

Animal Analogy in the *Zhuangzi*

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Preface

My initial interest in the *Zhuangzi* arose while taking various Chinese literature and history classes for the past four years. I was surprised by the use of parables in the *Zhuangzi*, and because of my love of stories, I desired to learn more. I started by translating 秋水 “Autumn Floods,” the seventeenth chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, which is one of the most famous. I was led to ponder and analyze his use of animals by the suggestion of my advisor, who proposed that I pursue a study of that which I found most intriguing, namely, his parables, and more specifically the uniqueness of his use of animals in comparison to other philosophers of the time.

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Introduction

The *Zhuangzi* 莊子 is a work of ancient Chinese literature, recognized alongside the *Laozi* 老子 as one of the founding texts of Taoism (道教, *Daojiao*). It is attributed to and named after the philosopher, Zhuang Zhou 莊周, more commonly known by his honorary title Zhuangzi 莊子, whose poetic prose and thought-provoking questions drew followers and disciples to the mysticism and uniqueness of his philosophy. The *Zhuangzi* is a compilation of Zhuangzi's own writings as well as the stories, ponderings, parables, anecdotes and thoughts of his disciples and later followers. Literary analysis suggests that these were written over a period of hundreds of years, beginning as early as the reign of King Hui of Liang 梁惠王 (370-319 B.C.) and ending as late as the second century B.C.¹ This range overlaps with the historical period called the Warring States Period (戰國時代, *zhanguo shidai*), a time of political unrest and great social change in which city-states warred with each other, either to maintain their borders or conquer their neighbors. It was not until 221 BC with the subjugation of the city-states by the Qin 秦 into the first Chinese Empire, the Qin Dynasty 秦朝, that this period came to a close. Such drastic and dynamic change created an environment of flourishing literary and philosophical activity, as the great minds of the time struggled to understand the breakdown of ancient governmental systems and decide questions of political correctness and moral judgment in a pursuit of a way to order both the public state and one's personal life.²

The version of the *Zhuangzi* in existence today was compiled by the commentator Guo Xiang 郭象 (died 312 A.D.) and is comprised of thirty-three chapters, a significant decrease

¹ I have chosen to use the pinyin style of Romanization. Within the context of my paper I have Romanized all names and concepts in pinyin. Within quotes, however I have stayed true to the original author's Romanization style, so occasionally names such as Zhuangzi will appear as Chuang tzu. Graham, *Disputers*, 170, 173; Graham, *Chuang-tzŭ*, 116

² Gr, *Disp*, 2-3

from the fifty-two chapters which the *Zhuangzi* is recorded to contain in the Han Imperial Library records.³ It is divided into three sections, the *Inner Chapters* (內篇, *neipian*, chapters 1-7), the *Outer Chapters* (外篇, *waipian*, chapters 8-22) and the *Miscellaneous Chapters* (雜篇, *zapian*, chapters 23-33). General consensus holds that Zhuangzi himself wrote the *Inner Chapters*, while disciples, later followers, and even Yangists wrote the various other episodes of the *Outer Chapters* and *Miscellaneous Chapters*.⁴ One of the most well-known of the *Outer Chapters*, entitled “Autumn Floods” (《秋水》 “*Qiu Shui*”) has been included in the Appendix as a sample reflective of the themes of the *Inner Chapters*, particularly those themes concerning animals that will be addressed in this paper.⁵

Very little is known about the life and work of the man Zhuangzi himself. According to Sima Qian 司馬遷 (died 110 B.C.) in *The Records of the Grand Historian* (史記, *Shiji*):

莊子者，蒙人也，名周。周嘗為蒙漆園吏，與梁惠王、齊宣王同時。
(ch 33, 《老子韓非列傳》 “The Biography of Laozi and Hanfei,” *Shiji*, 2143)
Chuang-tzū was a man of Meng. Personal name: Chou. He was at one time a public employee in Lacquer Garden (Ch’i-yüan). He was a contemporary of Kings Hui of Liang (370-319 BC) and Hsüan of Ch’i (319-301 BC). (Gr, *Disp*, 116)

By the age of Sima Qian, some four hundred years after Zhuangzi may have lived, it was believed that he came from the state of Meng 蒙 in modern day Hunan province. “Lacquer Garden” (漆園, *qi yuan*) may be a reference to the city in which he worked or a particular garden.⁶ Besides Sima Qian’s biography the only evidence of who Zhuangzi may have been comes from the *Zhuangzi* itself. The distinct voice of the seven *Inner Chapters* reveals a man of playful spirit and imagination, highly educated, yet buoyantly free from the constraints of

³ Gr, *Disp*, 3, 27

⁴ Gr, *Ctz*, 221

⁵ According to Graham, the *Outer Chapters* 17-22 (which he calls the “School of Chuang-tzu) are collected according to themes represented in the *Inner Chapters*. This is why “Autumn Floods,” the seventeenth chapter, also reflects themes of the *Inner Chapters*. Gr, *Ctz*, 28

⁶ Gr, *Disp*, 116

conventional duty in that he is often seen to poke fun at the methods of his contemporary philosophers. Even so, he is not altogether contemptuous of the morals that bound his fellows, merely thinking that they were wasting time focusing their energies on finding a ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ way of living. Stories of Zhuangzi in the *Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters* portray him talking to skulls and animals, laughing at the temptations of political office, and defeating his friends with their own logic. The vibrancy of his character attracted followers also inspired by the freedom of his teachings and charm of his disposition, creating a cult of likeminded disciples to carry on the tradition of his philosophy.

One element in particular that underwrites the distinctiveness of Zhuangzi’s voice in comparison to other philosophies of the time is his frequent reference to nature, in particular animals. Birds and beasts appear throughout the *Zhuangzi*, in fables, as analogies, and as objects or tools. Animal analogy is used by Zhuangzi to great effect in order to broaden the scope of his audience: rather than directly addressing the theses of specific philosophical schools he instead presents his argument through the vehicle of generalized animal analogy which may be applied to many different schools.⁷ Furthermore, animals provide that essential aspect of humor, which has come to be associated with the character of Zhuangzi himself, which softens what would otherwise be harsh criticism or blunt offenses.

⁷ The use of analogy itself is not unique to Zhuangzi. Analogies were oft used during this period in debate and rhetoric, for instance to show the relationship between different thing or to illustrate differences in motivation and circumstance. As Lau points out in an article on the use of analogy in Mencius 孟子 (a contemporary Confucian scholar of Zhuangzi): “the use of analogy is often the only helpful method in elucidating something which is, in its nature, obscure. Two examples come readily to mind. Theories about the mind are often presented through the medium of models, and so are physical theories of the atom. In either case the models are not only helpful in enabling us to see something of the “structure” of the mind or the atom which is not open to inspection by the senses but also instructing in the way they break down.” Lau, *Mencius*, 194

I have chosen to organize my paper into the two categories of question and answer, according to the general didactic style in which the *Zhuangzi* is written.⁸ I will therefore first look at how Zhuangzi and the other authors of the *Zhuangzi* undermine the traditional assumptions of human logic on which his rival philosophies based their arguments, and how animal analogy is used to aid this venture. In each case, I will demonstrate how animals support Zhuangzi's propositions, by means of generalizing his arguments and contributing an element of humor in order to engage a wider audience, to blunt the harshness of his criticism, and to withdraw from the complications of debate, which he believed to be an unnecessary distraction from the truth of the Way. I will then look at the solution that Zhuangzi provides in answer to these problems, and how animal analogy is used to illustrate how man may truly follow the Way. He does this by being attentive and adaptive to the circumstances he is confronted with while at the same time allowing a distance to separate himself from the folly of human knowledge and freedom to act according to the decrees of Heaven.

⁸ Like Plato, Confucius, and other great philosophers, in which a master is often seen as talking to an apprentice or young disciples. The disciples asks questions and the master answers according to his respective philosophy.

The Fallibility of Human Knowledge

Zhuangzi often uses animals to parody human logic, presenting the hypocrisy of conventional thinking through the mouths and actions of animals. To understand how animals used, however, we must first take a step back and look at the context in which Zhuangzi was formulating his ideas and the fundamental conclusions he came to regarding the limits of human understanding.

There are four schools in particular that had a great impact on the formulation of Zhuangzi's ideas regarding human knowledge, those of the Confucians, Mohists, Yangists and Sophists. The one hundred schools of thought in the Warring States period were primarily focused on the construction of a correct way of thinking and the identification of the importance of things. Accordingly, each of these schools founded their theories upon a different premise. The Confucians (儒林, *Rulin*) believed in an ideal of tradition and virtue, and taught the cultivation of the individual through custom and ceremony for the betterment of society and the realm.⁹ The Mohists (墨家, *Mojia*), agreeing with the Confucians that the good of the realm was the most important, but approaching from a different perspective, used utility as the ultimate measure of value and upheld usefulness as the highest ideal.¹⁰ The Yangists disagreed and advocated that protection of the self and human life be raised above all other concerns.¹¹ The Sophists uplifted and idealized debate, the 'arguing out of alternatives' (變, *bian*), between

⁹ Named after the most famous of Chinese philosophers, Confucius 孔夫子. The cultivation and perfection of one's inner 'Power' (德, *de*) was believed to extend towards and influence one's surroundings, and therefore the perfection of oneself leads to the perfection of the realm. (Gr, *Disp*, 9).

¹⁰ Named after a prominent member, Mozi 墨子. (Gr, *Disp*, 33).

¹¹ Named after Yang Zhu 楊朱, none of whose writings remain and about whom very little is known. They believed that human life is more precious than the rigors of work, so one should go to all lengths to preserve one's health. Graham has suggested that Zhuangzi was a Yangist in his early years, and has demonstrated that four chapters of the *Zhuangzi* are on Yangist themes. However, the key difference from Zhuangzi's line of thought is that Zhuangzi bent towards whimsy and a deep desire for a reconciling understanding of death. The term 'Yangist' is taken from Graham, *Disputers*. (Gr, *Disp*, 53-4, 56-7, 118; *Ctz*, 221-223).

“what is” (是 *shi*) and “what is not” (非 *fei*), as the ultimate of power in discourse, glorifying its ability to prove or disprove just about anything.¹²

Having come to believe that the attempt by these and other schools to raise an ideal logic above all other standards was misdirected, Zhuangzi responds with the idea that any classification by means of words will ultimately fail to represent the independent reality of a thing. Our understanding of words like “this” or “that” depends upon our understanding of the contrast of “this” and “that.” All ways by which a thing can be classified are equally valid, so that “this” may just as well be called “that.” Furthermore, if “this” is called “that,” then “this” is not really a “this,” because it has no real distinction from “that.” Thence, the man of enlightenment is one who recognizes that all attempts to classify reality will ultimately fail, and therefore no longer has a use for classifications like “this” or “that.”¹³

In order to undermine all the assumptions of these rival schools in one stroke so that he does not become muddled in the distraction of debate, Zhuangzi uses animal analogy in portraying the fallibility of human assumptions, while still retaining an element of humor in order to blunt the harshness of his criticism. The *Zhuangzi* begins with Zhuangzi’s retelling of a myth of the transformation of a great fish into a great bird. The great fish *Kun* 鯤 turns into the great bird *Peng* 鵬, whose wingspan is beyond measure, whose wings resemble the clouds in the sky, and who flies so high that everything from the greatest windstorms to slightest breath all

¹² The Sophists are so named because of the striking similarity in their arguments to the Greek Sophists who were also at the time exploring the power of argumentation to prove anything to be right or wrong. The term ‘Sophist’ is also taken from Graham. (Gr, *Disp*, 75-76).

¹³ “This is not the innocuous thesis that the English word “right,” for example, could have the meaning which the English word “wrong” does in fact have, so that what we now call “right” could have been called “wrong.” Zhuangzi’s thesis is the much stronger thesis that incompatible and contradictory judgements, based in different systems of classification, are equally valid (or invalid).” Summary of Zhuangzi’s argument according to the five points of the thesis in Soles and Soles.

looks the same. Two small creatures, a cicada and a turtle-dove, are witness to the *Peng*'s flight and comment with a laugh:

我決起而飛，檜榆枋，時則不至而控於地而已矣，奚以之九萬里而南為？ (ch 1, 《逍遙遊》 “Going Rambling Without a Destination,” *Zhuangzi*, 6)
We keep flying till we're bursting, stop when we get to an elm or sandalwood, and sometimes are dragged back to the ground before we're there. What's all this about being ninety thousand miles up when he travels south? (Gr, *Ctz*, 43-4)

In commentary of these two creatures, Zhuangzi asks:

之二蟲，又何知？小知不及大知，小年不及大年。(Zhz, 7)
What do these two creatures know? Little wits cannot keep up with great, or few years with many. (Gr, *Ctz*, 43-4)

The analogy is constructed so as to present the attributes of enlightenment and narrow-mindedness as they are manifested in the body, speech and abilities of the *Peng*, the cicada and the turtle-dove. The *Peng*, which is large beyond measure, does not speak, sees all on the ground as the same, and flies according to its nature is analogous to the man of enlightenment. The cicada and turtle-dove, on the other hand, are the smallest of creatures, make judgments of others, make distinctions between things such as referring to specific trees the “elm” (榆, *yu*) and the “sandalwood” (枋, *fang*), and can barely fly so far as the next tree before being pulled back down to the ground. Neither the *Peng*, nor the cicada nor the turtle-dove reveal any characteristics which would associate them with a particular philosophical school. The cicada and turtle-dove are merely described by Zhuangzi as having “little wits” (小知, *xiao zhi*) and “few years” (小年, *xiao nian*) in comparison to the *Peng*, which has “great knowledge” (大知, *da zhi*) and “many years” (大年, *da nian*). It is a matter philosophical opinion that determines what is constituted by “little wits” as opposed to “great knowledge.” Therefore, Zhuangzi carefully picks these creatures for his analogy in order to represent the attributes of the two general categories of enlightenment and narrow-mindedness.

As for the humor of the analogy, the reader immediately understands the absurdity of the cicada and turtle-dove's laughter at the *Peng*. Having been first introduced to the expansiveness and transience of the great mythological *Peng*, one finds the narrow-minded ignorance of the tiny and ordinary cicada and turtle-dove quite ridiculous. We are led to agree with Zhuangzi in asking rhetorically "What do these two creatures know?" (之二蟲，又何知) that these creatures know nothing of what they presume to laugh at.

In order to further understand this passage, let us also look at a second similar anecdote found in the seventeenth chapter, "Autumn Floods" 《秋水》 *Qiu Shui*, of the *Zhuangzi*, about a frog in a well.¹⁴ Prince Mou 公子牟 in teaching Gongsun Long 公孫龍 the limitless expanse of knowledge, tells the story of a frog expounding upon the joys of his dominion to a tortoise:

吾樂與！出跳梁乎井幹之上，入休乎缺甃之崖，赴水則接腋持頤，蹶泥則沒足滅跗，還軒蟹與科斗，莫吾能若也。且夫擅一壑之水，而跨時埴井之樂，此亦至矣，夫子奚不時來入觀乎？(Rouzer, 348)

This is the life, don't you think? I can come out of my well, and hop around on the rim. Then I can go down and rest in a chink in the wall where a tile is missing. When I dive into the water, I let it float me along, holding me up under the armpits and supporting my chin. If I am slipping around in the mud I bury my feet into it and let it cover all the way up my ankles. When I look upon the mosquito larva, the crabs and the tadpoles, I think of how none of them can match me! All the water of this hole is completely under my control. My joyfulness as I paddle around at peace in this crumbling well is the greatest the world has ever known! So, why don't you come visit and see some time? (Appendix, 36)

But hilariously, the tortoise can barely fit his foot into the well before he gets stuck! Thereupon, the turtle gives the frog a description of the sea:

夫千里之遠，不足以舉其大；千仞之高，不足以極其深。禹之時，十年九潦，而水弗為加益；湯之時，八年七旱，而崖不為加損。夫不為頃久推移，不以多少進退者，此亦東海之大樂也。(Ro, 348)

Indeed, you can't even use the distance of one thousand li to describe the sea's greatness. You can't even use the distance of one thousand fathoms to describe the sea's height. During the reign of the Emperor Yu, there were nine floods in ten years, and even this

¹⁴ See Appendix for full translation of "Autumn Floods."

could not cause the level of the sea's waters to increase. During the reign of Tang, there were seven draughts in eight years, and even this could not cause the banks of the sea's edges to decrease. The joyfulness of the East Sea comes from that fact that whether over a short time span or a long haul its waters do not push outward or shift, nor by a great deal or by a very little do they advance or recede. (App., 37)

To the ignorant frog, whose well water no doubt responds to the slightest sprinkling of rain, this is indeed a great awakening, and his only response is silence:

於是埳井之鼃聞之，適適然驚，規規然自失也。 (Ro, 328)

Thereupon, having heard these things about the sea, the frog in the crumbling well was at an utter loss and totally dumfounded. (App., 37)

This analogy is very similar to that of the *Peng*, cicada, and turtle-dove. Frogs are small compared to tortoises, but this frog in particular thinks himself to be great merely because he is greater than his fellow well-dwellers: the mosquito larva, the crab and the tadpoles (軒蟹與科斗). The frog, like the cicada and turtle-dove, is also very attentive to his surroundings, going into great detail to describe his tiny environment, the “chink in the wall where a tile is missing” (缺甃之崖), the different occupations, such as splashing in the mud and floating in the water with which he amuses himself, and his neighbors with whom he compares himself. Because he has such a thorough knowledge of his environment, the frog even goes so far as to presume domination over it, boasting “All the water of this hole is completely under my control” (擅一壑之水). While the attributes of narrow-mindedness are manifested in the appearance and thoughts of the frog, the attributes of enlightenment are manifested within the tortoise. Not only is it utterly unable to even enter the limited environment in which the frog lives, but the tortoise has experienced the boundlessness of the sea, and therefore speaks in terms much more general to define the indefinable, for example describing how “you can't even use the distance of one thousand li to describe the sea's greatness” (千里之遠，不足以舉其大). The revelation of the tortoise to the frog is of such weight that the frog is “at an utter loss and totally dumfounded”

(適適然驚，規規然自失也) for he cannot comprehend the weight of the immensity which the tortoise has described.

Furthermore, by looking briefly at the context in which this anecdote is told, some light may be thrown on its meaning. This is a story told by Prince Mou, a disciple of Zhuangzi, to Gongsun Long, a Sophist famous for his writings on debate and argumentation. In telling this story, Prince Mou paints himself as the tortoise and Gongsun Long as the frog. Gongsun Long has thought himself to be great because he can out-debate all he has thus-far come across, but Prince Mou points out that this was only until he met himself, the tortoise. However, Despite the fact that Prince Mou is making a direct comparison between Gongsun Long and the frog, this story is by no means exclusive to Sophist argumentation. Testament to this is the fact that it has become one of the most famous stories in all the *Zhuangzi*, and is even a modern phrase “井底之蛙” (*jingdizhiwa*) referring to “a person of limited outlook and experience.”¹⁵ While the pride of the frog in the well

Similar to the case of the cicada and the turtle-dove, the frog is portrayed as outrageously conceited. Not only does he enjoy himself splashing around in the mud, but he presumes that his pleasure is the greatest in the entire world. He is supremely pleased with himself for being superior to the smallest, nastiest most insignificant of others, not just crabs and tadpoles, but little specks of mosquito larva. The absurdity of his self-satisfaction in the midst of such squalor adds humor to the complete misdirection of the frog’s knowledge. This element of humor lessons the force of the criticism that is directed against Gongsun Long’s philosophical opinions.

The cicada and turtle-dove laugh and make assumptions about the *Peng* based only on their limited knowledge of their surroundings. Likewise, the frog in the well makes assumptions

¹⁵ MDBG, “井底之蛙”

about his own pomp and importance based on a narrow understanding of the world within his well. In presenting these creatures as narrow-minded in comparison to the *Peng* which retains the attributes of enlightenment, and the tortoise, who acknowledges the immensity of the sea, Zhuangzi creates an analogy in which he parodies the methods by which his rival philosophical schools make assumptions based on their own limited perspectives without considering what is beyond. The genius of Zhuangzi is, however, that overt criticism of these schools is blunted by the use of generalization and humor. The reader is led to consider the implications of animal analogy towards the state of enlightenment and the state of narrow-mindedness. The humor of the cicada, turtle-dove and frog's conceit serves to blunt the force of Zhuangzi's underlying assertion: that laughing at what one doesn't understand or priding oneself as being above that which is no more than mud and mosquito larva is merely a display of one's own ignorance. In revealing the fallibility of such assumptions, Zhuangzi encourages the reader to broaden his mind and turn towards his own suggestion of the Way as the ultimate of human nature.

One more story is worth mentioning in order to illustrate Zhuangzi's use of animal analogy to cast doubt over human presumption. In this third story, Zhuangzi himself as the main character is made suddenly aware of the similarity between himself and animals, and this realization has an enormous impact to his own presuppositions and philosophy. Just as the previous two stories, this episode is humorous and whimsical, focusing for the most part on the revelation of Zhuangzi himself, while at the same time subtly undermining the logic of his rival philosophers. While Zhuangzi is wandering through Diaoling 雕陵 with his hunting gear, he is brushed by a strange bird. He notes the stupidity of the bird, saying:

此何鳥哉？翼殷不逝，目大不覩。 (ch 20, 《山木》 “Mountain Tree,” *Zhz*, 190)
What kind of bird is this?...Its wings are huge, but it does not fly away, its eyes are large but it failed to notice (me). (Ivanhoe, “Zhuangzi's Conversion Experience,” 25)

However, just as he is preparing to shoot, he notices several other animals:

睹一蟬方得美蔭而忘其身；螳螂執翳而搏之，見得而忘其形；異鵲從而利之，見利而忘其真。(Zhz, 190-1)

But at that moment, he noticed a cicada which had just settled down into a nice patch of shade and there had forgotten itself. A praying mantis, hiding behind some cover, stretched forth its claws to grab the cicada. Intent upon this prospect of gain, it forgot about its own body (which was now exposed to danger). In turn, the strange magpie took advantage of the mantis, and intent upon gain, forgot its own true (nature). (Ivanhoe, “Zhuangzi’s Conversion Experience,” 25)

This sight makes him uneasy, and he exclaims:

噫！物固相累，二類相召也。(Zhz, 190-1)

Eeee, creatures inevitably draw each other into trouble, one calling down another! (Ivanhoe, 25)

He then flees from the grove while the keeper of the grove chases after him. For three days

Zhuangzi remains subdued and when asked the reason, he replies:

吾守形而忘身，觀於濁水而迷於清淵。且吾聞諸夫子曰：「入其俗，從其俗。」今吾遊於雕陵而忘吾身，異鵲感吾顙，遊於栗林而忘真，栗林虞人以吾為戮，吾所以不庭也。(Zhz, 190-1)

In preserving my body, I have forgotten my true self. Staring at muddy water, I have mistaken it for a clear pool. Moreover, I have heard my master say, “When among common people, follow common ways.” But now, as I was wandering near Eagle Hill, I forgot my (true) self. A strange magpie brushed against my forehead and (pursuing it) I wandered into a chestnut grove, forgetting my true (nature). (In this way), I was brought to disgrace by the keeper of the chestnut grove. That is why I am distressed. (Ivanhoe, 24)

Zhuangzi’s initial approach to the sight of the magpie is self-centered, and in pursuing it he is led to forget the true promptings of his nature. Just like the cicada and the turtle-dove, he makes a judgment of the magpie, scoffing at its stupidity by asking “What kind of bird is this?” (此何鳥哉?). He follows the magpie into a grove of chestnut trees, where we presume he would not have entered if he had been in his right mind because it is either off-limits or sacred. However, he is brought jarringly back to himself when he realizes the analogy that may be made between

himself and not only the magpie, but also the praying mantis and the cicada. Zhuangzi's own ignorance in concentrating on the magpie is compared to the cicada's ignorant pleasure as it enjoys a piece of sunlight at the expense of having "forgotten itself" (忘其身), or the mantis's excitement at the sight of gain at the expense of having "forgot about its own body" (忘其形) or furthermore the magpie, valuing profit at the expense having "forgot its true (nature)" (忘其真). Throughout Zhuangzi's line of thought, the pursuit of "gain" (得, *de*) or "profit" (利, *li*) is considered a distraction from following the Way, causing one to forget the importance of his own body (身, *shen* or 形, *xing*) and true nature (真, *zhen*). By describing the animals as being motivated by these factors, Zhuangzi draws the comparison between human ambition at the expense of awareness and the predator-prey relationship. He furthermore implies that this is the self-centeredness with which he himself initially approached the magpie, and therefore his pursuit of the magpie is motivated merely by, as Ivanhoe puts it, the "thought of a dinner of roast magpie."¹⁶ When Zhuangzi realizes the pursuit of gain is analogous to the predator and prey relationship, he then sees that in becoming a predator he has also put himself in the vulnerable position of prey. As he flees from the chestnut grove the implications of his mistake are further emphasized by the keeper of the chestnut grove pursues him, shouting profanities.

Zhuangzi's own interpretation of this experience is that "In preserving my body, I have forgotten my true self" (吾守形而忘身). He has been looking in "muddy water" (濁水, *zhuoshui*), being attentive only to himself and his own desires and has mistaken this for the "clear pool" (清淵, *qingyuan*), having an awareness of all things at all times. He realizes that he has not been following the teaching of his "master" (夫子, *fuzi*) who says "when among common

¹⁶ Ivanhoe, "Zhuangzi's Conversion Experience," 20

people, follow common ways” (入其俗，從其俗). The meaning of this proverb is that when one enters into a certain society, one must be attentive to the common practices of that place, for it is from these that the most dangerous of difficulties originate. Zhuangzi inadvertently ignores the “culture” of the chestnut grove, and this leads him to make the mistake of entering into the predator-prey relationship.

This anecdote is not directed at any school of thought in particular, and the implications of the analogy primarily apply to Zhuangzi himself. This story is considered by some to be a sort of “conversion experience” in which Zhuangzi realizes that he has allowed “his desire for immediate gain to becloud his awareness.”¹⁷ In identifying the pursuit of gain as a form of clouded perception Zhuangzi makes a generalized argument that may be applied to almost any school. He shows that the acknowledgment of the fallibility of human knowledge is a form of clear sightedness, and through the analogy of animal, one is once again given an illustration of the merits of following one’s true nature. His criticism of those who pursue gain is so subtle that one almost doesn’t notice it. Because the pursuit of gain is illustrated as being a dangerous and fatal mistake to one’s personal safety, the reader automatically sides alongside Zhuangzi in being repulsed by the thought of losing one’s life in such folly.

While this episode is often understood as “eerie” one is also able to find a certain amount of humor in the irony of Zhuangzi’s situation. The reader is encouraged by the humanity Zhuangzi exhibits in being humbled by a realization brought on by animals, and the image of a great philosopher running from the chestnut grove pursued by the cursing grove keeper is certainly entertaining. The reader is engaged, therefore, not only by the generality expressed through the animal analogy, but also by the sincerity of Zhuangzi himself. Seeing Zhuangzi in

¹⁷ Ivanhoe, 25

doubt is endearing for the reader, who is then able to relate more easily to a master who also makes mistakes.

Zhuangzi's use of animal analogy is in accordance with his fundamental assumptions regarding the fallibility of human knowledge. Because he believes that human argument and debate is a waste of time, no more important than the prattling of animals, it is therefore perfectly logical that Zhuangzi would withdraw himself from such debate. He therefore reveals the inherent mistakes of his rival philosophers through general animal analogy, and blunts his criticism with humor in order to keep their minds open to his new suggestions.

Following One's Heaven-Endowed Nature

For Zhuangzi, great understanding knows that perspective is variable, dependent upon and relative only to the beholder, and thus human knowledge is insufficient to encompass the true nature of things. Instead, he argues that the ultimate truth of things is embodied in the “Way” (道, *Dao*) as it comes from and is created by “Heaven” (天, *Tian*). The Way is the path one takes in following the mandate of Heaven, and is inextricably linked with the concept of “Power” (德, *de*), a person's “potentiality to act according to the [Way].”¹⁸ It is by Heaven that all things have a nature and are endowed with Power, and it is only by the interference of man that things have come to be differentiated and categorized as “this” or “that.” The man of greatest wisdom is he who acts out his Potency through spontaneous action, perfectly reflecting the situation, without extraneous thinking. Graham puts the relationship well when he writes:

When ceasing to analyse, simply attending and responding, our behavior belongs with the birth, growth, decay and death of the body among the spontaneous processes generated by Heaven. We are then doing, without knowing how we do it, what Heaven destines for us. Paradoxically, to enact the destined is, since we are always tempted to think out a better way, “the most difficult thing of all.” However, although my body matures and decays as Heaven decrees independently of my will, as thinking man I have to assist the process by feeding my body and taking care of my health. Similarly I nurture a spontaneous skill by the thought and effort of apprenticeship, and sagehood by Chuang-tzu's own philosophizing. (Gr, *Disp*, 196)

Thus in the nurturing of spontaneity and cultivation of *qi*, one is essentially adhering more closely to one's nature, following the Way as it has been mandated by Heaven.

¹⁸ The character 天 *tian* “Heaven, sky” was used in the Zhou Dynasty 周朝 to describe the sky-god, hardly distinguishable from the sky itself. The character 道 *Dao* “Way, path” is perhaps the most famous term associated with Taoism for the obvious reason that it is this word that Taoism (道教 *Daojiao*) gets its name. However, the Way is not a concept unique to Taoist thought, but a term used by most philosophical schools at the time to refer to a man's proper course of action. The character 德 *de* “Power, potency, virtue” was traditionally used to refer to “the power, whether benign or baleful, to move others without exerting physical force.” (Gr, *Disp*, 13, 192-3, 196)

Because animals are not distracted by the complications of man's "evaluating mind" they therefore serve as effective analogy for representing true adherence to one's nature.¹⁹ Animals act with a spontaneity free from the constraints of calculation and premeditation that characterize human action. Zhuangzi means by these animal analogies not to encourage man to become more like animal or to become more like Heaven, but on the contrary to become more like the True Man that Heaven has made him to be. He uses animal analogy therefore, not only to undermine the assumptions made by human logic, but to illustrate how one may truly adhere to one's nature as it has been given by Heaven. Because the Way is fundamentally indefinable by human logic, the only way one might approach understanding of it is by the roundabout process of illustrating what it is like. The generalization of the animal analogy is quite appropriate for such illustration.

In this first anecdote, Zhuangzi gives an explanation of how man accords with the Way in relation to others. The Heaven-endowed nature is not always peaceable, and as we saw in the story of the Zhuangzi and the magpie, Zhuangzi believed that one must necessarily be aware of others in order to be more aware of the dangers that they pose to oneself, and also to be more aware of the general nature of things. In a dialogue found in the *Inner Chapters*, Yan He 顏闔, who is about to become tutor to the heir of Wei 衛靈公大子 asks advice of Qu Boyu 蘧伯玉. :

有人於此，其德天殺...若然者，吾奈之何？ (ch 4, 《人間世》 "Worldly Business Among Men," *Zhz*, 58)

Let us imagine the case of a man with a Power in him which Heaven has made murderous...How would I deal with someone like that? (Gr, *Ctz*, 71-2)

To which Qu Boyu answers with several examples, including the methods of a tiger keeper:

¹⁹ It was generally believed that man was separated from animal on account of his ability to articulate and differentiate between things. "The concern with classification exists in the earliest strata of Chinese thought. Early Confucians maintained that it was an "evaluating mind" (Munroe, Donald. *The Concept of Man in Early China*. Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 1977) that distinguishes humanity from all other animals, and it is their emphasis on making proper distinctions and evaluations that lies behind the Confucian doctrine of names." (Soles and Soles).

汝不知夫養虎者乎？不敢以生物與之，為其殺之之怒也，不敢以全物與之，為其決之之怒也。時其飢飽，達其怒心，虎之與人異類，而媚養己者順也，故其殺者逆也。(Zhz, 59)

And don't you know what a keeper of tigers does? He daren't give them a live animal because they will get into a rage killing it, or a whole animal either, because they will get into a rage tearing it apart. He keeps track of the times when they will be hungry or full, and has the secret of their angry hearts. Tigers are a different breed from men, but when they fawn on the man who feeds them it is because he goes along with their dispositions; and so if they get murderous it is because he thwarts their dispositions. (Gr, *Ctz*, 71-2)

Within Qu Boyu's example, the tutor Yan He is described as analogous to the tiger keeper, and the heir of Wei is analogous to the tiger. Now, the position of imperial tutor in early China was an anxiety-ridden occupation. Because of the imbalance of power between a spoiled, aristocratic young heir and his less-powerful instructor, tutors were always at risk, of either incurring the wrath and future retribution of their young pupil or being punished on account of and in the stead of their young charge's crimes.²⁰ In drawing the comparison between a young heir and a tiger, Qu Boyu highlights the danger of the position that Yan He has found himself in. According to Qu Boyu, the tiger's natural disposition is ferocity, and just like the man that Yan He initially asks about he has "a Power in him which Heaven has made murderous" (其德天殺). The tiger is aroused by the blood of live animals and by the intensity of his hunger, but it also has the potential to "fawn on the man who feeds it" (媚養己者) if the tiger keeper "goes along with" (順, *shun*) its nature. Just so, a hot-blooded and spoiled young heir is aroused on the slightest whim, and may be murderous or fawning towards his instructor depending upon his moods. The skill of the tiger keeper or tutor is in knowing the disposition of the tiger or heir, and going along with the swiftness of these changes. It is only when he makes the mistake of "thwarting" (逆, *ni*) the tiger that the tiger keeper finds himself in the line of fire, and thence the tutor must also be careful not to thwart the pleasures of his pupil.

²⁰ Kinney, *Representations of Childhood and Youth in Early China*, 58

Zhuangzi does not tell Yan He to try and change the heir of Wei by means of a certain philosophical approach to education, but instead instructs him on accepting the heir's disposition towards violence as something that has been endowed by Heaven. According to Qu Boyu, the tiger has an "angry heart" (怒心, *nu xin*) because it has been given that Power from Heaven. Hence, the heir of Wei has a disposition towards "killing" (殺, *sha*) also because this is how Heaven has made him. The responsibility of Yan He as a tutor, therefore, is to learn to understand the change and flow of his pupil's temperament, and in doing so both become more aware of the danger that the boy may pose to his own personal safety and learn how and when to implement his education.

Such a careful approach to the education of a young heir is much more practical than would be that of say a Confucian scholar. While the Confucian scholar's solution to an unruly young lord is to draw lessons from history, the Zhuangzi approach is to adapt and adhere to the variance the student's disposition according to its changes. The Confucian tutor may be successful for a time, but he ultimately runs the risk of annoying his student with an overabundance of stringent policy, or even the failure of history to provide in the case of unprecedented problems. In following the Zhuangzi approach, however, the tutor has much great flexibility to deal with all possible fluctuations of the heir's whim or the kingdom's fortunes, and has a great deal more adaptability. Zhuangzi's approach is more effective in that it is general enough so as to provide a solution in any number of cases.

Furthermore, drawing an analogy between an heir and a tiger, and a tutor and a tiger keeper is a quite skillful move on Zhuangzi's part. A tiger is a fierce and proud creature, and it is no offense for an heir to be compared to a tiger. Also, the tiger keeper, while he understands and guides the tiger's movements, is always ultimately at the mercy of the tiger's whim, and

therefore it is quite accurate to say that he has the smaller power in the relationship. The tiger keeper's skill arises from his ability to understand and accord with the truest nature of the tiger. No attempt is made to change the tiger's nature, but rather to understand and bend accordingly. Just so, when one is following the Way, one does not attempt to change the nature of things, but to accept them as having been made in that way by Heaven and learn to harmonize and flow in relation to them accordingly.

The next two examples are illustrations of enlightenment. Animals appear in these two stories in a slightly different way than we have previously seen, but the fact remains that their presence provide a portrait of enlightenment as it is achieved by following the true nature of things. Animals do not fear the one who has advanced along the path to enlightenment, because as man acts more closely according to his Heaven-mandated nature, he trespasses less on the safety of animals. For example, in a story in which Confucius is moved by illustration and analogy of enlightenment made to him by the duke Dagong Ren 大公任, he responds in the following way:

辭其交遊，去其弟子，逃於大澤，衣裘褐，食杼栗，入獸不亂羣，入鳥不亂行，鳥獸不惡，而況人乎？(ch 20, *Zhz*, 186)

He said good-bye to his friends and associates, dismissed his disciples, and retired to the great swamp, wearing furs and coarse cloth and living on acorns and chestnuts. He could walk among the animals without alarming their herds, walk among the birds without alarming their flocks. If even the birds and the beasts did not resent him, how much less would men! (Watson, 213-14)

In the beginning of this episode, Confucius is being besieged by men on all sides and we are told that for seven days he forgoes the pleasures of eating cooked food. We are not told why he is being besieged, but we can assume by the analogy drawn at the end of the above section that he has made some enemies on account of one of his teachings and they have now surrounded him. In light of this, the fact that Confucius “said good-bye to his friends and associates” (辭其交遊)

and “dismissed his disciples” (去其弟子) is in fact an indication that he has completely given up his old beliefs and desire for renown in favor of the freedom expressed by Dagong Ren. Confucius also gives up the comfort of good clothing in favor of “furs and coarse cloth” (裘褐) and even the pleasures of cooked food that seemed so important at the beginning of the anecdote, preferring instead to eat only “acorns and chestnuts” (杼栗). Furthermore, when Confucius walks through the swamps, neither the birds nor the beasts are disturbed by him, and this is the most telling sign of his complete abandonment of his own former values, for the author asks “If even the birds and the beasts did not resent him, how much less would men!” (鳥獸不惡，而況人乎). The analogy is drawn between the animals (獸, *shou*) and birds (鳥, *niao*) and the men that have surrounded Confucius in the beginning of the story, and the implication is that because Confucius has given up striving after success, just as the animals are no longer concerned with him, so will the men cease to be bothered.

Furthermore, the description of Confucius’s life-style, eating and dressing habits, and non-aggression is representative of true accordance with the Way. Instead of walking among the birds and beasts and differentiating between himself and them in the desire for gain, like Zhuangzi does in the episode of the magpie, Confucius walks with them as a fellow observer of his own nature, just as unconcerned with them as they are with him. He accords with his own nature and with the nature of the animals, preferring meals of nuts to meals of flesh. He aligns himself with what is heavenly instead of what is manmade, and thus accords with and is accepted by others.

Another attribute of following one’s nature is that once the Power has concentrated to a certain degree, the sage in fact begins to radiate power by which all other things begin to accord with their own natures. This is the case for a nameless recluse described by Jian Wu 肩吾:

藐姑射之山，有神人居焉，肌膚若冰雪，淖約若處子。不食五穀，吸風飲露，乘雲氣，御飛龍，而遊乎四海之外；其神凝，使物不疵癘而年穀熟，吾是以狂而不信也。(ch1, *Zhz*, 9)

In the mountains of far-off Ku-yi there lives a daemonic man, whose skin and flesh are like ice and snow, who is gentle as a virgin. He does not eat the five grains but sucks in the wind and drinks the dew; he rides the vapour of the clouds, yokes flying dragons to his chariot, and roams beyond the four seas. When the daemonic in him concentrates it keeps creatures free from plagues and makes the grain ripen every year. (Gr, *Ctz*, 46)

The nameless “daemonic man” (神人, *shenren*) is one who, as Puett describes, “fully cultivates his spirit and thus wanders free from things while allowing things (including his own human form) to fulfill their natural endowment.”²¹ The physical description of this man, his “skin and flesh” (肌膚, *jifu*) having taken on the whiteness of “ice and snow” (冰雪, *bingxue*), is therefore the appearance that Heaven had originally intended for him according to his nature. The man’s nourishment, “wind” (風, *feng*) and “dew” (露, *lu*), is the food and drink that Heaven intends man to feed on. Also, through the power of his inward nature when “the daemonic in him concentrates” (神凝 *shen ning*) all animals are kept from sickness. Plague is understood as a perversion of nature, and therefore when animals become diseased, this is analogous to a distortion of the Way. But when the recluse concentrates his Power, “the spirit-man can cause things (*wu*) to be perfect and plentiful. By concentrating his spirit, the spirit-man can make things flourish as they naturally ought, free from harm.”²² He does not have the power to cause things to happen, but rather by virtue of acting as he himself ought, other things also begin to act as they ought. His ability to keep creatures free from disease is analogous to nurturing all things as they follow their own natures.

Compare this with the previous story of Confucius and we see even as Confucius also follows the Way by not threatening the animals around him, as the birds and beasts are

²¹ Puett, *To Become a God*, 132

²² Puett, 126

undisturbed by his presence. When a man acts contrary to his nature, he also tries to make others act contrary to their own nature, and this leads to disastrous results. If the tiger keeper attempts to thwart (逆, *ni*) the disposition of the tiger, it is dangerous not only to himself but also to others. However, when man acts according to his nature, other things are also able to adhere to the nature that Heaven has endowed upon them.

The portrait of this nameless recluse contains all the attributes of the enlightened man who follows his nature to such an extent that he has become a True Man according to Heaven's mandate. The True Man feasts on the wind and dew of the world, his skin is white as snow, and he is in perfect accordance with all nature. He understands clouds and yokes dragons to his chariot, understanding and according with their nature just as the tiger keeper does with the tiger and Confucius does with the birds and beasts. He is nameless and therefore he has no ambition for fame or political power, and does not concern himself with argumentation and debate over human affairs. By being in right relationship with Heaven, he is able to concentrate his spirit so that all around him, the creatures and the crops also follow their Heaven-endowed natures. He resembles the narrow-minded commoner, perhaps as represented in the attributes of the frog in the well, is almost unrecognizable. He is more similar, in fact, to the *Peng*, "roaming beyond the four seas" (遊乎四海之外) just as the *Peng* follows its whim and "when the seas are heaving has a mind to travel to the South Ocean" (海運則將徙於南冥).²³

²³ ch 1, *Zhz*, 43; Gr, *Ctz*, 43

Conclusion

Much of Zhuangzi's philosophy is depicted through the medium of analogy, and in particular animal analogy. Not only do animal stories add to the whimsy and humor of the *Zhuangzi*, but they also support the deeper underpinnings of Zhuangzi's philosophy.

In undermining the logic of his fellow philosophers, Zhuangzi uses animal analogy in order to generalize his arguments so that he may address all of his opponents at once without being caught up in the intricacies of specific debate. By creating general categories of "narrow-minded" as illustrated in the cicada, the turtle-dove and the frog and of "enlightened" as illustrated in the *Peng* and the tortoise, Zhuangzi presents easily understandable and adaptable arguments that are general enough to be applied to most philosophical schools. Furthermore, animals add an element of humor that softens his criticism of these schools. This gives him the additional advantage of keeping his readers' minds open instead of directly confronting what may be a deep-set opinion. We are also presented with the dangers that self-centeredness and the ignorant pursuit of gain may present to one's safety through the story of Zhuangzi and the magpie. Observance of the relationship between predator and prey is a crucial moment for Zhuangzi as he finds himself caught by the impulses of desire and sees the implications that it has to turn him into prey. These animal analogies challenge the basic assumptions that are made according to human knowledge by showing the ignorance and danger associated with these assumptions. Once the reader has found his previous suppositions unfounded, Zhuangzi takes the opportunity to present his own alternative in the pursuit of the Way.

For Zhuangzi, following the Way means following one's Heaven-endowed nature and becoming a True Man. It requires an awareness of the fallibility of human logic and the turning away from selfish desire in favor of the Way. One follows one's Heaven-endowed nature by

being aware of one's environment and surroundings, adhering to the nature of other things and flowing with the course of events. This is depicted in such analogies as the tiger keeper and the tiger, in which the tiger keeper is praised for his ability to adhere to the temperament and nature of the tiger. The True Man's adherence to the nature of others and rejection of fame makes it so that others are no longer concerned about him, such as in the story of Confucius who has the ability to walk among the birds and the beasts without disturbing them. Furthermore, when the True Man has cultivated himself enough, he is able to concentrate his essence to that all around him, as represented by animals, also accords rightly their Heaven-endowed natures.

The humor and style of Zhuangzi's animal analogies is a central characteristic of the *Zhuangzi*. In keeping with his rejection of human logic, he embraces animal analogy and through the medium of birds and beasts, successfully articulates his unique philosophy both succinctly and entertainingly.

Appendix

“Autumn Floods”²⁴

It was the time of the autumn floods, and hundreds of streams flowed into the Yellow River. The rushing and gushing of the flow was so great that even standing directly in the middle of the river, with the sandbars on one side and the cliffs on the other, one still wouldn't be able to tell the difference between a cow and a horse standing on the bank. The Lord of the Yellow River was delighted in himself! He glorified in his own greatness and thought that of everything in the world, he was the most magnificent.

He flowed along in the current as it headed east until at last he came upon the North Sea. Facing east and looking over the waters he saw that they went on without end. At this, the River Lord spun his eyes in his head, and gazing seaward at the North Sea Ruo he said with a sigh: “There is the proverb: ‘The one who’s heard the Way a hundred times thinks himself enlightened beyond all others.’ This is talking about me! Indeed I’ve heard there are some who belittle the knowledge of Confucius, and some who demean the righteousness of Boyi,²⁵ and at first I could hardly believe my ears! But now that I am confronted with your unfathomable greatness, I think of how if I had not arrived at your gate, I would have been in danger of being laughed at by the true Masters of the Great Scope²⁶ forever!”

²⁴ “Autumn Floods” is the seventeenth chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, and therefore belongs to the *Outer Chapters*. It was not written by Zhuangzi himself, but contains elements and themes consistent with those presented in the *Inner Chapters*, such as humor, whimsy, relativity of perspective, doubt of human wisdom, and spontaneity of Heaven. There are also several anecdotes describing Zhuangzi, presenting him as a man whose personality is consistent with the voice of the *Inner Chapters*. I would also like to mention that there are animals present or mentioned in every episode of this chapter, many instances of which represent my arguments.

²⁵ Confucius 仲尼, attributed to be the founding father of the Confucians, was known for his learning. Bo Yi 伯夷, refers to the brothers Bo Yi and Shu Qi 叔齊, used as examples of “righteousness” (義 *yi*). This is the virtue of uncompromisingly acting out the right relationship with another. The brothers are said to have starved to death in renunciation of unrighteous action. (Gr, *Disp*, 86).

²⁶ 大方 *dafang*. The “breadth of vision” of the “Great Man” (大人 *daren*). The Masters of the Great Scope are those men who see broadly, without the constraints of preconceived notions or human convention. (Gr, *Ctz*, 143-4).

The North Sea Ruo replied: “A frog in a well can’t talk about the sea because he’s limited by the walls of his home; the summer bug can’t talk about ice because he’s limited by the time of the seasons; the muddled scholar can’t talk about the Way because he’s bound up in his teachings. Only now that you have come out from between the cliff-banks and are confronted with the vastness of the sea can you know that you are inferior!

“Now that you are enlightened, we can talk about the Great Principle²⁷ of things. There is nothing greater under the heavens than the sea; the flow of ten thousand rivers returns into the sea, yet no one knows when they will stop because the sea never fills up. And then there is Weilu rock²⁸ that drains the sea away; but no one knows how long it will do so because the sea is never emptied. No matter whether it’s springtime or autumn, the level of the sea doesn’t change, and it knows nothing of floods or droughts. The sea’s huge flow is greater than the currents of the Yangtze River or the Yellow River, and impossible to measure! But even knowing all this, I have never once considered myself vast because I know I am a thing lodged between heaven and earth, and receive my essence from yin and yang.²⁹

“Here I am between heaven and earth. I’m like a small stone or a small tree on a great mountain. And now that I think of myself as small, how could I have ever considered myself great? And when I think of the four seas as being suspended between heaven and earth, isn’t this just like a little hole in a swamp? And what about China being in the sea, isn’t this just like a single grain of rice in a huge granary? When we use a word to describe everything in the world we say “ten thousand,” and mankind is only one of these many. There are people crowded into the nine provinces, but of all the places that crops can be grown, and all the places boats or carts

²⁷ 大理 *dali*. The pattern and principle that is the nature of things.

²⁸ The Weilu rock 尾閭, as Watson (176) notes, is said to be a “huge fiery stone against which the sea water turns to steam” and is siphoned away.

²⁹ 陰陽 *yin yang*. The two primal 氣 *qi* out of which a person is made. (Gr, *Disp*, 328)

can reach, mankind only occupies one of those many. If we compare this small number to ten thousand, is it not like the size of the tip of a hair on a horse's body? That which the Five Emperors pass on, that which the Three Kings³⁰ fight over, that which concerns the righteous man, that which the scholar toils over, all these things are encompassed in the Way!³¹

“Boyi rejected it for fame, Confucius debated it to be considered learned. They made themselves great by doing this. Isn't this just like yourself in your self-complacency thinking yourself greater than any other waters?”

The River Lord said: “Oh, then if that's how it is, what if I meditate on the greatness of the heavens and earth and the minuteness of the end of a hair, will that be enough?”

The North Sea Ruo replied: “No, indeed, there is no end to the measuring of things, no stop to the flow of time, no constant rule for how to separate and divide things, and no fixed rule for beginnings and endings. Great knowledge contemplates both what is far away and what is near at hand; it doesn't consider small things insignificant, or large things overly important, and it knows that there is no end to the measuring of things. It pursues a clear understanding of both the past and the present; and so it does not become bored if it spends a long time on one thing, and does not become anxious if it spends a short time on another, because it knows that there is no end to time. It investigates both the state of full satisfaction and the state of empty nothingness; so it does not rejoice in attaining, it does not worry when it loses, and it knows that things are separated and divided inconsistently. It understands how to follow the level road to the contented life; so it does not think living is joyous and does not think that death is a disaster, because it knows there is no fixed rule to the beginning and ending of things. Calculating the

³⁰ The five Emperors (五帝, *wu di*) were famous emperors of antiquity, the most well-known of which were the sage kings Yao, Shun and Yu. See note 21 below. The three kings (三王, *san wang*) were the founders of the three legendary dynasties of the Xia, the Shang and the Zhou. (Wat, 176)

³¹ 道 *dao*. Within Taoism, it is the course that is appropriate to a situation but that cannot be pre-determined, but instead is followed spontaneously as an echo to a sound or a mirror to an image. (Gr, *Disp*, 188)

total span of a person's knowledge is not as good as calculating what he does not know, and calculating the total span of a person's life is not as good as calculating the span of time before he was alive. This is like attempting to fathom the scope of the greatest thing using the smallest measurement. Doing this makes one muddled and confused so that one can't do anything by oneself. If we consider it all from this perspective, we furthermore must ask the question, how do we know the tip of a hair is small enough to determine distinctions of the tiniest kind? And then how do we know if heaven and earth are enough to fathom scopes of the largest kind?

The River Lord said: "The debaters of the earth all say: 'That which is most minute is without form, that which is most enormous cannot be encompassed.' Is this really how things are?"

The North Sea Ruo said: "Indeed, if you look at something that is large from the perspective of something that is tiny, you can't see it completely; and if you look at something that is tiny from the standpoint of something that is large, you can't comprehend it. Indeed, the tiniest of what is small is called 'essence.' And the greatest of what is large is called 'enormity.' Therefore, we are able to easily separate the large from the small because of the circumstance that is the present state of being. Indeed, 'fine' is different than 'rough' because each has different forms. As for that which has no form, what you are counting cannot be distinguished. As for that which cannot be encompassed, what you are counting cannot be fathomed. You can use words to speak of things that are rough; you can use the imagination to think about things that are fine. But it is impossible to determine the fineness or roughness of that which can neither be discussed using words or investigated using thoughts. For this reason, the Great Man's duty is not manifested in harming others, but he also not to make too much of benevolence and

kindness;³² he is not stirred to action for the sake of gain, and he does not despise the lowly servant. His duty is to not compete over wealth, and he does not think much of either refusing something or yielding himself to it. When he at work he does not borrow from others, and he does not make much of laboring for his food. He does not despise greed or corruption. He does not act like the common people, and he is not over-awed at eccentric things or extraordinary occurrences. He is content to behave in accordance with the crowd, but he also does not despise flatterers. None of the high positions or rich salaries in the world are enough to tempt him; none of the threats of execution or shame are enough to humiliate him. He knows that what is right cannot be separated from what is wrong, that what is tiny cannot be distinguished from what is great. I have heard it said: ‘The man of the Way is without reputation, the utmost of Virtue³³ is without gain, the Great Man is without a self.’ Such a one exemplifies the ultimate of accepting one’s fate!”

The River Lord said: “Whether I am considering a thing’s outward appearance or it’s inward characteristics, how do I arrive at and distinguish what is valuable from what is base? How do I arrive at and distinguish what is small from what is large?”

The North Sea Ruo said: “If one considers it from the perspective of the Way, a thing is without either value or baseness; if one considers it from the perspective of the individual things themselves, each regards itself as valuable and all others as base; if one considers it from the perspective of common opinion, the value or baseness of a thing is not determined by the individual itself. If one considers it from the perspective of differences, going by the state of it’s “bigness” to consider it big, then in everything there is nothing that is not big; going by on the

³² 仁 *ren* “benevolence.” “An unselfish concern for the welfare of others.” (Gr, *Disp*, 19). 恩 *en* “kindness, favor, grace.” Usually used in reference to favors bestowed by a ruler to his people. (Ro, 82)

³³ 德 *de* “...the spontaneous aptitude, the inherent capacity of a thing to perform its specific functions successfully” within the Way. (Gr, *Disp*, 188)

state of it's "smallness" to consider it small, then in everything there is nothing that is not small. Knowing that heaven and earth can be considering as nothing more than grains of rice, and knowing the end of a hair can be considered as great as hills and mountains, then we can understand the concept of the differences.

"If one considers something from the perspective of utility, going by the quality in it that possesses utility and consider it to have utility, then in everything there is none that does not possess usefulness. Going by the quality in it that does not possess utility and consider it to be without utility, then of everything there is none that is not useless. Knowing that east and west are opposite and that they cannot be without each other, then the usefulness of each can be determined. If one considers it from the perspective of preferences, going by the quality in it that is considered correct to think it correct, then of everything there is nothing that is not correct; going by the quality in it that is considered incorrect to consider it incorrect, then of everything there is none that is not wrong. If one knows that Emperor Yao and King Lie each considered himself correct and the other wrong, then we can see the selection of preferences.³⁴

"In the past, the rulers Yao and Shun abdicated in favor of worthy successors who continued the rule of emperors. The rulers Zhi and Kuai abdicated in favor of unworthy successors and the rule of emperors was destroyed. Kings Tang and Wu went to battle and became kings, while Lord Bo went to battle and was destroyed.³⁵ From the consideration of these things, thinking of the rituals of fighting and abdication and the actions of Emperor Yao

³⁴ Emperor Yao below. King Jie 桀, wicked last ruler of the Xia dynasty. (Ro, 326)

³⁵ "Yao 堯 and Shun 舜, two of the greatest legendary rulers of primordial China, are both said to have abdicated their thrones to the most talented person available, rather than to their own sons; Yao abdicated to Shun, whereas Shun abdicated to Yu 禹, who ended the practice of abdication by passing the throne to his own son (and thus beginning the Xia dynasty 夏朝). These legends of abdication became the focus of political debate in Chinese philosophy: Was it best for the empire for rulers to choose talented successors or to establish a more stable hereditary line? This issue emerged later in the person of Zhi 之, a minister of the state of Yan 燕 in the fourth century B.C. He persuaded Kuai 噲, the ruler of Yan, to abdicate the throne in imitation of the ancient sage rulers, but the result was anarchy rather than stability." (Ro, 330-1)

and King Jie, a common rule cannot be established for when to value one man's actions and despise the other's.

A beam can strike a wall, but cannot block up a hole; this bespeaks different capabilities. Qiji and Hualiu could gallop a thousand li in one day, but neither would ever be able to catch a mouse like a badger or a weasel;³⁶ this bespeaks different skills and techniques. An owl can snatch up a flea or examine the end of a hair during the night, but when day arrives it opens its eyes wide and can't even see a hill; this bespeaks the different natures of things.

Now, could you say: take 'right' as your teacher and dispense with the concept of 'wrong,' or take 'good governance' as your teacher and dispense with the concept of 'chaos'? If you do this, then you do not yet understand the patterns of Heaven and earth and the state of being of the ten thousand things! This is like taking Heaven as your teacher and dispensing with earth, like taking yin as your teacher and dispensing of yang; this is clearly impractical. Moreover, to speak like this and yet not live according to the one's words is not just foolish, but moreover deceptive! Emperors and kings abdicated according to different situations, the three kingdoms continued according to different configurations;³⁷ when it is against the times, we say those people who flout common rules are usurpers; when it is at the time of the event, we say those people who act in accordance with common rules are followers of righteousness. So, River Lord, hold your tongue! How could you understand the gate of nobility and baseness, or the house of small and great?"

The River Lord said: "Then this being the case, what should I do? What should I not do? If I refuse some things and accept others, if I prefer some things and discard others, how should I know what to do in the end?"

³⁶ 騏驎 and 驎騮. Legendary horses known for their speed. (Ro, 327)

³⁷ 三代, *Sandai*, the Three Dynasties or Kingdoms, were the Xia 夏, Shang 商 and Zhou 周 dynasties. (Ro, 329)

The North Sea Ruo said: “If one considers it from the perspective of the Way, what is valuable, what is base? This is called opposites going to extremes. Do not restrain your ambition, otherwise you will be departing from the Way. What is few and what is many, this is called cycles of fading and flourishing. Do not hold yourself to a single action, otherwise you will be at odds with the Way. Be stern, like the lord of a state, who grants no favors. Be generous, like the soil god of the sacrifice, not keeping back any abundance in secret. Be measureless, like the four directions without end, which are hedged in by nothing. If you embrace everything universally, which of them would give you particular support? This is called being without bias. The Way has no end and no beginning. But things have a time of death and a time of life; the time of death and the time of life do not depend on the fulfillment of each other, but always are being emptied or filled, and isn't it true that there is no time at which they are not being transformed into each other? A year cannot be held up, time cannot be stopped. The time of decay and the time of growth, when something is fulfilled and something is emptied, these each come to an end and then begin again. This is how we describe the plans of great significance, and the order of all things. As for things' span of life, it is like galloping forward, and there is no movement in which there is no change, there is no time at which they are not without movement. So what should I do? What should I not do? Indeed everything will change of its own accord.”

The River Lord said: “Therefore then, what is precious in the Way?”

The North Sea Ruo said: “The one who understands the Way is certainly also well-versed in principle. The one who commands principles is certainly also understands circumstance. The one who understands circumstances will not be harmed by things. These describe the most virtuous person: fire cannot burn him, water cannot drown him, cold or heat cannot hurt him, bird and beast cannot injure him. I am not saying that he makes light of these things, but rather

that he examines carefully both what is safe and what is dangerous, he is at peace both in disaster and in good fortune, he is careful in his goings and comings, and there is nothing that can harm him. Therefore, such a one says: ‘What is from heaven collects in the heart, what is from man manifests on the outside, and the greatest virtue is in obeying heaven.’ If you are knowledgeable of the affairs of men, root yourself in heaven and take your stand in virtue, then even if you hesitate, and even if you are wronged or stretched, you will still be able to return to the essential and speak about the ultimate.’”

The River Lord asked: “What do you mean by heaven? And what do you mean by men?”

North Sea Ruo replied: “Cows and horses have four feet, this bespeaks the Heavenly. We put bridles on a horse’s head, we pierce the noses of cows, and this bespeaks the human. Therefore it is said: “Do not let what is human destroy what is Heavenly. Do not let what is purposeful destroy what is fated. Do not use gain to seek after fame. Be careful to guard it and do not lose it, this is what is meant by returning to its truth.”

* * *

The Kui was jealous of the millipede, the millipede was jealous of the snake, the snake was jealous of the wind, the wind was jealous of the eye, and the eye was jealous of the heart.³⁸

The Kui said to the millipede: “I move by hoping along on one leg. Nothing could be more convenient than that! Isn’t it strange that you have to move by managing all those ten thousand legs?”

The millipede said: “No, it’s not like that. Haven’t you ever seen what its like when a man spits? The big pieces of the spittle are like pearls, and the little pieces are like mist. And

³⁸ The Kui 夔 was a creature with only one leg. For more, see Birrell, 134.

then, it's all mixed up together and comes down and could never be counted. For myself, I move by the mechanism given to me by Heaven. I don't know why it works the way that it does."

The millipede said to the snake: "I move by using my ten thousands of feet, but this can't compare with your ability to move with no feet at all! How can you do that?"

The snake said: "Well, how could I ever think the mechanism given to me by Heaven is so unusual? I can't imagine how I could ever use feet!"

The snake said to the wind: "If I move by using my spine and my ribs, this shows that I have a physical form. But you, who rise over the North Sea with a roar, and enter into the South Sea with a roar, how can you have no physical form?"

The wind said: "I will explain. I rise over the North Sea with a roar, and enter into the South Sea with a roar. This is how it is. But I am defeated if one holds a finger to me or tramples me. However, I am the only one who could snap a great tree, or blow over a great house. Therefore, I use my small defeats and make them into a great victory in the end. Only the sage is able to attain such great victories."

* * *

Confucius was traveling in Kuang when some people from Song besieged him.³⁹ They had surrounded him several times, yet he sat, playing his zither and singing. Zilu came in, saw him sitting there, and said: "How could you possibly be enjoying yourself right now?"⁴⁰

Confucius replied: "Come here and I will tell you! I've tried for so long now to avoid difficulties. But it is my fate that I am unable to avoid them. If I have been seeking after success for a long time, and yet have been unable to obtain it, this is on account of the times.

³⁹ Kuang 匡 is said to be a city in the state of Song 宋.

⁴⁰ Zilu 子路 was a disciple of Confucius.

“During the time of Yao and Shun, it was not because of their great wisdom that nobody in the world faced difficulties. During the time of Jie and Zhou, it was not because wisdom failed them that nobody in the world was successful. It worked out like this because of the times and circumstances. Indeed, courage for the fisherman moving over water without fearing the river dragon. Courage for the hunter moving over land without fearing the rhinoceros or the tiger. Courage for a heroic officer thinking of death like it is life when he comes face-to-face with bare blades. He knows that hardship is fated, and that success is a matter of the times. Courage for the sage knowing that hardship is fated, that success is a matter of the times, and therefore he can be at the very edge of great difficulty but have no fear. So calm down, Zilu! My fate consists of that which is already controlled.”

Very soon, the armored men entered. Then they apologized, saying: “We had surrounded you because we thought you were Yang Hu. Since you are not, we will now beg your pardon and withdraw.”⁴¹

* * *

Gongsun Long asked Prince Mou of Wei.⁴² “As a young man, I studied the Way of the former kings. Then, when I had grown up, I understood the duties of having good conduct and being righteous. I used debate to compare and differentiate things and I could distinguish between hard and white. I could claim that something was ‘so’ or something was ‘not so,’ that something was acceptable or not acceptable. I confounded the wisdom of the one hundred schools of thought and I debated with others until they could talk no more. I thought I had

⁴¹ This is a story adapted from the *Analects* 論語 IX and XI in which Confucius was mistaken for an enemy of Song named Yang Hu 陽虎. (Wat, 184)

⁴² Gongsun Long 公孫龍 is grouped with those philosophers called by Graham (1989, p75) the Sophists, who focused on the theory of “debate” (變 *bian*). He is most famous for his essay, the “White Horse” 《白馬》 in which he argued “a white horse is not a horse” (白馬非馬). Prince Mou of Wei 公子牟 was said to have written a Taoist work which has not survived. (Wat, 185)

reached the very farthest extent of learning. But upon hearing Zhuangzi's teachings, I realize that they confuse me and I think them quite strange. I don't know whether I don't measure up to him in rhetorical abilities or in knowledge. I have run out of arguments for which to open my big beak! Therefore, I am humbled to dare and ask to hear his side of things."

As he leaned down upon his armrest, Prince Mou heaved a great sigh. Then he looked up towards Heaven and laughed, saying: "Have you alone not heard the story of the frog in the crumbling well? This frog said to the tortoise of the East Sea: 'This is the life, don't you think? I can come out of my well, and hop around on the rim. Then I can go down and rest in a chink in the wall where a tile is missing. When I dive into the water, I let it float me along, holding me up under the armpits and supporting my chin. If I am slipping around in the mud I bury my feet into it and let it cover all the way up my ankles. When I look upon the mosquito larva, the crabs and the tadpoles, I think of how none of them can match me! All the water of this hole is completely under my control. My joyfulness as I paddle around at peace in this crumbling well is the greatest the world has ever known! So, why don't you come visit and see some time?' The tortoise of the East Sea hadn't even gotten his left foot into the well before his right knee was stuck. He thereupon backed out and drew back. Then the tortoise told the frog about the sea: 'Indeed, even the distance of one thousand li isn't enough to describe the sea's greatness. Even the distance of one thousand fathoms isn't enough to describe the sea's height. During the reign of the Emperor Yu, there were nine floods in ten years, and even this didn't cause the level of the sea's waters to increase. During the reign of Tang, there were seven draughts in eight years, and even this didn't cause the banks of the sea's edges to decrease. The joyfulness of the East Sea comes from that fact that whether over a short span of time or the long haul its waters do not push outward or shift, nor by a great deal or by a very little do they advance or recede.'

Thereupon, having heard these things about the sea, the frog in the crumbling well was at an utter loss and totally dumfounded.

“Indeed, you are now at the borders of knowing and not knowing, of what ‘is’ and what ‘is not;’ and yet you still wish to see through Zhuangzi’s words! This is like trying to make a mosquito bear the weight of a mountain or a centipede gallop on a river. You will never be able to achieve such a task! Moreover, in all your discussions of knowing and not knowing, in all your words that are notable and obtuse, in all your the momentary victories that you win for yourself, are these not all like the frog in his crumbling well?”

“At this very moment, Zhuangzi is trampling through the Yellow Springs.⁴³ He has ascended to the Heavens, where there is no south and no north but instead all is spaciouly dissolving in the four directions. He is lost in the unfathomable, where there is no east and no west and all begins in dark obscurity and ends in the great thoroughfare. But you yourself are at a loss, and investigate these things by seeking them out, using your debates in quest of them. This is merely like using a pipe to look at the sky, or using an awl to measure the earth. Are these not too small? Get out now!”

“Have you alone not heard of the boy from Shouling? He studied the swagger of people in Handan, but even while he still hadn’t mastered their swagger, he had already lost his old way of walking. And then all he could do was crawl on his hands and knees back home. And that was that! If you do not leave now, you will either forget what you once knew or you will lose your occupation.”

Gongsun Long stood with his mouth gaping wide without closing, his tongue raised to the top of his mouth without dropping. And only then did he withdraw and go away.

* * *

⁴³ The underworld.

Zhuangzi was fishing on the Pu River when the king of Chu sent two officials to make the following announcement to him: “If I may, I desire to impose upon you with troubling matters within the borders of the state!”

Zhuangzi took up his fishing pole without raising his head and replied: “I’ve heard that there is a sacred tortoise in Chu that has by now been dead for three thousand years. The king wrapped it, laid it in a box and placed it in an ancestral temple. But what of the tortoise, do you think it would rather be dead, knowing that its bones remain and are being worshiped? Or would it rather be alive, dragging its tail through the mud?”

The two officials replied: “It would rather be alive and dragging its tail through the mud.”

Zhuangzi said: “Go away! I will continue dragging my tail through the mud.”

* * *

Hui Shi was serving as minister of Liang when Zhuangzi came to visit.⁴⁴ Someone told Hui Shi: “Zhuangzi has come, and he wants to replace you as minister!”

Thereupon, Hui Shi was afraid, and searched for him everywhere in the state for three days and three nights. At last, Zhuangzi came and saw him and said: “There is a type of bird in the south called the phoenix, have you heard of it? Indeed, as for the phoenix, he rises over the South Sea and flies over the North Sea. It doesn’t stop unless there is a Paulownia tree, it doesn’t eat unless there is fine fruit about, and it doesn’t drink unless there is a sweet spring. It happened that an owl having gotten a rotten mouse, looked up at the phoenix passing by and gazing at it said ‘Shoo!’ Now it’s you who are wanting to ‘shoo’ me away because of your precious Liang!”

* * *

⁴⁴ Hui Shi 惠施 was another Sophist a Sophist who held political position under King Hui of Wei but of whose writing unfortunately none has survived. He was also a great friend of Zhuangzi’s. (Gr, *Disp*, 75)

Zhuangzi and Hui Shi were traveling over the Hao river on a bridge. Zhuangzi said: “The minnows are going about and playing around at their ease, such is the happiness of the fish.”

Hui Shi said: “You aren’t a fish, so how do you know what ‘happiness’ is for a fish?”

Zhuangzi said: “You aren’t me, so how do you know that I don’t know what ‘happiness’ is for a fish?”

Hui Shi replied: “I’m not you, and I definitely don’t know about you. But you are definitely not a fish, and therefore the fact that you don’t know what ‘happiness’ is for a fish is decisively proven!”

Zhuangzi said: “I beg of you that you follow your logic back to the origin of it. As to you asking me ‘How do you know what is happiness for a fish?’ this was because you already knew that I know, and this is why you asked me! What is already known is on the Hao river!”

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