as the one nature of all things and everything, Heaven (*tian* 天) as the nature of the world, inner or human nature (*xing* 性), self-so (*ziran* 自然) as the naturalness of Dao, world, and humanity, as well as the non-nature of the sage or true man, the overcoming of all these concepts and categories.

The aim of this paper is to reveal the notion of death in the philosophy of Zhuangzi through its relationship to the specific aspects of nature.[1] It explores his critique of opposite-based thinking and the paradoxical relationship between the natural order of things (*tian*) and the "immortality" of a sage, the emotional aspect of human nature (*xing*) and his conception of grief and mourning. It also elucidates his way of reducing the tension between nature and death founded on the non-metaphysical concept of Dao and the notion of the empty self of the sage (*wuwo* 無我) in this paper. Most probably, it will produce more questions than answers in its philosophical approach.

The *Zhuangzi* shares with ancient Daoism the prevailing notion of *qi* 氣, the cosmic vital energy that generates and pervades everything in the world, as well as the notion of Dao as all-embracing oneness. These notions create the basis for a specific understanding of humanity and the world: all parts of the human being as well as all beings and all parts of the world create one whole. However, many ancient Chinese perceived life and death as opposites, one of them being valuable, while the other is to be avoided as much as possible. They have this in common with many people elsewhere in the world, but their answer was to attempt an escape from death, or at least its suspension, by engaging in longevity (and later, alchemical) practices.

In this context, Zhuangzi was an exception, since to him life and death were equal parts of universal transformation. Still, even in his work, there are several stories that support nourishing life (prominently in chs. 3 and 4). Other stories seem to do the opposite, and glorify death (e.g., the story with an empty skull in ch. 18; Mair 1994, 170). While either one may reflect an emphasis on a particular attitude, overall, the text centers on a critique of opposite-based thinking in general.

[1] As much as the aim of this article is not linguistic or historical but a conceptual analysis, I refer to the entire text named *Zhuangzi* (Inner, Outer, and Miscellaneous chapters) as one opus. I do not aim to distinguish which concept came from Zhuang Zhou himself, and which from later followers. I consider the *Zhuangzi* as representing one philosophical, cultural, and religious tradition, formed on the basis of the thought of Zhuangzi himself. Therefore, I refer to the implied author of the text as "Zhuangzi." The ideas and expressions in the *Zhuangzi* do not express a single and united theory as might be expected in a Western discourse. The theme of death, however, appears constantly. Other scholars have discussed it, notably Ames 1998; Graham 1981, 23–24; Nivison 1991, 138-39; Wang 2014, 64.

Critique of Opposite-Based Thinking

Seeing life and death as opposites seems a natural, essential pattern of human thinking. It naturally connects with other opposites, such as self and others, good and evil, true and untrue. Human beings usually evaluate things from the perspective of self and others and naturally apprehend the world in this way. The perspective leads directly to the evaluation of things is ethical (good and evil) and epistemological (truth and nontruth, real and unreal) terms. Whoever speaks of himself as "I" naturally supposes that what "I" am feeling is more real and true than something someone else claims to be feeling. Something that seems to be clear and logical to "my" mind is always closer to truth (my truth) than to someone else's convictions. "My" death and the death of "my" beloved is always more real and, of course, much worse than the death of ten thousand people elsewhere.

Zhuangzi criticizes opposite-based thinking and looks at any opposite pair of events or objects as natural phases of everlasting flux.

> Life and death, preservation and loss, failure and success, poverty and wealth, worthiness and unworthiness, slander and praise, hunger and thirst, cold and heat—these are all the transformations of affairs and the operation of destiny. Day and night, they alternate before us, but human knowledge is incapable of perceiving their source. Therefore, we should not let them disturb our equanimity,[2] nor should we let them enter our numinous treasury. (ch. 5; Mair 1994, 47-48).

What harmony of nature is Zhuangzi talking about here? Are hunger and thirst, and life and death not elements of human nature? What is "our numinous treasury" or a "spirit storehouse"? Is Zhuangzi contemplating one nature or many different ones? Chapter 17 has, "Dao has neither beginning nor end, but things have life and death. Not being able to presume upon their completion, they are now empty, now full, without stability in form. . . . They change each moment" (Mair 1994, 157-58).

Maybe human nature and the world (i.e., the various temporary things) differ essentially from the otherworldly nature of Dao; the former does not influence the latter like in the Platonic dualism. However, all the authors who noticed the exceptional notion of Dao in the *Zhuangzi* have

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[2] The last sentence is translated differently. Mair uses "equanimity" for *he* 和, applying the term to human beings. James Legge has instead, "They are not sufficient therefore to disturb the harmony [of nature], and are not allowed to enter into the treasury of intelligence" (1962, 232). For him, *he* as "harmony" applies to the whole world. Burton Watson says, "Therefore, they should not be enough to destroy your harmony; they should not be allowed to enter the storehouse of spirit" (1996, 70). To him, *he* refers to the listener's or reader's inner state.

rejected such a reading. The text has certain ironic and even disrespectful things to say about Dao; they hardly support a metaphysical interpretation: for example, Dao even appears in excrement (ch. 22; Mair 1994, 217). Geling Shang asserts that Zhuangzi understood Dao differently from most of his contemporaries, including Laozi. According to him, Zhuangzi produced "a critique of Dao as metaphysical reality and cosmological originator" and established "a positive Dao of the world and an affirmative attitude toward life itself" (2006, 17).

If Dao is non-metaphysical, the nature of Dao and of things cannot be essentially different from each other. On the other hand, Dao is the nature of things. Zhuangzi presents life and death as stages of the transformation (*hua* 化) of things, i.e., Dao itself, opposing but not denying each other and still creating one whole. Thus, if there is only one Dao as the one and only essential nature of everything, the problem of opposites lies entirely in our consciousness. Plus, Zhuangzi's constant critique of opposite-based thinking shows that such thinking is not merely a feature of the contemporary world or of Western culture, but goes back all the way to antiquity. The people surrounding Zhuangzi thought in just the same way. Why, then, should we think that opposite-based thinking is not a part of human nature, if it has been around for so long and is typical for people in all times and cultures?

Discussing the dialectical and conditional character of life and death as opposites, Zhuangzi invokes the example of how people understand dreams and reality. One of its best-known stories in this context is the butterfly dream, presenting an allegory of multiple layers of meaning, exposed to an astonishingly wide variety of interpretations (see Kohn 2014, 40-43).[3] It clearly consists of three phases: Zhuang Zhou before, while, and after dreaming he is a butterfly. The relationship among these segments reveals different notions of human nature and the world.

For one, it is possible to read the story in such a way that there is only one being, a human, who undergoes a transformation. In that case, the allegory shows the relativity of perception: there is no reason to consider that reality is something other than what we usually understand as reality. Such an interpretation may seem logical and familiar to Westerners. However, in the same chapter Zhuangzi says, "I too am dreaming when I say

[3] Many but not all scholars translate the story as first-person narrative ("Once, I, Zhuang Zhou, dreamt . . ."). They differ vastly in their reading. For example, Robert Elliot Allinson translates the allegory to match his theory of spiritual transformation and even changes the position of two lines (1989, 79, 82). Hans-Georg Moeller translates it by evading all personal pronouns, instead emphasizing the separateness of the different phases (2006, 48).

that you are dreaming" (ch. 2; Mair 1994, 23), and we find ourselves caught in an Epimenides paradox, i.e., a Cretan says that all Cretans are liars. There is no clear distinction of the "real" reality of the dream and the "even more real" reality of wakefulness. Any assertion we make about the world can be neither universal nor trustworthy as long as we remember the skeptical author's attitude toward language and conceptual thinking.

Another interpretation sees three independent beings in the story and understands the allegory as an illustration of reincarnation. However, this is not true either, since the reincarnation in China only appears in medieval Daoism under the influence of Buddhism (see Bokenkamp 2007). Hence, the transformation of Zhuang Zhou in and out of the butterfly cannot be read in the literal or concrete sense of a physical change.

A third possible reading sees three separate stages of transformation, but does not place them on the physical level. It reads the story as an allegory of our understanding of life and death—understanding that both sides are real, since both are equal and equally valuable. There is no reason to worry or fear either one. This approach appears in several scholars (Graham, Moeller, and Wu among others), emphasizing the specific notion of death in the *Zhuangzi*, possibly following Guo Xiang 郭象 (d. 312).

> Well, the course of time does not stop for a moment, and today does not persist in what follows. Thus, yesterday's dream changes into a today. How could it be different with the change between life and death? . . . Only the stupid think they really know that life is something delightful and death is something sad. That is what is called "never having heard of the changing of things. (Moeller 2006, 51)

Guo Xiang interprets the butterfly allegory as the recognition of the relationship of life and death and emphasizes the calmness of heart-and-mind with regard to both. Guo Xiang might be read as focusing on dualism; he states that, "being one, there is no knowledge of the other. Being a butterfly while dreaming is genuine" (2006, 51). However, this would not be correct. The allegory necessarily works with the distinction between the dreaming man and the butterfly (like between life and death). However, their separateness and opposition are conditional and only in respect of each other. Their way of being opposite is like that of the spokes in a wheel: they are all equal and in perfect harmony if seen from the perspective of the empty hinge.

As Wayne Alt argues, Zhuangzi "has never questioned the reality of the distinction between living and dying, life and death, and so on. His question was what to do about them when we are alive, but refusing to distinguish between them was not one of his answers" (2000, 6). Thus, distinctions and partial opposites are not foreign to Zhuangzi's philosophy.

The object of his critique is not opposites *per se*, but our understanding of them as absolute and all opposite-based ways of thinking.

Human Nature and Mourning

Death tends to evoke anxiety and sorrow in the human mind. Even old people still find something delightful in life they do not want to lose, or they fear what comes next in the afterlife. The *Zhuangzi*, however, presents several cases where people exhibit tranquility and indifference in the face of death. For example, although sick and close to death, the four masters do not complain. Master Yu says, "I received life because the time had come; I will lose it because the order of things passes on. Be content with this time and dwell in this order and then neither sorrow nor joy can touch you" (ch. 6; Watson 1968, 81). He knows that he will die soon, but he does not try to escape death or strive for immortality. He accepts death as the natural order of things: "Nothing can ever win against Heaven—that's the way it's always been."

A similar approach to death appears later in the book, when Zhuangzi is on his deathbed. He looks at the universe as his home both while being alive and while being dead. He does not speak about "eternity" or "afterlife;" he does not feel sorrow for himself as he is dying and is not disgusted with the possibility to be eaten by other living things (ch. 32; Mair 1994, 332). Here again, death is as a natural process (*ziran*) equated with transformation itself. Many sages and true men in the *Zhuangzi* show such a calm attitude toward death and sickness; it is an exemplary attitude as opposed to sorrow and joy, grief and delight appear to be "inauthentic."

Another aspect of human nature in relation to death becomes apparent in mourning. The best-known story in this context is about the death of Zhuangzi's wife, ironically in a chapter called "Perfect Happiness." Huizi visits Zhuangzi to offer condolences and finds him beating on basin-drum and singing. Huizi reproofs him for this behavior. Zhuangzi explains the cycle of transformation and notes that death is just one phase, as good or bad as transformation itself. "When she first died, how could I of all people not be melancholy?" (ch. 18; Mair 1994, 169). "When she first died, do you think I didn't grieve like anyone else?" (Watson 1968, 113).

Obviously, even sages have emotional aspects as part of their human nature.[4] It would be difficult to deny the naturalness of the simple psycho-

[4] Of course, the sage's attitude to the emotions, or rather, his way of experiencing them is different from that of ordinary people. Chris Fraser calls this the Zhuangist "virtuoso view" and discusses the possible detachment from and involvement in the emotions as well as their specific features (2011).

logical attachment to relatives and friends.[5] Accordingly, sorrow and mourning after the loss of a loved one are not alien to human nature. Still, as the story about the death of Zhuangzi's wife shows, the mourner undergoes a change. First, Zhuangzi feels sadness; then, acknowledging the transformational nature of things, he sings and drums. Both emotional states—grief and joy—are natural.

The text suggests that it is natural to mourn and express emotions at death, something even sages do. According to Qingping Liu, Daoism in general may be described as a form of "natural emotionalism," "for it takes natural feelings as the first principles of human life in harmony with the natural world" (2011, 121). The whole world has emotional aspects, however, it remains unclear how long grief and mourning should last—a moment, a year, or a lifetime? At what point does it become unnatural? When one of the masters dies, the other two play music and sing songs (ch. 6). The text does not mention their grief, but there is no reason to assume they never felt any. We can only suspect that their grieving was not important for the author(s) of the text.

On the other hand, as evident from other stories, the book criticizes any attachment to emotions or any tendency of making them a guide of life. Then again, mourning as a stagnant social norm, an empty form of a ritual is completely different from natural emotions. As Amy Olberding states, "Zhuangzi accepts the norm of nature-emotion that is visited upon him by events and his own constitution as a creature who cares for another. He rejects the norm of society-emotion that must be actively cultivated and sustained through reflection that reifies loss as an injury" (2007, 343).

Mengsun Cai is an exemplary sage, a master mourner who mourns without enough grieving. The *Zhuangzi* describes him a "singularly awakened" (ch. 6; Mair 1994, 62). Qin Shi, on the other hand, is a non-mourner. After Laozi dies, he goes to mourn but leaves because of the artificial outpouring of emotion in the room. "There were some who wished not to speak but spoke anyway, who wished not to cry but cried anyway. This is to flee from nature while redoubling human emotion, thus forgetting what we have received from nature" (ch. 3; Mair 1994, 28).

Maybe for Zhuangzi, right after losing its spontaneity ("they wished not"), emotion becomes unnatural. On the other hand, the loss of spontaneity is as individual as everything else. Olberding says that the meaning of "acting naturally" can be understood as acting in accord with my own

[5] The question about how the sages' friendship is special is another issue. Again, the relationship to death plays an important role. However, even a sage (Zhuangzi) feels melancholy after his friend's (Huizi's) death. For more, see Blakeley 2008; Lundberg 1998.

nature (as in the case of Zhuangzi after death of his wife) or in accord with "a distinctively non-local, globalized nature, the macrocosmic processes that govern the wider world" (as in the case of Mengsun Cai or the four masters) (2007, 345). She sees these two modes of acting as different levels of perfection. I would say, however, that this evaluation is only valid if we try to find or build a continuous, coherent theory in the *Zhuangzi*. This seems wrong to me: we cannot derive any universally verifiable rule from the text. It has some major ideas though, and we can claim that every attempt to redouble emotion, to develop deep attachments to it or preserve it, appears as a loss of spontaneity and represents an inauthentic attitude toward human nature.

Attachment to emotions presupposes opposite-based thinking. Fear of one's own death as well as grief over the death of a loved one correlate with an attitude toward death as a loss and toward life as something more valuable than death, i.e., the opposite of life versus death. This is closely related to the idea of the illusory character of the self, which not by accident appears in the context of the discussion on mourning (ch. 6; Mair 1994, 62). Any sorrow for someone's death relates immediately to the notion of self, because it is "I" that feels the loss of the person, who was "my" friend or relative, i.e., the opposite of self and other.

One danger is to see Zhuangzi's ideas as extreme emotional relativism, which would leave no place for stability of any sort. Zhuangzi, however, allows room for something he calls "ultimate joy without joy" (ch. 18; Mair 1994, 168), "anger as an exhibition of non-anger" (ch. 23; Mair 1994, 236), and the final "great awakening" (ch. 2; Mair 1994, 22-23). Accordingly, there should be a position beyond all opposites, a true knowledge beyond knowing and unknowing, and a true nature beyond all natures.

Who, then, really can see all opposites as equal parts of one integrated process of transformation? Logically, this is possible only while looking in on things from the outside. Does this, then, mean that this looking "from the outside" is just a relativist outlook? Does the person simply not see the essential difference between life and death? Would this be just one more approach? Or would it represent real liberation (as Westerners would call it) from all opposites? Would that make the viewer physically independent of nature's law?

The Nature of Things and the Immortality of the Sage

One of the characters for the idea of nature in *Zhuangzi* is *tian*, which means the common nature of things as well as the order of the world as a whole.[6] Cook Ding follows this nature while cutting up the ox; Qin Shi talks about it in terms of "heavenly nature" when he comes to offer condolences after Laozi's death (ch. 3; Mair 1994, 16-28). The idea is also prevalent in chapter 6.

It is obvious that human beings take birth, grow, and decline like any other thing, i.e., they depend on the same common nature of things. The *Zhuangzi* does not assert that a sage is an exception to this rule. Sages, too, live, get ill, lose bodily functions, and die. They obey the destiny of being a thing among other things. Called true men (*zhenren* 真人), they are people who have developed human nature to perfection. Death is no stranger to them.

On the other hand, the *Zhuangzi* also present sages as "unnatural" beings, as people who have gone beyond nature. It typically contrasts them to the temporary and continuously changing world. Temporary things such as wealth, joy, and sorrow pass; sages maintain a state of stability and harmony. They are above life and death. "Life and death are of great moment. . . . but they can avoid their transformations. Although Heaven may collapse and Earth overturn, they are not lost in their wake. Settled in non-reliance, they are unmoved by the changes in things" (chs. 5, 21; Mair 1994, 43, 208). Nothing can harm a sage (ch. 2; Mair 1994, 21); "tired of the world, after a thousand years he leaves it behind and ascends to rest among the immortals" (ch. 12; Mair 1994, 107).

Such sagely super-powers at first glance appear to be a denial of the natural law of Heaven, but at closer look, they reflect common Chinese beliefs of the time—including the possibility of physical immortality. For example, Guangchengzi 廣成子 tells Huangdi 黃帝, the Yellow Emperor:

> All things that flourish are born of the soil and return to the soil. Therefore, I shall leave you to enter the gate of inexhaustibility and to roam in the fields of infinity. I shall mingle my light with that of sun and moon,

[6] Eske Møllgaard notes correctly, "In Zhuangzi *tian* does not mean 'nature' in our modern sense of a natural world understood in terms of biological evolution, nor in the seventeenth-century sense of matter extended in space and governed by a set of mechanical laws, nor in the Christian medieval sense of God's creation subservient to His purpose. . . . The word should be understood rather in the ancient Greek sense of an alive, intelligent, ceaseless movement of coming-into-being. . . . Nature is not an outer object but rather an inner experience" (2007, 20-21).

> and will become eternal with Heaven and Earth. . . Men may die altogether, but I alone survive. (ch. 11; Mair 1994, 96-97)

There are at least two possible interpretations of such passages. For one, we can connect them to popular practices of the time. According to Moeller, Daoist practices were already in place that encouraged the pursuit of bodily immortality, in contrast to philosophy, which taught the development of a calm and indifferent attitude toward life and death (2006, 82–84). According to the philosophical perspective, the concept of Dao as the all-embracing and eternal process of the universe leaves space neither for absolute death nor for everlasting life on the physical level.

There is no evidence that Zhuangzi shared a belief in physical immortality and he never supported any life extension program (Wang 2014, 64). Sages would have to cease being "things" in order not to die as all other living things. This contradicts numerous assertions in the text that describe sages as things among things and does not fit the critique of opposite-based thinking. Maybe there are two different natures in the human being: one that is part of temporary things; another that remains steady regardless of the transformations. Again, this would be close to Platonism, Western Romanticism, or a simplified Christian worldview, all of which separate the spiritual and bodily nature of man.

In both cases—separating the "immanent" nature of the world and the "transcendent" nature of Dao or distinguishing two opposing natures inside humans—there is dualism. The *Zhuangzi*, however, attempts to bypass all dualistic opposites and show the limits of opposite-based thinking. Sages should not pursue long life and avoid ailments while looking at things from a perspective beyond the life-death opposite. Immortality in the text, then, must mean something else than life without end, since physical immortality would mean a denial of the natural order of things. Also, being completely free from death on the physical level would not really be immortality but mean being non-human, which would contradict the characteristic of sages as true men. It would signify an ideal state, where all transformation and change—the fundamental characteristic of the universe according to Zhuangzi—have stopped. Nobody dies, nothing disappears—this is not at all an ideal state of the world for Zhuangzi.

A second possibility of interpreting the idea of immortality in the *Zhuangzi* is to read all references to it as literary devices or poetical means geared to impress the reader or listener. Of course, different people will gain different impressions. For example, a statement like, "Men may die altogether, but I alone survive," may seem outrageous to us: what arrogance! But we can only see it in this manner if we suppose that

Guangchengzi is speaking from the position of a substantial self and talking about the physical aspects of life. However, if his is a sagely self that is empty, or if he is in a state of no-self (*wuji* 無己) or not-I, he is not guilty of egocentrism. His statement, then, is not an indication of his arrogant towering above everybody and everything, but reflects his union with emptiness and his attainment of being no-thing or nothing. Nothing is not alive and will not die but will survive, just as emptiness survives in some form in spite of being part of every thing.

Another issue is the physical aspect of human nature. One story tells of Wang Tai 王駘 who has lost a foot. He is an exceptional man, but not because he is lame.

> Life and death are of great moment; but he is able to avoid their transformations. . . . Settled in nonreliance, he is unmoved by the changes in things. He recognizes that evolution is the destiny of things and thereby maintains what is essential. . . . He sees what bespeaks the identity of things instead of what bespeaks their loss. He sees the loss of his foot as the sloughing off a clump of earth. (ch. 5; Mair 1994, 43)

Wang Tai has lost a foot and his body reflects all common principles of nature. The story centers not on the negotiation of physical nature, but on Wang's attitude toward life and death and the calmness of his heart-and-mind. In the light of this story, therefore, sages do not change along with other things because their heart-and-mind stays unmoving even in the face of life and death, mutilation and calamity. Sages do not transform and present an exception from other things, but not in the sense of their inherent heavenly nature. Thus, the position beyond all opposites turns out to be an empty position or non-position. The various separate parts of the process of life and death are obscure from the outside (metaphysical perspective) and evident clearly from the inside (the perspective of the axis of Dao). Looking from this empty, inside perspective, sages transform along with all things and still, paradoxically, escape the transformation.

The Nature of Transformation

Zhuangzi sees all things and phenomena as equally good or bad, right or wrong, true or untrue. They are separate from each other and appear to form opposites—a situation that is true from the perspective of any particular concrete thing but false from the perspective of oneness and completeness. Zhuangzi, therefore, does not refute the opposite nature of life and death as such but continuously transcends it with the idea of the constant transformation of the whole. There is neither absolute extinction nor absolute origination. The existence or disappearance of a particular form is

mere a fragment of the process as a whole. From this perspective, any human being does not live or die, but is changing together with the entire world. He has never existed as a separate and independent thing.

Such ideas sound well in theory. In everyday life, however, there are no things in general or human beings in general, but only concrete, individual things and concrete, specific persons in particular situations. According to Geling Shang, already Guo Xiang notes that "Zhuangzi's words are hard to experience or practice, despite the fact that they are perfect" (2006, 149). How should we follow Zhuangzi's philosophy in the contemporary world? Is it possible at all? Should we pay no attention to sickness like Masters Yu and Lai? Or should we avoid ailments and death and practice nurturing life? Should we work on a healthy lifestyle, without wasting our energy and testing just how healthy we are? Or should we live just as we like, never condemning ourselves for addictions while getting sick as often and as badly as is predestined by such a way of life? Should we be careful and seek for longevity? Or should we forget all precautions and take all sorts of risks?

Shang says, "Virtually every being-in-the-world has a right to exist the way it chooses, for there is no violation whatsoever of the Dao of nature as long as one acts or transforms by one's own nature" (2006, 48). The problem is that there can be no generalization, if we agree with Zhuangzi that every thing and every human being has its own nature, which reveals itself in the world. The *Zhuangzi* is not a consequent exposition of a particular theory. Hence, we may apply one fragment to one situation or one person, and another fragment to another situation, another person. This attitude, however, reduces the *Zhuangzi* to a do-it-yourself set of ideas, where everybody finds what he or she wants at any given moment.

Furthermore, is there any way to decide whether someone is actually living according to his or her nature? Maybe he or she is just engaging in egocentrism or hedonism. Maybe it is his or her inborn nature to be an egotist, i.e., a person others call an egotist. How can we distinguish the true, inborn nature from artificial aspects formed by our surroundings? How can we assert that somebody is (or is not) living his life in harmony with the whole when we cannot see, feel, or perceive the totality? Maybe in the contemporary world the idea of holding on to our integral nature and maintaining our true nature in ultimate integrity is just another illusion. The world has changed and people have changed. Maybe our understanding of what true nature is needs to change as well.

The answer to these issues, at least to a certain point, lies in the notion of self-so, spontaneity, a concept that connects to nature, natural processes, and harmonious relationships. The sages reply to the question of

what to do in and with this ever-changing world, saying, "Just let things evolve by themselves" (ch. 17; Mair 1994, 158). Human beings as things and as a part of the world are not separate from the whole. That means, people should let "themselves evolve by themselves," i.e., live spontaneously. On the other hand, people and the world are separate and different from each other. The integral nature of human beings and spontaneity does not mean they dissolve or vanish in the world.

According to Møllgaard, sagely spontaneity is different from that of nature: "This experience has nothing to do with the animal's unity with nature, and Zhuangzi does not suggest that human beings must exercise themselves in order to attain a natural spontaneity that already belongs to animals" (2005, 16). Thus, it would be erroneous to think that Zhuangzi was against any active participation in the transformation of things, i.e., any cultural progress or the use of natural resources. In many exemplary stories, things are used: a tree is carved into a bell stand, an ox is cut up for sacrifice, and a rooster trained for a game. All these are examples of using nature or transforming things for the cultural or, more precisely, human purposes.

The notion of spontaneity makes it impossible to create a universal theory or code of behavior. The *Zhuangzi* has not only a skeptical attitude toward the common convictions of ordinary people, but also presents a relativistic approach to any conviction, attitude, or viewpoint. Whatever Zhuangzi thinks or does is unique to him, never purported to become universal or absolute—a point made clear in words about dreaming. He does not take a position of asserting or denying, but stays in the middle, beyond all opposites. This is a non-perspective, a zero-perspective as Moeller calls it (2006, 53). For Zhuangzi, it is the only possibility to react spontaneously.

Returning to the problem of nature and natures, everything participates in the one nature of Dao, which manifests differently every time. Therefore, "in Zhuangzi, the terms Dao, Heaven, or nature, are often interchangeable; they all refer to the thus-so or self-so nature in an original sense. . . . Dao as nature itself is actually Non-Dao or Dao of Non-Dao (2/5), because Dao does not do anything to control, to guide, to force, to change, to decide what is or what is to become; everything becomes, transforms itself all by itself" (Shang 2006, 28-29).

The essential nature of everything, thus, would lie in constant, spontaneous, and self-so transformation. Zhuangzi, however, does not promote striving for transformation. "Repose in what has been arranged for you and leave transformation behind, then you will be able to enter the unity of vast Heaven" (ch. 6; Mair 1994, 62). Transformation is not an absolute value worthy of attachment. It, too, has to be left behind as much as everything else. But then, is there anything left after leaving everything behind?

The Empty Joy of the Dry Skull

The whole (Dao) does not eliminate the distinction of different things and their individual natures. Every thing has its own nature; a human being as a special thing has human nature, while every individual has his own personal nature. On the other hand, nature is not necessarily more evident in one thing than in another; every thing has its nature to the same degree and in the same way. Knowing how to live according to, or in harmony with, nature and how to behave in every single situation is to know nothing beforehand and to act spontaneously. Sages have human nature, but they also have sagely nature, although they do not give prominence to their wisdom. They look at everything from the perspective of oneness or zero-perspective, where no particular nature matters. Maybe they have no nature at all.

How does Zhuangzi surmount the tension between the different aspects of nature in the human relationship to death? One answer appears in the story of Nüyu 女偊 (Woman Hunchback) explaining how to learning Dao. She provides the listener with a set of stages of achievement, described in terms of the ability to put outside various items: all under Heaven, all things, and life itself. Each stage of increasing detachment results in a new level of insight. The ability to see the clarity of the morning light, envision uniqueness, eliminate past and present, eventually leads to the point of "entering the realm of lifelessness and deathlessness, where that which kills life does not die and that which engenders life does not live" (ch. 6; Mair 1994, 57).

We can see these stages of detachment as levels of increasing freedom from our particular natures or aspects of nature in order to achieve oneness of Dao and the empty center of non-nature. The integral nature of the empty self appears after releasing the nature of a thing, nature of a human being and nature of a person. "Releasing" does not mean "denying." In the emptiness of oneness, there is no difference between sages, ordinary people, Heaven and Earth and the ten thousand things. There are no thoughts about past and future. Life and death are no longer opposite; there is no more self. As Watson has it, "That which transcends the categories of life and death can never be said to have lived or died; only that which recognizes the existence of such categories is subject to them" (1968, 79).

Moeller relies on Guo Xiang to assert that there is no concept of self in the butterfly dream, a self that would connect the state before the dream, the dream itself, and the state after. The disappearance of the I-position allows sages to access all positions. "The sage identifies

him/herself with neither of specific segments, but with the whole process as such. The Daoist sage is no longer a Zhuang Zhou and then a butterfly, one being alive and then one being dead, but reaches the "axis of Dao" and equally affirms both life and death" (2006, 88-89). Zhuangzi is the narrator of the story, thus, he "is not" in the story; he "is nothing" in the story. On the other hand, without a narrator, there would be no story at all. Only while being nothing are sages able to see everything as it is. Kuang-ming Wu comes to a similar conclusion in his theory about the empty self, seen as the authentic, sagely self left after total detachment (1990, 183-85).

The *Zhuangzi* contains no pessimism, nihilism, or indifference regarding life, death, and the self. All its stories about with death show quiet contentment and joy. According to Wu, the story about Zhuangzi's conversation with the empty skull is not about transcendental being, life after life, or the poverty of worldly affairs. The skull is empty; it is between life and death, beyond ordinary reality. In that sense, it is like the sages. Still, it contains some sort of individuality; there is no universal skull. Neither is there a universal sage, an overreaching paradigm. The skull can feel joy or frown: it is on the side of both life and death, not cut off from either (Wu 1990, 16-18). Bo Wang similarly states, "In the state of no life and no death, we cannot reject life and death or seek their destruction but rather must develop a new level of understanding. Thus putting outside does not mean getting rid of the world and its features altogether but rather finding a sense of inner peace within its complexity" (2014, 125).

By not creating a rational and universal theory, or even any theory at all, Zhuangzi teaches a major existential lesson for people of all centuries. Life lies in death and death lies in life when seen from the empty center of the transformation process. Only an empty self can realize this, one that has attachment to, or denies, neither life nor death. The butterfly dream, the various stories about masters taking ill, Zhuangzi's words after the death of his wife—they all reveal an absolute confidence in the process of transformation which is nothing but Dao. There is an absolute satisfaction with one's condition, an inner stillness, a tranquility, an acceptance of the nature of things. Such a state is only possible when there is no self that attaches itself to memories, evaluates situations, experiences emotions, feels concerns, or has anxieties about past and future, life and death. Everyone can reach this, not only the sage, because we all share the same common nature. It is not easy, however, to be confident in our reliance on the process of change, to act spontaneously, refuse evaluation, and be oneself without any particular self.

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Zhuangzi and the Heterogeneity of Value[1]

Chris Fraser

A commendable trend in ethics over the past two decades has been the growing amount of work that explores the complexity of moral life. One instance of this trend has been the thesis, shared by a number of leading moral philosophers, that the sources of value, including moral value, are irreducibly heterogeneous. Prominent writers who have advanced views Thomas Nagel (1979), Charles Taylor (1982), Susan Wolf (1982), Bernard Williams (1985), Charles Larmore (1987), Michael Stocker (1990), and James Griffin
along these lines include (1996).

By the "heterogeneity" of value, I mean the thesis that there is more than one fundamental kind of morally relevant value. Multiple, independent, mutually irreducible sources of value may make distinct claims on us and pull us in conflicting directions. For instance, in an influential essay, "The Fragmentation of Value," Nagel identifies five basic types of value—obligations to people, basic rights, utility, intrinsic value, and our own projects (1979, 129-30). In work partly influenced by Nagel, Larmore holds that there are at least three mutually independent types of principles of practical reason—deontic duties, consequentialist principles, and our partial interests—each of which plays an irreducible, ineliminable role in our moral lives (1987, 131-50). If we look beyond moral value, Wolf (1982) famously argues that the morally most worthy life—that of a moral saint—is not necessarily the best life, all things considered. Moral value must be balanced against other values, which may sometimes outweigh it.

The thesis that value is heterogeneous has far-reaching significance for ethics. If correct, it entails that no single, ultimate value or principle unifies all moral norms. It thus places important limitations on the scope and nature of normative theories. There will be no general, systematic theory of right and wrong by which we can resolve all moral questions. Indeed, no systematic, reasonably complete normative theory may be available at all. We must admit the possibility of irresolvable moral dilemmas, in which there may be no single "right" answer—and, in some

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