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## **Moving beyond identity: reading the Zhuangzi and Levinas as resources for comparative philosophy**

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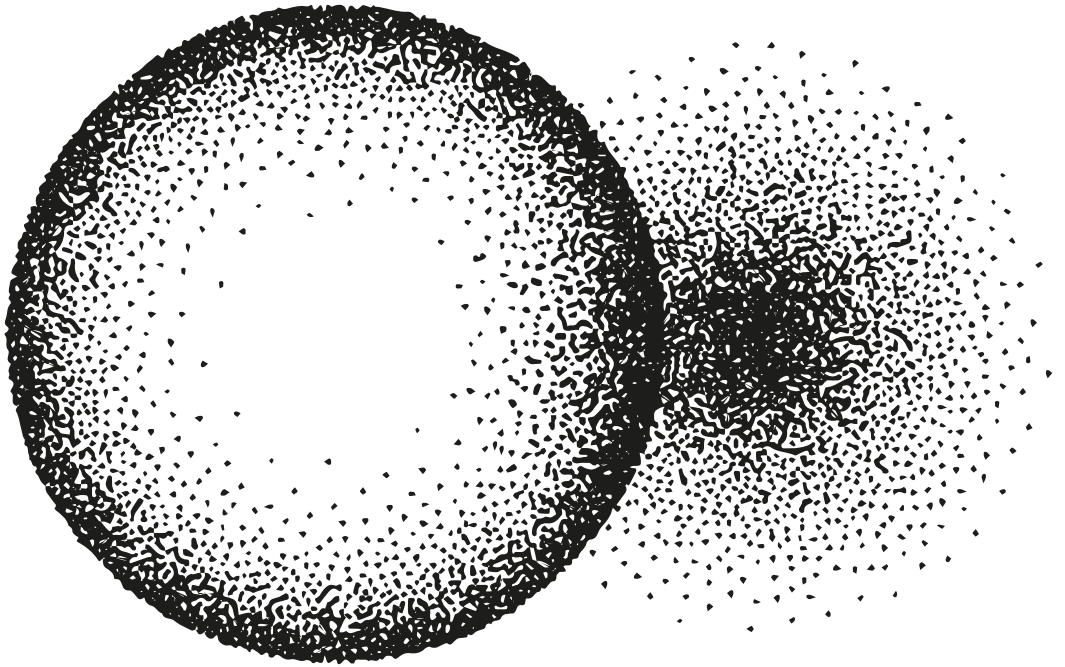
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Chapter 4

**The *Zhuāngzǐ* on the Self-Other  
Relation: Finding the Pivot of *Dào***

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In this chapter I argue that the *Zhuāngzǐ* tries to articulate a position that helps us to become open to alternative perspectives and which offers a way to relate to these different perspectives in a harmonious, non-violent way. In this chapter, I will particularly focus on the critical passage of finding “the pivot of *dào*,” (*dàoshū*, 道樞) which is a position that will help us to move beyond identity and which will contribute to a methodological shift in comparative philosophy. The discussion of the *Zhuāngzǐ* will particularly be helpful in providing us with a practical method of how to attune to the otherness of the other while simultaneously relying on conventional language and logic that affirm the equality between self and other. The pivot of *dào* (*dàoshū*, 道樞) is a position that consists of certain commitments, behaviors, emotions and beliefs that helps us to embrace the relativity of our judgments which will facilitate the comparative dialogue, and which enables us to embody the task to move beyond identity.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that reality consists of constantly transforming phenomena that cannot be captured in conventional modes of language and knowledge. For the *Zhuāngzǐ*, self and other harmoniously connect when self and other are able to follow their unique preferences and are not impeded by others in the unfolding of their self-so-ness (*zìrán*, 自然). The text offers us strategies that enable us to align with reality and to harmonize different perspectives which the text calls “being at rest at the centre of the pivot of *dào*” (*bǐshì mò dé qí ǒu, wèi zhī dào shū*, 彼是莫得其偶，謂之道樞). The aim of this chapter is primarily to illuminate what it means to “find the pivot of *dào*” and to show what might be gained by making no rigid distinctions between what “is-so” (*shì*, 是) and what is “not-so” (*fēi*, 非). In the first part of this chapter, I will clarify the historical and social-political background of the text in which will show how the Warring States era Masters (*zī*) were concerned with the relationship between justice, personal freedom, and humaneness and how philosophy was seen as disputation (*biàn*, 辯). The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s critique on *biàn* serves as the main motivation of the text in which its rhetorical style can inform us about what it means to be at rest in the middle of the pivot.

In the second part of the chapter, I will focus on the relation between making *shì fēi* distinctions, the desire to hold on the objective standards and following the situation. I will show how the *Zhuāngzǐ* rejects any commitment to universally valid concepts or theories and how the consequential destruction of knowledge, language and logic restores human being's natural Virtuousity (*dé*, 德). Virtuousity enables human beings to respond to situations from an attitude of carefree

wandering (*xiāoyáo* 逍遙), which indirectly leads them to complete activities with effortless action (*wúwéi* 無為). The *Zhuāngzǐ* shows how clinging to knowledge, language and logic alienates humans from their natural alignment with the universe and how the deconstruction of artificial human values and conventions will liberate humans from their limited perspective.

In the last section I will focus on the merits of “being at rest in the middle of the pivot of *dào*,” a position in which we are able to transcend polarization by having become truly free of preferences, but in which we still are actively involved in ordinary practices and can as such “walk on two roads” (*liǎngxíng* 兩行). I will argue that the pivot can be seen as the perspective in which comparative philosophers are open to a variety of alternatives and perspectives and can see them equal in their difference. The person at the pivot does not refrain from making every day *shìfēi*-judgments, but only uses them in a non-rigid, convenient way. In the end, as we will see in the case of Levinas, once all this material has been rehearsed and elucidated, these principles of the *Zhuāngzǐ* are not merely interesting contents of the text when placed into the specifics of its cultural environment but offer us a fundamental reorientation for comparative philosophy in our own times.

## **Part I: The Masters Of The Pre-Qin Period**

### **§4.1 Contextualizing the *Zhuāngzǐ***

The *Zhuāngzǐ* as a text is shaped by the intellectual climate of the “Master texts” of the Warring States Period (480-221 BCE) in ancient China, such as those associated with Confucius (孔子), Xúnzǐ (荀子), Mòzǐ (墨子) and Mencius (孟子). The text responds to the moral-political discourse of its time and particularly to the Mohist commitment to correlating names with the correct classifications, which result from judgments made in terms of what is “so” (*shì*, 是) and “not so” (*fēi*, 非). These “so” (*shì*, 是) and “not so” (*fēi*, 非) judgments applied both to descriptive as prescriptive statements and referred to what is “right,” “appropriate” or “fitting”. Early Chinese philosophy can be seen as the debate over which *shìfēi*-judgments are right or most fitting. The *Zhuāngzǐ* responds as a text to these *shìfēi*-debates and particularly questions the reliance on a universal, neutral standard that can be used to discern what is right or appropriate and what is not.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* (莊子) and the *Dàodéjīng* (道德經) of *Lǎozǐ* (老子) have been traditionally classified as 'Ancient Daoist texts', even though "Daoism" is a term that neither the *Zhuāngzǐ* nor the *Dàodéjīng* uses; that classification emerged in the Han dynasty (202 BCE-220 AD). What we do know is that the *Zhuāngzǐ* refers several times to *Lǎozǐ*, indicating that the *Dàodéjīng* was at least known of earlier than the *Zhuāngzǐ*. The heterogeneous collection of writings entitled the *Zhuāngzǐ* dates from the Warring States Period (c. 480-221 BCE) to the early Han (202 BCE-9 CE). The collection of writings is divided, at least after its reception by the commentator Guo Xiang in the third century CE, into 33 chapters, of which the first seven chapters are referred to as the *Inner Chapters* (*nèipiān*, 內篇); sections of the text that are commonly seen as a coherent whole written by one author. The attributed author of these seven chapters in traditional Chinese doxography was Zhuang Zhou (ca. 369-286 BCE), although scholars today are of the opinion that the collection of writings was written by different authors and were also written in different time periods. Most early Chinese texts are composite in nature and can be better seen as 'anthologies' than single-authored works.

We do not know a lot of the life of Master Zhou, the only information we have is a short biography given by the historian Sima Qian (145-86 BCE) who wrote that Zhuāngzǐ was born in the state of Song and worked in a lacquer-tree garden of Meng. Zhuāngzǐ was, in this representation, a contemporary of Mencius (孟子) as well as Aristotle (384-322 BC). At the time of Zhuāngzǐ, incessant wars were fought among competing territorial states. The period that came to be known as the "Warring States Period" was not only an era of intense turmoil, but also gave rise to an increase in social mobility and the emergence of a cultural elite. Tao Jiang calls the pre-Qin period (traditionally 551-479 BCE) "the foundational period in Chinese philosophy," that "has been considered the single most creative and vibrant chapter in Chinese intellectual history."<sup>209</sup>

The cultural elite of the Warring States era was a group of educated persons who formulated social ideals of proper conduct and tried to sell their ideas on how to govern to the rulers of territorial states. These scholars who travelled from state to state trying to find an official position, formed "lineages of thought" (*jiā*, 家) that were later on classified as 'Confucian' (*rújiā*, 儒家), Mohist' (*mòjiā*, 墨家) or 'Daoist' (*dàojiā*, 道家) lineages. These lineages of thought were deeply dissatisfied with the political and social situation and began to think about how to restore political and social stability to a rapidly, and quite violently fracturing world. As a result,

<sup>209</sup> Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China*, 1

Chinese lineages of thought concentrated on moral cultivation, social praxis, and the systematic education of government officials.<sup>210</sup>

Philosophical thought in the Warring States texts was centred on the question of proper conduct and how rulers should behave and approach their citizens to create political stability and bring about prosperity. The implicit “teaching model” of these texts was that proper conduct ought to be modelled after the persons who showed morally perfected behaviour. These exemplary persons (*worthies*, *xián*, 賢) modelled their behaviour after the sage kings, the cultural heroes who created prosperous civilizations and were able to harmonize society and improve the lives of the populace. These ancient sage kings, whose narratives place them as early as the third millennium BCE, were the ones who followed the heavenly patterns and had ‘the mandate of heaven’ (*tiānmìng*, 天命), the divine right of ruling.

The main concern for scholars of the Pre-Qin era was to harmonize human conduct with heavenly patterns and established cultural norms. Identifying these patterns and norms was considered finding the Way (*dào*, 道), which can, in addition to its nominal denotation of a path, road, course or way, also be translated in a verbal sense as “to lead” or “to guide,” but can also mean, “to speak,” and so has the sense of giving someone direction, telling them where to go or how to get there, or what to do and how to do it.<sup>211</sup> Searching for *dào* was not the sole concern for the thinkers later classified as the *dào*jiā (道家); nearly all pre-Qin lineages of thought discuss following *dào*, although they tend to interpret the “course” (“the way”) in different fashions.

Finding the course was deemed important for harmonizing human behaviour with the heavenly patterns. Chinese cosmology is based on the premise that the universe is constantly generating and regenerating itself, implying that all states are in flux. The universe is not created but comprises the vital force *qì* (氣), which pervades the entire universe and “animates” inanimate matter as different beings. *Qì* operates according to a pattern of interdependent yet opposing forces of *yīnqì* (陰氣) and *yángqì* (陽氣). *Yīn* (陰) is associated with the malleable, female, and tranquil side of *qì* whereas *yáng* is considered aggressive, male, and energetic.

<sup>210</sup> Puett, M. & Gross-Loh, C. (2017) *The Path: What Chinese philosophers can teach us about the good life*, Simon and Schuster

<sup>211</sup> Ziporyn remarks that each *jiā* has its own course and that these *dào*'s have a prescriptive force. See: Ziporyn, B. (2009). *Zhuangzi. The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, Hackett Publishing Company, xiii

The written form of the *Zhuāngzǐ* is essential to its philosophical content, but the content is also a direct response to the political and philosophical climate of its time. In his book *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China* (2021) Tao Jiang offers a useful interpretative framework for understanding the political and philosophical climate of the pre-Qin period. Jiang argues that the intellectual debate centred around the three values of humaneness, justice and personal freedom that were re-thought and re-negotiated by the Masters in an effort to resolve the tensions between the distinct domains of the personal, the familial and the political.<sup>212</sup> The philosophical dialectics between the value of partial humaneness, our natural inclination to be partial toward those who are close to us, and impartial justice, defined as the exercise of impartial judgment on the merits of persons and state of affairs irrespective of their relations to us, were the two fundamentally juxtaposed ideals of governance for Warring States Master texts.<sup>213</sup>

Jiang argues that the *Zhuāngzǐ* needs to be read as a text that wants to illuminate the futility of the philosophical-political debate of these Masters. In the next section, I outline how these texts of the so-called “Masters” (*Zǐ*, 子) all saw their own position as the absolute truth, an assertion that the *Zhuāngzǐ* sees as the failure to comprehend that what is “so” and “not so” expresses only situated views.

## §4.2 The Teachings of the Masters

In ancient Chinese thought, the true teacher was the supreme intellectual – a noble man (*jūnzǐ*, 君子, or a *worthy*, (*xián*, 賢) who was no longer simply a matter of consanguineous privilege. Being a teacher was no longer an inherited status but resulted from the moral perfection of one’s character and one’s gestures. These *shìs* (*shì*, 士) became “Masters” of moral excellence who instructed disciples and rulers and whose ideas became lineages of thought (*jiā*, 家). It is against this background that we need to understand the “teachings of the Masters” and their rhetorical style. Collections of sayings like *The Analects* are not presented as a philosophical program but are – as Wiebke Denecke calls them – “scenes of instruction” between a Master and his disciples or apprentices.<sup>214</sup>

<sup>212</sup> Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy*, 1

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 36

<sup>214</sup> Denecke, W. (2010). *The dynamics of masters literature, early Chinese thought from Confucius to Han Feizi*. Columbia University Press, 21



The rhetorical style of *The Analects* greatly influenced the later Warring States texts and defined the intellectual context of this period. Nevertheless, these Masters all were re-negotiating the Confucian relation between the personal, familial and the political, which led to competing perspectives on the central notions of their time: humaneness and justice. In his analysis of the moral-political climate of the pre-Qin period, Jiang classifies the *Zhuāngzǐ* as the sole text that rejects the mainstream discourse, and instead endorsed personal freedom as the “appreciation and cultivation of personal space wherein one can be left alone and enjoy the company of like-minded friends without being entangled in the socio-political world.”<sup>215</sup>

Although I do agree that the *Zhuāngzǐ* can be seen as endorsing personal freedom, I will argue that this is not the text’s primary focus. Throughout this chapter I will show that the *Zhuāngzǐ*’s is aimed at teaching persons to become at rest in the middle of the pivot, so that they can respond to the other’s perspectives with the most clarity, which will, as a result, give them more personal freedom. Nevertheless, the person in the pivot still follows human conventions, but in a non-rigid and spontaneous way. Persons who are at rest in the pivot harmonizes with both Heaven and the human realm primarily because of their trained position of emotional equanimity and the acceptance of indeterminacy of life.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* urges us to embrace doubt as a way of being so that we are aligned with how reality is and can assess a situation with the most clarity. The *Zhuāngzǐ*’s rhetorical style is aimed at exposing the blindness of the other Masters by showing how their points of view are the result of clinging to preferences and do not articulate the ultimate truth, but merely express a particularly situated view. The text does not criticize making *shifēi*-judgments but does reject the belief that there is an ultimate principle or standard that justifies these judgments and because of its rejection of meta-standards, the *Zhuāngzǐ* also sees *shifēi*-debates as a vain, futile, and even potentially violent practice.

There is indeed a tendency in the other Master texts to elevate their own thinking not only as the right and only way (*dào*), but also to portray those who have cultivated themselves in this tradition as “better persons” who deserve to rule the state. People less capable of perfectly displaying the virtues and conduct of a certain *jiā* are considered those who need specific guidance from

<sup>215</sup> Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy*, 36.

these morally elevated people. The texts of these Masters are characterized by consciously constructed “scenes of instruction” between the Master and his disciples or apprentices, but also frequently add a subtle form of a “rhetoric of therapy” that firmly establishes the natural authority and moral excellence of the Master. The texts of these Masters can all be considered rhetorical texts that try to teach the proper Way (*dào*) by dismissing or refuting other alternatives. The frequent use of repetition of arguments and the strong reliance on sage-king (*shèngwáng*, 聖王) narratives were used as strategies to prove that their theory was the right one.

The collection of texts we know as the *Zhuāngzǐ*, needs to be understood from this context, in which philosophy consisted of dispute and rhetorical strategies aimed at defaming advocates of rival positions. Masters such as Xúnzǐ, Mencius and Mòzǐ were highly confident that their particular approaches could help us definitively determine what constituted “right” and “wrong” conduct and tended to distinguish between “worthy persons” or “gentlemen” and “petty persons,” referring to those who did not follow the standards of the particular *jiā*.<sup>216</sup> The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s aim is to show that these other Masters have “petty knowledge” and fail to see that their perspective is mere opinion. The central point of the *Zhuāngzǐ* is that there are not principles or criteria that can uncontestably prove what is “right,” or “appropriate” because there is always the possibility in that neither or both of the contesters are right. Debates about what is “so” and “not so” provoke unnecessary anger and lead mankind away from “the current of the central median as its normal course.”<sup>217</sup>

The *Zhuāngzǐ* classifies the distinctions of what is “so” and “not-so” (*shìfēi*, 是非) as mere opinions, opinions that alienate persons from their natural spontaneity if they cling to these opinions and beliefs as if their perspective conveys the absolute truth. Instead of seeing us as the ones who can know what is ultimately right or appropriate, we should embrace indeterminacy and doubt as the fundamental characteristics of reality. The *Zhuāngzǐ* wants to overcome the split between heaven and the humane realm by rejecting all traditional human values and transcending all *shìfēi*-judgements of right and wrong or benefit and harm. It is particularly the belief in the existence of rigid distinctions that creates problems and prevents us from harmonizing with the myriad of things (*wànwù*, 萬物). The *Zhuāngzǐ* seeks to restore the natural relation between self and other by liberating men from their

<sup>216</sup> See for example *Xunzi* 1:145 (Hutton, 2014, 5), *Mencius* Chapter 11:33 and *Mozi* Chapter 9, 40-41 (Mei, 1929[2016]).

<sup>217</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 22.

belief in rigid distinctions and their conflating of their identity. In the passage just before the pivot of *dào* is discussed, the *Zhuāngzǐ* asks the question:

果有言邪？其未嘗有言邪？其以為異於轂音，亦有辯乎，其無辯乎？道惡乎隱而有真偽？言惡乎隱而有是非？道惡乎往而不存？言惡乎存而不可？

*How could courses be so obscured that there could be any question of genuine and fake among them? How could words be so obscured that there could be any question of right and wrong among them? Where can you go without it being a course? What can you say without it being affirmable? Courses are obscured by the small accomplishments already formed and completed by them. Words are obscured by the ostentatious blossoms of reputation that come with them.<sup>218</sup>*

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s articulation of a positive approach to life aims at deconstructing traditional beliefs in truth, language and knowledge and the endorsement of a natural spontaneity in which we are at rest in the pivot and encompass the broadest perspective possible in which we see the natural interconnectedness of the different things.

"The pivot of *dào*" or the "middle of the Heavenly Potter's Wheel," is one of the central metaphors in the second chapter of the *Zhuāngzǐ*. This critical passage allows us to synthesize a variety of topics in one common concern. I will show that topics featured in the *Zhuāngzǐ* such as skepticism and deconstruction, which are often discussed by scholars as the text's driving topics, actually need to be seen from a broader perspective. The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s narrative structures and its use of images, parables and metaphors also play an important role in its overall aim and purpose.

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s own rhetorical style pushes us towards becoming free of all dependency, such as relying on knowledge, logic and language, as the text asserts that we cannot know what is ultimately "so" and "not so." The *Zhuāngzǐ* here does not claim authority, nor claims that it possesses the ultimate truth, yet in its sophisticated use of questioning the beliefs held by the various intellectual lineages, or *jiās*, it invites its readers to adopt an open and flexible attitude towards the different perspectives that are presented to us. Recognizing the

<sup>218</sup>Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 11.

equality of the different perspectives and not preferring one to the other is for the *Zhuāngzǐ* the emulation of the natural *dào*. Important strategies that help us to find the pivot are practicing emotional equanimity, equalizing the seemingly opposed perspectives, embracing indeterminacy, not relying on any fixed meaning and being able to walk two roads (*liǎngxíng*, 兩行).

Equalizing the self-other relation means approaching the myriad things without preferences and seeing them all as expressions of *dào*'s intent. The *Zhuāngzǐ* remarks that we can endlessly add new or other *shīfēi*-distinctions, but that "nothing compares to the Illumination of the Obvious" (*yǐmíng*, 以明). The *Zhuāngzǐ* does not argue against making *shīfēi*-distinctions but wants to show how clinging to them and seeing them as ultimately "so" or "not so" limits our creative responsiveness. The ultimate preferred perspective is holding on to the pivot of *dào*, a position that is no longer concerned with evaluative judgments and having the right standards but responds to and can use a variety of standards.

It is important to recognize that the *Zhuāngzǐ* uses styles and aspects of the other Masters but frequently reverses or deconstructs their conventional meaning. Irony and humour in the *Zhuāngzǐ* are important tools aimed at destabilizing traditional values and exposing unacknowledged assumptions and beliefs, which is why the text is difficult to read and to interpret. The *Zhuāngzǐ* also occasionally mimics Confucian "teaching scenes," introducing the Master Confucius who educates a person. However, instead of being presented as the charismatic master who has authority because he possesses superior wisdom, Confucius in the *Zhuāngzǐ* mocks his own scholarship.

In Chapter 4 of the *Zhuāngzǐ*, Yan Hui tells Confucius that he wants to go to King Wei to "implement" what he has learned from Confucius and "derive standards and principles from it" to save the king's state from chaos and disorder. However, instead of affirming the wisdom of Yan Hui's attempt, Confucius replies that Yan Hui will be executed. In the unfolding dialogue, Confucius relates the main critique regarding the other lineages by letting Yan Hui ask whether a particular practice "would work." Confucius negates these practices and indicates why they are undesirable. The practice of "being a follower of the ancients" (i.e. a mere transmitter of superior wisdom) is, for example, dismissed as a mere diversion to avoid taking responsibility for one's own ideas.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>219</sup>Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 26.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* is very critical towards the Masters and exposes their teachings as a mere strategy to win a dispute or as a means to win approval from rulers. These Masters are abusing language to affirm their own truth, suggesting that they were more concerned with proving themselves right than being genuinely concerned about creating political stability and diminishing violence. But, the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s Confucius sees through these subterfuges, and ironically but powerfully predicts that this violent approach to dominating others will be seen through by malevolent rulers, and rewarded with violence, in the form of the execution of the "Masters."

### §4.3 Genuineness and Living Out One's Full Lifespan

It is my contention to show that the *Zhuāngzǐ* provides comparative philosophy with strategies that can help comparative philosophers to employ a critical-transformational discourse that enables them to respond to the other and the other's perspectives in the most open and respectful way possible. The text embodies a rhetorical style of raising issues and then quickly dismissing them, a style often identified as a "sceptical" or "relativist" position, but which I will approach as a position that helps us to become less dogmatic and more open minded. The *Zhuāngzǐ* sees the position of the pivot as the perspective in which a person experiences the most freedom and has the most clarity. The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s emphasis on living out one's natural lifespan, its endorsement of an empty, wandering and mirroring heart-mind and its endorsement of flexible responsiveness towards resistance are all aspects that are important to realizing genuineness. The pivot as the preferred position entails certain beliefs, comportments and attitudes and stimulates us to rely on our natural ability to decide what is appropriate or fitting in a certain situation.

The novelty of the *Zhuāngzǐ* lies in the fact that the text does not propose an alternative political theory for the ruler, but instead urges each of us of to restore our innate power to approach the myriad things naturally. The *Zhuāngzǐ* particularly shows how man's tendency to see his own perspective as ultimate can lead to bickering, debate, execution, and oppression. In contrast to its intellectual contemporaries, the *Zhuāngzǐ* emphasizes the individual and the cultivation of their inner spontaneity or genuineness. An inauthentic life can best be restored by taking responsibility of one's own life and restoring one's natural spontaneity through self-transformation, or better said, the destruction of

conflating of one's self-identity which prevents one from responding creatively to any situation.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* does not advocate an individualist philosophy, but firmly believes in the natural correlation and connection between things and persons. Restoring our natural responsiveness and nourishing the world means recognizing that we are all part of a larger whole and entails embracing a radical impartiality towards the human realm, towards the self and towards other perspectives. Man should model himself upon the natural *dào*, which makes no distinctions between "this," "that," "so" and "not so." *Dào* is impartial to human concerns for being "this" or "that", because for *dào* all perspectives are ultimately One. Throughout the text, the *Zhuāngzǐ* shows how each perspective is unique and has its own preferences, but that human beings tend to group perspectives together, creating all sorts of artificial distinctions that are consequently but mistakenly seen as the need to internalize and cling to pre-established, or societal, preferences. For the *Zhuāngzǐ*, violence does not emerge from the fact that each perspective has certain preferences, but emerges from clinging to these preferences and preferring "this" perspective to "that" perspective. Clinging to preferences creates a fixated, artificially completed (*chéng*; 成) heart-mind, that is biased and partial.

Before we illuminate the different topics of the text, it is important to look at the passage in the *Zhuāngzǐ* where the "pivot of *dào*" (§2.16-2.18) is discussed so that we can understand how this part of the text needs to be seen as the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s overall philosophical project:

物無非彼，物無非是。自彼則不見，自知則知之。故曰：彼出於是，是亦因彼。彼是，方生之說也。雖然，方生方死，方死方生；方可方不可，方不可方可；因是因非，因非因是。是以聖人不由，而照之于天，亦因是也。是亦彼也，彼亦是也。彼亦一是非，此亦一是非。果且有彼是乎哉？果且無彼是乎哉？彼是莫得其偶，謂之道樞。樞始得其環中，以應無窮。是亦一無窮，非亦一無窮也。故曰「莫若以明」。

*There is no being that is not "that." There is no being that is not "this." But one cannot be seeing these from the perspective of "that": one knows them only from "this," [i.e., from one's own perspective]. Thus, we can say: "That" emerges from "this," and "this" follows from "that." This is the theory of the simultaneous generation*

of "this" and "that." But by the same token, their simultaneous generation is their simultaneous destruction, and vice versa. Simultaneous affirmability is simultaneous negatability, and vice versa. What is circumstantially right is also circumstantially wrong, and vice versa. Thus, the Sage does not proceed from any one of them alone but instead lets them all bask in the broad daylight of Heaven. And that too is only a case of going by the rightness of the present "this."

"This" is also a "that." "That" is also a "this." "THAT" posits a "this" and a "that" – a right and wrong – of its own. But "THIS" also posits a "this" and a "that" – a right and a wrong – of its own. So is there really any "that" versus "this," any right versus wrong? Or is there really no "that" versus "this"? When "this" and "that" – right and wrong – are no longer coupled as opposites – that is called the Course as Axis, the axis of all courses. When this axis [pivot] finds its place in the centre, it responds to all the endless things it confronts, thwarted by none. For it has an endless supply of "rights," and an endless supply of "wrongs." Thus, I say, nothing compares to the Illumination of the Obvious.<sup>220</sup>

Ziporyn has translated 是 and 非 as "this" and "that," in which 是 and 非 are actions: to posit something as "this" or "that." The passage wants us to see that affirming something as "this" or "that," is a human activity dependent upon a particular perspective. Furthermore, it shows how "this" and "that" are generated simultaneously: positing something as "this" is automatically denying that it is a "that." In §4.2, I have discussed the philosophical context of the Master scholars and their rhetorical style. The *Zhuāngzǐ* mocks their complacency in being the knowers of what is ultimately and universally "this," or "that," or "right" or "wrong." The fundamental problem is not positing something as "this" or "that," but originates in a person's inability to see the interconnectedness of "this," and "that." I will illuminate the passage in the next section in which I will particularly show in which way the *Zhuāngzǐ* wants us to embrace a position in which we are open to different alternatives.

First of all, the *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that we cannot rely on meta-standards that can guide our *shifēi*-distinctions and judgments. This means that we also cannot assume that humans have a privileged position in the world; from the perspective

<sup>220</sup>Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 12.

of humans, human beings are the most important creatures, but another living thing will see it differently. In the *Lǎozǐ* and the *Zhuāngzǐ*, humans have no special role or position, but are just as other things, generated by and returning to *dào*. *Dào* does not only generate human beings (*rén*, 人) but rears alike the ten-thousand things (*wànwù*, 萬物).<sup>221</sup> This realignment between *dào*, nature and humans led to a different understanding of the attitude and characteristic of the ideal man (the Sage). The *Zhuāngzǐ* concentrates on the personal realm instead of the political realm and tries to restore the genuineness of human beings so that they can “wander far and unfettered,” and do not add any violence to the universe.<sup>222</sup>

Jiang argues that the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s central intellectual project is that of personal freedom, a freedom that Jiang defines as “creating and discovering new possibilities to navigate various constrains of the world, instead of simply making choices as an “escape” of necessity.”<sup>223</sup> Although I do agree with Jiang that the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s notion of carefree wandering (*xīāoyáo*, 逍遙遊) revolves around altering our relations or attitude to external phenomena, I don't think that the main concern is personal freedom, as this position does not take into account that the Sage in the *Zhuāngzǐ* has lost himself, and technically speaking has no-self. Furthermore, Jiang's position does not consider the crucial passage of the pivot that is “located in the centre of the circle of things.”<sup>224</sup> Occupying the centre of the circle of things is associated with Illumination; with supreme wisdom. The supreme wisdom does not only refer, I would argue, to “creating and discovering new possibilities to navigate various constraints of the world,” but in living out one's full lifespan and nourishing the self-so-ness of the other perspectives as well.

The overall project of the *Zhuāngzǐ* is the integration of all the myriad things and restoring their natural connection and interrelatedness. This entails that we should harmonize or equalize differences, deconstruct or conflated sense of self-identity and embracing the indeterminacy of reality. The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s aim is as such to liberate each human being from various constraints so that the ultimate Course can be realized which means that each thing can follow its own preferences and inclinations. Nevertheless, the text is realistic in the sense that it recognizes that, in times of great social upheaval and times when persons are

<sup>221</sup> Perkins, F. (2014). *Heaven and Earth are not Humane*, Indiana University Press, 195.

<sup>222</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 3.

<sup>223</sup> Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy*, 292.

<sup>224</sup> Mair, V.H. (1994). *Wandering on the Way. Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu*, Bantam Books, 15.



abusing their power; it is not tenable to nurture the natural self-so-ness of both self and other. When the Course is absent in human society, all that the wise Sages can do is to preserve their own life.

At this point, it is interesting to compare the *Zhuāngzǐ* to Levinas. In Chapter Three we have seen that Levinas' main belief is that the immanent worldview, or the natural view, needs the surplus of transcendence in order to do justice to the otherness of the Other. Where Levinas thus interprets natural spontaneity as the egocentric concern with one's self-perseverance in being, the *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that one's natural spontaneity is not egocentric but is a potentiality in which both self and other naturally interrelate and connect. The *Zhuāngzǐ* localizes the problem of violence against the otherness of the Other in the self's rigid ways of thinking and particularly the tendency to hold on to one particular *dào* (*chéng*, 成). The main problem is, once more, not making distinctions, but rigidly clinging to these distinctions and mistakenly believing that there is a meta-standard that governs what is right or wrong in any given situation. The deconstruction of these patterns of rigid thinking will help us to restore our natural spontaneity to follow along any *dào* and to see how reality naturally interconnects.

Equalizing assessments of things originates in the recognition that one's natural spontaneity is nurtured by Heaven, the force that nurtures all the myriad things and affirms the equality of these different things. The *Zhuāngzǐ* offers several strategies to overcome the egological culture of the same and to respond to the givenness and otherness of each perspective. The overarching project of the *Zhuāngzǐ* in a minimal sense is self-preservation and in the fullest sense harmonizing the myriad things, which is realized when human beings have deconstructed their calculative heart-mind. Being in the center of the pivot and following along different *shifēi*-patterns in a minimal sense thus prevents us from being attacked by others, but when others also are persuaded to embrace a less rigid way of thinking, harmony between self and other will be more easily be realized.

The calculative heart-mind, from which human beings assess the world based on calculative gain, is the culprit of violence and the loss of harmony. The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s desire to restore the natural interrelatedness between the myriad things leads to a reconfiguration of the human self-other relation in which self and other are seen as unique beings that form an integral part of the Whole. In the *Zhuāngzǐ*, differences are not fixed or static but are constantly changing and transforming, both within the self and the other as within the way they relate to

each other. The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s primary focus is on living out one's natural lifespan and integrating the human realm in the natural flux of transformation, which entails that we should recognize that our relation to the other and the other's perspectives is constantly changing and that we have to honour and attune to these differences to be able to affirm them as equally different.

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s overarching project is for us all to realize the Way through inhabiting the pivot of *dào* so that we can "respond to their infinite transformations."<sup>225</sup> Fundamental to obtaining this flexible responsiveness is accepting that reality is constantly changing and cannot be divided into rigid opposed terms of "this" and "that." An important aspect of being at rest in the pivot is accepting that indecision and insecurity and especially contingency mark our assertions; when we unconditionally have accepted this, we have freed ourselves of intense emotions and limiting behaviours and beliefs.

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s "golden rule" for self-preservation seems to be not to let others disturb or upset one's peaceful heart-mind (a wandering, mirroring and empty heart-mind) while doing no harm to others.<sup>226</sup> Furthermore, the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s emphasis on "the usefulness of the useless" and its psychological strategy of genuine pretending in which we mirror persons who are corrupted by "playing the baby with him if he's playing the baby," are all effective strategies to preserve one's own life while at the same time letting others follow their own preferences and desires.<sup>227</sup>

Self-preservation and harmonizing perspectives are the main motivations to prefer being at rest in the middle of the pivot, as this position enables a person to see things without being emotionally invested in them and nourish all the perspectives from an impartial, non-attached position of clarity (*míng*, 明). In the pivot, the Sage is at rest and acts from a state of emotional equanimity and non-preference, the Sage can understand the nature of each perspective and is as such able to attune to their needs and preferences instead of corrupting their inborn nature by trying to impose standards on them. Persons who train their heart-mind not to be disturbed by inner or outer events have the power to access the situation in an open, non-biased way and will respond in a more creative and harmonious way.

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<sup>225</sup> Mair, V.H.. *Wandering the Way*, 15.

<sup>226</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 27

<sup>227</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 30

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s aim is to show a different way of being in the world, in which we can experience the self-other relation differently. Jiang argues that the *Lǎozǐ* "appropriates the Mohist idea of the impartiality of Heaven but did so under a naturalist cosmos, making justice and impartiality a natural feature of the cosmos."<sup>228</sup> This applies to the *Zhuāngzǐ* as well, with the slight adjustment that the *Zhuāngzǐ* makes impartiality a natural strategy for self-preservation and, subsequently for the affirmation of other perspectives. Nevertheless, the *Zhuāngzǐ* is very realistic regarding the sage's ability to restore the naturalness of the human realm by integrating it into the Whole. The *Zhuāngzǐ* claims that when the "Course is present in the world," the Sage perfects himself with it, which implies that when there are many persons who have adopted to some degree a wandering, empty and mirroring attitude, the Sage is able to harmonize the different perspectives fairly easily. Yet in a world in which most persons see their perspective as the ultimate truth and fight the other, all we can do is avoid being hurt and harmed.<sup>229</sup> When persons abuse their power and try to master and control the other perspectives, the Sage is not able to nourish the different perspective, but can only concentrate on his self-preservation, which entails that the Sage concentrates on remaining at rest in the middle of the pivot.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* seems to question the validity of the political-philosophical discourse of its time. The text responds especially to the Mohist commitment to disputation (*biàn*, 辯) and offers a more open way to approach the other and the other's perspectives. The *Zhuāngzǐ* does not claim that the position of the pivot resolves all conflict between self and other, because that would presuppose the reliance on a meta-standard that makes the Zhuangzian approach true. The subtle difference between the *Zhuāngzǐ* and the other Master scholars is that the Sage in the *Zhuāngzǐ* aligns itself with the current situation and responds to that what is most fitting or adequate in the experienced situation, because the Sage is then in line with how nature unfolds. I agree with Graham (1978) who indicates that the *Zhuāngzǐ* sees disputation as a practice that alienates us from Heaven. Disputation for the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s according to Graham:

*[...] the technique for judging between alternatives, the right and the wrong, the beneficial and the harmful, self and other, that we cut ourselves off from the world we objectify, and lose the capacity of the angler, the carpenter and the swimmer to heed his total*

<sup>228</sup> Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy*, 185.

<sup>229</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 32.

*situation with undivided attention and respond with the immediacy  
of a shadow to a shape and an echo to a sound.*<sup>230</sup>

The *Zhuāngzǐ* rejects for the need for standards to evaluate *shìfēi*-judgments and responds to the Mohist commitment to disputation and its rhetorical style. In the *Zhuāngzǐ* we also frequently find references to artisan tools and artisans such as carpenters. The pivot of *dào*, - also translated as the "Potter's Wheel," uses tools as a metaphor for pairing counterparts. For the Mohist, artisan tools are metaphorically used to show how making evaluative judgement is dependent on having the adequate tool, having adequate and reliable standards.

Realizing justice is for the Mohist similar to a craft. The will of Heaven has a unified standard (*míngfǎ*, 明法) that measures (*dù*, 度) whether opinions are successful (*zhōng*, 中) and are therefore "so/right" (*shì*, 是) or are not successful and therefore "not-so/wrong" (*fēi*, 非).<sup>231</sup> Jiang (2021) argues that the Mohists were the first ones who fully embraced justice and who laid the foundation for adjudicating whether an argument is right (*shì*, 是) and wrong (*fēi*, 非).<sup>232</sup> The *Zhuāngzǐ* wants to show that these *shìfēi*-distinctions are merely opinions or limited perspectives; appropriate from the points of view of those who assert them, but which are not generalizable to different people and to different situations because there is no fixed vantage point from which we can evaluate these *shìfēi*-distinctions.

The problematic nature of making *shìfēi*-distinctions is a concentrated focus of the *Zhuāngzǐ*, inspired by the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s emphasis on recognizing how these distinctions emerge from a particular perspective. While the Mohist method of inclusive care (*jiānài*, 兼愛), aimed at individuals benefiting each other by caring for others inclusively if needed or desired is important, being free of preferences and not being committed to a particular *shìfēi*-distinction, is for the *Zhuāngzǐ* the real solution to eschewing anger. It might be that the term "inclusive" or "to combine, to unite" *jiān* (兼) is replaced in the *Zhuāngzǐ* by the term "even" "level with" *qí* (齊), as nourishing is aimed at the self and its relation to the oneness of *qí* (齊). For the *Zhuāngzǐ* "equalizing all things," is a way of affirming each perspective (whether human or non-human) in their self-ness (*zìrán*, 自然). The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that the best position, the most realistic

<sup>230</sup> Graham, A.C. *Later Mohist Logic*, 21.

<sup>231</sup> De Reu, W. "How to Throw a Pot: The Centrality of the Potter's Wheel in the Zhuangzi" *Asian Philosophy*, 20 No. 1, (2010):44.

<sup>232</sup> Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy*, 116.

perspective, is being in the centre of the pivot, in which we can see how the Mohist and Confucian attempt to define one another reveals that there is no such thing as an ultimate "so" or "not so".

## **Part II: *Dào*, Self-Transformation And Perspectivism**

### **§4.4 What is Debatable is not *Dào***

I have indicated that the overall intent of the *Zhuāngzǐ* is to overcome disputation by "finding the pivot of *dào*", which entails that we should never cling to dualistic oppositions but align ourselves with the nature of *dào*. In this part I will show that the first step for finding the pivot of *dào* is the deconstruction of language, logic, and knowledge. The deconstruction will trigger the loss of the calculative heart-mind, which is the precondition for taking rest in the pivot. I will first clarify the nature of *dào* and which specific role *dào* fulfils in both the *Zhuāngzǐ* as in the other Master texts.

The relation between *dào* (Way, path) Heaven (*tiān*), morality and social order as well as their nature was heavily debated and (re)-negotiated by the pre-Qin Masters. A common consensus among the Masters is that, in the presently chaotic scene of social and political fragmentation and increasing bloodshed, the Way has been lost, and that losing the Way was the main cause for the decline of the Zhou dynasty and the violence of the Warring States Period.

The character *dào* is a compound of the words for head (*shǒu*, 首) and the radical *chuò* (辵), which means "walking," or "passing through." In Chinese, many words, with no morphological changes, can serve as both nouns and verbs in different sentences or even the same sentence; *dào* can therefore both verbally refer to an event (action, process) as well as nominally to a path.<sup>233</sup> The "head walking," can be metaphorically interpreted as the ruler or master that leads one in a certain destination. As a noun, *dào* refers to "principle," or "pattern," indicating that the way represents the logic of things or events. Walking the way is etymologically thus synonymous with knowing the way. *Dào* as a verb can also mean "the act of saying," or "discourse," which indicates that *dào* has multiple meanings and is also used in different ways by the Masters of the pre-Qin

<sup>233</sup> Sun, Z. (2015). *Language, Discourse, and Practice in Ancient China*. Springer, 117

period. While some Masters interpret *dào* as the Way, it can also be interpreted as principle (*lǐ*, 理) and as discourse.

The pre-Qin Masters tended to interpret *dào* as the pattern of Heaven and/or as the patterns of human life and assumed that an ultimate principle or Way must exist. *Dào* was interpreted as the ultimate reality or ultimate principle of the universe, the principle that, when followed, brought prosperity and social harmony. The human realm was seen a manifestation of *dào* and needed to be modelled and perfected in the light of the ultimate principle that provided the socio-political and moral horizon. Jiang (2021) classifies the pre-Qin thinkers as either embracing the *dào* of human morality or humaneness (*rén*, 仁), which is partial in nature, or justice which is impartial.<sup>234</sup> In the *Mòzǐ* *dào* is interpreted as Heaven's will (*tiānzhì*, 天志) that serves as a method (*fǎ*, 法) to establish impartial standards of justice (*yì*, 義). The *Mòzǐ* argues that Heaven is all-inclusive and impartial in its activities (*jiānàixià*, 兼愛下), which is why humans should not only care for their next of kin but should extend their care to others when needed. For the *Lǎozǐ*, *dào* gives rise to continuity, continuity gives rise to difference, difference gives rise to plurality, and plurality gives rise to the manifold of everything that is happening (*wànwù*, 萬物)."<sup>235</sup>

The *Zhuāngzǐ* is frequently read as a Daoist text that interprets *dào* like the *Lǎozǐ* as giving birth to the One and then to the myriad things. But when we look closely at some passages in the *Zhuāngzǐ*, it seems that the *Zhuāngzǐ* has an incompatible understanding of *dào*. *Dào* is described as the dynamic, creative force in all its potentialities, the event or process of transformation itself, a potency (*dé*, 德) that has no beginning or ending and is without any principle of constancy. *Dào* is spontaneous, unlimited, timeless, and indivisible. The *dào* is the natural course of the universe:

夫道，有情有信，無為無形；可傳而不可受，可得而不可見；自本自根，未有天地，

*[..] has its own tendency and consistency, but without any deliberate activity or definite form. It can be transmitted but not received,*

<sup>234</sup> Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy*, 51.

<sup>235</sup> Ames, R. T. & Hall, D.L. (2003). *Daodejing*. "Making this Life Significant." A Philosophical Translation, Ballentine Books.

*attained but not shown. Being its own root and its own foundation, it exists firmly even when heaven and earth are not yet there.*<sup>236</sup>

Where the *dào* in the *Lǎozǐ* is “alone and constant, ever present and in motion,” (*jìxīliáoxī, dúlì bù gǎi, zhōuxìng èr bù dài*, 寂兮寥兮, 獨立不改, 周行而不殆) as “the root of all things” (*tiānxià mǔ*, 天下木) the *dào* in the *Zhuāngzǐ* has no ultimate presence or reality. *Dào* has in the *Zhuāngzǐ* no metaphysical connotation referring to an ultimate reality or objective law; it is the event of becoming-into-being as the process of differentiation and un-differentiation. This event of coming-into-being is a temporal break between the being of a thing (*wù*, 物) and the absence of a thing. The coming-into-being is a split in the thing itself, - a being engendered by *dào*-, a moment in which things come forth into existence with their complements or opposites.

*Dào* thus engenders complementary things and complementary perspectives. Transformation (*biàn*, 變) and change (*huà*, 化) are essentially inherent of the coming-into-being (*shēng*, 生) in which a thing can even transform into its opposite or counterpart. Similar to the balance between *yīn* (陰) and *yáng* (陽), the *Zhuāngzǐ* refers to this process as the tipping of the vessel, which will automatically empty itself when full. Every-thing comes-into-being, transforms and changes according to the natural rhythm of *dào*. The natural rhythm of each thing (including living beings) is in each moment utterly unique and unpredictable, which the *Zhuāngzǐ* calls “self-so-ness” (*zìrán*, 自然).

When we look at the passages in the *Zhuāngzǐ* on the myriad things and Heaven, we can gain insight into the relation between *dào*, the myriad things and Heaven, as well as understanding how the self is essentially connected and interdependent upon the other. This is an important step in our study, as the aim of this dissertation is to affirm the togetherness of disparate cultural philosophical traditions, while at the same time accounting for their uniqueness. The *Zhuāngzǐ*, like the *Lǎozǐ*, argues that humans are part of nature; they are part of “the myriad things” (*wànwù*, 萬物). The novelty of the *Zhuāngzǐ*’s conception of the myriad things is that it argues that Heaven generates every “this” as singular, which suggests that the ultimate “Oneness” of the universe is a mere collection of a multitude of different and unique perspectives. It suggests also that each “this” is generated in a particular way and has particular preferences. Each perspective generated as a particular “this” will follow its own unique course as the innate divisions (*tiānní*, 天倪) of heaven.

<sup>236</sup>Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 43.

"Oneness" (*yī*, 一) in the *Zhuāngzǐ* has a fundamentally different meaning than in the *Lǎozǐ*; in the *Lǎozǐ* divisions emerge from the Oneness of *dào*, while for the *Zhuāngzǐ*, Heaven as the infinite process of generation, transformation and change, brings each thing in the world in its *self-so-ness*. This implies, as Graham and Hansen have already suggested, that all things are actually in the *Zhuāngzǐ* not one but are treated by Heaven and the Sage as One.<sup>237</sup> The different perspectives do not emerge from Oneness because *dào* is not the ultimate reality of root of all things. Each perspective is without an origin, without a root and is merely a temporal unity that consists of a finite process of transformation and change.

The recognition that perspectives do not share an ultimate origin is important to understand the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s conception of knowledge and truth but is also the distinguishing quality that justifies the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s articulation of the Sage who takes a place at the pivot of *dào* and harmonizes all perspectives. The Sage who harmonizes the different perspectives is not merely adding a new perspective but works with Heaven. Nelson (2014) suggests that this entails embracing the perspective of nature as a whole instead of the perspective of humanity, allowing the *Zhuāngzǐ* to articulate a unicentric holism.<sup>238</sup> The term "unicentric holism," describing the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s "perspective of all perspectives," is also introduced and elucidated by Brook Ziporyn:

*Unicentric holism will refer to any doctrine holding that there is indeed a perspective from which all things can be viewed aright, from which their connections may be comprehended in their true aspect; this would be the holistic view that the quiddities of all things are determined solely by their relations to other things, and thus the whole is more than the sum of its parts, but that a whole has only one centre and hence one and only one true perspective that can validly determine the value and nature of the parts.*<sup>239</sup>

<sup>237</sup> Graham, A.C. (2001). *Chuang-Tzu. The Inner Chapters*, Hackett Publishing Company, 56.  
Hansen, C. (1992). *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation*. Oxford University Press, 410-412.

<sup>238</sup> Nelson, E.S. "The Human and the Inhuman: Ethics and Religion in the *Zhuangzi*" *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 41 S.1, (2014):724/725.

<sup>239</sup> Ziporyn, B. (2003). "How Many Are the Ten Thousand Things of I? Relativism, Mysticism, and the Privileging of Oneness in the "Inner Chapters."" In: S. Cook (eds.). *Hiding the World in the World*, State University of New York Press, 35.



I will call this “unicentric holism” or the position of the pivot, an “realist perspectivism.” I prefer this term because it emphasizes that it is still a human perspective, - we cannot transcend our human form, but it is the perspective in which we have the most clarity because we are no longer emotionally committed to a more limited standard or perspective. The pivot is also the position in which we affirm the correlation or togetherness of the self and the other and have dissolved the dichotomy between self and other, because we see that we are at the same time “self” and “other”. I will clarify the self-other relation in the pivot later on in this chapter.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* seems to suggest that because Heaven nourishes each thing, we should therefore also affirm each thing its unique spontaneous nature.<sup>240</sup> Proper nurturing thus must start with the right consideration for the arrangement of perspectives of the other, which means that we respond to the needs of the other. Responding adequately as the emulation of *dào* entails incorporating what the other takes to be his or her needs, rather than assuming that there are general needs that we have in common or assuming that his or her needs are the same as mine. Recognizing and attuning to differences is thus central to finding the “pivot of *dào*,” it originates from a deep trust in the natural operations of *dào*.

Central to the *Zhuāngzǐ* is show how we naturally can care for the myriad things, for different perspectives, without the need to rely on an evaluative standard. The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that we can see all perspectives as a whole when we no longer attach to our preferred perspective. As Heaven is impartial to the different things and nourishes them all, the Sage wants to abide to “no-thing” and embraces the impartial perspective of Heaven. Heaven as the all-encompassing perspective of all perspectives is *wúwù* (無物), a no-thing, or open space and the encompassing of things and no-things. Heaven is the “reservoir,” (*tiānfǔ*, 天府) or “numinous reservoir,” of no-thing that encompassing the thing and its opposite by “Transforming Openness.” (*huàtōng* 化通; *dàtōng*, 大通). The Sage who is the same as the Transforming Openness of Heaven is “free of all preference,” (*wúqíng*, 無情) and as such impartial and “free of all constancy,” (*fāngqiě yǔ wùhuà èr wèishǐ yǒu héng*, 方且與物化而未始有恒) implying that the Sage does not rely on an ultimate origin or root.

<sup>240</sup>We should assume the “Primacy of Nourishing Life,” or “Nourishing the Host [or Master] of Life,” or “What is primary in nourishing life.” (Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi* 21)

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s specific challenge now becomes clear. Most (if not all) perspectives do have preferences and also do tend to believe that there is an ultimate origin (*héng*, 恒) of things. The difficulties that the *Zhuāngzǐ* deals with is how we can emulate *dào* and can adopt, as particular beings, an all-encompassing perspective of "Transforming Openness," that harmonizes and nourishes all. The challenge is not only to become as particular perspectives free of preferences and free of all constancy but it also concerns the problem how we can nourish and harmonize perspectives that have lost their way.

More specifically, if Heaven nourishes and equalizes all things, how can we as particular perspectives nourish and equalize perspectives that do not take themselves as perspectives but as comprehensive views of truth with constancy? How can the Genuine Human Being "take joy in clearing the way for things," [and human beings] if that human being tries to impose their preferences on others? I think these are the most important questions that the *Zhuāngzǐ* tries to address, as why the text on several occasions warns that, when we haven't yet mastered the Course ourselves, we should not try to impose it on others.<sup>241</sup> This problem furthermore helps us to understand the difference between the Master scholars who affirm a particular position and the *Zhuāngzǐ*. Both positions are composed of a set of beliefs, behaviours, compartments and emotional cognition, but the difference between the Zhuangzian Sage and the other Sages is that the the Zhuangzian Sage keeps on deconstructing his or her position in order to be able to respond to each situation in a fresh and non-biased way.

## §4.5 Knowledge and Truth

In this study I try to show the relevance of the *Zhuāngzǐ* and Levinas for comparative philosophy. I have proposed that comparative philosophers need to cultivate a form of ethical competence in which they become open to different perspectives and methodologies and critically reflect on their emotional commitments and assumptions. The *Zhuāngzǐ* proposes a critical-transformational position of the pivot in which persons have become free of preferences and can respond to the other and the other's perspectives in their uniqueness by seeing them ultimately as the same. In this section, I will outline how the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s endorsement of "non-knowledge" is related to the recognition of bias and preferences and the acceptance that reality never can be fully known.

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<sup>241</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 24.

Knowledge (*zhī*, 知) plays a pivotal role in the *Zhuāngzǐ* and has become a major topic of debate among contemporary interpreters of the text. Hansen (1998, 2003) interprets the *Zhuāngzǐ* as defending both a relativist as well as a sceptical position, while Ivanhoe (1993, 1996) suggests that we should not interpret the *Zhuāngzǐ* as a sceptical philosopher nor as endorsing relativism.<sup>242</sup> Fraser proposes a more nuanced reading and argues that, while the *Zhuāngzǐ* is sceptical about our ability to know which class of distinctions should be privileged, the *Zhuāngzǐ* does not question our ability to know how to distinguish between things in an ordinary, everyday manner.<sup>243</sup> I will interpret the texts' use of scepticism as an integral part of its overall project, which is aimed at enabling the Sage to find the pivot of *dào*, a reading in which scepticism is a necessary tool to deconstruct knowledge and become free of preferences. I will argue that the *Zhuāngzǐ* cannot be a relativist or sceptic because that would entail that the *Zhuāngzǐ* is committed to a particular doctrine or theory. Furthermore, the *Zhuāngzǐ* does not criticize all knowledge, but just a particular kind of knowledge.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* is very critical of the ruling elite, who abuse knowledge to control its citizens; a vulgar use of knowledge that is also embraced by the Masters who restrain the natural spontaneity of others in the name of moral cultivation. Instead of wasting our time on "petty knowledge", we should gain knowledge of how the world consists of different things and how we should interact with these different perspectives. This kind of knowledge is "psychological knowledge," knowledge that helps us to understand how the positions of others are eventually the result of (arbitrarily) chosen starting points. The *Zhuāngzǐ* prefers this kind of knowledge not because it is "better" knowledge, but because it serves the practical goal of realizing the Course and restoring harmony between humans.

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s scepticism needs to be seen in the light of its aim of "finding the pivot of *dào*," as only the person who is not committed to a particular pattern of *shifēi*-distinctions can be perfectly at rest in the middle. Central to

<sup>242</sup>Hansen, C. (1983). "A Tao of 'Tao' in Chuang Tzu." In: V. Mair (eds). *Experimental Essays on Chuang-Tzu*, University of Hawai'i, 24-55; Hansen, C. (2003). "Guru or Skeptic? Relativistic Skepticism in the Zhuangzi." In: S. Cook (eds.) *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi*. SUN, 128-162.; Ivanhoe, P. J. "Zhuangzi on Skepticism, Skill, and the Ineffable Dao" *American Academy of Religion* 61 No 4, (1993):639-654; Ivanhoe, P.J. (1996). "Was Zhuangzi a Relativist?" In: P. Kjellberg & P.J. Ivanhoe (eds.). *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi*, State University of New York Press, 196-214.

<sup>243</sup>Fraser, C. "Knowledge and Error in Early Chinese Thought" *Dao*, 10, (2011):127-148.

the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s philosophy of life is that the universe is in endless flux without constancy (*héng*, 恒), which means that the universe does not have an ultimate origin or reality. The process of infinite transformation and the shifting from one thing to another are responsible for the effacement of things and life, but also for changes of meaning and knowledge. Central to the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s cosmology is the observation that the myriad things are mutually engendering and have no origin or essence. When things have no essence, are unique, and are mutually engendered and have no origin, objective knowledge that can evaluate particular *shìfēi*-judgments is compromised and replaced by subjective, or practical knowledge.

Before discussing knowledge and truth in the *Zhuāngzǐ*, it is useful to offer some context on the meaning of knowledge in the pre-Qin period. First of all, the character 知 in pre-Qin texts denotes both knowledge (*zhī*, 知) and wisdom (*zhì*, 智).<sup>244</sup> Secondly, knowledge can refer not only to practical know-how knowledge, but may also include moral knowledge (to know how to act, how to feel), to be acquainted with (to know what a cat is) or it can refer to a general proposition (to know that a bachelor is an unmarried man). Knowledge was also used within the political-moral framework that revolved around the contestation between partial humaneness and impartial justice.<sup>245</sup> Knowledge was, in any case, for the pre-Qin Masters, always connected to action, or behaviour. The Confucian virtues of benevolence (*rén*, 仁) and righteousness or justice (*yì*, 義) were conceived as morally perfected knowledge in which purpose matches conduct.<sup>246</sup>

The *Zhuāngzǐ* emerged from a historical and socio-political background in which philosophy was considered *biàn* (辯, disputation)<sup>247</sup>; the different Masters argued over who promoted the best Way of life, who had the best understanding of the special qualities of human life and who best understood which values and virtues needed to be cultivated. It is from this context that the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s scepticism and critique on knowledge need to be understood: the *Zhuāngzǐ* attempts to express the idleness of knowledge and the way knowledge is used

<sup>244</sup> Graham, A.C. *Disputers of the Tao*, 137.

<sup>245</sup> Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy*, 39.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 137

<sup>247</sup> 辯 is closely related to 辨 (distinction, distinguishing). 辨 refers to the cognitive capacity to draw distinctions between different (kinds of) things and/or recognizing things in the right way. 辯 is the activity of disputing how to make distinctions by drawing upon analogies and giving justifications. Knowledge is sometimes seen as the wisdom to draw adequate distinctions.

to affirm one's own merit and is used as an instrument to gain political power. Even though the *Zhuāngzǐ* rejects intense cultivation of knowledge and instead proposes to rely on our inborn "uncarved" nature, it does agree with the Masters that the Course is lost and needs to be restored.

In this respect the *Zhuāngzǐ* isn't an outlier. Although the text argues against the mainstream discourse that human beings are mandated by Heaven to follow their unique course (*zìrán*, 自然) and need to embrace their inborn "unsocialized nature" to become virtuous persons, the text does aim to formulate different strategies to restore the Course. However, the *Zhuāngzǐ* attacks "idle" or "petty knowledge," knowledge that is not used to navigate everyday situations but is used to overpower the elite; knowledge that is shown off and affirms the merits or power of a particular person or group of persons. The *Zhuāngzǐ* exposes this as "sham Virtuosity":

肩吾見狂接輿。狂接輿曰：「日中始何以語女？」肩吾曰：「告我：君人者，以己出經式義度，人孰敢不聽而化諸！」狂接輿曰：「是欺德也。其於治天下也，猶涉海鑿河，而使蚤負山也。夫聖人之治也，治外乎？正而後行，確乎能其事者而已矣。且鳥高飛以避矰弋之害，鼯鼠深穴乎神丘之下，以避熏鑿之患，而曾二蟲之無知！」

*Jian Wu said, "He told me that if a ruler can produce regulations, standards, judgments, and measures derived from the example of his own person, none will dare disobey him and all will be reformed by him." Jieyu said, "That is sham Virtuosity. To rule the world in this way is like trying to carve a river out of the ocean, or asking a mosquito to carry a mountain on its back. For when a sage rules, does he rule anything outside himself?"<sup>248</sup>*

For the *Zhuāngzǐ*, standards derived from our own perspective but that are mistakenly taken as universal, will restrain the other perspectives. Perspectivism is a recurrent theme in the *Zhuāngzǐ* that not only refers to being in somebody else's position, but also reveals how knowledge is derived from our own particular preferences. The problem is not that we have preferences and that we are tied to our perspectives, but the source of the problem resides in the tendency to judge others and approach others from our own perspective. The Sage who responds from the pivot does not criticize the other and the

<sup>248</sup>Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 50/51

other's perspectives, but attunes to their needs from a position of tranquillity and emptiness and holds as such the broadest, most encompassing perspective.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* is critical of maxims that are aimed to generate disapproval and approval, and which are used as standards for judging action. While I agree with scholars such as Hansen who argue that the *Zhuāngzǐ* is a "relativistic sceptic" claiming that one's linguistic and conceptual perspective determine one's knowledge,<sup>249</sup> I think that this is not the main concern of the *Zhuāngzǐ*. The specific problem that the *Zhuāngzǐ* wants to address is that we fail to see that knowledge is tied to our unique perspective, is constantly changing, and transforming and is, dramatically but palpably, nourished by that which we don't know. The futile attempt to question the origin of knowledge misses the fact that we have knowledge even if we don't know or acknowledge where that knowledge comes from.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that Heaven produces the myriad things in their unique self-so-ness; all these creatures do not know how they are born, but nevertheless "they get hold of it somehow, without knowing how they do so."<sup>250</sup> (故天下誘然皆生,而不知其所以生;同焉皆得,而不知其所以). As humans are part of nature, they naturally know how to live well, as the "piping of Heaven" "gusts through all the then thousand differences, allowing each to go its own way."<sup>251</sup> (夫吹萬不同,而使其自己也,咸其自取). The *Zhuāngzǐ* endorses spontaneous knowledge as the suspension of any judgment and the rejection of reflection on emotion and cognition, so that one can attune to one's natural responsiveness and "instead entrust it [each thing] to the everyday function [of each being] (唯達者知通為一,為是不用而寓諸庸)."<sup>252</sup>

Spontaneous knowledge is responding to the needs and preferences of the other and the other's perspectives, a responsiveness that originates in the "greater knowledge" (*dàzhī*, 大知) which acknowledges that incorporating what others take to be their needs is key to harmonizing different perspectives. Their everyday function is "what works for them" and we should just let them live their lives instead of mingling with them and trying to pursue them to change their preferences. Pursuing knowledge of what is "so" (right, good) and "not

<sup>249</sup> Hansen, C. *Theory of Chinese Thought*, 268

<sup>250</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 58

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.* 9-10

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.* 13

so" (wrong, bad) that is used to guide action does not lead to a just, good, and beautiful life, but corrupts our inborn nature and leads to "idle knowledge."

Idle knowledge and seeking knowledge to affirm one's (moral) superiority is analogous to making weapons. Pursuing knowledge is in the *Zhuāngzǐ* seen as a "shooting forth like an arrow from a bowstring," creating violence and conflict. Those who pursue idle knowledge will create constant emotional upheaval both for him- or herself as for others. The problem is thus not knowledge *per se*, but using knowledge as an instrument for judging what is the right way to do and what is the correct way to use things (*zhèng*, 正) and using this knowledge to persuade or rule others.

Perspectival knowledge thus becomes idle knowledge when we fail to see that it is merely our own opinion; our own preference for acting and thinking. It cannot be objective knowledge, not only because the universe consists of the relations between the myriad things that are constantly changing, generated, and transforming, but also because the myriad things have no ultimate origin and no essence; each thing is without essence (*qíng*, 情). The *Zhuāngzǐ* frequently mocks the attempt to gain knowledge of the ultimate origin of things; not only does the text show that it leads to an infinite regress, but it also shows that such an attempt only stirs up anxiety and confusion:

其發若機括，其司是非之謂也；其留如詛盟，其守勝之謂也；其殺如秋冬，以言其日消也；其溺之所為之，不可使復之也；其厭也如緘，以言其老洩也；近死之心，莫使復陽也。

*We give, we receive, we act, we construct: all day long we apply our minds to struggles against one thing or another – struggles unadorned or struggles concealed, but in either case tightly packed one after another without gap.*<sup>253</sup>

Similar to Levinas, the *Zhuāngzǐ* emphasizes the violence of the human realm in which everything is made the same, in which human beings are trying to reduce that which is other to something similar and implicitly take their limited perspective as the ultimate truth. In contrast to Levinas, the *Zhuāngzǐ* shows that persons who reduce that which is other to the same experience resistance, which causes stress and anxiety. The experience of resistance needs to be seen as a warning that one is alienated from one's natural spontaneity and has lost

<sup>253</sup>Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 10

the natural harmonious connection to the whole. The relationship between self and other is naturally correlated and integrated into the harmonious Whole. However, human beings have alienated themselves from Heaven which had led to the unnatural conflictual opposition between self and other.

The deconstruction of knowledge is an important step to overcome the blockage between self and other and to restore their natural interconnectedness. Idle knowledge refers to the rigid use of claims that leads to fierce discussion, intellectual bickering, and the suppression of alternative views. The *Zhuāngzǐ* points out that, when we are debating and think that we are right and the other is wrong, we are so entangled in our own perspective that we are no longer able to nourish the myriad things. Debates on what is right and wrong can only lead to the spiral of violence as the debaters in their position only align themselves with others who have the same starting point. Adding perspectives which also rely on what is “so” and “not so” leads us nowhere, something that is vividly described in the following passage:

既使我與若辯矣，若勝我，我不若勝，若果是也？我果非也邪？我勝若，若不吾勝，我果是也？而果非也邪？其或是也，其或非也邪？其俱是也，其俱非也邪？我與若不能相知也，則人固受其黷闇。吾誰使正之？使同乎若者正之，既與若同矣，惡能正之！使同乎我者正之，既同乎我矣，惡能正之！使異乎我與若者正之，既異乎我與若矣，惡能正之！使同乎我與若者正之，既同乎我與若矣，惡能正之！然則我與若與人俱不能相知也，而待彼也邪？何化聲之相待，若其不相待。和之以天倪，因之以曼衍，所以窮年也。<sup>1</sup>謂和之以天倪？曰：是不是，然不然。是若果是也，則是之異乎不是也亦無辯；然若果然也，則然之異乎不然也亦無辯。忘年忘義，振於無竟，故寓諸無竟。

*Suppose you and I get into a debate. If you win and I lose, does that really mean you are right and I am wrong? If I win and you lose, does that really mean I'm right and you're wrong? Must one of us be right and the other wrong? Or could both of us be right, or both of us wrong? If neither you nor I can know, a third person would be even more benighted. Whom should we have straightened out the matter? Someone who agrees with you? But since he already agrees with you, how can he straighten it out? Someone who agrees with me? But since he already agrees with me, how can he straighten it out? Someone who disagrees with both of us? But if*



*he already disagrees with both of us, how can he straighten it out? Someone who agrees with both of us? But since he already agrees with both of us, how can he straighten it out? So neither you nor I nor any third party can ever know how it is – shall we wait for yet some “other”?*<sup>254</sup>

The problem with idle knowledge is that it brings violence into the world; it leads to bickering, dispute and anger and leaves humans stressed and depleted. The rigid attachment to knowledge leads to a clogged heart-mind, – a heart-mind already full that clings to what is “so” and “not so” –, preventing humans from being creative and considering the endless perspectives and possibilities of the world. The *Zhuāngzǐ* sees the culprit of our misery in having a “fixed heart-mind” (*chéngxīn*, 成心) and suggests that we should liberate our heart-mind from the construction of knowledge and (moral) standards. Embodying Heaven implies that humans become free of preferences and free of all constancy, which means that humans have to accept that knowledge is nothing more than a provisional, temporal opinion.

The conclusion of the *Zhuāngzǐ* is that what “man knows is far less than what he does not know.”<sup>255</sup> Different perspectives are equally mere opinions or interpretations that emerge from a specific point of view. The main problem of human knowledge is that our knowledge is in the end derived from a subjective point of view, a point of view that is limited when compared to the infinite possibilities and ways of being of the different perspectives of the universe. To see clearly means embracing this as a way of life, indicating that the pivot is the position of the recognition of infinite possibility of indeterminacy as there are always other perspectives that equally fit or are equally appropriate. Deconstruction knowledge also leads to the deconstruction of language and logic. The language of humans is not similar to the chirping of the birds, not because human speech is more elevated or able to “know the Way,” but because the human constitution is different to that of birds. The chirping of baby birds seems unsophisticated to man, but to baby birds it is a very sophisticated way of communicating their needs. Instead of judging the other and the other’s perspectives, we should respect our innate capabilities. The first commentator of the *Zhuāngzǐ*, Guo Xiang (252–312), complements this point by drawing attention to each being relying on its own potential:

<sup>254</sup>Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 20.

<sup>255</sup>Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 70

*Though some are larger and some are smaller, every being without exception is released into the range of its own spontaneous attainments, so that each being relies on its own innate character, each deed exactly matching its own capabilities. Since each fits perfectly into precisely the position it occupies, all are equally-far reaching and unfettered. How could anyone be superior to any other?<sup>256</sup>*

The problem that the *Zhuāngzǐ* sees is that when humans do not adequately deal with their limitations, it causes not only conflict and anxiety, but it also blocks them from experiencing life in a natural, harmonious, and carefree way. The pivot of *dào* is not only a position in which humans are freed from conventional knowledge and can shift between a variety of perspectives, but is also the position in which humans experience the least resistance and are therefore content. Being content means affirming “non-knowing,” as the recognition that from our confined human perspective we can never gain true knowledge of what is “so” and “not-so”. It is also the recognition that we can never transcend our human perspective and that our knowledge is always relative.

The Way is obscured by man’s desire for the heart-mind to be “fully formed” (*chéngxīn*, 成心). The heart-mind naturally desires to turn what is perceived into objects of knowledge<sup>257</sup>, a desire that is useful but can also cause problems. The acquisition of knowledge is constrained (*kùn*, 困) by what it desires to reach; we will always be obstructed in our desire for knowledge. Our perspectival knowledge is grounded in a process that we cannot understand, and which provides no fixed method or standard. Petty or idle knowledge originates from reasoning that imposes fixed patterns and division onto reality, but these linguistic patterns do not match with the endlessly transforming, changing, and dissolving world.

Forcing your Way into the world brings only more violence to the world, because it prevents the world from taking its own course (*zírán*, 自然). Human cultivation should not serve some external standard, but should be an internal, self-critical transformation, which in the *Zhuāngzǐ* is called “bringing clarity” (*míng*, 明) by equalizing things. This means that we have to ‘unclog our heart-mind’ and disregard stored-up knowledge and preconceived ideas and ingrained habits.

<sup>256</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 129

<sup>257</sup> Geaney, J. (2002). *On the Epistemology of the Senses in Early Chinese Thought*, University of Hawai’i Press, 56.

This will enable us to adequately deal with our limitations instead of artificially trying to control them.

To summarize, the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s scepticism is not an isolated philosophical position, but is the first step to restoring our natural integrity and restoring the natural relationship between self and other. Being *at rest* in the middle of the centre of the pivot refers to an unclogged and liberated heart-mind that does not experience intense emotions. Robert Allison argues that the *Zhuāngzǐ* aims at a radical change on human consciousness in which the conscious self "does not depend upon the belief in any system of putative truths", but rather silences these attitudes of scholarly thinking, which leads to a transformation of one's personality and a widening of one's perspective.<sup>258</sup> To conclude: it is not that the *Zhuāngzǐ* is a radical sceptic of knowledge, but it offers an analysis of how we are blinded by our belief in knowledge, a blindness that prevents us from living in harmony with the world.

In a similar way, the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s relativism should be seen as but a part of its primary project. As we have seen, the *Zhuāngzǐ* endorses a harmonious, non-contradictory oneness composed of unique, constantly changing and transforming things that can never be adequately conveyed in traditional modes of human language and logic. Being at rest in the pivot entails that the Sage approaches the other and the other's perspectives in a different way; his or her way of speaking has changed. Hans Peter Hoffman (2015) concludes that this way of speaking:

*[...] must be a way of speaking that is no longer useful and can no longer be used as an argument in debates, as a weapon of discerning, as a means and – remembering that the text is from the horrific era of the Warring States – a legitimation of war; a way of speaking, however, that at the same time insists on the importance and the effectiveness of its ideas.*<sup>259</sup>

The *Zhuāngzǐ* offers us insight into how to communicate without using fixed distinctions or elaborate argumentative discourse. The *Zhuāngzǐ* tries to show that we can spontaneously follow a particular *shīfēi*-distinction without the

<sup>258</sup> Allinson, R.E. (1989). *Chuang-Tzu for spiritual transformation: An analysis of the Inner Chapters*, State University of New York Press, 24.

<sup>259</sup> Hoffman, H.P. (2015). "Yuzhile. The Joy of Fishes, or, The Play on Words" in R. T. Ames & T. Nakajima (eds.). *Zhuangzi and the Happy Fish*, University of Hawai'i Press, 42.

need to rely on a universal standard. The pivot passage says that the Sage sees how denials and affirmations follow each other (*yīnshì yīnfēi*, 因是因非); the Sage sees how the disputers follow their own *shīfēi*-judgments and are stuck in a rigid way of using language. In the pivot of *dào* humans are no longer attached to any rigid belief, enabling them to others without colonizing them.

For comparative philosophy that generates a variety of different, often incompatible, perspectives, this is key to solving the problem of how we can approach another cultural philosophical tradition in its difference by means of comparison. Comparing A and B is a creative moment in which we affirm the connectedness of A and B and in which we approach A and B without relying on a fixed distinction or a specific pattern of what is “so” and what is “not-so”. By using a fluid language of indeterminacy, a language of “spill over-goblet words” that maintains an equilibrium amid different opinions, expressions, and judgments, the *Zhuāngzǐ* is able to affirm the rightness of every perspective.

## §4.6 Bringing Clarity

Instead of using knowledge to show off one’s moral perfection or as a way to affirm one’s moral superiority, the *Zhuāngzǐ* endorses the use of *yǐmíng* as a method to harmonize perspectives. The text argues that “when words demonstrate by debate, they fail to communicate,” indicating that when we approach the other and the other’s perspectives from a fixed heart-mind we are no longer communicating with them but fighting with them. Language is aimed at facilitating communication between different perspectives, not as an instrument that can prove what is right or wrong. Persons who rest in the pivot are able to communicate with and responds to the different perspective in a flexible open way because they have adopted a critical-transformational position. This entails first of all that persons in the pivot do not offer their views for disputation, which particularly implies that they do not agree nor disagree in a doctrinaire fashion with any of the debaters. Lai and Wai Wai (2014) suggest interpreting the character *yòng* (用), which is frequently used in the *Zhuāngzǐ* not as “listening to” or “trying to understand,” but as an active attitude enabling one “to engage in such a way so as to further perpetuate this kind of discourse.”<sup>260</sup> *Míng* in the *Zhuāngzǐ* is primarily concerned with avoiding disagreement and needs to be seen as a viable alternative to both relativism and dogmatism. The

<sup>260</sup> Lai, K. & Wai Wai, C. “Ming in the Zhuangzi Neipian: Enlightened Engagement” in *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 40, No 3-4, (2013):531-532.

sage is not a relativist who claims that anything goes but treats preferences as situational and provisional. As Fraser aptly explains, the Sage does not hold on to his preference and quickly recognizes the need for an open, flexible approach:

*Practically, the agent with ming still draws shi fei distinctions, but in an open-ended, adaptive way grounded in a loose, flexible set of ethical and prudential ends, not in a doctrinaire fashion that assumes there is only a single genuine' (zhen) way to proceed, all others being 'false' (wei).<sup>261</sup>*

In the pivot, persons recognize their innate biases and know that they should not hold on to them. Lai and Wai Wai argue that the Sage situates *shifēi* discourse into the domain of ordinary life (*yōng*, 庸), indicating that the Sage is able to contextualize the perspectives and is able to see how the perspectives emerge from different points of view that are equally permissible. The Sage is therefore not anxious to win the argument but embraces an impartial attitude. The effort of *míng* (clarification) which harmonizes perspectives is more than a method that liberates humans from their anxiety and entanglement but shows a care for all perspectives through transcending all human values and adopting an empty, wandering and mirroring heart-mind.

While scholars such as Hans-Georg Moeller (2006) and Lee Yearley (1996) interpret the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s use of skilful knowledge as a kind of mysticism, I suggest reading the *Zhuāngzǐ* from a psychological point of view, as a way to cope with the world of intersubjective clashes. The pivot of *dào* needs to be seen as a coping strategy rather than a mystical state in which we have attained spiritual freedom. There is for example nothing mystical to the method of "genuine pretending" that the *Zhuāngzǐ* proposes as a way to interact with tyrants. Genuine pretending is here offered as a way to cope with a tyrant who in no respect adopts an enlightened, nourishing perspective. The method of genuine pretending provides us with psychological insights on how to interact with a perspective that is abusive and harmful:

顏闔將傅衛靈公大子，而問於蘧伯玉曰：「有人於此，其德天殺。與之為無方，則危吾國；與之為有方，則危吾身。其知適足以知人之過，而不知其所以過。若然者，吾奈之何？」蘧伯玉曰：「善哉問乎！戒之慎之，正汝身也哉！形莫若就，心莫若

<sup>261</sup> Fraser, C. "Zhuangzi, Xunzi, and the Paradoxical Nature of Education" in *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 33 No 4, (2006):538.

和。雖然，之二者有患。就不欲入，和而不欲出。形就而入，且為顛為滅，為崩為蹶。心和而出，且為聲為名，為妖為孽。彼且為嬰兒，亦與之為嬰兒；彼且為無町畦，亦與之為無町畦；彼且為無崖，亦與之為無崖。達之，入於無疵。

*Be compromising in appearance and harmonious in mind. But even these measures can present problems. Don't let the external compromise get inside you, and don't let your inner harmony show itself externally. If you let the external compromise get inside you, it will topple you, destroy you, collapse you, cripple you. If the harmony in your heart shows itself externally, it will lead to reputation and renown, until you are haunted and plagued by them. If he's playing the baby, play baby with him. If he's being lawless and unrestrained, be lawless and unrestrained with him. If his behavior is unbounded and shapeless, be unbounded and shapeless with him. You must master this skill to the point of flawlessness.<sup>262</sup>*

When we have given up all our preferences and are freed from constancy, we can harmonize perspectives by moving through them without obstruction. However, the *Zhuāngzǐ* recognizes that we have to adapt our strategy of how to move through these perspectives based on the perspective(s) we encounter. The *Zhuāngzǐ* was written in a time when social responsibilities could not always be questioned or dismissed, which is why the *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that we should accept that humans are constrained by social responsibilities.<sup>263</sup> Fleeing from the situation or using violence to overpower the tyrant is as such not an option for the *Zhuāngzǐ*; as Heaven has given us the human form we have to accept our social roles as fate.

Knowing how to cope with different perspectives is for the *Zhuāngzǐ* crucial for self-preservation in times when the Course is absent in the human world, but psychological knowledge of the inclinations of all these perspectives allows us and the other perspectives “to accomplish their own mandates” (聖也者，達於情而遂於命也).<sup>264</sup> Accomplishing their own mandates means being responsive to the situation and taking into account the emotions and needs of the other perspectives. Humans who embodies *dào* is able to cope with different perspectives by affirming their rightness, but at the same time restrain their

<sup>262</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 29.

<sup>263</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 28

<sup>264</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 68

heart-mind from becoming fixed and keeps him from entering into a debate as he or she simultaneously recognize the limitation of each perspective:

六合之外，聖人存而不論；六合之內，聖人論而不議。春秋經世，先王之志，聖人議而不辯。故分也者，有不分也；辯也者，有不辯也。曰：何也？聖人懷之，眾人辯之以相示也。故曰：辯也者，有不見也。

*As for the sage, he may admit that something exists beyond the six limits of the known world, but he does not further discuss it. As for what is within the known world, he will discuss it but not express an opinion on it. As for historical events, he will give an opinion but not debate it. For wherever a division is made, something is left undivided. Wherever debate shows one of two alternatives to be right, something remains undistinguished and unshown. What is it? The sage hides it in his embrace, while the masses of people debate it, trying to demonstrate it to one another. Thus, I say that demonstration by debate always leaves something unseen.<sup>265</sup>*

The Sage does draw *shifēi*-distinctions, but knows that human knowledge is limited, and knows that constant disputation is a futile and even dangerous practice that alienates us from our spontaneous nature. We have to take the contextual situation here into account in which scholarly debate frequently was a risky endeavour that sometimes even led to the execution of a Master. The text sees no difference between dispute, debate and discussion and seems to see all of them as unwanted practices that emerge from a clogged and fixed heart-mind.

## §4.7 The Deconstruction of the Calculative Heart-Mind

We have come to this study with the hope of making progress on the question how we can approach the cultural other in the most open way possible. The question that is at the heart of comparative philosophy is how we can approach the other as a unique tradition different from our own; while at the same time bringing this other closer to us through familiar philosophical concepts. In Chapter Three, we have seen that Levinas' ethical relation is concerned with attuning to the otherness of the other, which can be translated as the infinite

<sup>265</sup>Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 16.

task to move beyond identity. We can see a similar concern in the *Zhuāngzǐ*, who embodies doubt and indeterminacy and rejects fixed identities and classifications. Where Levinas' thinking however emphasizes how the otherness of the Other interrupts the spontaneous activity of the self, the *Zhuāngzǐ* takes a different route and argues that the feelings of anxiety and stress that the self experiences in relation to what is other reveals that the self has lost its natural spontaneity. Reducing what is other to the same is not only something that violates the Other, it is also something that hurts the self. In this section, I will explain how the *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that we have lost our natural spontaneity the moment we constructed our egocentric identity. The Sage at the pivot "has lost himself," (*shì sàng qíǒu*, 似喪其耦) he or she has "no-self," which liberates him or her from artificial constraints.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that the culprit of anxiety and confusion lies in a clogged heart-mind; a heart-mind that has lost its natural self-so-ness. The text proposes several methods to free the heart-mind from sprouting weeds in order to restore man's inner spontaneity as a mirror responds to the myriad things. Particularly important is restoring the natural interactions between the body and its different organs. Before discussing the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s emphasis on liberating the heart-mind, I will first provide a general background on how the body, senses and the heart-mind was conceived in ancient China.

In ancient Chinese philosophy, *xīn* (心), translated as "heart-mind," represents the physical organ of specifically human subjectivity and the source of man's deliberating and judging. The heart-mind is seen, however, as both an affective and cognitive source of rationality, reasoning and understanding. In contrast to much in Western philosophy, which from the beginning distinguished reason from emotions, the heart-mind also includes the expressions of the emotions such as imagination and desire. In ancient Chinese philosophy, emotions do not refer to a strong subjective state, but elicit inner states by describing human embodiment in situations.<sup>266</sup>

The heart-mind is also the organ that can make evaluative judgments (*shifēi*-distinctions) and can tally (*fú*, 符).<sup>267</sup> Tallies were, in ancient China, tokens of official agreements that consisted of a left and a right part that matched.<sup>268</sup> If

<sup>266</sup>Hansen, C. (2015). "The Relatively Happy Fish" in R.T. Ames & T. Nakajima. *Zhuangzi and the Happy Fish*, University of Hawai'i, 56.

<sup>267</sup>Geaney, J. *On the Epistemology of the Senses*, 50.

<sup>268</sup>Falkenhausen, L. von (2005). "The E Jun Qi metal tallies, inscribed texts and ritual context" In: M. Kern (eds.). *Text and Ritual in Early China*, University of Washington Press, 82-123.



agreements were broken, the matched notch kept by the party which broke the agreement would be evidence of the betrayal. The tallies then were measures of whether the promises, the words of an agreement, were fulfilled by the required deeds. In ancient Chinese, the heart-mind is seen as the ruler of the body and the central faculty of cognition. The heart-mind is the faculty that unifies the will, emotion, intuition, and sense experiences; it makes tallies among all of them.

Geaney (2002) distinguishes two types of knowledge associated with the ability to differentiate information through the senses. First, sensing knowledge refers to the knowledge of the senses themselves, which are acquired independently from the heart-mind. Second, sense discrimination refers to the verification of knowledge as the combined result of a certain sense and the heart-mind. Geaney further notes that hearing and seeing in the pre-Qin texts are considered special aspects of knowing because these senses are used by the heart-mind to tally things; specifically, the ears and eyes enable the heart to tally whether the words and deeds of other persons, as well as one's own, match.<sup>269</sup> Perceptual knowledge therefore does not only originate from the senses but is verified by the heart-mind.

In the pre-Qin texts, the relation between the body and the heart-mind is an important theme for ethical and epistemological reasoning. The different aspects of the human body are all composed of human *qi* (氣) and the flowing of *qi* pervades the entire human body. The human body, the senses, and the heart-mind (which in some texts might also be interpreted as a sense organ) form a network of mutual interactions and cannot be conceived as independent sources of knowledge. Knowledge of different kinds is overtly attributed in classical Chinese texts to the sense organs, the heart-mind and the body's vital energy.

Most Warring States texts emphasize the holistic unity of humans and argue that all parts of their embodied consciousness need to be correctly cultivated. Most ancient Chinese thinkers assumed that the proper cultivation of the body is needed in order for the correct teachings to penetrate the heart-mind. The heart-mind has to set itself to learning, and the cultivation of the heart-mind is regarded as superior to the cultivation of other senses. Persons who had set their heart-mind to learning were seen as the best potential rulers who had

<sup>269</sup> Geaney, J. *On the Epistemology of the Senses*, 50

earned the merit to govern petty people.<sup>270</sup> These commitments reveal thus that there is a universal evaluative standard that can distinguish the morally superior man from the petty man, which is the main point of critique on the *Zhuāngzǐ*. This is why the text often pictures dismembered or deformed persons as Masters, probably also because these persons are outside of being considered morally worthy and have thus more personal space to emulate *dào*.

Although the heart-mind and the body are an organic whole that need proper cultivation, there is a tendency in these early Chinese texts to view the heart-mind as the central organ that rules the other organs. The strong emphasis on human cultivation and the forming of the heart-mind by reciting the classics and modelling correct moral conduct resulted from a general tendency to view human nature as “not good enough,” or in need of social re-shaping. The idea was that, when left unattended, humans would certainly fall into chaos by not being able to align their own individual standards of righteousness with others, or by not being able to recognize “right” from “wrong” and “benefit” from “harm.” These thinkers agreed not only that humans needed a proper, uniform, cultivation framework to live harmoniously together, but also felt it was necessary to elevate them to become “human.” Xúnzǐ, for example, argued that humans differ from animals because humans can “have distinctions” (以其有辨). Through ritual, man is the only living being that can clarify and apply social distinctions, which makes man particularly able to create harmonious and elevated social relations.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* seeks to reintegrate the human realm in the natural whole of the universe. The text argues that the construction of knowledge, morality and the belief in an ultimate origin has resulted in a constrained and alienated life in which humans respond to the world from a “clogged” or “calculative heart-mind.” In other words, the construction of egocentric identity (social position, moral superiority) has led to negative intersubjective emotions such as greed, vanity, and jealousy. Humans have the tendency to push away the Course by becoming entangled in social relations and conventions and are particularly prone to using “the Human to try to help the Heavenly.”<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> See for example *Mencius* IIIa, IV, 6 (Legge, 249-250): “Hence, there is the saying, “Some labor with their minds, and some labor with their strength. Those who labor with their minds govern others; those who labor with their strength are governed by others. Those who are governed by others support them; those who govern others are supported by them.” This is a principal universally recognized.”

<sup>271</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 40

Trying to adjust the natural inclinations of the myriad things to a socially approved framework creates a constant tension, particularly because these unique perspectives resist being unified by a universal standard. In the *Outer Chapters*, the *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that the interaction between the natural inclinations of the ten thousand things and the traditional codes for human relationships alter them both: "joined, they separate. Completed, they are destroyed."<sup>272</sup> The particular inclinations of each perspective do not match the generalized social rules for human relationships, but when humans force them upon other perspectives, their natural self-so-ness will be destroyed, which will lead to the impoverishment of nature.

Several passages in the *Zhuāngzǐ* draw attention to how the human tendency to judge things according to their usefulness leads to reducing or harming the natural lifespan of things. Trees that are seen as useful are chopped down and employed for human practices, which the *Zhuāngzǐ* uses as a metaphor to draw attention to the paradoxical fact that when a thing is deemed not useful, its uselessness enables that thing to complete its natural lifespan, which is very useful to that thing. These passages in the *Zhuāngzǐ* on uselessness that can become useful when we change perspective should not be interpreted as an ecological concern but is an allegory for human relations. One of the most quoted passages in the *Zhuāngzǐ* that shows the "use of the uselessness," is about the tree of the shrine at the Qu Yuan Bend:

匠石之齊，至乎曲轅，見櫟社樹。其大蔽數千牛，絜之百圍，其高臨山十仞而後有枝，其可以為舟者旁十數。觀者如市，匠伯不顧，遂行不輟。弟子厭觀之，走及匠石，曰：「自吾執斧斤以隨夫子，未嘗見材如此其美也。先生不肯視，行不輟，何邪？」曰：「已矣，勿言之矣！散木也，以為舟則沈，以為棺槨則速腐，以為器則速毀，以為門戶則液構，以為柱則蠹。」

*Carpenter Shi was traveling in Qi when he came upon the tree of the shrine at the Qu Yuan bend. It was over a hundred arm spans around, so large that thousands of oxen could shade themselves beneath it. It overstretched the surrounding hills, its lowest branches hundreds of feet from the ground, at least a dozen of which could have been hollowed out to make into ships. It was surrounded by marvelling sightseers, but the carpenter walked past it without a second look.*

<sup>272</sup>Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 84

*When his apprentice finally got tired of admiring it, he caught up with Carpenter Shi and said, "Since taking up my axe to follow you, Master, I have never seen a tree of such fine material as this! And yet, you don't even deign to look twice at it or pause beneath it. Why?"*

*Carpenter Shi said, "Stop! Say no more! This is worthless lumber! As a ship it would soon sink, as a coffin it would soon rot, as a tool it would soon break, as a door it would leak sap, as a pillar it would bring infestation. This is a talentless, worthless tree. It is precisely because it is so useless that it has lived so long."<sup>273</sup>*

Instead of the tree that has excellent lumber and is subsequently cut down and cultivated in something (a cup, a ship) that it is not, the useless tree is able to affirm his own self-so-ness, to follow his natural spontaneity as it has been intended by Heaven. The example intends to show that a rigid distinction of what is "useful" and what is "not useful" cannot be made, as it is relative to the unique perspective of and on each thing. Oppositions such as "right and wrong," "useless and useful" and "benefit and harm," are not *real* oppositions, but are interconnected: the carpenter, who deems the lumber of the tree useless, is for the tree very useful, because it leaves it unharmed. As a consequence, interpreting anything as "so" automatically creates what is "not-so," revealing the togetherness of opposed perspectives. The particular passage in the *Zhuāngzǐ* is however of particular weight of this present study when we look at the next passage in which the Carpenter dreams about the useless lumber tree:

且予求無所可用久矣，幾死，乃今得之，為予大用。使予也而有  
用，且得有此大也邪？且也，若與予也皆物也，奈何哉其相物  
也？而幾死之散人，又惡知散木！」匠石覺而診其夢。弟子曰：  
「趣取無用，則為社何邪？」曰：「密！若無言！彼亦直寄焉，  
以為不知己者詬厲也。不為社者，且幾有翦乎！且也，彼其所  
保，與眾異，以義譽之，不亦遠乎！」

*Back home, Carpenter Shi saw the tree in a dream. It said to him, "What do you want to compare me to, one of those cultivated trees? The hawthorn, the pear, the orange, the rest of those fructiferous trees and shrubs - when their fruit is ripe they get plucked, and that is an insult. Their large branches are bent; their small branches are pruned. Thus do their abilities embitter their lives. That is why*

<sup>273</sup>Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 30

*they die young, failing to fully live out their natural life spans. They batter themselves with the vulgar conventions of the world – and all other creatures do the same. As for me, I've been working on being useless for a long time. It almost killed me, but I've finally managed it – and it is of great use to me! If I were useful, do you think I could have grown to be so great?*

*“Moreover, you and I are both [members of the same class, namely] beings – is either of us in a position to classify and evaluate the other? How could a worthless man with one foot in the grave know what is or isn't a worthless tree?” Carpenter Shi awoke and told his dream to his apprentice. The apprentice said, “If it's trying to be useless, what's it doing with a shrine around it?” Carpenter Shi said, “Hush! Don't talk like that! Those people came to it for refuge of their own accord. In fact, the tree considers it a great disgrace to be surrounded by this uncomprehending crowd. If they hadn't made it a shrine, they could easily have gone the other way and started carving away at it. What it values is not what they value. Is it not absurd to judge it by whether it does what is or is not called for by its position, by what role it happens to play?”<sup>274</sup>*

This passage shows that we can always find similarities between things and perspectives; the tree is just as a human a being, making it as such “comparable” or “relatable.” This however does not make it right to evaluate them according to some general, universal standard. What the tree values is not what man values; their perspectives are as such always at the same time different.

The text aims to show the arbitrariness of social conventions on how to value a certain thing. These conventions are based on an artificial agreement of what is “so” and what is “not-so,” which does not make these conventions right, but only shows that there are a lot of perspectives that share the same starting point. The *Zhuāngzǐ* draws attention to the hermeneutic circle that is here at stake: because we agreed that a tree is only useful when its lumber is of good quality for us to use, we, therefore, call this particular tree “useless.” In other words: because we have committed ourselves to a particular pattern of *shifēi*-distinctions, we can only evaluate a thing or perspective in one particular way. From an epistemological concern, this tendency restricts us from gaining a broader, all-encompassing perspective and producing new knowledge. From a

<sup>274</sup>Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi*, 30

psychological point of view, it brings stress and anxiety, particularly when the perspective of the thing that is presented to us does not fit within our categories. Michael Puett articulates that the main goal of the *Zhuāngzǐ* is to celebrate the natural process of Heaven:

*The goal of the adept is not to control things – an act that would be portrayed within this cosmology as an attempt to overcome Heaven. One must rather take pleasure in the ceaseless transformations of the universe – including those of one’s own life and death. Instead of attempting to overcome Heaven, one should seek to glory in the transformations of Heaven.*<sup>275</sup>

Instead of taking human conventions as their standard, humans should take Heaven as their model and recognize that the universe is in ever-changing flux that is, in every moment, exactly how it “should have been.” Genuine humans recognize that every moment of this flux is part of nature, and as such part of him. The recognition that everything is constantly in a state of flux, calls for extensive self-adaptation (*zìshì*, 自適); the mandate to respond to the unfolding of the current situation and affirm, and nourish, the self-so-ness of the myriad things.<sup>276</sup> The human embodied self (*shēn*, 身) is a transforming, complex wholeness that has several behavioural- and thinking patterns (*qíng*, 情). Humans are for example naturally inclined to take several unique perspectives as a group by creating identities. These identities can fragment the human embodied self, causing anxiety and confusion and condemns humans to labouring themselves “over the aspects of life that deliberate activity can do nothing about.”<sup>277</sup>

Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692), a seminal commentator on the text, interprets nourishing the self-so-ness of the myriad things as recognizing that, among “forms lodged here between heaven and earth, there is only this wandering, this play, and nothing besides. It makes no difference how large and small: each stops only where it finds itself.”<sup>278</sup> Restoring our natural spontaneity means adapting spontaneously to circumstances rather than controlling the outside

<sup>275</sup> Puett, M.J. (2003). ““ Nothing Can Overcome Heaven”: The Notion of Spirit in the *Zhuangzi*” In; S. Cook (eds.). *Hiding the World in the World*, State University of New York Press, 254

<sup>276</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 40

<sup>277</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 77

<sup>278</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 129

world, which calls for a disengagement with social conventions. Only when we have untangled our heart-mind can we be at rest in the middle of the pivot.

## **Part III: Harmonizing Perspectives And (Self) Nourishment**

### **§4.8 Fasting the Heart-Mind**

In this part I will show how the loss of the calculative heart-mind, - the loss of our egocentric "me"-, is key to finding the pivot. Self-transformation begins with deconstructing language, logic, and knowledge; a step that I have discussed in the previous section. When we see that language, knowledge and logic are mere human conventions and do not express the absolute truth, as they cannot adequately capture the constant transforming and changing flux of reality, we can let go of our fixed or calculative heart-mind.

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s primary focus is on how to cope with the myriad things in a nourishing, non-controlling way. Its focus bears some similarities with Levinas' project, which also sees the self's egocentrism and its tendency to approach the other from its own perspective as violence. But while Levinas opts for transcendence as a surplus that gives the human immanent world its ethical orientation, the *Zhuāngzǐ* seeks to reveal how clinging to particular ways of seeing the world prevents us from affirming the oneness of the different perspectives. In other words: the *Zhuāngzǐ* shows how violence originates in rigid ways of thinking and a conflated sense of self-identity in which humans believe that they can know what is universally right or wrong.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that humans need to become genuine (*zhēn*, 真) by becoming free of preferences and by becoming free of constancy. Genuineness is acquired by fasting the heart-mind, by means of meditation or breathing techniques and by accepting fate. To become a genuine person, the *Zhuāngzǐ* proposes approaching the self-other encounter not as a constraint but as a connection, in which the Sage recognizes that "Heaven and earth are born with me, and the ten thousand things and I are one." (*Tiāndì yǔ wǒ bìng shēng, ér wàn wù yǔ wǒ wéi yī*, 天地與我並生，而萬物與我為一).<sup>279</sup> The genuine man is a follower of Heaven (*yǔ tiān wèi tú*, 與天為徒) who allows for the joy of the

<sup>279</sup>Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 15

harmonious state of the heart-mind “to open into all things without thereby losing its fullness (*shǐ zhī hé yú tōng ér bùshī wū duì*, 使之和豫通而不失於兌), which is the moment when we are at rest in the middle of the pivot.<sup>280</sup> The Zhuangzian Sage differs from other Sages, primarily because he or she uses |the radiance of drift and doubt” as his or her only map (*Shì gù huá yí zhī yào, shèngrén zhī suǒ tú yě*, 是故滑疑之耀, 聖人之所圖也), indicating that the Sage in the pivot uses *shìfēi*-judgments to respond to situations, but at the same time is fully aware of the indeterminacy and contingency of these judgments.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that humans should begin by “unclogging [their] own heart-mind. The three methods the *Zhuāngzǐ* proposes to bring the heart-mind back to its natural rhythm are emptying (*xū*, 虛), wandering (*yóu*, 遊) and mirroring (*jìng*, 鏡). The emptying of the heart-mind is the clearing of all prior-knowledge, ingrained habits, and preconceived ideas, so that the self can retain the heart-mind’s natural, unique potential. Emptying the heart-mind helps him to “[use] various rights and wrongs to harmonize with others” (*Shì yǐ shèngrén hé zhī yǐ shìfēi*, 是以聖人和之以是非)<sup>281</sup> which reveals that the Sage no longer sees that what manifests itself as some-thing but as no-thing; as a fleeting moment in which all things become what they are before dissolving again. Emptying enables self-return (*zìhuí*, 自回) in which the self realizes that the socialized self, -the identity that is shaped by social conventions-, is not the true self.

Emptying restores the natural epistemological limits of our senses. When we empty our heart-mind, the heart-mind will “stop at tallying,” indicating that the heart-mind is limited to verifying what is perceived by tallying the senses of hearing and vision.<sup>282</sup> Emptying the heart-mind prevents it from judging experience rigidly, because, as Wang Fuzhi aptly describes it, the heart-mind is no longer obsessed with opposites.<sup>283</sup>

The second strategy of restoring our natural spontaneity is adopting a mirroring heart-mind. The Sage’s heart-mind is like a mirror “rejecting nothing, welcoming nothing: responding but not storing,” so he can “handle all things without harm.” (*Yīng ér bù cáng, gù néng shēng wù ér bù shāng*, 應而不藏, 故能勝物而不傷).<sup>284</sup> This comment regarding harm is crucial. The *Zhuāngzǐ* suggests that we harm

<sup>280</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 26, 37, 77

<sup>281</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 14

<sup>282</sup> Geaney, J. *On the Epistemology of the Senses*, 95

<sup>283</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 138

<sup>284</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 54



other perspectives when we let our preferences guide our actions, something we have seen in Chapter Three, when we had to conclude that Levinas, who wanted to articulate the radical transcendence of the Other, failed to attune to the otherness of the cultural other. What humans prefer, is an affirmation of their own perspective; when they reject a certain characteristic of a thing or person, they will try to change that thing or person. Equally, welcoming something or welcoming a person involves a positive bias that excludes other perspectives. Mirroring offers us the best method to connect our perspective with the other myriad things; because we do not judge but passively receive, respond but do not become affected so that the heart-mind can hold its peaceful state. Mirroring as the pure reflection of the universe, without adding anything, is a technique that helps us with the 'balancing acts of what enters and what exits the heart-mind', as a means to keep a soft, silent, empty, and non-deliberate heart-mind.<sup>285</sup>

*Yóu* 遊 is also a crucial character for restoring the natural spontaneity of humans. Translated as "wandering," "roaming" or "play," it is usually interpreted as the endorsement of a less serious approach to life. The term is particularly used to depict the roaming sages have fasted their heart-minds and can move freely and independently. In the first chapter of the *Zhuāngzǐ*, entitled *xiāoyáoyóu* (逍遙遊), the *Zhuāngzǐ* uses the metaphor of *being* a "chariot upon what is true both to Heaven and to earth" to describe the wandering sage.<sup>286</sup> The image of a chariot was a well-known metaphor for describing the unity between Heaven and earth.<sup>287</sup>

The roaming heart-mind is characterized by its unboundedness; its ability to transcend the human perspective results in an attitude that the commentator Liu Xianxin describes as the position in which "everything is wanted; all is to be included."<sup>288</sup> *Yóu* allows the heart-mind to adopt an all-encompassing approach to the world that enables it to accept different perspectives without being obstructed by assessments of rights and wrongs. Wandering enables man to see the difference between the "piping of man," "the piping of earth" and the "piping of Heaven." When humans only hear the "piping of man," they hold on to *shifei*-distinctions and does not see how humans give voice to the differences

<sup>285</sup> Geaney, J. *On the Epistemology of the Senses*, 34

<sup>286</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 5

<sup>287</sup> In ancient Chinese cosmology, Heaven was considered to be round and earth to be square. Together, they formed a chariot, the body representing earth and the canopy representing Heaven. The wandering mind can unify Heaven and earth by correlating the different perspectives and "walking two roads."

<sup>288</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 137

between the myriad things, differences that originate from the “piping of the Earth,” that equalizes differences.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* seeks to liberate humans from artificial constraints caused by the construction of and belief in truth, knowledge, and morality. A fixed heart-mind is the main culprit for why we are unable to harmonize with the other and the other’s perspectives and why we fail to see how self and other naturally connect. Instead of introducing new *shifēi*-distinctions, the *Zhuāngzǐ* deconstructs all human artificiality and urges us to rely on our natural spontaneity. The techniques of wandering, emptying, and mirroring help us to see the equal nature of the different *shifēi*-perspectives and recognize how a specific perspective confines us to a particular way of looking at the world. The empty, mirroring, wandering heart-mind is not a masochistic giving to the other, but is a strategy that aims to protect the self’s natural lifespan by adequately responding to the variety of perspectives and not offending them. This is close to the Fabian strategy of letting the opponent defeat himself and is as such not an ethical strategy, but a realist strategy.

The sage in the pivot responds to the situation in a skilful, efficacious way. When we look closely, we see that fasting the heart-mind restores the connection between the heart-mind and the body. The body plays an important role throughout the *Inner Chapters* and is denoted primarily as personhood (*shēn*, 身), form (*xíng*, 形) and the body as envired substance (*tí*, 體). In the *Zhuāngzǐ*, *shēn* seems to refer to the living body, the body that constitutes one’s personhood, while *xíng* seems to refer to its form, a form that can be mutilated. The *Zhuāngzǐ* seems to reconceive personhood and sees it not shaped by social conventions, but shaped and nourished by Heaven:

舜問乎丞曰：「道可得而有乎？」曰：「汝身非汝有也，汝何得有夫道？」舜曰：「吾身非吾有也，孰有之哉？」曰：「是天地之委形也；生非汝有，是天地之委和也；性命非汝有，是天地之委順也。」

*Shun asked Cheng, "Can the Course be attained and possessed?" Cheng said, "Even your body is not your own possession; how could you attain the Course?" Shun said, "If my body is not my own possession, whose is it?" Cheng said, "It is just a form lent*

*by heaven and earth. Life is not your own possession; it is just a harmony lent by heaven and earth.*"<sup>289</sup>

The *Zhuāngzǐ* suggests that we tend to confuse the temporal flux that each of us is in the present moment with what is "ours," that which defines us, what can be manipulated and controlled. Clinging to life is a preference that seems to be the root of confusion, as death is for human beings the most radical transformation of all. But life, human or not human, belongs to *dào*, belongs to the infinite flux of generation, transformation, and change; belongs to the infinite process of reversal (*diāndǎo*, 顛倒). The different parables and riddles in the *Zhuāngzǐ* teach us that cultivation is not about exercising our human abilities, but about restraining these abilities so that we can articulate a form of life that is boundless and spontaneous.

There is a deep trust in the *Zhuāngzǐ* in the natural unfolding of the self-so-ness or unique pattern of each being, an unfolding that, when left unharmed, naturally will interlock with the myriad things. The natural interlocking is connecting to a larger whole, a being lodged "in a common body" (*tóngtǐ*, 同體). Deborah Sommer defines this common body as "a complex, multi-layered corpus whose centre can be anywhere but whose boundaries are nowhere."<sup>290</sup> The fasting of the heart-mind does not only free our heart-mind, but also changes the way we relate to our physical body (*shēn*, 身) and its appearance (*xíng*, 形). The bodily form (*xíng*, 形) is said to protect spirit (*shén*, 神), as vital energy (*qì*, 氣).<sup>291</sup>

Becoming free of preferences and constancy involves a disengagement from both the heart-mind and the body in which we no longer see the body as our possession and no longer treat the heart-mind as the governor of all our organs. The *Zhuāngzǐ* suggests that the heart-mind is ill-suited to be the ruler (*zhì*, 治) of the other organs. This view aligns with the commentary of the Song Dynasty philosopher Lü Huiqing (1031-1111) who comments: "the life process follows the body and thus ends where the body ends. But the mind bent on knowledge chases object after object without limit."<sup>292</sup> Instead of representing the world with our heart-mind, the heart-mind should harmonize with the natural impulses of the body. When the heart-mind aligns itself with the spontaneous impulses of the body, the Sage is able to adequately respond to the seamless flux of

<sup>289</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 87

<sup>290</sup> Sommer, D.A. (2010). "Concepts of the Body in the Zhuangzi" In: V. Mair (eds.). *Experimental Essays on Zhuangzi*, Three Pines Press, 212

<sup>291</sup> Mair, V.H. (1994). *Wandering on the Way*, Bantam Books, 108

<sup>292</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 166

*dào*, because he himself has also become a seamless flux of transformation and change. Fasting the heart-mind does not only transform the heart-mind, but also restores the natural relation between the heart-mind and the other organs, creating a synergistic and responsive whole. The pivot of *dào* is thus not a doctrine nor a theory, but a way of life that embodies doubt and indeterminacy as a way of life and is rooted in the unconditional trust that we can respond spontaneously to each situation.

The relation between the heart-mind and the body is particularly restored by the loss of *me-ness*, also seen as the loss of the calculative heart-mind, in which the process of life is no longer seen as mine. The Sage who is no longer a “me” has overcome the differences between self and other and sees the many manifestations of the world no longer as things but as no-things; as a unique flux that goes its own unique way. Ziporyn argues that this is an important step in the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s ideal that we should equally assess all perspectives, and, as I would argue, understand what it means to be at rest in the middle of the pivot:

*'Losing me' is paired with and indeed seems to be identical with 'losing his opposite'. Here the great question of the mutual definition of dyadic pairs makes its unmistakable appearance. It is here too that the decisive step toward omnicentrism is made. For here we begin to see concretely what a 'whole' is for Zhuangzi. It is not an undifferentiated mass of indifferent matter or qi, as we might think from an unreflecting reading of some of the passages quoted above, and others. Instead, the primary idea of a whole is of a correlative pair, which Zhuangzi pares down to its purest and most abstract form: this and that, or self and no-self.<sup>293</sup>*

The displacement of the ego as the locus of control is in the *Zhuāngzǐ* described in terms of *zuòwàng* (坐忘), - sitting and forgetting-, and *sàngwǒ* (喪我), forgetting oneself. Forgetting oneself does not mean that the Sage has withdrawn from the world to become One with the universe, but is a coping strategy that enables the Sage to wander freely in the world.

It is here important to draw attention to the specific difference between Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ*. In her essay “Transcendence, Freedom and Ethics in Levinas’ Subjectivity and Zhuangzi’s non-being Self,” (2015) Zhao draws attention to the similarity between Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ*, as they both appreciate pre-ego

<sup>293</sup>Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 41

and pre-reflective experiences and reveal the violence of the ego that tries to master and control its outside environment. Although I do agree that Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ* both see the non-self, - the self that is no longer an egocentric usurpation and colonizer of the world-, as the primordial vocation of the self, I think that it is important to see how Levinas' project of the ethical relation is challenged by the *Zhuāngzǐ*.

For Levinas, only the epiphany of the Face of the Other can liberate or suspend the self's egocentric spontaneity, it is only in the face-to-face-encounter and the Height of the Other that the self is transformed into a non-self or a *being-for-the-other*. The *Zhuāngzǐ* shows that the violence and resistance that the Levinasian egocentric spontaneity creates originates in a fixed heart-mind and the artificial construction of knowledge, morality as well as the unfounded belief in the power of language and logic. Levinasian egocentric spontaneity is not the ontological realm produced by the infinite relation to the Other as pure goodness, it is the result of a clogged heart-mind constructed by social conventions and the rigid belief in (moral) standards.

For the *Zhuāngzǐ*, the affirmation of difference does not reveal the radical transcendence of the Other as an ethical command, but is the recognition that the perspective of others and their preferences are different from mine and are relative to their specific *shifēi*-patterns and circumstances. Adequately responding to the other and the other's perspectives and seeing the togetherness of the different myriad things entails taking reality as it is and responding from an unconditional trust in the natural unfolding of the self-so-ness of things. In the beautiful narrative of the fish Kun, who changes seamlessly into the bird Peng, we see what it means to wander freely and be at ease with the myriad things:

北冥有魚，其名為鯤。鯤之大，不知其幾千里也。化而為鳥，其名為鵬。鵬之背，不知其幾千里也；怒而飛，其翼若垂天之雲。是鳥也，海運則將徙於南冥。南冥者，天池也。

*There is a fish in the Northern Oblivion named Kun, and this Kun is quite huge, spanning who knows how many thousands of miles. When he rouses himself and soars into the air, his wings are like clouds draped across the heavens. The oceans start to churn, and*

*this bird begins his journey toward the Southern Oblivion. The Southern Oblivion – that is the Pool of Heaven.*<sup>294</sup>

Kun is able to follow its bodily transformations without judging and without clinging to its identity as a “fish named Kun.” Kun has retained its spirit and can wander limitlessly through the sky. The parable indicates that Kun is beyond what can know or remember (*běimíng*, 北冥), suggesting that Kun’s heart-mind holds to the pivot of *dào* which enables it to harmonize the different perspectives without any resistance. The wandering heart-mind of Peng is contrasted with the limited perspective of the cicada and the fledgling:

蜩與學鳩笑之曰：「我決起而飛，槍<sup>1</sup>榆、枋，時則不至而控於地而已矣，奚以之九萬里而南為？」

[..] *The cicada and the fledgling dove laugh at him, saying: “We scurry up into the air, leaping from the elm to the sandalwood tree, and when we don’t quite make it, we just plummet to the ground. What’s all this about ascending ninety thousand miles and heading south?”*<sup>295</sup>

The difference in attachment between clinging to the truth of one’s own perspective and judging that which is other from this ‘small truth’ is depicted here as the earth-dwelling animals who mock and ridicule Peng. In the moment, Peng knows that it is Peng, but it does not hold on to its identity, nor derive its sense of self-worth from its state of being Peng. Its decentred, nomadic heart-mind is able to respond to the unfolding of the world ceaselessly and can dwell in the flow of the moment with ease. This responsiveness follows the moment, but does not dwell on its achievement, it “lets [itself] be carried along by things and the mind wanders freely. Hand it all over to the unavoidable so as to nourish what is central to you” (*Qiě fū chéng wù yǐ yóuxīn, tuō bùdéyǐ yǐ yǎng zhōng, zhì yǐ*, 且夫乘物以遊心，託不得已以養中，至矣).<sup>296</sup>

The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that our singularity and self-worth is not derived from human conventions, but is derived from being generated by Heaven in our unique self-so-ness.<sup>297</sup> Restraining the heart-mind enables the release of the

<sup>294</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 3

<sup>295</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 4

<sup>296</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 29

<sup>297</sup> Mølgaard, E.J. (2015). “Zhuangzi’s Notion of Transcendental Life” In: R.T. Ames & T. Nakajima (eds), *Zhuangzi and the Happy Fish*, University of Hawai’I, 100

body, which demonstrates, as Peng Yu notes “an extraordinary openness to external influence inasmuch as the boundary is a porous surface rather than an impermeable wall.”<sup>298</sup> The wholesomeness that the Sages have attained enable them to become conscious and celebrate life as it is. Instead of Levinas, who articulates the guilty self that is responsible to each and every human being, the *Zhuāngzǐ* emphasizes how human conventions and more precisely rigid thinking patterns and the reliance on universal standards are the main source of negative emotions and violence.

## §4.9 Emotions, Debate and Social Relations

4

Methodologies in comparative philosophy are primarily aimed at bringing two disparate traditions together so that we can understand and grasp that other cultural philosophical tradition. In this present study I have pledged for a reconceptualization of comparative philosophy by considering the self-other relation and to adopt a critical-transformation position as a form of ethical competence. Ethical competence is required to approach the other in a respectful, non-colonizing way. Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ* have both articulated a discursive practice in which we can communicate with the other and the other’s perspectives in an open and responsive way. Being a competent comparative philosopher does not only call for reflecting on different methods on how to do comparative philosophy, but also entails that we need to see comparative philosophy as intercultural communication, which comprises the ability to communicate with interlocutors from other cultural traditions. Based on the readings of Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ*, this study tries to disclose the ethical underpinnings of intercultural communication that concentrates on the problematic assumptions and emotional commitments in the comparative praxis. In this study I try to discern a critical-transformational discourse that does not originate in the assertion of commonality.

For the *Zhuāngzǐ*, adopting a critical-transformational discourse helps us to become open to the other and the other’s perspectives. This discourse is aimed at affirming the self-so-ness of each thing, which persons can do when they do no longer cling to traditional values and human conventions which block their natural spontaneity. A confined perspective is produced by a clogged heart-mind that strives for completion (*chéng*, 成); it is the construction of identities

<sup>298</sup>Yu, P. “Indeterminate Self-Subjectivity, Body and Politics in Zhuangzi” *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 46 No 3, (2020):351

and the clinging to what is “so” and “not-so.” In contrast with the other thinkers, the *Zhuāngzǐ* seems to see human relationship as deeply troublesome. Man, who “groups every appearance with something else,” (*Tiān zhī shēng shì shǐ dú yě, rén zhī mào yǒu yǔ yě*, 天之生是使獨也，人之貌有與也) tries to exchange perspectives for a systematic unity, which creates “constant anxiety (*Duō zé rǎo, rǎo zé yōu, yōu ér bù jiù*, 多則擾，擾則憂，憂而不救).”<sup>299</sup> Their confusion and anxiety lead them away from the Way, leaving them empty and depleted and bickering over “whiteness” and “blackness” instead of enjoying their natural lifespan. The human abilities, argues the *Zhuāngzǐ*, “embitter their lives,” (*Cǐ yǐ qí néng kǔ qí shēng zhě yě*, 此以其能苦其生者也)<sup>300</sup> which raises the question of whether human beings should rejoice in human activities at all.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* nevertheless fiercely promotes a method of self-adaptation that enables each of us to nourish life and, as it seems, to nourish human relationships. Throughout the *Zhuāngzǐ*, friendship plays an important role, which indicates that the *Zhuāngzǐ* does not endorse a withdrawal from the world but opts for a different way of approaching the world. Self-adaptation means for the *Zhuāngzǐ* fasting the heart-mind and a calm acceptance of fate (*ānmìng*, 安命). Bringing clarity implies seeing the current situation from an impartial viewpoint in which we are able to attune to the different perspectives without causing harm and anxiety. The unconditional trust of the Sage in the transformation and change of the myriad things leads to the acceptance of that what we cannot change.

Accepting the inevitable fate of the death of our loved ones as well as accepting our own mortality is seen in the *Zhuāngzǐ* as an immense liberation that provides us with more openness to experiencing life to the fullest. Liberating the heart-mind from its desire for completion is seen as overcoming death and becoming infinite. No longer chained to our form, we can marvel in the thought that we can transform in future incarnations into a “mouse’s liver? Or perhaps an insect’s arm” (*Yǐ rǔ wèi shǔ gān hū? Yǐ rǔ wèi chóng bì hū?*, 以汝為鼠肝乎? 以汝為蟲臂乎?).<sup>301</sup>

The *Zhuāngzǐ*’s endorsement of harmonizing the different perspectives should however not be seen as a kind of fatalism in which we happily walk into the arms of a murderer. The aim is to safeguard and fulfil our natural given lifespan, to live out our years and to take joy in carefree wandering. Especially in violent

<sup>299</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 23, 24

<sup>300</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 30

<sup>301</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 45



times, it is necessary to learn coping strategies and self-techniques to secure our survival, a desire that does not originate in an egocentric *conatus essendi*, but in the fact that Heaven has created us and nourishes us.

When we do not attune to how we naturally interlock with the myriad things, we tend to go astray. The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that anxiety, stress, and violence emerge from not accepting internal and external limitations. Man tends to move beyond his epistemological limit and tries to gain knowledge of that which cannot be known from his perspective. The belief in objective knowledge results in quarrelling, debate, and hatefulness, while acceptance of the limits of knowledge and seeing knowledge as provisional and dependent upon a perspective enable us to approach others in a less aggressive but more creative way. The *Zhuāngzǐ* also argues that our loyalty to our parents and family members are fated and as such does not need to be cultivated. The *Zhuāngzǐ* sees the personal-familial relation as natural, as mandated by Heaven and does not see it as a privileged domain for moral cultivation.<sup>302</sup>

Accepting fate also involves recognizing that social relationships, social roles, and responsibilities, are fated. The *Zhuāngzǐ* suggests that self-adaptation is a more positive and valuable approach than controlling the outside world and endorses an attentive and receptive attitude toward the world; an attitude based on the trust that we can “freely pass wherever we may go”.<sup>303</sup> The novelty of the *Zhuāngzǐ* is that the text shows that colonizing what is other creates resistance that will make the subject anxious and angry. Zhao draws attention to the harmful effects of the calculative heart-mind in her essay:

*For the Zhuangzi, ego and consciousness are the root of anxieties, fears, and worries from which human suffer. With a thinking, judging and evaluating mind, we differentiate things, we set up*

<sup>302</sup> Parents as such do not have the responsibility to cultivate their children, but should approach their children from an empty, wandering and mirroring heart-mind. The *Zhuāngzǐ* seems thus to endorse a permissive parenting style in which parents have unconditional trust in their children to find their own way. It seems however that both parents as children are fated to stay loyal to their family members, indicating that parents and children naturally share an intimate and close relationship, which might suggest that for these particular relations “leaving the other and other’s perspectives alone” is not a natural option.

<sup>303</sup> I paraphrase here the commentary of Lü Huiqing: “The passage from “depend on Heaven’s unwrought perforations” to “knotted nodes” describes what it is like to “never see the entire ox” – or to be entirely free of seeing the ox. Freely passing through wherever you may go, since each thing is the Course, I also like this.” (Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 168)

*boundaries and develop attachments and preferences, which eventually brings up constraints, inequalities, and unfreedom.*<sup>304</sup>

Colonizing what is other does not only harm what is other, but also harms the subject because the subject experiences negative emotions and no longer sees the situation with clarity. Being free from all preferences means that we respond to the world from emotional equanimity, a position of tranquillity and stillness. This does not mean that the Sages are free of emotions, but that they are more able to vacillate between having emotions and being free of them.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* acknowledges that humans have emotions, and that the Sage has a human form, even though this person is free of “human inclinations.” The Sages are however able to keep their heart-mind at ease and let the emotions blow like the wind, adding nothing to the process of life.<sup>305</sup> This is what the *Zhuāngzǐ* has in mind when it emphasizes dwelling “in the moment and abiding in ease” (*ànshí ér chùshùn*, 安時而處順). The tranquil acceptance of fate does not allow feelings to enter in, not even happiness and joy. Fasting the heart-mind transforms the self from a limited, evaluative self to a unified self that rests in the flow with *dào*, which provides the self with a “transcendent kind of knowledge,”<sup>306</sup> as Sham Yat Shing calls it; which is described by Møllgaard as the spiritual awareness of “being nourished by self-emerging life itself, the life of Heaven, which generates each being in its own unique way.”<sup>306</sup>

The Sage who is at rest in the middle of the pivot of *dào*, can nourish all perspectives equally because he or she responds to them from a situation of emotional equanimity and non-preference. The pivot is as such the most open and receptive position; a perspective in which, and I quote here Cheng Xuanying:

*Action and quiescence form an undifferentiated unity [xiangji] in arcane response [mingjing] to the circumstances of the moment, so while such a one sits upright in the very center of the universe, his mind travels beyond the boundaries of the four seas.*<sup>307</sup>

<sup>304</sup> Zhao, G., *Transcendence, Freedom, and Ethics*, 72

<sup>305</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 38

<sup>306</sup> Sham, Y.S. (2015). “Knowledge and Happiness” In: R.T. Ames & T. Nakajima (eds.). *Zhuangzi and the Happy Fish*, University of Hawai’i Press, 127; Møllgaard, E. *Zhuangzi’s Notion of Transcendence*, 90.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.* 64

Chen Xuanying's commentary on the *Zhuāngzǐ* is sometimes criticized by scholars as his commentaries are overtly influenced by Xuanying's Buddhist ideas. However, I think Xuanying's attempt to integrate the different passages in the *Zhuāngzǐ* on the Sage, the Sage as the *zhēnrén* (真人), the *dàrén* (大人) and the *shénrén* (神人), can be useful for understanding what it entails to be in the pivot of *dào*. Xuanying interprets the *Zhuāngzǐ* in a metaphorical way and interprets the extraordinary qualities of the Sage who roams freely in terms of simply being uninterested or unaffected with the troubles and issues of other human beings.

Nevertheless, Xuanying also recognizes that the sage returns to the human realm and responds to the needs of other beings, indicating that the Sage has transcended the human realm, but at the same time still is part of it. The Sage in the *Zhuāngzǐ* is not a reclusive hermit, but participates in the human world, but without "being human," as the Sage:

*Concentrated in tranquil profundity, his sagely intelligence reflects things free of predilections [qing], toward which it neither advance nor with does it engage, neither giving rise to nor extinguishing them, so such a one certainly does not travel on the perfect path [zhidao] of emptiness [xu] and interchangeable expedience [tong] with a mind [xin] that clings to the objects of phenomenal reality [panyuan zhi xin].<sup>308</sup>*

This passage suggests that Xuanying sees the sage as someone who is part of the human world, but interacts with others in a detached, non-involved way. The Sage who has adopted an empty, wandering and mirroring heart-mind remains unaffected by the dogmatism, violence, and fixations of others although the Sage does interact with others and mingles with them.

Because the sages have no attachment or judgments towards others, -and act from an attitude of non-knowledge, they can emphatically respond in the best way to the needs to other beings. Xuanying specifically pays attention to the sage who has transcended the dualism between self and other and the body and heart-mind, which is the position in which we are able to affirm the equality of the different things. For Xuanying the main goal of the Sage is to nourish other beings and help them to unfold their natural self-so-ness; an interpretation that might be inspired by the Buddhist idea of the Bodhisattva, but which is in line

<sup>308</sup>Ibid, 64.

with the passages in the *Zhuāngzǐ* in which it is said that the Sage is not able to help others when the Course is not present. When the human realm is so corrupted, it is not possible for the Sage to help others to complete their self-so-ness, as they have lost themselves completely and are, in a way, “beyond help.” The only thing that the Sages in this case can do is protect their own self-so-ness, which sometimes amounts to mirroring the corruptness of the other as in the example of “playing baby with the ruler when he is playing baby” (*Bǐ qiě wèi yīng’ér, yì yǔ zhī wèi yīng’ér*, 彼且為嬰兒，亦與之為嬰兒).

Nurturing life involves respecting the self-so-ness of each thing. The “principle of nurturing life” (*yǎngshēngzhǔ*, 養生主) is embraced by practicing forgetting (*wàng*, 忘), transformation (*huà*, 化) and using the unborrowed or surplus (*yú*, 餘) of the universe. *Yú* refers to the way we can change perspectives and change our way of seeing things as no-things, which means seeing things in their unique manifestation. We can conclude that the *Zhuāngzǐ* does not merely articulate a notion of personal freedom that values pluralism, a personal freedom that Jiang conceived as creating and discovering new possibilities to navigate constraints,<sup>309</sup> but articulates a multidimensional perspective from which all things can be viewed in their true uniqueness. The Sages’ commitment to keep their heart-mind at ease originates from a deep trust in the infinite expressions of *dào*, an unconditional trust in the transcendental order which moves beyond a mere concern for personal freedom. The Sage resonates with the world while keeping his distance from unwanted influences and keeps his peaceful heart-mind from being disturbed. The Sage’s heart-mind is like dead ashes and his body like dried wood (*Xíng gù kě shǐ rú gǎomù, ér xīn gù kě shǐ rú sǐhuī hū?*, 形固可使如槁木，而心固可使如死灰乎?), a visualization of the Sage’s inward transformation.<sup>310</sup>

Although the *Zhuāngzǐ* emphasizes that the world comprises many perspectives, the text privileges the perspective of non-interference, a perspective that abides to Heaven and is attuned to how nature is. For the *Zhuāngzǐ* the myriad things all naturally interlock, which is why the Sage treats all things equally, since for him “each thing is just so, each thing is right, and so he enfolds them all within himself by affirming the rightness of each” (*Wàn wù jìn rán, ér yǐ shì xiāng yùn*, 萬物盡然，而一是相蘊).<sup>311</sup> The Sage approaches the different things as expressions rather than attributes or qualities of that particular thing (or lived being) and treats them as a manifestation of the flow of *dào*.

<sup>309</sup> Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China*, 292.

<sup>310</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 9.

<sup>311</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 19.

We can recognize that an open and receptive heart-mind that does not allow for intense emotions and fixations to enter, is able to interact with objects in a creative and novel way. When we no longer see objects from a particular fixed point of view, we can explore different ways of enjoying and relating to objects. Gourds can be used as boats as well as spoons, they can be used to make soup or can become potential forms of art. This playful, receptive approach becomes however more difficult when interacting with other human beings. Humans seem to be the only ones who can lose their self-so-ness and who can get confused about the true Way. First of all, humans make an artificial distinction between humans (*rén*, 人) and other beings and give the human realm a special, privileged status. The problem is not that humans make distinctions between forms; the Sage equally recognizes the different forms and even groups them in classes such as “trees” and “humans.” Problems emerge when we approach things and persons as having an identifiable essence or a fixed inborn nature (*rénzhīqíng*, 人之情) that needs the right cultivation. The *Zhuāngzǐ* rejects that there are essences; the myriad things do not have a common, moral root (*běn*, 本), but emerge together from a vital energy that is devoid of any form and does not depend on anything. Dependence (*dài*, 待) on one’s own perspective, on meaning or knowledge are therefore undesirable as it alienates man from his natural spontaneity and causes anger and conflict.

While some scholars see the *Zhuāngzǐ* as idealizing the anti-social hermit and recommending withdrawal from society, I suggest reading the *Zhuāngzǐ* as recommending that we resist from adding anything artificial to our relations with others.<sup>312</sup> The *Zhuāngzǐ* does not promote withdrawing from relationships but promotes a different way of relating to them. There is ample evidence that the *Zhuāngzǐ* acknowledges that human life unfolds within a human society. Most of the parables and stories in the text are friendly dialogues in which social outcasts are seen as instructors, usefulness is interpreted as uselessness and in which ritual propriety and benevolence as moral qualities are mocked.

These dialogues do not promote a withdrawal from the world but expose the problems of interacting with persons solely in a restrictively socially accepted, way. Fasting the heart-mind and concentrating on our “vital breath” and accepting fate are self-adaptive strategies that restore the natural connection between humans. The Sage’s understanding of a current situation is “limited to his immediate surroundings,” (*Zhī bù chū hū sì yù*, 知不出乎四域) and because the Sage does not have preferences and is free of constancy, he has the creative

<sup>312</sup>E.g. Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China*

power to find “something fitting in their encounter with each thing (*Yǔ wù yǒu yí*, 與物有宜).<sup>313</sup> The genuine man accepts change and transformation, exists spontaneously, lacks a self, has no preferences, acts from emotional equanimity and does not cling to social norms. When Huizi asks Zhuangzi if a human being really can be without “characteristic human inclinations” (*wúqíng*, 無情), the *Zhuāngzǐ* clarifies the Sage’s attitude as being liberated of “affirming some things as right and negating others as wrong.” Here, the Sages do not let *shifēi*-distinctions hurt themselves or others. Rather than being troubled by what is or should be “so” and “not so,” by pondering over and re-assessing relationships, the Sage can just go along with the present “rightness”. What entails this “rightness” appears spontaneously when we are in a situation. The entails that we should leave others complete their own course, because when we respond from our natural spontaneity, we are utterly self-sufficient and will transform naturally and without any help from others:

泉涸，魚相與處於陸，相响以溼，相濡以沫，不如相忘於江湖。  
與其譽堯而非桀，不如兩忘而化其道。

*When the springs dry up, the fish have to cluster together on the shore, gasping on each other to keep damp and spitting on each other to stay wet. But that is no match for forgetting all about one another in the rivers and lakes. Rather than praising Yao and condemning Jie, we'd better off forgetting them both and transforming along our own courses*<sup>314</sup>

Jiang (2021) takes this passage as evidence that the *Zhuāngzǐ* advocates a personal freedom and problematizes the entanglement in relations, “even when he acknowledged at times the nurturing aspect of human relationship.”<sup>315</sup> I would however suggest that for the *Zhuāngzǐ* the problem is not generally our entanglement in relationships, as the world is comprised of different perspectives and we are part of the myriad of things that are ultimately One. The problem is more specifically that we do not relate to these relationships in the natural way but evaluate other things from our own perspective, causing us to become entangled and blocking our natural interconnectedness.

<sup>313</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 36, 40

<sup>314</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 43, 293

<sup>315</sup> Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China*

The *Zhuāngzǐ* accepts human conventions but sees them as mere means to communicate with others. When we need others for self-survival or others need us for their self-survival, the *Zhuāngzǐ* deems it necessary to care for each other. But the *Zhuāngzǐ* recognizes that in most cases others do not need care, especially not the care in which the talented and knowledgeable provide guidance for those less fortunate.<sup>316</sup> The *Zhuāngzǐ* opts for a philosophy of life that is subtle enough to overcome the various problems attached to social interaction. Forgetting others like the fish that forget each other when they are swimming in the rivers and lakes has a different meaning than withdrawing from relations. The perspective of fish is frequently introduced in the *Zhuāngzǐ* as an allegory for carefree wandering. Fishes in the text can also frequently be read as an allegory for ideas or meanings.<sup>317</sup> Forgetting each other means not seeing the other as having an identity; “forgetting” here means not holding on to any meaning, not clinging to how the person is or how my relation to the other should be. Transcending all artificial values through the cultivation of inner stillness enables the self to respond from a position in which the self as no-self can connect to the other as no-other in each instant in novel, creative ways.

## §4.10 The Problem of Politics

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s perspectivism and its emphasis on self-transformation, in which self and other are relativized but in which their difference is not resolved, can show us how to become open to cultural others. In terms of the self-other relation, which is the main focus of this study, this entails that we should be aware of the risks involved both in attuning to and to ignoring differences. The risk involved in attuning to difference is that we “other the other,” in which the tradition classified as “different” is approached either as having no common nature to our own cultural tradition or being assimilated to our tradition for the purpose of comparison. Ignoring difference between self and other amounts not only to a missed opportunity to learn from what is other, but also tends to dismiss the need to reflect upon one’s own biases, prejudices, and perspectives. For comparative philosophy, it is important to reflect upon one’s own self-understanding and undermine cultural hegemony.

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s emphasis on desocialization and liberating ourselves of all artificial values and unnatural constraints is an active method in which we adopt

<sup>316</sup>Robins, D. “Mohist Care” *Philosophy East & West*, 62 No 1, 64

<sup>317</sup>Hoffman, H.P. *Yuzhile*, 42

a broader, open perspective that mirrors the other perspectives rather than evaluating them. For comparative philosophy, the decision to adopt a wandering, empty and mirroring heart-mind is a political choice that reflects our ethical responsibility not to colonize what is other as a need to gain epistemological clarity. Politics is however always the realm of the violation of the other and the other's perspectives, something that is not only illuminated in Levinas' analysis, but is also a sentiment present in the *Zhuāngzǐ*.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* is often interpreted as advocating a philosophy that privileges the tranquil life and eschews politics. Graham describes the *Zhuāngzǐ* for example as "in effect an anthology of writings with philosophies justifying withdrawal to private life."<sup>318</sup> The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s relativism and perspectivism are also seen as a problem for the articulation of a political theory, as the lack of epistemological clarity regarding the determination of personal duties provides no ground for formulating laws and regulations. The *yǐnshì* (隱士, hermitic) interpretation of the *Zhuāngzǐ* emphasize the text's disapproval of politics and sees the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s spiritual ideal as a withdrawal from social life. Dull for example argues that the *Zhuāngzǐ* celebrates socially marginalized persons who are freed from being assimilated into schemes, designs, and agendas. For Dull, the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s distrust of politics is not a mere anti-authoritarian resistance but is grounded in a "deep criticism about the way in which designs, ideologies and intentional frameworks forcefully impose themselves on nature itself."<sup>319</sup> Jiang argues that the *Zhuāngzǐ* primarily opts for political abstention and living in the margins of the political world due to "what they considered the hopelessness of the mainstream moral-political project."<sup>320</sup>

The readings of both Dull and Jiang suggest that the *Zhuāngzǐ* is not anti-political but sees the political realm as the site of exploitation, oppression, imperialism, and violence. I agree with these readings, especially when we consider that the *Zhuāngzǐ* overall aim is to liberate all humans from artificial constraints so that they can find the pivot of *dào* and naturally interlock with the myriad things. Politics is however the realm of power in which humans try to control others; a realm of violent power relations in which humans risk their own lives.

<sup>318</sup> Graham, A.C. *Disputers*, 172

<sup>319</sup> Dull, C.J. "Zhuangzi and Thoreau: Wandering, Nature, and Freedom" *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* (2012): 222-239

<sup>320</sup> Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China*, 231



On multiple occasions, the *Zhuāngzǐ* indicates that in its time there was no space for “being careless,” that its time was a time of “great confusion,” in which “he who steals a belt buckle is executed, but he who steals a state is made a feudal lord” (*Bǐ qiè gōu zhě zhū, qièguó zhě wéi zhūhóu*, 彼竊鉤者誅，竊國者為諸侯).<sup>321</sup> The *Zhuāngzǐ* provides us with great insight into how our emotions and our desire for reputation can create tensions in social relationships. Showing off how good and wise we are is an instrument to expose how bad the other person is, and this is seen as “plaguing others,” a behaviour that for sure leads to being “plagued in return” (*Zāi rén zhě, rén bì fǎn zāi zhī*, 齎人者，人必反齎之).<sup>322</sup> Fasting the heart-mind is seen as a method that mutually benefits persons; by responding in a non-evaluative way, others do not feel controlled and are affirmed in their own self-so-ness, which, as a consequence will not provoke them to afflict us.

Persons who respond from an empty, mirroring and wandering heart-mind and who is at rest in the middle of the pivot are excellent mediators in social relationships, because they do not add any emotional disruption to the situation and their presence is a source of tranquillity and stillness. Their mere presence is as such enough to teach persons about the genuine life; teaching is for the *Zhuāngzǐ* unintentional, in the sense that having the intention to teach others is already assuming too much and will be easily confused with controlling others.

It seems that being in the pivot will also be a position that will be of use in politics, as we are in the pivot able to emphasize with the other and the other’s perspectives. The *Zhuāngzǐ* does seem to share this point of view, but also sees how the political realm will make it hard for us to remain in the pivot. For understanding the problem with politics, we have to understand the relation between *zhēn* (真) and natural spontaneity. *Zhēn* denotes the true nature of things and is as a concept closely related to virtue (*dé*, 德), another term frequently used in the text which in an original sense means “efficacious power,” which for the *Zhuāngzǐ* refers to one’s natural inborn unique capacities. True autonomy is for the *Zhuāngzǐ* realized when we act spontaneously, drawing upon the resources of or natural inborn unique capacities which entails responding with efficacious power as we are affirming our own self-so-ness.

We have to consider that the *Zhuāngzǐ* frequently attacks and mocks the Mohist and Confucian Masters, who particularly disagreed on the nature of political obligation. While Confucians emphasize politics as a moral obligation that

<sup>321</sup>Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 26, 64

<sup>322</sup>Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 25

originates from one's specific role, the Mohists saw it as a natural obligation derived from impartial moral principles. For the *Zhuāngzǐ*, these "Rúmò" Masters all were making the same mistake: they all made the heart-mind dependent on specific patterns of *shīfēi*-distinctions and failed to see that these artificial distinctions construct a confined, anxious, and limited self.

Petty rulers are depicted in the *Zhuāngzǐ* as persons who use wisdom to maintain their power of position, and the text tries to show that these persons are locked in their own perspective and dwell in their own self-righteousness. In a sense, the *Zhuāngzǐ* suggests that political power corrupts persons and changes their inborn nature, suggesting that persons do not tend to give up their position of power. This is why the *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that it is easier to change ourselves than others and that we should invest in mastering different anti-rebellious methods that are best suited for self-preservation. Dodging the bullet by transforming oneself into uselessness, - into a person who aligns themselves with others and does not enter into debates, is a fairly reliable strategy to secure one's natural lifespan. The only viable possibility we have is securing our own self-preservation and not adding any more confusion to the world. Bo Wang (2004) emphasizes this point:

*It is not that the Zhuangzi was not concerned with [social] order, but rather that he thinks this problem is not something he can consider, or that only after one's life is [relatively] safe and peaceful that [political and social] order can be considered. So he chooses to give up [the discussion of order], or we could say temporarily give it up. This attitude of "giving up" allows him to take a relaxed approach in the world, which means that he can keep an appropriate distance from it.<sup>323</sup>*

Wang observes that the *Zhuāngzǐ* recognizes the need for genuine pretending and hiding our Virtuosity (*dé*, 德) in order to remain aligned with others. I think this passage also particularly shows that the Zhuangzian project is not ethical but realistic. Where Levinas interprets the resistance of the Face as pure goodness and infinite responsibility to the Other, the *Zhuāngzǐ* proposes being in the middle of the pivot to preserve one's own life and opening oneself to the entire universe so that we can respond to life without being deluded.

<sup>323</sup>Wang, Bo. 庄子哲学 (2004), 23 quoted in: D'Ambrosio, P. & Moeller H.G. "Authority without Authenticity: The *Zhuangzi's* Genuine Pretending as Socio-Political Strategy" *Religions* 9, (2018): 1-11

The technique of genuine pretending is a practical strategy to preserve one's own life and not be affected by the politics of competition and desire for power. The technique is particularly suitable when dealing with tyrants and oppressors or those who are unlikely to criticize their own attitude. However, the *Zhuāngzǐ* also leaves room for the "clear-sighted sovereign" whose achievements are effective and invisible, indicating that the *Zhuāngzǐ* recognizes that withdrawing from political life is not a lone ideal. The sage ruler can:

功蓋天下而似不自己，化貸萬物而民弗恃，有莫舉名，使物自喜，立乎不測，而遊於無有者也。

*cover all the world, but they seem not to come from himself. He transforms all things, and yet the people do not rely upon him. There is something unnameable about him that allows all creatures to delight in themselves. He establishes his footing in the unfathomable and roams where nothing at all exists.*<sup>324</sup>

The rulers who roam freely can, thus, empower each individual in their rightness, indicating that they refrain from criticizing them and judging them wrong. Rulers can regulate the community without relying on their singular perspective, which can only mean they issue regulations, standards and laws that align the different perspectives. Yet, even when the rulers have adopted the strategy of fasting the heart-mind and have mastered keeping their heart-mind at ease, they will remain a potential target for violence and aggression as long as there are still persons who have not yet mastered the Course. The *Zhuāngzǐ*, therefore, concludes that rulers cannot be truly free, but can, when they have transformed their heart-mind, "roam freely in [their] cage." Politics is, thus, always the sacrifice of one's own freedom, a risking of one's self-preservation for the sake of society.

Politics as such does not align with the overall project of the *Zhuāngzǐ* in which we can freely and creatively respond to the endless range of *shífēi* perspectives without becoming entangled and affected by them. Navigating the world in a relaxed way is what the *Zhuāngzǐ* calls "carefree wandering," (*xíāoyáoyóu*, 逍遙遊). Carefree wandering is a state that results from being in the pivot of *dào*: it refers to a detached heart-mind that can look at the different perspectives from a distance and can play with a variety of perspectives to align them. This meandering and playful approach to life that D'Ambrosio and Moeller call

<sup>324</sup>Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 51

“genuine pretending.”<sup>325</sup> A genuine pretender is able to playfully and skilfully engage with the different perspectives from a neutral, non-committed position.

## §4.11 Adepts Who Do Not Rely on the Eyes or Heart-Mind

In this section, I will show how the person whose heart-mind is at rest in the middle of the pivot occupies an “objective perspectivism” and lets the different perspectives “illuminate the obvious,” (*Yiming*, 以明)<sup>326</sup> this means that, from the pivot, one sees that debates over what is right/beneficial/comparable are mere expressions of opinions issued from a situated context. In the pivot, the person lets the different perspectives debate about what is right and wrong. What perspective A affirms, is denied by perspective B, which, simultaneously means that A denies what B affirms, revealing that A and B both are wrong and right at the same time. The affirmation and denial of a perspective is only an opinion produced in relation to (an) other perspective(s).

Persons in the pivot do not show any preference for a particular perspective, but instead “[go] by the rightness of the present “this,” (*Yi yinshi ye*, 亦因是也)<sup>327</sup> which means that they in each situation assesses the best way in which things fit together. D’Ambrosio and Moeller call the specific attitude of the Sage who is in the middle of the pivot “genuine pretending,” an attitude in which the pretender “pursues no selfish goal – he has no hidden agenda, no mission to complete, no ideology to impose,” and is as such not attached to his position or role. D’Ambrosio and Moeller further specify this position as follows:

*Pretending here can be understood in the way that children play, that is, without attachment to whatever is temporarily adopted, recognizing both the contingency and transience of transformations. The “genuineness” of genuine pretending is reflected in a child’s play as well. Children take on their roles and actually “become” them, but again only while affirming the contingency and transience of their roles.<sup>328</sup>*

<sup>325</sup> D’Ambrosio, P. & Moeller, H.G. *Authority without Authenticity*, 1-11

<sup>326</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 12

<sup>327</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 12

<sup>328</sup> D’Ambrosio & Moeller, *Authority without Authenticity*, 7

I would however add to this explanation that genuine pretending is responding to the world from an attitude of emotional equanimity, it is a mature spontaneity which the child lacks. Children often do not have control over their emotions and are as such not good examples of persons who are *at rest* in the middle. Fasting the heart-mind as a method of genuine pretending is a trained spontaneity that does not come easily, even when it is the most natural method to approach external constraints.

Genuine pretending is an attitude that requires a detachment from socially approved aspirations such as success and requires the ability to train the heart-mind, a practice that not all persons will readily adopt. The different parables and stories of the attitude of the Sage therefore emphasize the benefits of this approach, even though we have to recognize that expecting or clinging to beneficial results from fasting our heart-mind is still a sign of having a fixed heart-mind.

The Sage is depicted as a person fully immersed in the world but who acts from an attitude of *wúwéi* (無為). Commonly translated as “without action” or “effortless action,” this term depicts the person who responds to the unfolding of a situation without clinging to a particular identity and as such creates a perspective in which the Sage is open to any identity. The prototype of the person in a state of *wúwéi* is Cook Ding:

庖丁為文惠君解牛，手之所觸，肩之所倚，足之所履，膝之所踣，砉然騞然，奏刀騞然，莫不中音。合於《桑林》之舞，乃中《經首》之會。文惠君曰：「譔！善哉！技蓋至此乎？」庖丁釋刀對曰：「臣之所好者道也，進乎技矣。始臣之解牛之時，所見无非牛者。三年之後，未嘗見全牛也。方今之時，臣以神遇，而不以目視，官知止而神欲行。依乎天理，批大郤，導大窾，因其固然。技經肯綮之未嘗，而況大軋乎！良庖歲更刀，割也；族庖月更刀，折也。今臣之刀十九年矣，所解數千牛矣，而刀刃若新發於硎。彼節者有間，而刀刃者無厚，以無厚入有間，恢恢乎其於遊刃必有餘地矣，是以十九年而刀刃若新發於硎。雖然，每至於族，吾見其難為，怵然為戒，視為止，行為遲。動刀甚微，謾然已解，如土委地。提刀而立，為之四顧，為之躊躇滿志，善刀而藏之。」文惠君曰：「善哉！吾聞庖丁之言，得養生焉。」

*The cook was carving up an ox for King Hui of Liang. Wherever his hand smacked it, wherever his shoulder leaned into it, wherever his foot braced it, wherever his knee pressed it, the thwacking tones of flesh falling from bone would echo, the knife would whiz through with its resonant thwing, each stroke ringing out the perfect note, attuned to the "Dance of the Mulberry Grove" or the "Jingshou Chorus" of the ancient sage-kings. The king said, "Ah! It is wonderful that skill can reach such heights!" The cook put down his knife and said, "What I love is the Course, something that advances beyond mere skill. When I first started cutting up oxen, all I looked at for three years was oxen, and yet still I was unable to see all there was to see in an ox. But now I encounter it with the spirit rather than scrutinizing it with the eyes. My understanding consciousness, beholden to its specific purpose, comes to a halt, and thus the promptings of the spirit begin to flow. I depend on Heaven's unwrought perforations and strike the larger gaps, following along with the broader hollows. I go by how they already are, playing them as they lay. So my knife has never had to cut through the knotted nodes where the warp hits the weave, much less the gnarled joints of bone. A good cook changes his blade once a year: he slices. An ordinary cook changes his blade once a month: he hacks. I have been using this same blade for nineteen years, cutting up thousands of oxen, and yet it is still as the day it came off the whetstone. For the joints have spaces within them, and the very edge of the blade has no thickness at all. When what has no thickness enters into an empty space, it is vast and open, with more than enough room for the play of the blade. That is why my knife is still as sharp as it if had just come off the whetstone, even after nineteen years. Nonetheless, whenever I come to a clustered tangle, realizing that it is difficult to do anything about it, I instead restrain myself as if terrified, until my seeing comes to a complete halt. My activity slows, and the blade moves ever so slightly. Then all at once, I find the ox already dismembered at my feet like clumps of soil scattered on the ground. I retract the blade and stand there gazing at my work arrayed all around me, dawdling over it with satisfaction. Then I wipe off the blade and put it away."<sup>329</sup>*

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<sup>329</sup>Ziporyn, B. Zhuangzi, 22-23

This lengthy report of Cook Ding's extraordinary capacity to cut up oxen without effort gives us insight into how we can engage with the outside world in a spontaneous dispossessed way. Furthermore, Cook Ding can be seen as an example of a Sage who "uses various rights and wrongs to harmonize with others and yet remains at rest in the middle of Heaven the Potter's Wheel." (*Yǐ yīng wúqióng. Shì yì yī wúqióng, fēi yì yī wúqióng yě*, 以應無窮。是亦一無窮，非亦一無窮也).<sup>330</sup> Just like the potter who uses his wheel to make pots, the Butcher uses his knife to slice up an ox. Their crafts need to be interpreted here as a metaphor for the genuine person (*zhēnrén*, 真人), or a person of Virtuosity (*dé*, 德), who responds to the situation from an attitude of emotional equanimity and has a specific knack for navigating smoothly through the world. The Way, says Cook Ding, "advances beyond mere skill," indicating that the Cook takes the oxen as there are at this present moment and not as language or conventional concepts takes them to be.

When Cook Ding explains that when he first started to cut oxen, all he looked at "for three years was oxen," which in the context of traditional Chinese probably indicates that Cook Ding connected the right name to the right image. Deconstruction language and more specifically the belief that the right name correlates with the right image, is a very important moment in finding the pivot of *dào*, as the *Zhuāngzǐ* wants to show us what kind of creative freedom we will get when we let go of clinging to *shifēi*-distinctions and no longer rely on universal evaluative standards. Instead of clinging to distinctions, we should respond from an attitude of *wúwéi* (無為), in which we let things run their own course. In the pivot of *dào*, our thinking is no longer limited as the Sage recognizes that there is no essential or "right" meaning for words, which, as a consequence, allows the Sage to think in endless possibilities.

*Wúwéi* in the *Zhuāngzǐ* does not mean 'no action' but refers to a specific kind of non-interference with the unfolding of the world. The philologist Pang Pu notes that the term *wu* (無) might mean "without a definite plan" or "losing something that was initially possessed" but in its most ancient forms is probably related to "dance" (舞).<sup>331</sup> In the narrative of Cook Ding, the *Zhuāngzǐ* refers to ritual dances to emphasize the way Cook Ding is able to align his bodily gestures with the outside world. I think this might also refer to how genuine persons (*zhēnrén*, 真人) draw

<sup>330</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 14

<sup>331</sup> Pang P. (2005). "Yifenweisan" in *Zhijiao liushi zhounian ji bashiwu shouchen jinian wenji*, Shandong Education Press, 418-422

upon their own nature, their embodied efficacy, instead of acting out of moral or political obligation.

In the pivot, persons respect their sensory and rational limitations. The Sage firmly restrains the desire of the heart-mind and “stops at tallying.” Geaney argues that the *Zhuāngzǐ* regards tallying as the common ability of the heart-mind, and that the text describes tallying as “the closest thing to verification.”<sup>332</sup> The Sages, thus, use their heart-mind to access a situation, but at the same time restrain their heart-mind from overemphasizing its desire to turn things into objects of knowledge. While the *Zhuāngzǐ* rejects the heart-mind’s tendency to make fixed *shifēi*-distinctions based on emotions, it does allow for grading the situation (*lùn*, 論), explained by Ziporyn<sup>333</sup> The *Zhuāngzǐ* does not reject knowledge, but wants us to change our relation to knowledge, a change that requires a wandering heart-mind that does not cling to knowledge, language, and logic.

Being at rest in the middle of the pivot of *dào* (*dàoshū*, 道樞) is a position that changes the way the Sage relates to himself and the outside world. The illumination of the endless variety of perspectives of *shifēi*-distinctions and the recognition that what is “so” and “not so” are interchangeable and interdependent, enables the Sage to transcend these values and to find the pivot. In the pivot, humans temporarily forget any particular pattern of *shifēi*-distinctions, and respond to the perspectives from an empty, wandering and mirroring heart-mind.

Nevertheless, the Sages do act, but from an attitude of *wúwéi*, indicating that these Sages respond from their natural spontaneity, their natural capacity to harmonize the seemingly opposed perspectives by recognizing the disparate values that can be constructed. The Sages who “us[e] various rights and wrongs to harmonize with others,” responds to what other’s take their needs to be, a responsiveness that is the ultimate state of freedom because in the pivot, the Sages have lost “their selves.”

<sup>332</sup> Geaney, J. *On the Epistemology of the Senses*, 93

<sup>333</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 9



## §4.12 Non-Obstruction and Connection

We have seen that the Sage in the pivot no longer clings to human values and traditional conventions on language, logic, and knowledge. In the pivot, persons respond from an attitude of emotional equanimity and embrace doubt and indeterminacy as life itself. Instead of relying on rigid evaluative standards, the Sages draw upon their natural Virtuosity (*dé*, 德) and respond from an attitude of "effortless action" (*wúwéi*, 無為).

In this section I will specifically concentrate on how the different elements of Virtuosity, effortless action and carefree wandering relate to remaining at rest in the middle of the pivot. First of all, responding from the pivot entails that we no longer have a clogged heart-mind and have transcended all human values and conventional beliefs on language, knowledge, and logic. The deconstruction of language, moral values and knowledge liberates the heart-mind from its limitations and enables the heart-mind to move along within the social sphere in a detached and non-obstructive way.

The Way of wandering is a recognition that "understanding is merely a bastard son, obligations and agreements merely glue, Virtuosity is a mere continuation of something received, skill merely salesmanship" (*Gù shèngrén yǒu suǒ yóu, ér zhī wèi niè, yuē wèi jiāo, dé wèi jiē, gōng wèi shāng*, 故聖人有所遊,而知為孽,約為膠,德為接,工為商).<sup>334</sup> The Sage uses knowledge, social responsibilities and conventions in a provisional, non-committed way. Genuine pretending should however not be seen as being indifferent, the sages do draw *shifēi*-distinctions, but only in a very loose, practical and provisional way.

Retaining the position in the pivot, provides humans with the ability to be stable amid instability without trying to eliminate or control the flux of the moment or adding anything artificial to the situation. The *Zhuāngzǐ* calls this strategy "walking two roads" (*liǎngxíng*, 兩行) or finding the "hinge of the way" (*dàoshū*, 道樞) to "illuminate things in the light of heaven (*zhào zhī yú tiān*, 照之于天) and being identical to *dàtōng* (大通).<sup>335</sup> I will first analyse the philosophical meaning of "being identical to *dàtōng*," as this provides us with insight in how we can harmonize seemingly opposed perspectives. In the following passage, "being identical to *dàtōng* is explained:

<sup>334</sup>Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 38.

<sup>335</sup>Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 12

顏回曰：「回益矣。」仲尼曰：「何謂也？」曰：「回忘仁義矣。」曰：「可矣，猶未也。」他日復見，曰：「回益矣。」曰：「何謂也？」曰：「回忘禮樂矣。」曰：「可矣，猶未也。」他日復見，曰：「回益矣。」曰：「何謂也？」曰：「回坐忘矣。」仲尼蹴然曰：「何謂坐忘？」顏回曰：「墮肢體，黜聰明，離形去知，同於大通，此謂坐忘。」仲尼曰：「同則無好也，化則無常也。而果其賢乎！丘也請從而後也。」

*Yan Hui said, "I am making progress." Confucius said, "What do you mean?" Yan Hui said, "I have forgotten Humanity and Responsibility." Confucius said, "That's good, but you're still not there." Another day he came again and said, "I am making progress." "What do you mean?" "I have forgotten ritual and music." Confucius said, "That's good, but you're still not there." He returned another day and said yet again, "I am making progress." "What do you mean?" Yan Hui said, "I just sit and forget." Confucius jolted as if kicked, said, "What do you mean, you sit and forget?" Yan Hui said, "It's a dropping away of my limbs and torso, a chasing off of my sensory acuity, which disperses my physical form and ousts my understanding until I am the same as the Transforming Openness. This is what I call just sitting and forgetting." Confucius said, "The same as it? But then you are free of all preference! Transforming? But then you are free of all constancy! You truly are a worthy man! I beg to be accepted as your disciple."*

The passage in Chapter 6 of the *Zhuāngzǐ* identifies three different stages of forgetting (*wàng*, 忘): forgetting the sentiments of humaneness and rightness (*huí wàng rényì yǐ*, 回忘仁義矣) (stage 1 or 2), forgetting of rites and music (*huí wàng lǐ yuè yǐ*, 回忘禮樂矣), practices that work upon the natural feelings that are not yet moral in content<sup>336</sup> (stage 1 or 2) and "sitting and forgetting" (*huí zuò wàng yǐ*, 回坐忘矣), which is the last phase of forgetting (stage 3).

I will first concentrate on phase 3 of forgetting, in which the human person becomes the same as *dàtōng*. "Becoming or being the same" as *dàtōng* is first of all a coping strategy and not a spiritual or mystical state. Yan Hui is still Yan Hui; he has maintained his physical appearance and still has the human form. His transformation is an inner transformation, a change in the way he relates

<sup>336</sup>Wong, D. (2000). "Xunzi on Moral Motivation" In: T.C. Kline & P.J. Ivanhoe. *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*, Hackett, 149

to his heart-mind, his body and to the outside world. We can also discern that Confucius' exclamation that Yan Hui is a worthy man who one should follow is an implicit mockery of Confucius who is still the "nook and corner scholar," and still assumes that being worthy is preferable to being useless. The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that the Course cannot be captured in words but needs to be performed: it is an exercise in self-adaptation that transforms the heart-mind its relation to the body. Furthermore, while our inborn characteristics might resemble *dàtōng*, our circumstances, abilities and social position are unique, which is why we should not follow others, but follow our natural selves.

"Sitting and forgetting" is a state in which we no longer hold on to the distinctions "self-other" or "life-death" and are in a state of emotional tranquillity, a state in which we have made the heart-mind like dead ashes and made the body like dried wood. When we fast the heart-mind and let the organs, - which all have their natural desire-, take their turn in ruling us, we will become free of mental, personal, and social constraints. Key to the dialogue is "dispersing one's physical form and ousting one's understanding." Dispersing one's physical form is the movement from the *tǐ* (體)-body to the communal-body (*tōngtǐ*, 通體). *Tōng* (通) is translated as "thoroughness," but has in Chinese several meanings. In the *Zhuāngzǐ* *tōng* encompasses all there is, referring to a whole that contains more than its parts. *Tōng* signals connection, thoroughness, or pervasiveness and signifies as a concept the absence of demarcation.<sup>337</sup>

Residing in the common body entails the rejection of differences between things and recognizing the co-emergence of "this" and "that," of "life" and "death" of "happiness" and "unhappiness." The single (human) *tǐ* (體)-body is part of the larger corpus; that is created from the bodies of her ancestors and her future children and grandchildren. The single *tǐ* (體)-body is related to other human bodies through mutual labouring, by sharing food and by being in each other's co-presence. In the *Zhuāngzǐ* the communal body has a broader metaphorical meaning and also refers to the interdependency between opposites, the interlocking of the different perspectives and the transformation of meaning.<sup>338</sup> Becoming one with *dàtōng* is the accomplishment of a wandering, empty and mirroring heart-mind that is not seeking after an artificial and restricted completion. The *Zhuāngzǐ* treats thus difference *as difference* and not as oppositional to sameness. Difference

<sup>337</sup> Hong, L.C. "Clearing up Obstructions: An Image Schema Approach to the Concept of 'Datong' 大通 in Chapter 6 of the *Zhuangzi*" *Asian Philosophy* 23 No 3, (2013):281.

<sup>338</sup> Sommer, D. *Concepts of the Body in the Zhuangzi*, 224

only is neutralized or becomes sameness when humans artificially group things together and cling to evaluative *shifēi*-distinctions.

“Sitting and forgetting” does not refer to not making distinctions between things; making distinctions between things is what makes us human. The aim of sitting and forgetting is that we do not evaluate the distinctions and cling to that what is “right” or “good” or “desirable.” Understanding means here “cleverness,” or “keenness of sight and hearing,” (*cōngmíng*, 聰明)<sup>339</sup> that leads to clinging to objects of knowledge (*zhī*, 知). Sitting and forgetting implies freeing ourselves from the limitations that our thinking projects in concepts. Knowledge should only be used to assess a current situation; the meaning of words should be forgotten when we have grasped the meaning in the ongoing moment. This is only possible when we have emptied our hearts-mind and have practiced stillness.

The Daoist sage is the one who is able to attune to the “self-so-ness” of each thing but is not naïve or destined to be killed by others. We must remember that Master Zhuang Zhou assumingly responded fiercely to the messenger who informed him of the offer of King Wei. Master Zhuang does not lament over those who want to “kill” him by fixing his heart-mind and “piercing” his heart-mind with desire for fame and remuneration, but specifically keeps these influences at a distance. The Sages do not let others penetrate holes in them for the sake of satisfying some need these others have.

This aligns with Moeller’s interpretation, which is that the Hundun parable in the text is not only a parody, but also satire in its purest form.<sup>340</sup> First, Moeller places the parable in its historical context by classifying it as a “charter myth,” a parody of mythological tales that were well-known in the Warring States Period. Hundun (*hùndùn*, 混沌) is depicted in Chinese mythology as a “faceless being” that corresponds to the self-generating power of the origin of the cosmos. The *Zhuāngzǐ*, however, turns the mythological character of Hundun into a parody by combining it with the “sage kings” who – ultimately – kill the very origin of the cosmos by trying to give him a face.

Moeller observes that the Hundun parable can be read as a parody of all lineages of thought that rely on some form of cosmological theory of origins or

<sup>339</sup> Hong, L. *Clearing up Obstructions*, 283

<sup>340</sup> Moeller, H.G. “Hundun’s Mistake: Satire and Sanity in the *Zhuangzi*” *Philosophy East & West* 67 No 3, (2017):783-800

mythological tales of sage kings who express perfect moral behaviour to justify their ideals. Especially the use of the words “all men have” (*rénjiēyǒu*, 人皆有) is an implicit mockery of the Masters who claim that humans are endowed with special qualities. The parable can, therefore, be considered a parody of a charter myth – a myth that serves to justify the status quo of a society and express the prejudices and desires of the ruling class. Instead of elevating the three earliest lofty sage kings, the *Zhuāngzǐ* depicts the emperors *Shu* (儻) and *Hu* (忽) as goofy idiots, who, in their act of ultimate benevolence, kill Hundun by drilling holes in him because his nature is not “human enough.” However, as Moeller illustrates, the Hundun parable can also be interpreted from the Zhuangzian attitude of *wúwéi*, in which the sage resists the temptation to assign himself a fixed identity. Those good at holding onto “what is central to them” keep their distance from attempts to fixate them in any way but remain in a state of *wúwéi*. Hundun, however, makes the mistake of being hospitable to emperors with a fixed idea of what human nature looks like and, as such, Hundun cannot resist the penetrations and loses his great virtuosity. The art of *dào* (*dàoshù*, 道術) is, thus, not only trusting the natural unfolding of the universe, but also the ability not to be disturbed by inside and outside penetrations. The persons in the pivot are thus fully committed but keep their sanity.

When we forget the evaluative schemes of righteousness and benevolence as the culprits of unnecessary suffering, we have already taken a very big step towards becoming free from mental, personal, and social constraints. Forgetting music and ritual is an important next step to become free of constraints. Music and ritual refer to the Confucian social etiquette, formalizing behavioural patterns to harmonize social relations. Ritual and music are embodiments of humaneness and justice but are seen in the *Zhuāngzǐ* as less problematic. Music for example is a natural human activity that nourishes friendship. We should however treat them as natural expressions and not as a standard or instrument that we can use to streamline relations.

The three stages of forgetting are a reversal of the forgotten *dào*, its regeneration. This means that we first should forget humanness and righteousness, which is the stage when right and wrong began to appear in the heart-minds of persons and the Way was destroyed. Ritual and music are in a sense benign, as the fasting of the heart-mind can also be seen as a kind of ritual or committed practice. Nevertheless, when we cling to them and perform these because of expected outcome, we are not genuinely free from constraints.

When we are the same as *dàtōng* we let *dào* flow through us and we can hold to the "pivot of *dào*."

### §4.13 The Pivot of *Dào*

In this chapter I have presented the *Zhuāngzǐ* as an important resource for comparative philosophy. Comparative philosophy compares a variety of sometimes incompatible perspectives that deems concepts from disparate cultural philosophical traditions "comparable" or "not comparable," "similar" or "different". This present study has highlighted that it is particularly important for comparative philosophy not to approach the other from a fixed normative framework or to essentialize difference.

In this Chapter I have concentrated on explaining what it means to be at rest in the pivot of *dào* on the basis of a crucial passage in the *Zhuāngzǐ* which describes how we can harmonize seemingly incompatible perspectives. Throughout this chapter I have described this position as an "objective perspectivism," in which the person responds to the other from an attitude of emotional equinity. I will now synthesize the different findings of this chapter and will discuss what it specifically means to be in the pivot. I will start with quoting the crucial passage:

物無非彼，物無非是。自彼則不見，自知則知之。故曰：彼出於是，是亦因彼。彼是，方生之說也。雖然，方生方死，方死方生；方可方不可，方不可方可；因是因非，因非因是。是以聖人不由，而照之于天，亦因是也。是亦彼也，彼亦是也。彼亦一是非，此亦一是非。果且有彼是乎哉？果且無彼是乎哉？彼是莫得其偶，謂之道樞。樞始得其環中，以應無窮。是亦一無窮，非亦一無窮也。故曰「莫若以明」。

*There is no being that is not "that." There is no being that is not "this." But one cannot be seeing these from the perspective of "that": one knows them only from "this," [i.e., from one's own perspective]. Thus, we can say: "That" emerges from "this," and "this" follows from "that." This is the theory of the simultaneous generation of "this" and "that." But by the same token, their simultaneous generation is their simultaneous destruction, and vice versa. Simultaneous affirmability is simultaneous negatability, and vice versa. What is circumstantially right is also circumstantially wrong,*

*and vice versa. Thus, the Sage does not proceed from any one of them alone but instead lets them all bask in the broad daylight of Heaven. And that too is only a case of going by the rightness of the present "this."*

*"This" is also a "that." "That" is also a "this." "THAT" posits a "this" and a "that" – a right and wrong – of its own. But "THIS" also posits a "this" and a "that" – a right and a wrong – of its own. So is there really any "that" versus "this," any right versus wrong? Or is there really no "that" versus "this"? When "this" and "that" – right and wrong – are no longer coupled as opposites – that is called the Course as Axis, the axis of all courses. When this axis [pivot] finds its place in the center, it responds to all the endless things it confronts, thwarted by none. For it has an endless supply of "rights," and an endless supply of "wrongs." Thus, I say, nothing compares to the Illumination of the Obvious.<sup>341</sup>*

We can now see that the *Zhuāngzǐ* here tries to show that we cannot rely on any meta-standard that can evaluate *shifēi*-judgments. Debates on what is "right" and "wrong" are deluded because what is "right" is dependent upon a particular perspective and certain circumstances. What is right from one perspective is wrong from a different perspective, revealing that *shifēi*-judgments are not fixed and are always underdetermined. Every perspective is relative to a particular context and consists of certain preferences of what is "this" and "that," in which the *Zhuāngzǐ* emphasizes that these preferences are not only cognitive, but also emotional commitments.

Persons in the pivot are only committed to take the situation as it is and have the ability to see how the different disputations are mere opinions and express only preferences. These Sages "harmonizes with others," by using "various right and wrongs," indicating that the sage does not prefer a certain method or approach but is familiar with a variety of methodologies and approaches. In this chapter I have tried however to show that the *Zhuāngzǐ* does have a method, which is more a position or a way of life that embodies beliefs, compartments, and commitments. The Sage at the pivot uses the method of "the radiance of drift and doubt" (*gùyízhīyào*, 故疑之耀) and uses the "illumination of the Obvious" (*Yíming*, 以明) and "[goes] by the rightness of the present "this" (*Yīnshì*, 因是).

<sup>341</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 12.

The difference between the *Rúmò*-scholars and the *Zhuāngzǐ* is that the latter argues that we cannot know beforehand what “that” is and “this”, “right” or “wrong,” but that these distinctions are mere convenient ways to navigate a particular situation. *Yīnshì* 因是 thus means being responsive to the situation, which requires an attitude of flexibility and creativity. The *Zhuāngzǐ* gives a very good example between being responsive to the situation and clinging to predetermined, rigid distinctions:

已而不知其然，謂之道。勞神明為一，而不知其同也，謂之朝三。何謂朝三？曰狙公賦茅，曰：「朝三而莫四。」眾狙皆怒。曰：「然則朝四而莫三。」眾狙皆悅。名實未虧，而喜怒為用，亦因是也。是以聖人和之以是非，而休乎天鈞，是之謂兩行

*But to labour your spirit trying to make all things one, without realizing that it is all the same [whether you do so or not], is called “Three in the Morning.” What is Three in the Morning? A monkey trainer was distributing chestnuts. He said, “I’ll give you three in the morning and four in the evening.” The monkeys were furious. “Well then,” he said, “I’ll give you four in the morning and three in the evening.” The monkeys were delighted. This change of description and arrangement caused no loss, but in one case it brought anger and in another delight. Thus, the Sage uses various rights and wrongs to harmonize with others and yet remains at rest in the middle of Heaven the Potter’s Wheel. This is “Walking Two Roads.”<sup>342</sup>*

The persons who are at rest in the pivot, see knowledge as a convenient way to communicate with others, not as something that is objectively so, as our limited perspective prevents us from ultimately knowing what is right/wrong/this/that. Distinctions are furthermore not rigid opposed terms but are interdependent and often ambiguous. In a situation it might be that a variety of, seemingly opposed perspectives, are appropriate or right. In the pivot, we are able to value pluralism and indeterminacy and are, as a consequence, most open to the other and the other’s perspectives.

The pivot is the broadest perspective in which persons are the most open to the other and the other’s perspectives and can be seen as an objective perspective in which they are freed from unwanted bias. A requirement for being open is not being dogmatic and to be aware of one’s implicit biases. The persons in the pivot

<sup>342</sup> *Zhuangzi*, 14



who constantly are committed to keeping their heart-mind at rest are keenly aware of how their emotions, expectations and beliefs influence the encounter with the other and try to respond spontaneously to the situation.

In the place, called in the text the “pivot of *dào*,” which provides humans a stance from where they at once recognizes that other individual perspectives are limited by their circumstances, while at the same time acknowledging that they are circumstantially valid. Harmonizing thus means that we attune to the preferences of each perspective and respond to them without condemning their preferences. The person in the pivot has the flexibility to approach comparative philosophy from a plurality of perspectives. We should first remember that, for the *Zhuāngzǐ*, Heaven does not make distinctions, but nourishes all the myriad things. It generates, transforms, and changes all beings and all existence, but remains itself untransformed. Human consciousness and language create distinctions and humans mistakenly take their heart-minds as the governor of the other organs. Taking the heart-mind as the governor leads to clinging to objects of knowledge that are mis-taken as necessary to attaining social order and harmony. Instead of clinging to these artificial distinctions and classifications, we should adopt a conscious perspective that moves along with the fleeting temporal things in a tranquil and detached way.

The Sages recognize that valuing “this” is dependent upon a situationally proper assessment of “that,” and thus feels no need to justify or defend their position. They also recognize that their preference for “this” is a situational choice and can easily become a “that” in the next moment. Because the Sages have freed themselves from preferences and constancy, these Sages are able to “shed an impartial light on things,” which gives the Sage the advantage of seeing things very clearly and free from bias.

The Sage’s perspective is a flexible position that can see “through” things in a way and is as such the most objective, while still being a human perspective, because the person in the pivot sees that there is ultimately no ground to favour only one of the many perspectives. Instead of seeing self and other as oppositional alternatives, the Sage in the pivot thus can see their relatedness, as they both affirm what they prefer and deny what they do not prefer. Their affirmations and denials are as such interchangeable and are mere opinions. The *Zhuāngzǐ* raises questions that challenge epistemological claims and criticizes philosophical debates that try to discern what is ultimately “this/that,” “so/not so” or “right/wrong.” The text attacks one of the most important features

of philosophy as it questions the very task of philosophy as aiming for truth and transparency.

Philosophy is in the *Zhuāngzǐ* related to embracing doubt and indeterminacy as a way of life and promotes an extensive form of self-adaptation and self-liberation to restore the natural interconnectedness of the myriad things. The Sage resonates with the infinite process of change and transformation, a following along that experiences more than that can be captured in words or can be known. In the pivot, these persons remove the blockages between the different perspectives, and use "the same as the transforming oneness," (*dàtōng*, 大通) implying that they do not impede any perspective and let the perspectives exist in their own right. The Sages also recognize that the preferences of others can easily change and as such respond each time to them from the current situation. In the pivot of *dào*, persons have emptied themselves of all expectations and prejudices and open themselves completely to what is presented to them. For the *Zhuāngzǐ*, this is what it means to go along with transformation and change and to find the connection between the different perspectives.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* recognizes that language cannot adequately capture reality; interpretation is always a mis- or re-presentation, particularly because transformation from one thing into another cannot be adequately captured in fixed distinctions. This is also the point of the famous butterfly parable. The seamless transformation from dreaming that I am a butterfly and awaking as myself is a transformation in which awakening is seen as reality and dreaming as fiction. Treating things equally does not mean that there is no distinction between being awake and dreaming, between being a butterfly and being a Master Zhuang. Treating things equally frees us from preferring or giving more weight to one side of the transformation than the other.

In the same sense, finding the pivot of *dào* dissolves the self-other opposition. Treating the other and myself equally recognizes that I can only be myself when there are others, without others I am no-self. What I call me is in my perspective "myself," whereas in the perspective of my brother "me" refers to "him." Being in the pivot enables us to see that we are simultaneously self and other, indicating that the self-other dichotomy is an artificially constructed opposition.

Scholars who claim that the text is committed to scepticism, or embraces relativism, are all trapped in dichotomies of what is "so" and "not so" and fail to see the overall intent of the *Zhuāngzǐ*. In the pivot, we recognize that there

is not a very clear distinction between the perspective that claims that “the *Zhuāngzǐ* is a sceptic,” and the perspective that claims that “the *Zhuāngzǐ* is not a sceptic” (or only a sceptic in a specific way, or to highlight something). This point also applies to the *Zhuāngzǐ*’s linguistic scepticism, which is not meant as a rhetorical trick but is the natural outcome of the cultivation of the peaceful heart-mind that recognizes that reality cannot be adequately conveyed in terms of distinctions. The text’s linguistic scepticism is not just philosophical standpoint – as conceived by *Zhuāngzǐ*’s best friend Huizi, used merely to win an argument.

I would even suggest that the *Zhuāngzǐ*’s linguistic scepticism is not a therapeutic strategy to make its readers sensitive to the limitations of language, as Wong (2017) and Schwitzgebel (1996) argue, as this suggests that the *Zhuāngzǐ*’s scepticism is a mere rhetorical trick. I think the key to the text’s use of linguistic scepticism is that, through emptying, wandering, and mirroring, such scepticism is the only way the sages can speak without disturbing their heart-mind. Letting go of rigid distinctions, giving up on preferences and finding the pivot of *dào* changes our language: our use of language in the pivot can only be a specific kind of detached, non-involved language that communicates but does not cling to preferences and standards.

The language used by a person who embodies *dào* should adapt itself to the ongoing process of transformation, implying that the meaning of words is always provisional. Language should not be used to stir up a debate or win an argument but should be aimed at communicating that which at this moment is present(ed). Language spoken by a person who embodies *dào* and has fasted his heart-mind is aimed at informing the listener rather than convincing the listener. Language is as such an instrument to facilitate communication and is only a description of the current, fleeting temporal situation. Language as a means of communication is, therefore, not fundamentally different from the chirping of baby birds. The *Zhuāngzǐ* rejects the scholarly model, – which leads to disputation, bickering and quarrelling–, because it uses language to impose artificial standards on the world, preventing the myriad things from unfolding their ‘self-so-ness’ and causing us unnecessary frustration and anxiety.

Instead of matching words with proper action, we should rely on “spill over-goblet words” (*zhīyán*, 卮言); that is, words that, like a hinged vessel, tip over when they become full and fill themselves when empty. Spill over-goblet words are described in the *Miscellaneous Chapters* as words that “give forth [new

meanings] constantly, harmonizing them all through their Heavenly Transitions" (*Zhī yán rì chū, hé yǐ tiān ní*, 卮言日出, 和以天倪).<sup>343</sup> The meaning of words is context- and speaker dependent; they are not exchangeable but mark a unique moment in time. True language is not the "rectification of names" in which the father fulfils the specific duties of being a father and a son fulfils his; true language is when this particular father in this particular situation praises his son because his son does something in this particular situation that is remarkable at this moment in time.

Spill over-goblet words, thus, hold meaning for a particular person in a particular situation and in a specific moment in time. This aspect aligns with the observation that the *Zhuāngzǐ* does not reject language nor claims that we should never make *shīfēi*-distinctions. Making *shīfēi*-distinctions is crucial for humans to navigate their lives; even the *Zhuāngzǐ* as a text would become utterly meaningless without making distinctions. However, the *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that when we attune to *dào* and roam freely with an unbounded heart-mind, our language can only mirror this unboundedness. There is no need to rectify names because, when we roam with a peaceful mind, we attune to the spontaneous "self-so-ness" of the world and can trust in the meaning we receive from it. Instead of preferring one kind of meaning, or one kind of interpretation, we should let go of all our expectations and beliefs and approach that what is other in the most open, detached way. Only when we no longer cling to our own perspective and preferences are we able to transcend ourselves and understand and use an endless range of perspectives.

To summarize, the Sages as the comparative philosophers who are at rest in the middle of the pivot, do make distinctions, but do not cling to them as they recognize that human language cannot adequately capture reality. Instead, these Sages use language to describe, to express a particular, provisional perspective that is faithful to the openness created in the pivot. Truthful language, - not signifying "true language", but a "being faithful to"-, is language that is open to change and is driven by the recognition that the relation between meaning and that which it describes is never fixed. When we experience the world as moments of emergence, we need to trust that the language used to express those emergences can arise from the circumstances of the event itself, without needing to be pre-emptively shaped to represent reality in accreted modes.

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<sup>343</sup> Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 114.

Spill over-goblet words are open to change and ascribe a loose meaning to a thing. This playful, loose language is particularly evoked language that is ambiguous, distils seriousness and emphasizes indeterminacy. Indirect, implicit, and ambiguous language is an important instrument for conveying multiple forms of messages that allow for the “righteousness” of different perspectives. The language of persons who embody *dào* attunes to the different perspectives by according to their own understanding, which is why the *Zhuāngzǐ* states that the sage “says something by saying nothing and says nothing by saying something.” This aspect is more evident in the *Zhuāngzǐ* as the recognition that there is always something “left undivided.”

Thus, persons who embody *dào*, empathize with all perspectives by affirming the circumstantial rightness of these perspectives, but at the same restrain their heart-mind from becoming fixed and keep themselves from entering into a debate. Debates do not reveal what is ultimate right, but are only an interplay between affirmation and denials that stir up intense emotions. Emotions in comparative philosophy are personal, but at the same time tell us something about clinging to particular *shīfēi*-distinctions. The *Zhuāngzǐ* offers a challenge to philosophers who are emotionally committed to their preferred perspective and try to discern right perspectives from wrong ones. Instead, the *Zhuāngzǐ* wants us to embody doubt and indeterminacy as a way of life, so that we can equalize all perspectives through intense self-adaptation and self-transformation and urges us not to engage in any debate. This challenges some important aspects of philosophy such as the search for truth and the desire to find universal, neutral standards that can ensure how to do (comparative) philosophy.

I will pick up on this topic in Chapter Five, but for now, we can say that being in the pivot enables us to see that perspectives argued over in a scholarly debate have some rightness in them and are equally different in their strategies of approaching a text. As comparative philosophers, we do not need to affirm the correctness of one of them which necessarily leads to denying the correctness of the other, but we can simply highlight the value of each perspective and the way they shed light on a text from a different angle. This implies exactly what the *Zhuāngzǐ* calls “Walking Two Roads.”

The *Zhuāngzǐ* is an important resource to comparative philosophy because the text teaches us how to embrace an all-encompassing perspective or a realist perspective in which we have freed ourselves from as much bias as possible. Through the deconstruction of language, logic and morality, the self can

liberate itself from its artificial limitations and can transcend its perspective. In the pivot of *dào*, we can accept that each perspective is circumstantial and sheds a partial light on reality and recognize that what perspective A affirms is denied by perspective B, which reveals that A and B both affirm and deny at the same time. Being at rest in the middle of the pivot enables us to see how perspectives come about and how the various rights and wrongs are endless in nature, revealing that there is no true ground for claiming the ultimate rightness of any perspective.

The Sages, who are at rest in the pivot, do not claim the ultimate truth, nor enter in a debate to affirm a particular perspective and to deny the other ones, but use their words to communicate and align different perspectives. The Sage remains in a position in which all the perspectives are recognized as limited perspectives but are at the same time affirmed in their rightness, a position in which the self and other are no longer approached as oppositional terms, but as interconnected terms.

## §4.14 Conclusion

In this Chapter, I have discussed the significance of the pivot of *dào* as the most important technique in the *Zhuāngzǐ* to harmonize seemingly opposed perspectives. Key to understanding the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s perspectivism as a position that consists of certain beliefs, compartments, and commitments, is its belief that each perspective is limited and produced by particular and circumstantially situated preferences of what is "so" and "not so." The *Zhuāngzǐ* is not merely interesting when placed in its cultural context, but also offers us a fundamental reorientation for comparative philosophy. I have shown how being at rest in the middle of the pivot can help us to shed light on debates in comparative philosophy from multiple angles so that we can see how these perspectives are not opposed to each other but are equally different. These topics will be rehearsed in Chapter 5 when I will discuss the findings of this current study in the light of the research question and its sub-questions.

The rhetorical style of the *Zhuāngzǐ* is highly appreciated today, but the text itself needs to be contextualized within the Warring States Period and the Masters' literature. The *Zhuāngzǐ* needs to be viewed as a reaction to Confucianism, Mohism and to the *Lǎozǐ*, but is unique in its emphasis on becoming free of mental, personal, and social constraints. Instead of interpreting the *Zhuāngzǐ*

as a text that endorse withdrawal from social relationships and political life, I have interpreted the *Zhuāngzǐ* as a text that proposes coping strategies to help us to relate differently and more harmoniously to different relationships. Key for the *Zhuāngzǐ* is the acceptance of fate, which is constituted by the natural love and devotion we feel for our parents and loved ones and the acceptance of our social responsibilities. We have a human form, and humans are mandated to live in the human community. Self-adaptation not only involves acceptance of fate but also the fasting of the heart-mind and nourishing what is central to us, which is nourishing our vital energy. But the purpose of these efforts is precisely the acquisition of the ability to recognize the perspectives of others, so that way may refrain from harming them and do justice to them.

Similarly to the *Dàodéjīng*, the *Zhuāngzǐ* urges us to follow *dào* and celebrate the existence of the myriad things in the world and the existence of human life. Central to understanding the *Zhuāngzǐ* is its rejection of intellectual disputation (*biàn*, 辯), the prevalent method that justifies fixed ideals and socio-political programs. Masters such as Mozi and Mencius claim that their specific ideals were those that the Course prescribed, which led to the fierce rejection of ideals and moral principles of other lineages of thought (*jiā*, 家).

The *Zhuāngzǐ* attempts to describe *dào* from the perspective of human life and relates *dào* to Virtuousity (*dé*, 德): the ability to see a situation from spirit and act from a state of emotional equanimity, The *Zhuāngzǐ* is distinguished from other Masters texts by its uniquely different solution to the challenge of political and social instability. While the other Masters plead for the following of fixed norms or adhering to universal standards of rightness, the *Zhuāngzǐ* questions the ability of humans to arbitrate right and wrong. The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that Heaven created all things and living beings as singular, which profoundly influences the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s philosophy of the good life and his strategy of "treating all things as equal." Based on reality, which consists of a plurality of singular, generally incompatible perspectives, the *Zhuāngzǐ* aims to liberate the individual from his/her unnecessary anxieties and frustration.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* offers a realistic philosophy of the good life that argues that humans can only be content and free from constraints through radical self-adaptation and the affirmation of life. The explicit recognition is that all perspectives of the world are manifestations of *dào* and need, therefore, to be regarded as natural. The historically conditioned temptation to add something to nature by imposing fixed moral norms prevents us from becoming truly in

accord with how nature has generated the unique, myriad things and causes us to “sprout weeds.” The *Zhuāngzǐ* observes that the heart-mind can be, just like the eyes and the ears, deaf and blind to reality. Instead of taking the heart-mind as the governor of the other organs, we should restore the natural vitality of the heart-mind by practicing emptying, wandering, and mirroring.

Although the “fasting of the heart-mind” seems to restrain the heart-mind’s ability to interact with the world and to manage the world – the sages presented in the text are not passive; they are skilful artists who perform their daily activities smoothly, beautifully and without experiencing resistance. Instead of concentrating on predetermined knowledge, values, aims or goals, the Sage’s peaceful heart-mind switches its attention from one’s own personal body to the communal body, enabling the Sage is able to embrace all other perspectives in his own perspective.

Becoming free of preferences and free of constancy enables the Sage to respond from an impartial and therefore clearer situation in which he sees what can be mastered and what not, a position that calls for a “contrapuntal awareness” in which we reflect on a variety of voices, interests, and identities. The *Zhuāngzǐ* highlights this ability of “finding the pivot of *dào*” as a larger, more objective perspective that is preferred above being confined to a limited perspective. And it is primarily in this latter respect, the respect in which the full recognition of the validity and vitality of other perspectives, that the *Zhuāngzǐ* can, along with Levinas, make a needed contribution to comparative philosophy in the modern era. It is to that contribution which we now turn.



