

大殺曰。是因是也。成云亂而不損曰靈無道之謚故曰是因是也伯常騫曰。夫靈公有妻二人。同濫而浴。

釋文靈浴器史綰奉御而進所。至其搏幣而扶翼。成云公見史魚深懷愧悚假遣人搏挺幣帛令扶將羽翼慰而送之其慢若彼

之甚也。見賢人若此其肅也。是其所以為靈公也。成云又諡法德之精明曰靈狝韋曰。夫靈

公也。死卜葬於故墓。不卜葬於沙丘而吉。掘之數仞。得石槨焉。洗而視

之。有銘焉。曰。不矯其子。公奪而里之。釋文里居處也郭崇焘云古之葬者謂子孫無能獨依以保其墓靈公得而奪之夫靈

公之為靈也。久矣。之二人何足以識之。蘇輿云狝韋歸之前定言命言神者之所祖也

少知問於大小公。謂丘里之言。李云四井為邑四邑為丘五家為鄰五鄰為里丘里者。

合十姓百名。而以風氣。合異以為同。宣云合十百為丘里散同以為異。宣云散丘里為十百今指

馬之百體。而不係於前者。立其百體。而謂之馬也。宣云可見合異為同方能見道天下理皆

如是。故丘山積。與而為言。江河合水而為大。俞云水乃小卑小大相對大人合升而為

公。郭云無私於天下且以自。人者。有主而不執。宣云心為天下大木欲自外人者有存而無歸執由中山者。有

正而不距。宣云行為天下不距故由中出者得正理而物不距四時殊氣。天不賜。故歲成。宣云賜則私也五

官殊職。君不私。云殊職自有其才故之耳非私而與之文武大人不賜。故德備。郭云文者自文武者自武非大

人所賜也。若由賜而能則有時而闕矣。豈唯文武凡性皆然。察宣本武宣云道渾同無名。故無為。無為而無不為。郭云各自為故無不為時有終始。世有變化。

禍福信信。至有所拂者。而有所宜。王云信信流行貌宣云禍福渾然自為倚伏失意中藏有好處自殉殊面。成云殉逐也面向也彼此

ZHUANGZI

THE COMPLETE WRITINGS

TRANSLATED, WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES, BY BROOK ZIPORYN

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PREFACE

This volume includes a complete translation of the thirty-three chapters of the Chinese text, *Zhuangzi*, a substantial portion of which I had previously translated and published in 2009 as the main text of a volume titled *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Hackett, 2009). In the course of my normal duties in the decade or so since, I have had many opportunities to further study and teach the *Zhuangzi*, reading through and discussing my translation and interpretation of this work with a great many very intelligent and attentive students and scholars. In these same ten years since the publication of the abridged *Zhuangzi*, the digital tools available for research into classical Chinese texts, which played little to no role in my translation process during the aughts, have become exponentially more powerful, allowing for instant comparison of huge quantities of texts and contexts, which would have taken months and years only a short time ago. In the course of these highly enjoyable labors, with these amazing new resources, going over and over both the source text and my own translation many dozens of times and hashing it out with so many brilliant students and colleagues, I have sometimes felt I had made important new discoveries about how to interpret particular passages and how to approach various structural and philosophical issues, sometimes in the form of major insights, sometimes just as a further nuancing of prior hunches or through a more felicitous English word choice that had not previously come to mind. The ripening of these things can take quite a bit of time, it seems. Hence, in addition to providing translations of all portions of the text that are omitted from the 2009 book, I have also made some substantial changes to the translations of the chapters previously translated there. Where the present and previous translations diverge, I am happy to have both versions available to readers. In all cases, both choices have something to recommend them, although obviously as of this moment in time I regard the versions in this volume to be preferable, albeit sometimes only marginally so.

The selections from traditional commentaries in the earlier volume have been omitted in this one; the reader is invited to consult them there if interested. But I have amplified considerably the explanatory material included in the footnotes (marked 1, 2, 3, etc.), which provide important information to aid the real-time reading of the text, and have also added endnotes (marked A, B, C, etc.) when a technical philological matter must be addressed or a more extended conceptual

discussion is warranted. This, too, was a result of repeatedly working through the text with knowledgeable and insightful interlocutors, in the course of which I was sometimes surprised by queries about some of the technicalities of the translation choices or about the implicit interpretative stance behind them. This made it incumbent upon me to explain in detail the contextual and philosophical considerations that informed my decisions as well as the relevant grammatical constructions, parsings, and textual precedents in the source language and the relevant rhetorical implications or ghost allusions in the target language. I had often found such questions unexpected, not because I had any illusions that all my choices were obviously right, but because I expected that all who would be in a position to wonder about them—proficient readers of classical Chinese—would also be able to reconstruct the reasoning behind them at a glance, tracking which among the many ambiguous possibilities presented by the text had been followed. The astute questionings I have received from my colleagues have disabused me of that assumption and have had the great value of forcing me to ponder these decisions closely and to communicate their justifications. The ensuing conversations often led to deeper ponderings of the many factors contributing to each decision, sometimes also leading me to reconsider them, but in every case giving me a more intricate grasp of the complexity of the text and the need for detailed explanations. The footnotes and endnotes in this volume provide such readers with at least the bare outline of the reasoning and evidence behind controversial translation choices in the hopes that even if they remain unconvinced, they will at least have the evidence laid out before them. This volume also includes a Glossary, which is a considerably expanded and revised version of the Glossary that appears in the 2009 abridgment.

My views concerning the historical and philosophical background of this text as stated in the Introduction to the 2009 volume, partially reprinted below, have not significantly changed in the intervening decade. I deliberately did not provide a specific interpretation of the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophical or religious thought and its significance in the print version of that volume, although obviously my own interpretive perspective was embedded in my translation in thousands of places, because I hoped the text should nonetheless be given the maximal possible opportunity to speak for itself to new readers, without poisoning the wells in advance with my own sometimes fervent views on its meanings to any greater degree than would be inevitable as a consequence of already pulling the interpretive strings in every sentence of the translation. Among scholars of ancient Chinese, after all, interpretations of *Zhuangzi* are like, er, belly buttons—everyone has one—and I hoped to make the translation as user-friendly as possible to whomsoever might want to use it in whatever way they saw fit. I did provide my own interpretation of the philosophical position that in my view best explains the text of the Inner Chapters (1–7) if and when they happen to be considered as a single unit, in an online essay linked to the earlier edition, “*Zhuangzi* as Philosopher” (<https://www.hackettpublishing.com/zhuangziphil>). My views on that topic have not substantially changed, although they have developed and ramified further in the same direction, toward greater precision and detail and into a more fully

elaborated explication of the premises and implications of Zhuangist thinking, to which I attach considerable philosophical importance. But in that essay I did not attempt to give an interpretation of any of the remaining twenty-six chapters of the book, or any subset of them considered as a single coherent text, nor indeed of the thirty-three-chapter *Zhuangzi* considered as a whole. My feeling is still that it would be an injustice to both the material and the reader to try to adequately explore these topics in the few pages available for an Introduction to an already quite complex translation. As mentioned, some of the more elaborate explanations of the philosophical interpretation informing the translation are now included in the endnotes. Further works addressing these matters at greater length, as well as interpretative commentaries on individual passages, are liable to appear on this title's support page at Hackett Publishing (<https://www.hackettpublishing.com/zhuangzisup>), or in some other form, in the hopefully not-too-distant future.

Still, we can say a few words about this here. What the reader now has in her hands is the thirty-three-chapter *Zhuangzi* text as a single full-fledged book. The impression this gives of a unified opus written by a single author with a consistent beginning-to-end intent is something that modern Anglophone scholars have been fighting to dispel by all means available for at least the last fifty years—and with good historical reasons, since it is vanishingly unlikely that these thirty-three chapters were written by a single person who conceived it as a single work arranged in this order, designed from beginning to end to fulfill a specific design plan. It is much more likely that the selection of these thirty-three chapters from previously circulating materials associated with Zhuangzi (the legendary fifty-two-chapter version mentioned in early records), and their arrangement in this sequence, divided into Inner, Outer, and Miscellaneous Chapters, is the work of Guo Xiang (d. 312) some six centuries after the putative life of Zhuang Zhou. It is more likely still that these “materials associated with Zhuangzi” were not all written by any one person, and even a casual reader will no doubt notice the breathtaking diversity of styles and stances in this book. We have very little certain knowledge even about how to date the composition of most of this material, how to divide it, where one section begins and another ends, and what belongs coherently with what, and this has led to much ingenious speculation and disagreement. For these reasons, many recent scholars prefer to consider the text as something like an anthology, perhaps along the lines of a commonplace book, *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, or a debater's cheat sheet, a collection of materials loosely related to each other and to the figure of Zhuangzi rather than a work of any one person or even of any one identifiable school of thought. On this view, the basic unit of coherence is something like the paragraph or the anecdote—more or less those chunks of text, amounting to anywhere from a few lines to a page or three in the English version, that are generally separated from one another by line breaks in modern translations. Much can be gained by reading the text in this way—a veritable smorgasbord of voices, thoughts, images, attitudes, arguments, fragments, and aphorisms emerge to our inner eyes and ears. The sheer muchness and manyness of the *Zhuangzi*, read in this way, already makes this a book that can take the role of—to borrow an apt word from Kuang-ming Wu—“a companion” for life.

The same basic view could conceivably also be turned around, seeing the scattered and fragmentary nature of the text—with its whimsical dialogues, anecdotes, and musings plopped down in no particular order—as just the way it flowed from old man Zhuang’s brush back in the day: the book read in this way is something like a notebook of a brilliantly creative and perhaps conflictedly multifarious genius who jotted down various ideas, making points and observations as they appeared to him, without any concern for bringing them all together into a coherent whole. The tensions in the text can then be viewed as wildly contradictory and unresolved aspects of one man’s thinking, or else as brazenly and deliberately unsystematized, perhaps as an illustration and embodiment of precisely the virtues of flexibility of viewpoint advanced in some of the work’s most striking passages. That might make it something like Nietzsche’s middle-period hodgepodge aphoristic style, deliberately reveling in contrasts, paradoxes, and unresolved teases, which he sometimes justified as a principled protest against the mendacity of system-building; or indeed like the *Analects of Confucius*, which likewise presents only isolated remarks that are often sharply contrasted, with no apparent rhyme or reason to the arrangement and no explicit attempts at resolution of apparent contradictions. This seeming incoherence of the prime canonical text of the Confucian tradition was indeed often interpreted as an exemplification of precisely the supreme virtue of the sage, his many-sided timely responsiveness and freedom from bias and dogmatism. The bewildering diversity of viewpoints found in the whole *Zhuangzi* could be read as exemplifying a further radicalization of this style: a virtuoso performance by some guy named Zhuang Zhou of his “wild card” mirror mind that can inhabit and affirm any and every available point of view, while at the same time preventing its ossification into dogma by juxtaposing it freely with equally sincere and equally self-ironic performances of alternate points of view. On this reading, focusing on the form as much as on the content, the text would present not merely as a genius’s notebook, but as an enlightening record of the wild pedagogical technique characteristic of a sage.

Another approach is to try, on linguistic, historical, stylistic, and thematic grounds, to compose a likely story to divide the text into coherent and distinct sections, identified with different strains of thought and perhaps even distinct schools, as we find in the work of A. C. Graham and Xiaogan Liu. Their conclusions are presented in the Introduction to the 2009 volume.¹ To briefly reiterate in broad strokes the relevant takeaways, we are introduced through this approach to a number of shadowy but distinctive writers and thinkers: the logically rigorous but also poetically incomparable philosopher/humorist/gadfly/mystic/skeptic/agnostic pietist/relativist/existentialist/fatalist of the Inner Chapters, sometimes linked to the name Zhuang Zhou (Chapters 1–7); the primitivist or anarchist social critic of Chapters 8–11; the moderately quisling accomodationist syncretist of Chapters 11–16 and 33; the “rationalizing” Zhuangist disciple of Chapter 17; the “irrationalizing” Zhuangist disciple of Chapter 22; the skill-mystic of Chapter 19; the Yangist resistance fighters of Chapters 28–31, and a host of others. We then

1. For an overview, see <https://www.hackettpublishing.com/zhuangziabout>.

have in our hands an anthology reflecting the diversity of one period and one strain of ancient Chinese “Daoist” schools and their various attempts to work out some of their most difficult and exciting ideas and tropes and to find a place for them in the wider intellectual conversation of the time, the drama of which is then played out with great literary and intellectual subtlety before our eyes. My own predilection in the classroom usually tends to be toward this kind of reading, for both textual and philosophical reasons. For though we can deal only with probabilities here, and the opportunities for subjective illusion are many, long immersion in the text does make it hard not to feel the presence of several identifiable and distinctive stylistic voices, marked in some cases by the clustering of linguistic peculiarities that would be hard to attribute to mere chance (though they could be attributed to deliberate manipulation by a very astute literary forger or show-off of diverse stylistic pyrotechnics), some but not all of which have been singled out by Liu in particular as the basis of his classification of the parts of the text. I am not quite as sanguine as Liu about the possibility of making definitive judgments about how to date these diverse sections on the basis of these linguistic peculiarities, although they are perhaps one of our better clues. But though I do find some objective basis to justify reading, for example, the Inner Chapters as more or less a linguistically, stylistically, and philosophically coherent whole that stands apart from the rest of the book, in the main this is really a preference: this way of reading allows us to have a book that makes many different points and expresses many points of view, not merely in the throwaway hurdy-gurdy manner of the random scrapbook reading, nor as a way of showing diversity for diversity’s sake, but each given some intricacy of expression and argument and contextual expansion. The radical political critics get their say, as do the conservative accommodationists, and they both have something interesting and distinctly Zhuangzian to tell us. I would hate to have them blurred into a single position or scattered into a series of disconnected one-liners. Similarly, the radical skeptics and the radical mystics, the fatalists and the existentialists, the fire-breathing rebels and the pious harmonizers all get their say, unblurred and untruncated. Even the radical skeptic-mystics and mystic-skeptics, those rarest of creatures, also get their say without being blended into the mix and without losing the opportunity to expand and invoke the full range of implications of their vision and without being split into two incompatible voices, skeptic and mystic, on the basis of whatever sub-Zhuangzian assumptions we might bring to the text about what is consistent with what. We can thus read the whole work as encompassing the first few steps in the great tradition of commentary that continues onward through the millennia, the reception history of diverse thinkers grappling with those first Zhuangzian seeds in the core text, already appearing as the later parts of the anthology, and then responses to those responses and so on and on through the conversation that continues even to ourselves responding to the text in the present day. This was the approach taken in the 2009 volume. The *Zhuangzi* anthology read in this way is not just a companion for life but the beginning of a long history of interpretation and an invitation to join and continue the conversation started there.

But the book the reader now holds can also be read as it was by most premodern fans: as a single work written by a single man named Zhuang Zhou, designed to be just as it is with set purpose. To read this book straight through from the first page to the last under this assumption is an entirely different experience, and the writer and thinker who emerges, the Zhuangzi who figures in two millennia of Chinese intellectual culture, is a man of incomparable subtlety, complexity, breadth, and depth, though a potentially very baffling and elusive one. This is arguably the most culturally relevant way to read the *Zhuangzi*, since it betokens not the murky origins of the text but its reception and life in the much larger swath of East Asian history that followed. And who is this Zhuangzi? Nietzsche once remarked that it would be hard for future generations to believe that the skeptical humanist of his *Human, All Too Human* was the same writer as the poetic visionary of his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, so disparate did they seem in both style and content, in spite of being written only a few years apart and by the same person. It can happen. And a soul capable of such capaciousness and inner tension and mastery of that inner tension, able even to play with that inner tension, would be no small matter, not a figure we should lightly let slip from the profile of the world's possibilities. Let us imagine this Zhuangzi, and let us imagine the book created by this Zhuangzi as a single carefully crafted journey designed to seduce, unsettle, educate, and enchant the reader, to express an intricate worldview in all its facets, an argument and a trajectory of thinking that wends through all relevant sides to fully express its one complex thought. Read this way, I would summarize the sinews of the narrative and philosophical flow of the text like this:

Inner Teachings for Initiates

Chapter 1: Small and large, use and value, recognized identities and status, these are relative to surrounding conditions, to the position one occupies. For holders of divergent ideas about what is right to be carping back and forth, judging one another, ignores that dependence of valuation on its conditions, the relativity of all value judgments, and forecloses a possibility of greater flexibility in transforming from one such function and value to another. **Chapter 2:** In fact, this relativity of value to position and prior condition is deep and thoroughgoing. It actually extends beyond questions of value even to the most fundamental ontological questions, the question of who or what any given entity is. If we think it through, with a little help from some of the perplexities pointed out by the logicians of the day although pushing them to the point of their reversal, it actually undermines conventional notions of what causes what, what grounds what, what determines what, what subsumes what, what entity is or is not there making any action or characteristic or subsequent entity as it is. This undermines any conclusions we might embrace concerning a particular self or identity as a fixed cause of particular actions or characteristics, about identities in general, about *either the existence or nonexistence* of a single real self, or of a singly-identifiable Heavenly cause of all things, or of a uniquely privileged fact-of-the-matter about any contested state of affairs. For the impossibility of disentangling any position from its negation,

embedded in the deepest structures of language and thought, leads not to the solipsism of the ordinary skeptic but to the mutual transformation of any tentatively posited identity and its putatively paired opposite, the opening up of each position into every other. This total agnosticism thus enables a kind of openness to transformation that has large and attractive consequences. **Chapter 3:** For one thing, not letting putative knowledge direct the process of transformation, of life and activity, can be seen in a certain sense to enhance adaptive life skills in dramatic ways, and concomitantly to free us of concern with fame and disgrace, even with life and death, which anecdotally seem to be among the key blockages to really virtuosic living. **Chapter 4:** This also applies to other projects, like political reform and persuasion, if that's what you happen to want to do: better not to "make the mind one's teacher" there either, and to forget about being useful or valuable in any determinate way. **Chapter 5:** In fact I could tell you some stories about people who have thoroughly abandoned all putative knowledge about values, about what is right, about facts, about what is so, and thus also all projects and plans, and yet who seem to have a mysteriously dramatic effect on others, even when everything else about them—physically, mentally, and morally—is, to all appearances, completely worthless. The total and thoroughgoing absence of all merit, beauty, skill, and purpose attracts and changes people, as still water allows people to view their own reflections, thereby fascinating, revealing, and transforming them. **Chapter 6:** And it also allows you to identify with all transformation, hide the world in the world, simultaneously follow both Heaven and man, never knowing to hate death or love life, swooshing along in the great Transforming Openness, swooshing along all the better for never knowing who or what causes it or why, or what it really is. **Chapter 7:** And if anyone comes around asking about politics or improving society, avoid answering. That's a trap: precisely ignoring it, continuing your thoroughgoing agnosticism about all identities and willingness to transform into any identity, now an ox and now a horse, is the best thing you can do, even for society; otherwise, you'll have to be negating something about the full scope of your fellow humans and nonhumans in all their unknowable swooshing transformations. This will also dispel the pretensions of seers, shamans, and savants who claim to know who you are or should be, or who or what anything else is or should be. Be mirrorlike, and don't let your primal chaos be killed by these pretensions to know and fix things into one definite identity or another.

Outer Teachings for General Public Consumption

Chapter 8: But that's exactly what all these busybody sages and philosophers and reformers are always doing! They ruin everything with their highfalutin, moral programs—twisting and distorting our simple inborn nature which is not trying to be anything in particular, the kind of thing you see in simple village people who never think about who or what they are. **Chapter 9:** Like the way horse trainers torture and damage the horses, violating their inborn natures, claiming they're improving them, but really thereby perverting and corrupting them. **Chapter 10:** And this wisdom and morality not only distort our inborn nature,

but they also end up being tools that hugely enhance the power of tyrants and bullies. Away with all that! **Chapter 11:** Yes, away with all that. But sometimes you still have to deal with that, and just complaining about it as I just did, I know, really doesn't help—in fact, it just adds to the confusion, becoming just one more reformer's voice adding to the cacophony. In critiquing them, I'm guilty of the very thing I'm critiquing, like the leper who is afraid her child will be like herself. So what can I do? These things suck but they aren't going away any time soon. They have to be dealt with. **Chapter 12:** Let's try a way to accommodate knowledge, order, morality, family, government, and all the other sociopolitical roles that bestow relatively fixed identities. Actually, this is, in a sense, truer to what I've been saying than the rejection of all definite forms would be: if we're really enabling transformation into all forms, we have to enable this one too. Otherwise, just clinging to primitivism all the way down the line, we are merely bogus practitioners of the arts of Mr. Chaotic Blob, the kind who know the one but not the two, the first step but not the second step. All things come from Chaotic Blob, that undivided confusion of all identities, and so all can be brought back to it, all can be kept in contact with its life-giving chaos of drift and doubt, even when they are temporarily required to play some specific role. **Chapter 13:** It should circulate everywhere without obstruction and without accumulation. Those temporary identities, even all that annoying political and moral stuff, are really the derivative branches of it. The ancients didn't get rid of them; they just kept them in their proper secondary place, always connected to the silence and stillness, the unhewn clump of the inborn nature, the true non-knowing, which is their real source and sustainer. The sage kings were awesome, actually: it's just they've been misunderstood, taking only their footprints and traces, as in their books and injunctions, as if they were the real deal, which they aren't. **Chapter 14:** It's really all about the transformation and interfecundating of all things, not what any shaman or prophet or moralist could know—more like music, which transforms us from fear to languor to confusion to foolishness, the forgetting of the world and the world's forgetting of us, the non-doing non-knowing that does it all. **Chapter 15:** But people are always trying to use some one-sided technique to master it, to know it, to identify it, to commodify it. All those values are again derivatives of non-doing and non-knowing, not its source but also not its total negation as long as they remain unseparated from it, comprehended within it, capable of transformation into one another. **Chapter 16:** What is ideal is rather the harmony of non-knowing non-doing as source on the one hand and all sorts of temporary knowings and doings as derivative on the other. **Chapter 17:** Let me sum that up in a more orderly way. It's all about relativity of large and small, infinitely extended so even those attributes are never fixed: complete and total flux and transformation. So there's no need to know who you are or what to do: you will definitely transform anyway! But as mentioned, this non-knowing and non-normativity does actually seem to enhance people's life skills. And it even opens up a different kind of knowing that makes no claim to the other kind of definite knowing—a constantly adapting, transforming knowing that is another kind of skill and activity and transformation of perspectives and play. See it there in the fishes, and in our arguments about the

fishes! **Chapter 18:** That's the happiness of non-doing, the wildness of uncontrolled inter-transformation. **Chapter 19:** And the skill that comes from not interfering with it. **Chapter 20:** This harmony between deliberate and nondeliberate, between useful and useless, might be seen as a kind of midpoint between them, but it's really something constantly shifting and transforming. That means avoiding fame and self-indulgence and reconciling to fate, getting beyond any fixed notion of what one stands to gain, what's good for oneself—all of which really just brings on trouble. **Chapter 21:** And again, it's not just self-interest that has to be avoided: we have to also remember to avoid regulations and rules. Even Confucius knew that: he was deeply tapped into transformation, the rules and all that were just the surface of what he did. That's why all the other Confucians are hypocrites and frauds. **Chapter 22:** Ultimately, it's still all about non-knowing. Even talking about non-knowing the way I've been doing in this exoteric section is, strictly speaking, straying from it, however unavoidable that may sometimes be. Even then there's no escape from non-ability and non-understanding at the root of everything, pervading everywhere, in the piss and shit and in every possible thing and event. But all that talk of omnipresence is just a way to spark and jostle us, you and me both, through all the raw dancing transformations of all things, never knowing where or how or why.

Appendices: Random Clarifications, Applications, and Illustrations

Chapter 23: Some may hear all these disparagements of merit, fame, society, moral conduct, deliberate action, and definite knowledge and just feel like it's only making things worse, that it doesn't change anything for them, even if they get the point in theory. It is just piling on one more unrealizable ideal! They may even try to deliberately change themselves by purifying their own minds accordingly. So here are some notes on what not to do in such a situation. Attune instead to the radiance of empty space, of the not-yet-thing, of the formlessness at the root of every reconfiguration of the totality, shifting along with the shifting rightness that always hews to the unavoidable, even as it careens through the new totalities emerging with every new scramble. **Chapter 24:** Some notes on the powers of the genuine, the unfaked, no matter how trivial, and the pointlessness of understanding, debate, and planning. **Chapter 25:** Intrinsic virtuosity, as opposed to conscious virtue, is a kind of following-along by which both self and other are brought to completion, attuned to the vastness and formlessness and ambiguity of the world, diminishing the certainty of one's plans and one's biased wars for rightness. But though the vastness of the Course, the most comprehensive activity, dwarfs all else into insignificance, its formlessness also undermines any definite contrast of large and small; even to say there is something there called the Course is just a figure of speech; it's better expressed in the shifting meanings that neither know nor care whether there really is a source of things. In fact, all general claims such as those we make here are only meant as roughly true; the ultimate facts about both the largest and the smallest are equally incomprehensible, and what is really sought when we speak of some "Course" is just a kind of attunement to that, enabling us

to walk it. **Chapter 26:** Non-knowing is the mind's empty space to wander in; knowledge, plans, moral conduct, and reform—these are just blockages. **Chapter 27:** My method for conveying this: not wordlessness, but words that embody the ambiguity of things, that tip over and empty when you try to fill them up with too much definite meaning—enabling them to endlessly produce new meanings. Thus emptying and following along completely each new context, they are, though dark and obscure, nevertheless always as paradoxically bright and vigorous as the shadow's shadows. **Chapter 28:** Politically speaking, the exemplars really to be admired are those who were so disgusted with the very idea of governing that they either disappeared or killed themselves when it came anywhere near them. **Chapter 29:** And furthermore, from their own point of view, the self-interest of outlaws and brigands has at least an equal claim to genuineness as the self-denying virtues of the Confucians. But of course what's better than either of these two extremes is the shifting transformation that can take on any of these positions temporarily without excluding any of the others, without getting locked into any as a definite value—or even, finally, seeing how they ultimately converge, so that renunciation of self-interest is what's genuinely in one's self-interest and vice versa. **Chapter 30:** In a way, all these rulers and reformers and criminals locked into their own single system of values and purposes are just thinking too small and are too constrained, too lacking in that empty space that is the mind's wandering. If they'd enlarge their obsession, its big version would instantly dissolve their fixation on a single corner of it. Here's how I do it with a king obsessed with swordsmanship. **Chapter 31:** Perhaps the kind of person who could really get this across to someone like Confucius would not be the fire-breathing Robber Zhi or the sly Zhuangzi, but a simple genuine fisherman. **Chapter 32:** The unavoidable, the unfaked, the imponderable, is always there; the problem is not its lack, but the tendency to take it as one's own undissolved possession within, as some kind of definite merit of one's own, deserving praise or reward. Again, it's just a question of taking it vastly or narrowly. Comprehending the great meaning of fate is always following along behind it, completed by it, for it is always more than just the one thing that confronts and opposes one. Comprehending merely the small meaning of fate is always having to confront it face-to-face, fighting it and always being defeated by it. That includes death. Either way you're eaten, wherever you may go to avoid it. But that very transformation in the vastness, the imponderable spiritlike change you must undergo through all things, is both the problem (in its small form) and the solution (in its vast form). However, any alleged knowledge about the vast form of transformation is really just another limiting version of the small form of transformation. **Chapter 33:** Every school of thought, every philosopher, maybe every person thinks they have knowledge of the vast form, the total form—but really each of them is just a fragment of the vastness, of the endless and the indeterminable whole. And yet they are also right in a way: each of them is the vastness of unevadable transformation, which is everywhere; it's just that knowledge and values take one piece and stretch it too far, and take it out of communication with all the other parts and aspects and forms of it. This is true for all the various philosophical, moral, and social thinkers of the world—even me, Zhuang

Zhou, but really I'm just tossing forth a tangled cluster of jokes and baubles, unsettling and unsettlable questions to spur on the endlessness of the transformation of meanings and identities. That may look quite a lot like the paradoxes of the logicians—but they just want to demonstrate either that all things are one and therefore we should love all equally, or else just their own dialectical brilliance that can win every argument. If *per impossibile* anything could fail to be a part of that ancient totality, could fail to be an aspect of that ceaseless unavoidable exceptionless transformation of identities of all things, these works of yours, my dear Huizi, which seem most like my own approach, would be it!

There we have the *Zhuangzi* in every permutation I can think of right now, the many *Zhuangzis* which are the *Zhuangzi*. I invite the reader to savor whichever of these books she finds in her hands at any particular time—and then to forget it and find another one there.

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The acuity of these students bears eloquent witness to the excellence of their other mentors and instructors, among whom I must especially single out my very eminent current sinological colleagues at the University of Chicago—above all Edward Shaughnessy, Donald Harper, Paul Copp, and Huan Suassy—for special thanks. My own sensitivity to many crucial philological and cultural issues informing this text has been greatly enhanced by their superlative work in the field and the scholarly environment it has fostered.

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some of the draft translations of chapters provided by Richard Sage, long intensely engaged with the closely related text of the *Liezi*, intensified my attention to many subtle textual issues, greatly improving the translation. Over the same period, learning to speak and write in new ways about the *Zhuangzi* during the nascent collaborative project begun with the inimitable Professor Lai, my brother from another mother, has been a great boon on every level, sparking fresh insights and inroads into the text and beyond, for all of which I am deeply grateful.

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INTRODUCTION¹

About Zhuangzi

Not much is known about Zhuang Zhou (ca. 369–286 BCE), who was also called Zhuangzi (“Master Zhuang”), the ostensible author of this work of the same name. What we do know is limited to the brief biography written by Sima Qian (145–86 BCE), telling us simply that Zhuangzi was a native of Meng in the state of Song (present-day Henan province) and served as a minor official in an otherwise unknown locale described as “the lacquer-tree park of Meng.” One brief anecdote about the man is appended: King Wei of the state of Chu, hearing of Zhuangzi’s talents, sent a messenger to offer him financial support and perhaps to invite him to serve as prime minister in his government. Zhuang Zhou is said to have laughed and replied to the messenger:

A thousand measures of gold is a substantial profit, and a prime ministership is an exalted position indeed. But haven’t you ever heard about the ox offered in the official sacrifice? He is generously fed for years and dressed in the finest embroidered fabrics, so that he may one day be led into the Great Temple for slaughter. When that day comes, though he may wish that he were just a little orphaned piglet instead, it is too late! So scram, you! Do not defile me! I’d rather enjoy myself wallowing in the filth than let myself be controlled by some head of state. I’d rather remain without official position to the end of my days, enjoying myself whichever way I wish.

It is probably safe to assume that this story is less factual than rhetorical. That is also true of the tales about the character named “Zhuangzi” that we find in the book that bears his name. Even in this brief sketch, however, we begin to see that convergence of apparently contradictory identities that make Zhuangzi so fascinating: acerbic mystic, subtle rustic, bottom-dweller and high-flyer, unassuming rebel, abstruse jester, frivolous sage. Funny philosophers have always been hard

1. Reprinted, with abridgements, from the “Introduction” to *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings, with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, translated by Brook Ziporyn (Hackett, 2009).

to come by; profound comedians perhaps even more so. To enter into this work attributed to Zhuangzi is to find oneself roused and enraptured not only by its intellectual and spiritual depth, but also by its provocative humor and its sonorous beauty. But what is perhaps even more precious and unusual here is that these three heady torques seem to erupt in this work all at once: it is precisely Zhuangzi's humor that is beautiful, his beauty that is profound, his profundity that is comical. This work defies the dreary but prevalent notion that the serious is the important, that the playful is the inconsequential, and above all that we are under some obligation to draw conclusions about ourselves and our world, and then stick to them. Zhuangzi refuses to let himself be completely known; indeed he seems to deny the possibility and even desirability of total understanding, of himself, or of anything else. But at the same time he shows himself to us, an unignorable and unforgettable presence that is all the more vivid and evocative for his staunch evasion of ultimate knowability or definitive identity. Encountering Zhuangzi opens a window into a world of enlivening confusions, taunting misdirections, surreal grotesqueries, cutting satire, virtuoso reasonings, insouciant despair, mischievous fallacies, morbid exuberances, impudent jokes, and jolting non-sequiturs, which nonetheless has the most profoundly consequential things to say about the gravest human problems of living, dying, and knowing. Who is this man? What is this book?

...

Historical and Philosophical Background

Zhuang Zhou was born into a time of great political and philosophical upheaval and ferment, known as the Warring States Period (575–221 BCE). To get a sense of that time, one must look back to the political situation emerging from the collapse of the Western Zhou empire (1122–770 BCE) and its aftermath.

The Western Zhou had unified the central area of what is now China under a single regime. When it fell apart, a number of de facto independent principalities cropped up, vying for supremacy, each attempting to unify the other states under its own aegis. This provided a kind of open marketplace of potential sponsors for a new class of intellectuals, as all of these rulers were looking for an ideology and set of policies that would both establish their legitimacy as heirs to the Zhou dynasty and allow them to accomplish political unification under their own hegemony.

In this climate, advocates of many contending philosophical schools eventually emerged. The earliest of these private reformers and educators, putting forth a doctrine independent of any particular political power but marketed to various contenders, was Confucius (孔子 Kong Qiu, ca. 551–479 BCE). Confucius, as represented in the *Lunyu* (*Analects*), advocated the cultivation of certain personal qualities—"virtues"—that would allow those who mastered them to form an educated class capable of presiding wisely, benevolently, and effectively over their subjects, inspiring the people to emulate these virtues without having to be commanded to do so, ideally bringing about both social order and personal harmony

without recourse to coercion. The virtues in question involved a return to an idealized version of the earlier Zhou ritual forms of social organization, rooted in the relations of the family that were hierarchical but also cemented by bonds of spontaneous affection. The trademark virtues of the Confucians were Human-kindness (仁 *ren*), Responsibility (義 *yi*), Ritual Propriety (禮 *li*), and Filial Piety (孝 *xiao*).²

The work of Confucius was opposed by Mozi, (墨翟 Mo Di) (ca. 450–390 BCE?). Mozi rejected the primacy of the family, and the spontaneous but biased affections that come with it, as a model for social organization. Instead, he proposed a more abstract notion of moral obligation rooted in a utilitarian calculation of maximized material benefits for all, justified not by human fellow-feeling but by the will of an anthropomorphic deity, Heaven, to benefit all equally, and the punishments and rewards enforced by this deity and many lesser ghosts and spirits. In place of filial piety, which prescribed special duties toward one's family, Mozi put "all-inclusive love" (兼愛 *jian ai*), meaning the concern for the benefit (construed almost exclusively as enjoyment of material resources) of all equally, kin and non-kin. Rituals such as lavish funeral services and musical ceremonies, which Confucians saw as important expressions of family sentiment and methods for harmonious social consolidation, were seen by Mozi as a useless waste of resources.

The development of Confucian thought was continued by Mencius (孟軻 Meng Ke, ca. 372–289 BCE), a contemporary of Zhuangzi's (although neither explicitly mentions the other). Mencius defends the Confucian virtues against the Mohist attack by asserting that their seeds are in some sense built into the human person at birth, such that their cultivation and development are at the same time the maximal satisfaction of the natural "Heaven-conferred" dispositions of human beings, which motivates Mencius's famous slogan, "Human nature is good." The exact sense in which this was meant continues to be the subject of much scholarly disagreement.

The Mohists and the Confucians each have their own "Course" (道 *dao*). The term *dao* is cognate with the term for "to lead or guide" (導) and can also mean "to speak." Hence its prescriptive force is particularly pronounced. When used in Confucian and Mohist texts of this period, it could perhaps be translated, following Chad Hansen, as "guiding (dis)course." The term originally meant a set of practices designed to guide one's behavior in some specific way so as to promote the attainment of some predetermined value or objective: social harmony, personal contentment, material benefit. The term *dao* ("course," "way," "method," "path,") is thus initially used by both the Confucians and Mohists to denote their "way" of doing things, their particular tradition of values and behaviors, including the exemplary deeds of a teacher and the guiding discourse prescribing a course of study and emulation, and the resulting set of practices (e.g., the system of traditional ritual), which lead to the attainment of the preconceived

2. See the Glossary for a further discussion of the notion of "virtue" (or "Virtuosity") in general, and of the Confucian virtues of humankindness and responsible conduct.

value. When these practices are mastered and internalized, one has “attained (i.e., mastered) the Course” or “the Way” in question, and this “attainment” (得 *de*) is what is known as “Virtuosity” or “Virtue” (德 *de*).

Thus, there are many *daos*, many courses: the course of the ancient kings, the course of Heaven, the course of charioteering, the course of swordsmanship, the course of all-inclusive love, the course of filial piety, the course of Confucius, the course of Mozi. One studies and practices one of these courses, thereby mastering a predetermined skill, a virtuosity that involves both dividing the world up in the way prescribed by the system of terms employed in the guidance provided by that course, and in turn valuing and disvaluing things and acting accordingly. The courses advocated by the Confucians and Mohists in some ways contradicted each other: some of what one affirmed as right (e.g., filial piety, lavish funerals; or, conversely, all-inclusive love and frugality in funerals) the other negated as wrong.

Sometime after Mozi, another position, later known as “Daoist,” came to be articulated in a probably gradually compiled, multiauthored text known as the *Daodejing*, later associated with the mythical figure Laozi (or Lao Dan, as he is usually called in the *Zhuangzi*). This text marks a major break, indeed a deliberate 180-degree turnaround, from the understanding of *dao* found in the Confucian and Mohist schools, developing a new and profoundly different, *ironic* meaning of the term *dao*.³ In this context, Dao is precisely what is *free* of purpose and specific guidelines, the exact opposite of the traditional meaning of *dao*. Yet it is still called a *dao*. Why? Because it does in fact do what the traditional *daos* promised to do: generate the things we see, know, and want. Most *daos* were seen as generating these things through deliberate human action, and initially even the Course of Heaven was seen as involving Heaven’s intention. But as the concept of Heaven came to be increasingly naturalized in this period, among Confucians if not among Mohists, Heaven’s Course came to be seen as producing what we see, know, and want *without* any deliberate intentions, explicit commands, or purposeful actions.⁴ The Course of Heaven is thus closely associated with the shift in the meaning of *dao* effected by the early Daoists, and the term “Heaven” occurs frequently in Daoist works, though now Heaven, formerly a commanding and controlling deity, is also explicitly divested of conscious knowing and moral desiderata. Indeed, central to the Daoist idea is a critique of conscious knowledge and moral ideals as such. Our attention is directed away from the foreground purposes of human activity and toward the background, that is, what normally escapes our awareness. This move reorients our focus toward the spontaneous and purposeless processes in nature and man that undergird and produce things, begin things, end things, compose the stuff of things, and guide things along their courses by not deliberately guiding them at all. This can be viewed as a new stress on Nature as opposed to Man, but only if “nature” is understood precisely as

3. See “The Dao of the *Daodejing*” at <https://www.hackettpublishing.com/zhuangzisup> for a fuller exposition of the meaning of *dao* in the *Daodejing*.

4. See Glossary for a fuller discussion of the term “Heaven.”

“spontaneity,” that is, what is so without conscious planning or purpose, not nature understood as a product of a purposeful creator that abides by the laws He imposes upon it and reveals thereby the glory of His intelligence and goodness.

The *Daodejing* is never quoted or directly alluded to in the Inner Chapters (though it is often quoted verbatim in the rest of the *Zhuangzi*), but some similar ideas concerning *daos* and *dao* are found there. For example, we find Zhuangzi saying that when the Course becomes explicit, it ceases to be the Course (Chapter 2, p. 18), which could stand almost as an exact paraphrase of the first line of the received version of the *Daodejing*. It is impossible to know whether these considerations are arrived at independently, or if the tradition that produced the *Daodejing* also had some influence on Zhuangzi. But in any case, it is to these philosophical controversies over alternate *daos* that we find Zhuangzi responding in the Inner Chapters.

There is another development in Chinese thought that has a deep impact on Zhuangzi, setting the stage quite directly for his work and marking it off sharply from other Daoist texts. This is the emergence of a form of logical disputation represented here by Zhuangzi’s great buddy, sparring partner, straight man, and arch-foil, Huizi (Hui Shi, ca. 370–310 BCE). Huizi figures prominently throughout the Inner Chapters, even when he is not explicitly named.⁵ The standard thirty-three-chapter version of the *Zhuangzi*, furthermore, concludes with a long description of Huizi’s work and a heartfelt but biting lament over his shortcomings (see Chapter 33). On the basis of these descriptions, it seems that Huizi developed a method of overturning all common-sense assertions by showing that the distinctions on which they are based depend on the particular perspectives from which they are drawn, making them inherently negotiable. Thus all our usual distinctions about units of time and space, and even of “sameness” and “difference” in general, are relative and malleable. It would seem that part of Huizi’s object in pressing this point was to show the contradiction entailed in making any distinctions at all, for the sole positive ethical pronouncement attributed to him

5. He appears explicitly in Chapters 1, 2, 5, 17, 18, 24, 25, 26, 27 and 33, but implicit references to and critiques of his thought are found much more frequently. Indeed, the rhetorical framing of Zhuangzi’s first chapter (its opening trope and its final two dialogues) might suggest the hypothesis that the Inner Chapters were written by Zhuang Zhou precisely as a response to Huizi, perhaps intended for the latter’s eyes in particular, almost as a private joke. We are told, after all, that Zhuangzi considered Huizi the only one who really understood his words, the only one for whom he spoke or wrote (see Chapter 24). The chapter begins with a vast fish that transforms into a vast bird and is then ridiculed for his high flying by smaller birds gazing up at him from the ground. It ends with two dialogues between Zhuangzi and Huizi, which closely parallel the structure of the relationship between Peer Phoenix and the little birds. Another story of a confrontation between Zhuangzi and Huizi (Chapter 17) supports the view that the large-and-small-bird trope symbolizes Zhuangzi’s view of their relationship. There, Zhuangzi, after hearing that Huizi believes him to be after his official position, tells the story of a tiny creature who screeches at a vast one uncomprehendingly. The rhetorical trope there (“In the southern region there is a bird, and its name is . . .” and so on) closely parallels the opening tale of Peer Phoenix and the little birds, with Huizi compared to the latter and Zhuangzi to the former.

in Chapter 33, at the end of a long string of paradoxes, is “Love all things without exception, for Heaven and Earth are one body.” As A. C. Graham has suggested, just as Zeno’s paradoxes are generally interpreted as intended to support the Parmenidean thesis of absolute oneness of Being, Huizi would seem to be using a similar sort of *reductio ad absurdum* as a support for a crypto-Mohist injunction to love all things equally. Zhuangzi has much in common with Huizi: the method of revealing the presuppositions underlying seemingly unproblematic claims, the mastery of dialectic, the thesis of relativity to perspective, the penchant for paradox, the suspicion of distinctions, and the interest in the oneness of all things. Indeed, it seems possible, if not likely, that Zhuangzi directly adopted all this from Huizi, taking them over from him wholesale. And yet Zhuangzi objects strenuously to his friend’s position, the ridicule of which is one of the most vital motifs running through this entire work. For it appears to Zhuangzi that Huizi wants to win arguments by proving that all things are really one, and therefore that one really should choose the path of loving all equally. Huizi provides an answer to the questions: what is the case (all things are one body), how can I know it (through reasoning and dialectic, which relativize all distinctions), and therefore how should I live my life (love all things equally). In doing so, he asserts the unique ascendancy of his own position and practices, as the one who can victoriously demonstrate and proclaim this. It is to this that Zhuangzi lovingly and laughingly objects, undermining it by means of a further extension of Huizi’s own premises. Zhuangzi seems to adopt everything from Huizi except his answers—and his concomitant status as “the one with the answers.”

The questions Zhuangzi faces are indeed among the most fundamental human problems: How should I live my life? Which of the alternate courses should I take as my guide? And how is it that I come to choose one course over another? Given that there are alternate ways of seeing things, why do I, and why *should* I, see things the way I do rather than another way, and thus follow one path rather than another? Zhuangzi’s response to this problem, simply stated, is this: this question can never be answered in the terms in which it has been put, because our understanding consciousness can *never* know why it sees things one way rather than another, can *never* ultimately ground its own judgments, and is actually in no position to serve as a guide for living. To consciously weigh alternatives, apply your understanding to making a decision about what is best and then deliberately follow the course you have decided on—this is the fundamental structure of all purposive activity and conscious knowledge, the basis of all ethics, all philosophy, all politics, all human endeavors at improvement, and this is precisely what Zhuangzi seems to consider ridiculous and impossible. Knowledge is unreliable; Will is unreliable; Tradition is unreliable; Society is unreliable; Intuition is unreliable; Logic is unreliable; Faith is unreliable. But what else is there?

Multiple Perspectives of the Inner Chapters

There has been considerable diversity of opinion in understanding Zhuangzi as a philosopher, somewhat exacerbated by recent attempts by Western readers to fit

him into a familiar Occidental philosophical category. Is Zhuangzi, even merely in the Inner Chapters, a mystic? A skeptic? A metaphysical monist? A spirit-body dualist? An intuitionist? A theist? A deist? An agnostic? A relativist? A fatalist? A nihilist? A linguistic philosopher? An existentialist? Or perhaps a poet uncommitted to any particular philosophical position? All of these have been suggested and aggressively argued for, and indeed none of these interpretations is without support in the text. There are places where Zhuangzi speaks as if he were a mystic in the traditional sense, or a skeptic, or a monist, a dualist, an intuitionist, a theist, a deist, an agnostic, a relativist, and so on. The reader would do well to note as she proceeds through the text the passages that, taken on their own, might lead to these conclusions. Like a mystic, Zhuangzi often seems to speak of a state that transports one beyond ordinary reason and sensation and puts one in touch with an alternate, life-changing realm of experience. Like a skeptic, he has many cutting observations to make about the limits of all possible forms of knowledge and ridicules the dogmatism of anyone who claims to know anything conclusively. Like a monist, we find in his work the repeated assertion that “all things are one.” Like a spirit-matter dualist, we find him telling stories of the negligibility of the physical body, however deformed it may be, in favor of “what moves the body.” Like an intuitionist, his dismissal of rational knowledge sometimes seems to point to some alternate type of knowing which can escape the skeptical objections he presents. Like a theist, we find him presenting characters who speak piously of submitting to the will of an anthropomorphized “Creator of Things.” Like a deist, we find a softer version of this trope that severely limits what can be known of this creator, even its personal character and relationship to human beings. Like an agnostic, we finally find him questioning even his ability to know what the Heavenly is, whether the Heavenly is not really the Human or vice versa. Like a relativist, he asserts that all words are acceptable, all courses right, in relation to the perspective from which they are pronounced. Like a fatalist, he speaks of Fate as something about which nothing can be done, which is simply to be accepted as unavoidable. Like a nihilist, he denies the distinction between right and wrong, and even whether we can know whether knowing is knowing or not-knowing. Like a philosopher of language, he presents devastating insights into the character of discourse and its effect on our beliefs about the world and about values. Like an existentialist, he seems to conceive the range of human transformation to be unbounded, and the values that guide it to lie in the hands of each individual and to be renewed moment by moment.

This list could be extended. But it is obvious that many of these positions seem to be starkly opposed or at least incompatible. Does Zhuangzi somehow really combine them all? Can the contradiction be alleviated by judging some of these impressions to be plain misreadings, not really intended in the text? Or are some additions by later editors who didn't understand its philosophy? Is there some hierarchy of provisional and more ultimate formulations that would allow us to order them, so that some are to be taken as rhetorical, therapeutic, or jocular formulations while others express Zhuangzi's real position? Are all these positions

just thrown together incoherently? Or is there some coherent way to integrate all these different strands into one vision?

Like any translator, I have my own opinions about what I think Zhuangzi is getting at here, and how his text has been arranged to express that vision. Readers interested in understanding the philosophical interpretation that informs this translation are invited to consult “Zhuangzi as Philosopher” on this volume’s title support page at <https://www.hackettpublishing.com/zhuangzisup>, where an extended analysis of the philosophical arguments and implications of the Inner Chapters, and their manner of solving the apparent contradictions between relativism and absolutism, between skepticism and mysticism, is offered. (In addition, the reader will find there an account of recent scholarly analysis of the grouping and dating of chapters of the text, a more detailed discussion of the notion of Dao as developed in the *Daodejing*, and notes on the method of translation and conventions used in this volume.) But conclusions are perhaps the least important thing to be gained from reading the Zhuangzi, and it is hoped that the delicious experience of grappling with and being jostled about by this text will allow readers to come to their own conclusions about it—and then perhaps to question those conclusions, and try out some others.

NOTES ON THE TRANSLATION

Everyone probably admits in principle that translation is an art rather than a science, but few would deny that it is among those arts that requires a great deal of precise knowledge and accurate information, perhaps an art like architecture. It is obvious that the architect must make exact technical calculations about the interactions between mass and surface area and density and material durability, must make no mistakes about the geometry of force distribution and weight support as embedded in the laws of physics. But it is equally obvious that these necessities are not sufficient conditions for the work's overall success, that more is needed than precision to create a structure that is both beautiful and humanly habitable. A good translation does its job only when a thousand aesthetic and compositional decisions cohere around its substructure of precision in a way that brings into focus the life, style, and rhythm of the source text, made to lurk and lilt in the marrow and margins of these efficient and precise structures without corrupting or collapsing them, instead quickening them into an emanation of the interconnected universe of thought, feeling, and word that lives and breathes in the original work.

It is with an eye to this spectrum between precision and poetry that translations are sometimes divided into the more literal and the more literary. The former run the risk of holding so closely to the wording and structure of the source language that the final rendering is clunky and difficult in the target language, while the latter can veer into arbitrary and distorting paraphrase that obscures the distinctiveness of thought and expression of the original text, as well as the coherence of the arguments advanced. But this way of framing the issue, as a tension between literalness and literariness as if they are mutually exclusive opposites, is highly problematic. For literalness is a problematic category, and the problem of translation is radically misrepresented when literalness is treated as a bivalent characteristic that is either present or absent in any single line or even any single word of translation, let alone in any translated work as a whole.

Let me give a few examples that may illustrate the near meaninglessness of the claim that the translation of a single word, let alone any single sentence, paragraph, chapter, or book, simply is or is not literal. If someone were translating into English a scene in a modern Chinese novel in which a man is complaining to his plumber about his *longtou* 龍頭, few would insist that the literal translation should be “dragon head,” which translates the meanings of each of these two Chinese

characters very precisely, because the two-character compound is also a common expression for “faucet” in English. So most would agree that “faucet” is perfectly literal in this case. “Faucet” is a literal translation of *longtou*, even though neither *long* nor *tou* is translated literally or in any way alluded to. What is literal for the component parts of the phrase is not literal for the phrase as a whole, and vice versa. Since the *referent* in this case is a concrete physical object, it is easy to make this decision. For something a bit less concrete, like an idiomatic description of a situation, the case is not quite as clear but still relatively straightforward: if one were translating the English expression “easy as pie” into Chinese, most translators would not feel they had veered into loose poetic paraphrase if they avoided any mention of baked goods, which would require a lengthy and irrelevant explanatory note for the Chinese reader, and instead reached for a functionally close phrase in Chinese, perhaps 易如反掌, “easy as turning over the palm of the hand.” On the other hand, if someone were to translate the pair Ru-Mo 儒墨 as used in Chapter 2 of the *Zhuangzi* not as “Confucians and Mohists” but rather as “Rationalists and Empiricists” or “Democrats and Republicans,” most of us would strenuously object, despite these translations being functionally equivalent sets of names presumed to be known to the target audience as a pair of constant disputants whose first premises make it impossible for them to agree.

Where do we draw the line? In addition to the obvious desirability of avoiding anachronism and jarring cultural incongruity, there are other criteria that bear on these decisions in a more intricate and complicated manner. If some further development in the narrative of our hypothetical Chinese plumber novel seemed to hang on some punning reference or thematic connection to dragons or heads, we might consider adding a note, whether we chose to go with “faucet” or a scare-quoted “dragon head” in our main text. If an argument in our English text pivoted to punningly develop the metaphor of baking with respect to degrees of relative ease and difficulty considered abstractly, we’d have to do something to make this intelligible to the reader of our Chinese translation. Perhaps if we were citing the *Zhuangzi* passage about Ru-Mo as a passing bit of exotic color for opening remarks at a political convention, we would paraphrase with something about how Democrats affirm what Republicans deny and vice versa—but would we be comfortable adding “as Zhuangzi said”? No, but we might get away with something like, “To borrow a trope from the ancient Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi. . . .” These cases are pretty uncontroversial, but still they open a can of worms that potentially spells disaster for any attempt to take the idea of literalness literally, as it were. What is literal at one level is nonliteral at another, and which is the relevant level in any case is highly disputable and context-dependent. The translator is constantly called upon to make judgment calls about what level to land on, in accordance with what aspects of any particular phrase will be, in her judgment, important to the coherence and continuity of what precedes and follows in the source text.

But to see the implications of this point for the undermining of any straightforward notion of literalness, let’s consider a trickier case from the *Zhuangzi*. A climactic line in Chapter 1 reads: 至人無己, 神人無功, 聖人無名. The first phrase might be translated as “The Utmost Person has no self.” But what is a “self”? What

is *ji* 己? Like “dragon” as a component in the complex compound translated as “faucet,” it might be a vanishing mediator that has no place in the final literal translation of the phrase in question. Even though as stand-alone words “self” and *ji* may work similarly enough in many contexts to allow them to translate each other, to translate *ji* as the English “self” may be in other contexts as misguided as translating 龍頭 as “dragon head.” A “self” in English might mean many things: the psychological core that lies hidden deep within a person, or her self-regard and self-esteem, or her degree of resistance to persuasion, or her store of memories and ambitions and character traits, or a consistent set of behavioral habits, or a causally independent source of free acts of will, or an identifiably independent psychological character, or a perceiver unconditioned by what it perceives, or a subjectivity in contrast to the perceived world and objective truths, or a thorny philosophical and psychological problem that resists easy characterization. But none of this is obviously in play in either the local context of the chapter in question or in the broader Warring States Chinese discourse in which it is embedded. On the contrary, when we examine our line about *ji*, we find that it comes at the climax of a discussion that begins with the fish Kun in the water, the bird Peng in the sky, the little birds in their bushes, and people who manage to please one ruler or one community with their particular skills and virtues and are rewarded for it with some affirmation of their value. These tropes are marshaled toward a meditation on the absurdities that come when value judgments derived from any one of these contexts are applied to all the others, and on the limitations of being able to operate well only in certain contexts and not others, culminating in the example of Liezi who can only do his riding when there is wind. Our attention is turned then toward the diversity and ceaseless transformations of these contexts and the values derived from them, and the desirability of the ability to “ride” these transformations—to be able to function fittingly not only in wind but also in rain, not only in light but also in darkness, not only in cold but also in heat (these six being the “six atmospheric breaths,” *liuqi* 六氣), and mounted upon what is true not only to heaven but also to earth, rightly in place both down there and up there, like the little birds in the bushes on the ground as well as both Peng up in the sky and Kun down in the waters of the earth (i.e., “what is true both to heaven and to earth,” *tiandizhizheng* 天地之正). This mention of Liezi and his limitation to wind riding refers us back in contrast to the opening line of the chapter as an example of how this proposed riding, which can fit in all these varied contexts, might be done: by transforming accordingly, as the water-submerged fish Kun does in becoming the wind-riding bird Peng, rather than remaining fixed as merely a wind rider, as Liezi does, or stuck only being rightly placed on the earth, like the hopping little birds. Precisely at this point is where we find our queried line, “The Utmost Person has no *ji*.” We should then expect that “having no *ji*” has something to do with all these tropes that prepare the way for it. We notice further that *ji* is, in our passage, directly parallel to “merit” and “name,” thus presumably associating the above ideas with things like a person’s social identity, role, and position within some context that allows him to function in a way that is affirmed as valuable by those who share that context, something that bestows name

and fame upon him for his achievements in that sphere. Finally, in addition to the question of change over time, the preceding discussion in Chapter I raises many questions about knowability and the extent to which someone in any one position can know or understand what's going on within other positions, and indeed whether there is any single knowable character to something that is known differently from many perspectives at once—not only the diachronic question of whether the thing up there is at other times a tiny fish in the water, but also synchronically whether it is a galloping heat haze, a swirl of dust, or a living being blown aloft. *Ji* thus has a closer connection to ideas of social identity and value derived from context fitting, and with it the perspectives that attribute specific values, the epistemological problem of identifiability and the social problem of recognition that this brings, than the unmodified English word *self* might suggest. Given the context, “having no *ji*” is likely meant as a description of someone who is able to transform to fit in all the different contexts both high and low, who rides all the varying atmospheric conditions, both windy and otherwise—someone with no single fixed social identity or role, no single unchanging way of relating to her environment, and who is therefore confusing to others and perhaps ultimately resistant to definite characterization, identification, or recognition. In English, in contrast, to “have no self” tends to suggest mental disintegration, schizophrenia with multiple personalities, immature lack of self-knowledge or principle, or else something like selflessness in the moral sense of unselfishness and altruism. We should not expect a lack of *ji* to bring the same range of associations to mind; rather, if we assume that it has some relevance to the passage in which it appears, it must have something to do with *unchanging commitment* to a particular recognizable social identity or mode of behavior valorized by some specific social or natural context, and to the view of the world and of alternate value-contexts that goes with it. We might have to search for a word, or a group of words, in English that match this meaning more literally than “self.”

And this also bears on how we are to construe the actual range of what looks at first like a simple negation in the sentence “He has no self.” As we have seen, the context of the chapter thus far says nothing about any entity, inner or outer, vanishing entirely, or anyone completely devoid at any time of some specific action, role, viewpoint, identity, or body-mind, but rather is all about transformation of all of these to fit varying contexts, and the difficulties of recognition and evaluation that go with it. Further, when we consider the use of an unmodified negation like this in other classical Chinese texts, we find that it does not always translate neatly as a simple unmodified “none” in English, but rather in many well-attested cases refers rather to a lack of temporal fixity. Consider a statement Confucius makes about himself in the *Analects* (18:8): 無可無不可. Though “literally” the text says, “[I] have nothing I allow and nothing I disallow,” it is clear that this does not mean that Confucius never approves or disapproves of anything; rather, due to his behavior in the surrounding text, we understand it to mean he has no *exclusive* or *fixed* standard of permissibility, applied in all cases and to the exclusion of other standards applied at different times: it is an expression of his “timely” adaptability in applying judgments, not of the total lack of them.

So the *ke* here can be construed to mean not “allow” but “always-allow”; the negated verb itself in this context already implies definiteness, fixity, or exclusivity, which is what is being negated by the negation. We should remember here, too, that the Chinese language has no tenses, and thus that to say “He *had* X but *has* Y and *will have* Z” would use one and the same verbal form three times, so that what is negated in negating that he “has X” would actually be negating that he has it full stop, irrespective of tense, that is, that he “had, has, and will have X.” In English we might say instead, “He does not always have X, or the same X, though he may have X sometimes, and might even have *some* X at all times.”

All of these considerations must apply when we make the judgment call of how to translate 至人無己, 神人無功, 聖人無名. It is thus not clear that “The Utmost person has no self, the Spiritlike Person has no merit, the Sage has no name” is in any meaningful sense more literal than “the Utmost Person has no definite identity, the Spiritlike Person has no particular merit, the Sage has no one name,” which is how it is translated in this volume. The question has no simple answer. Similar considerations apply *mutatis mutandis* thousands of times in the pages that follow.

With these considerations in mind, in this translation I have aimed, as a default starting point, to faithfully render every phrase in the source text—rather than every word—as literally as possible, on the premise that literalism must ground itself in what we know about how whole semantic units were likely to be apprehended by a native reader of the original text. But the length of a relevant phrase is highly variable, so this can extend to taking an entire sentence or pair of sentences and perhaps even paragraph as the targeted unit for literal translation. This means also that sometimes the semantic effects intrinsic to Chinese syntax—for example, parallelisms—must somehow be expressed in English, which has its own semantic conventions. An example would be the opening lines of Chapter 2 (p. 11). Two morphologically parallel phrases (literally, “leaned against armrest and sat, faced-upwards to heaven and exhaled”) evoke an up-down, earth-heaven parallelism, which is underscored a few lines later with the mention of partnerings (“loosed from a partner,” on page 11, foreshadowing the morphologically and phonologically similar term “coupled as opposites” on page 14), which otherwise seems to be an irrelevancy that has come out of nowhere. A literal version in English will not capture this nuance. In such cases, I have attempted to recreate the original effect, in this case by adding the phrase “on the ground,” which marks the parallelism with heaven. The word *ground* does not appear in the text, so this is not word-literalism, but the opposing vector toward the earth below is invoked structurally in the “leaning,” which qualifies the translation as phrase-literalism.

Another example would be the opening line of Chapter 3: “The flow of my life is always bound by its banks, but the activity of the understanding is constrained by no such limits.” No single word equivalent to “flow” is present in the Chinese; instead we have merely the character *sheng* 生, elsewhere translated simply as “life,” as “to be born or give birth,” or as “generate.” But the unusual term used for “limits” in this particular passage, as opposed to the many other words more commonly used to mean “limits” elsewhere in the text, means literally

“the banks of a river,” which, in the context of the image as a whole, suggests an amorphous flow being shaped by its bounding outer contours (which had in turn been shaped by its own fluid current). Hence, instead of the word-for-word translation “My life has bank-limits,” I render the sentence as above. The never-explicit image of “flow” in turn informs the rest of this opening passage and indeed arguably is what makes the passage philosophically and rhetorically coherent.

Another issue that brings many complications for the text is the oft-mentioned ambiguity of classical Chinese, which is sometimes crucial to Zhuangzi’s argument and to the coherence of the text. Chinese words will often carry many possible meanings. English translators, due to the less robust range of ambiguity of English syntax and vocabulary (or to put it less negatively, the more robust requirements for precise disambiguation), usually must choose only one. But in many cases the text is playing on all of the implied meanings, forefronting one among them but counting on the copresence of a crowd of adumbrated alternate senses lurking like a cloud around it, tying together various resonances drawn from their diverging trajectories. Sometimes one can find an English phrase that will cover the range of ambiguity, but in most cases this is not possible. Translators sometimes handle this with notes or bracketed words. In this translation, to address this problem I have sometimes instead resorting to what I call “double translations,” using an extra phrase or repeated sentence. See, for example, page 13. There the translation has six sentences: “Is there really any difference? Or is there no difference? Is there any dispute going on there? Or is there no dispute? Is anything demonstrated? Or is nothing demonstrated?” These are collectively the translation of only two Chinese phrases, actually only eight characters, because the word *bian* 辯 can mean (when considered cognate with 辨, as here) both “differentiation” and “dispute,” and thus—bringing together these two meanings—can also mean “to make clear by means of dispute,” for which we have the English word, “to demonstrate [by argument].” (See Glossary). The text is asking: (1) whether there is really any difference between human language and the chirping of birds; (2) whether there is therefore any definite difference between any two argued-for positions, whether there is really anything to argue about; and (3) whether anything can thus be proved or demonstrated by means of argument. Each meaning is necessary for the coherence of the discussion that follows, so I have expanded the telescoped Chinese into several English sentences. Another example is the many references to “music,” not least the astonishingly beautiful and strange passage on it in Chapter 14 (p. 118). The same Chinese character, pronounced differently, also means “joy,” and every Chinese reader will realize that the discussion, ostensibly about musical performance, is also a rumination on human happiness. To convey this, I have sometimes used phrases like “Music, which is joy . . .” to translate the single character, which can mean both. In all these cases, the English text has several phrases or sentences to render a single one in Chinese, which conveys all of these alternate meanings at once.

A more complicated form of this sort of problem is found not in the semantic range of specific words, but in certain features that are built into Chinese syntax,

which allows a word to function not only in a wide variety of ways, but sometimes even in two opposite ways. For example, consider a very ordinary word like *da* 大: this means “big,” though in some contexts it can also mean “bigger than” or “the biggest of.” But the more interesting complications come when it is used as a verb preceding a noun, where it could mean “to consider big,” or “to make big [because it was considered too small]” or “to consider *too* big [and thus be willing to make smaller].” In most places, context is a fairly clear guide to which choice should be made among these alternatives. But in a text like *Zhuangzi*, where surprising turns, shocking reversals, contrarian twists, counterintuitive claims, and multiple meanings are so central to both the form and content, we sometimes come across uses like this that could plausibly swing both ways; in some cases, we may even suspect that the ambiguity is being played on deliberately—that both of the contrary meanings, and the very uncertainty wavering between them, is the whole point. Here, too, I have sometimes adopted the expedient of the “double translation” technique when I judged it to be appropriate, in most cases alerting the reader that I am doing so with a note.

On Translating Character Names in the Zhuangzi

Lastly, I have adopted a *deliberately inconsistent policy* for translating the names of people and places used in Zhuangzian fables and dialogues. Sometimes the names are transliterated into their modern Mandarin pronunciations (using the pinyin system of romanization), and sometimes they are translated into English with words approximating their putative meaning. I attempt the latter when the name has a meaning, implication, or resonance that would likely have been immediately obvious to literate readers through much or most of the pre–May Fourth eras of Chinese history (i.e., before the advent of vernacular language as the vehicle of education and cultural literacy), of the kind sometimes played on in the commentarial literature, and which adds some interesting additional layer of meaning or irony to the story. Due to the changes in Chinese phonology and linguistic usage over the centuries, it is impossible to know for sure what degree of punning allegorical sense was and was not intended in most cases, but I have tried to produce an English rendering that presents the same mixture of possibly significant puns and meaningless names that would have confronted a (necessarily vaguely) idealized average Chinese literatus, steeped in traditional Chinese literary culture, when reading this text in the post-Han through pre-Republican period (220–1912 CE).

In the 2009 edition, I translated only those names that I judged to be of such obvious strangeness to an imagined contemporaneous reader that they were unmistakably meant as allegorical or as farcical jokes. A more robust commitment to translating as many of the names as possible has to my knowledge previously been attempted only by the intrepid Victor Mair and to some extent by Richard Wilhelm in German. Though familiar with Mair’s work on this front, and duly impressed by his courage and imagination as well as his erudition, I had previously

found these Jabberwockian names to be a bit of an incongruous disturbance to the readerly eye and ear in the English translation. What first caused me to reconsider the value of this incongruity was a suggestion by Professor Hans-Georg Moeller that the inexplicable names in this *Zhuangzi* might be viewed as intended to be something similar to the stage names of hip-hop artists, that is, deliberately stylized nicknames that signal the embrace of outlaw/outcast status with a dramatic, almost kitschy flair, at once badass and surreal, farcically but defiantly embracing and owning one's own ridiculousness in the eyes of mainstream culture. Further conversations with Professor Shi-San Lai concerning the function of the character names in the phenomenology of reading for this text and its impact on Chinese literary traditions consolidated my sense that the English reader would be missing something important if some of the strangeness of these names was not conveyed. This is particularly true when we consider the seriousness with which proper nouns were generally treated in the overall corpus of pre-Qin literature and philosophy, the crucial roles of exemplars and historical precedent in all other important texts of the period with only a single exception: the *Daodejing*, which is an anomaly of anomalies among what came to be widely circulated pre-Qin texts in containing not a single proper noun: no sage-king names, no anecdotes about specific persons, no place names, no names of dynasties or historical periods. The fact that the *Zhuangzi* also treats proper nouns in a very unusual manner—albeit precisely the opposite way, from namelessness to the unrestrained proliferation of names *ad libitum*—thus seemed not without significance.

What really clinched the case is the fact that digital tools have now made it much easier to feel some confidence that a particular name—which may look weird but might just be some historical or mythological figure's actual name—is in fact not attested anywhere else in the extant corpus of texts, or only in texts postdating the *Zhuangzi* and obviously riffing upon the usage there. To be sure, we cannot conclude with certainty that these are merely whimsical authorial inventions even now, since it is of course also possible that any such presently unidentifiable figure appeared somewhere in the vast numbers of ancient texts that have been lost, and really was a known figure of mythology or history at the time of writing. It is not impossible, too, that the classical commentators had some knowledge of these now lost sources, and thus what seem to be transparently ad hoc, circular or forced attempts to identify these figures in their annotations actually have some basis. Nonetheless, in broad statistical terms and on balance, the synoptic sweep of information made possible by the digital tools inclines one to the view that the identifications of these characters made by commentators that appear to be ad hoc space-filling improvisations are just that, rather than precious knowledge based on some now lost source of information. Even if subsequent discoveries prove this hunch wrong, the strange figures who have dropped so entirely out of all other sources should probably be made to appear as strange to the English reader as they would likely have appeared to the eye of two millennia of classical readers of the text, that is, as sudden incongruities stumbling obtrusively onto the page in a cloud of semantic associations, posing ridiculously as the name of a human or nonhuman being playing a role in a narrative or dialogue.

So I've tried to translate what names I could, somewhat adventurously but never arbitrarily, in this spirit. When I could discern no conceivable angle of relevance, or in passages where the general literary tone has moved a few steps away from the more distinctively aggressive Zhuangzian whimsicality, I have left the names transliterated into modern Mandarin pronunciations.

ZHUANGZI

THE INNER CHAPTERS

CHAPTER ONE

Wandering Far and Unfettered

There is a fish in the Northern Oblivion named Kun,¹ and this Kun is quite huge, spanning who knows how many thousands of miles. He transforms into a bird named Peng,² and this Peng has quite a back on him, stretching 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.

The Equalizing Jokebook, a record of many wonders, reports: “When Peng journeys to the Southern Oblivion, the waters ripple for three thousand miles. Spiraling aloft with the whirling winds, he ascends ninety thousand miles into the sky, availing himself of the gusting breath of the midyear to make his departure.”

“It’s a galloping heat haze!”^A “It’s a swirl of dust!” “It’s some living creature blown about on the breath of the air!” And the blue on blue of the sky—is that the sky’s true³ color? Or is it just the vast distance, going on and on without end, that looks that way? When Peng looks down, he, too, sees only this and nothing more.

Now, if water is not piled up thickly enough, it has no power to support a large vessel. Overturn a cupful of water in a hole in the road and you can float a mustard seed in it like a boat, but if you put the cup itself in there it will just get stuck. The water is too shallow for so large a vessel. And if the wind is not piled up thickly enough, it has no power to support Peng’s enormous wings. That is why he needs

1. 鯤. The name means literally “a fish egg.” The character consists of a “fish” radical beside a phonetic element that means literally “elder brother.” If we were to take this as a kind of visual pun, the name might be rendered “Big Brother Roe.” The paradoxes implicit in this name are not irrelevant. The largest fish is thus also the smallest speck of pre-fish, the tiny fish egg. The youngest newborn here, the not-yet-fish, is also the elder brother.

2. 鵬. The name is cognate with 鳳 *feng*, meaning “phoenix,” a mythical bird of enormous proportions. The phonetic of the form used by Zhuangzi here is the character 朋 *peng*, meaning a friend or classmate, a comrade or peer. If we wished to render the visual pun, we might translate “Peer Phoenix.” Again, the paradox is of some importance. Peng is vast, and his superiority to other birds seems to be stressed in what follows. But his name also includes a reference to parity and companionship.

3. 正 *Zheng*. See Glossary. Note also that “sky” here translates as 天 *tian*, the same word elsewhere translated as “Heaven” or “the Heavenly.” See Glossary.

to put ninety thousand miles of air beneath him. Only then, bearing the blue of heaven on his back and unobstructed on all sides, can he ride the wind and make his way south.

The cicada and the fledgling⁴ 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?”

If you’re only making an outing to the nearby woods, you can bring along your three meals for the day and return with your belly still full. If you’re traveling a hundred miles, you’ll need to husk grain for the journey the night before. And if you’re traveling a thousand miles, you’ll need to save up provisions for three months before you go. What do these two little insects know? A small consciousness⁵ cannot keep up with a vast consciousness; short duration cannot keep up with long duration. How do we know? The morning mushroom knows nothing of the noontide; the winter cicada knows nothing of the spring and autumn. This is what is meant by short duration. In southern Chu there is a tree called Mingling,⁶ for which five hundred years are as a single spring, and another five hundred years are as a single autumn. In ancient times there was even one massive tree whose spring and autumn were each eight thousand years long. And yet nowadays Pengzu⁷ alone has a special reputation for longevity, and everyone tries to match him. Pathetic, isn’t it?

This is exactly what Tang’s question to Ji^B amounted to: “In the barren north-land there is a dark ocean called the Pool of Heaven. There is a fish there several thousand miles across with a length that is as yet unknown, named Kun. There’s a bird there named Peng with a back like Mt. Tai and wings like clouds draped across the heavens. In a spiraling ascent that twists like a ram’s horn he climbs ninety thousand miles, breaking through the clouds and bearing the blue of the sky on his back, and then heads south, finally arriving at the Southern Oblivion. The scoldquail laughs at him, saying ‘Where does he think *he’s* going? I leap into the air with all my might, but before I get farther than a few yards I drop to the ground. My twittering and fluttering between the bushes and branches is the utmost form of flying! So where does he think *he’s* going?’ Such is the difference between the large and the small.”

4. Literally “studying,” 學 *xue*.

5. 知 *Zhi*, elsewhere translated as “understanding,” “the understanding consciousness,” “knowing consciousness,” “conscious knowing,” “knowledge,” “cleverness,” or “wisdom.” See Glossary.

6. The name, unattested elsewhere, plays on the name of Kun’s dwelling place and Peng’s destination, meaning something like “Oblivion’s Numinosity.”

7. A legendary figure reputed to have lived to be several hundred years old.

And he whose understanding⁸ is sufficient to fill some one post, or whose deeds meet the needs of some one village, or whose personal virtues⁹ please some one ruler, or who is able to prove himself in a single country, sees himself in just the same way. Even Song Rongzi¹⁰ would burst out laughing at such a man. If the whole world happened to praise Song Rongzi, he would not be goaded onward; if the whole world condemned him, he would not be deterred. He simply made a sharp and fixed division between the inner and the outer, and clearly discerned where true honor and disgrace reside. He did not involve himself in anxious calculations in his dealings with the world. Nevertheless, there was still a sense in which he was not really firmly planted.

Now Liezi¹¹ got around by charioting upon the wind itself and was so good at it that he could go on like that in his cool and breezy way for fifteen days at a time before heading back. He was someone who didn't get caught up in anxious calculations about bringing the blessings of good fortune upon himself. Nevertheless, although this allowed him to avoid the exertions of walking, there was still something he needed to depend on.

But suppose you were to chariot upon what is true¹² both to Heaven and to earth, riding atop the back-and-forth of the six atmospheric breaths,^C so that your wandering could nowhere be brought to a halt. You would then be depending on¹³—what? Thus I say, the Utmost Person has no definite identity, the Spiritlike Person has no particular merit, the Sage has no one name.^D

8. 知 *Zhi*. See Glossary.

9. 德 *De*. Elsewhere translated as “virtuosities,” “intrinsic virtuosities,” and, for nonhuman entities, “intrinsic powers.” See Glossary.

10. Song Rongzi is another name for the philosopher Song Xing, to be discussed at greater length in Chapter 33, p. 269. His doctrine that “to be insulted is not a disgrace” is acknowledged by the author here as a salutary first step toward independence from the opinions and value judgments of convention. But as many commentators point out, this is still just a first step, which rests on making a clear and fixed distinction between self and other, safeguarding one's identity against external influence. The author sees true independence both as lying beyond this, taking it further, and in another sense as going in just the opposite direction: the effacement of any fixed border between self and other, any definite identity.

11. Lie Yugou, a figure of doubtful historicity mentioned many times in the *Zhuangzi*, to whom a later philosophical work, the *Liezi*, is attributed. If translated as a made-up name, perhaps “Lineup Banditpreventer.”

12. 正 *Zheng*. See Glossary. This echoes the question at the beginning of the chapter about the “true” color of Heaven, the sky, as seen from the earth. Now Zhuangzi speaks of riding upon what is true both to Heaven *and* to earth, what he later calls “Walking Two Roads” (Chapter 2, p. 16) or neither Heaven nor man winning out over the other (Chapter 6, p. 55). “True to” here is opposed to “swerving from,” meaning “straight” or “aligned with,” rather than “true” as opposed to “false.”

13. 待 *Dai*. See Glossary.

When Yao¹⁴ went to cede the empire to Xu You, he said, “To keep the torches burning in broad daylight would be making needless trouble for oneself. To continue watering one’s garden during a heavy rainfall would be pointless labor. Now you, sir, so much as appear in the world and at once it is well ordered. And yet here I am, playing the host and master,¹⁵ acting like I control it all. I feel I am greatly deficient. Please accept the rulership of this world from me.”

Xu You replied, “You are ruling the world, and thus is the world already ruled however you rule it. If I were nonetheless to take your place, would I be doing it for the name? But name is just a guest of the real. Shall I then play the role of the guest? The tailorbird lives in the depths of a vast forest, but uses no more than a single branch to make his nest. When the beaver drinks from the river, he takes only enough to fill his belly. Go home, my lord! I have no use for an empire. Although the cook may not keep the kitchen in order, that doesn’t mean the impersonator of the deceased—or even the priest who arranges the ritual vessels—needs to leap over the sacrificial vessels to replace him!”¹⁶

Shoulder Self¹⁶ said to Unk Linkin’, “I was listening to the words of the madman Jieyu.¹⁷ He talked big without getting at anything, going on and on without getting anywhere. I was shocked and rather scared by what he said, which seemed as limitless as the Milky Way—vast and excessive, with no regard for the way people really are.”

“What in the world did he say?”

“There are imponderable Spiritlike Persons who live on distant Mt. Guye with skin like ice and snow, gentle and yielding like virgin girls. They do not eat the five grains, but rather live by breathing in the wind and drinking in the dew. They ride upon the air and clouds, charioting upon soaring dragons, wandering beyond the four seas. They just concentrate their spirits and straightaway all things are free from sickness and the harvest matures.’ I regard this as crazy talk, which I refuse to believe.”

“No surprise there,” said Unk Linkin’. “The blind have no access to the beauty of visual patterns, and the deaf have no part in the sounds of bells and drums. It

14. Mythical ancient sage-emperor who ceded his empire not to his son but to the most worthy man in the realm, Shun, also subsequently revered as a sage. The current incident, in which he tries and fails to cede it to the hermit Xu You, suggests that Shun was a second choice at best.

15. *Shi* 尸. This word, literally denoting the ritual role of the impersonator of the deceased at funerals, has an extended meaning of “to control, preside over, serve as host or master.” Its double meaning sets up the play on guest and host in Xu You’s answer, and especially his final riposte, where he uses the same term.

16. “Shoulder Self” (Jian Wu 肩吾) appears also in Chapters 6, 7, and 21. In the Chapter 6 (p. 68) instance, he is listed among a set of mythological figures and identified by Cheng Xu-anyang as a god.

17. Jieyu ridicules Confucius in the *Analects* (18:5) and thus serves as a classic symbol of anti-Confucian sentiment. He appears again at the end of Chapter 4 and *passim*.

is not only the physical body that can be blind and deaf; the understanding¹⁸ can also be so. If you were then to ‘agree’ with his words, you would be acting like a virgin girl who has just reached her time.^F Such persons, or the virtuosity¹⁹ in them, would be spreading everywhere through^G the ten thousand things until all are made one, while the current world is busy groping toward its own chaotic order²⁰—why would they wear themselves out fretting about the world as if it were something to be managed? Such persons are harmed by no thing. A flood may reach the sky without drowning them, a drought may melt the stones and scorch the mountains without scalding them. From their dust and chaff you could mold yourself a Yao or a Shun. How could they consider any particular thing worth bothering about? It is like a ceremonial cap salesman of Song traveling to Yue, where the people shave their heads and tattoo their bodies—they have no use for such things. After Yao brought all the people of the world under his rule and put all within the four seas into good order, he went off to see four of these masters of distant Mt. Guye at the bright side of the Fen River. Astonished at what he saw there, he forgot all about his empire.”

Huizi²¹ said to Zhuangzi, “The King of Wei gave me the seed of a great gourd. I planted it, and when it matured it weighed over a hundred pounds. I filled it with liquid, but it was not firm enough to lift. I cut it in half to make a dipper, but it was too wide to scoop into anything. It was big and all, but because it was so useless I finally just smashed it to pieces.”

Zhuangzi said, “You are certainly stupid when it comes to using big things. There was once a man of Song who was skilled at making a balm to keep the hands from chapping. For generations his family had used it to make a living washing silk through the winter. A customer heard about it and asked to buy the recipe for a hundred pieces of gold. The family got together and consulted, saying, ‘We’ve been washing silk for generations and have never earned more than a few pieces of gold; now in one morning we can sell the technique for a hundred. Let’s do it.’ The customer took the balm and presented it to the king of Wu. When Yue started a war with him, the king made the man a general who led his soldiers through a winter water battle with the men of Yue, and beat them big.²² The man was then enfeoffed as a feudal lord. The power to keep the hands from chapping

18. 知 *Zhi*. See Glossary.

19. 德 *De*. See Glossary.

20. The term *luan* 亂 usually meant “disorder” in Zhuangzi’s time but also had an archaic meaning of just the opposite: “to govern or put in order.” Zhuangzi seems to be playing on this double meaning here.

21. The logician Huizi is a key presence throughout much of this book as Zhuangzi’s interlocutor, foil, frenemy, sparring partner, rival, companion, perhaps even intended audience. His interest in logic and its paradoxes, as documented especially in the final section of Chapter 33, p. 272, highlights both his similarities to and difference from the Zhuangzian positions that are developed in contrast to them, but which often seem to some extent to echo their language and even procedures.

22. Because the balm protected their hands.

was one and the same, but one man used it to get an enfeoffment and another couldn't even use it to avoid washing silk all winter. The difference is all in how the thing is used. You, on the other hand, had a gourd of over a hundred pounds. How it is that you never thought of making it into an enormous vessel for yourself and floating through the lakes and rivers in it? Instead, you worried that it was too wide to scoop into anything, which I guess means the mind of our greatly esteemed master here is still all clogged up, occupied with its bushes and branches!"²³

Huizi said to Zhuangzi, "I have a huge tree that people call the Stinktree. The trunk is swollen and gnarled, impossible to align with any level or ruler. The branches are twisted and bent, impossible to align to any T-square or carpenter's arc. Even if it were growing right in the road, a carpenter would not give it so much as a second glance. And your words are similarly big but useless, which is why they are rejected by everyone who hears them."

Zhuangzi said, "Haven't you ever seen the wildcats and weasels? They crouch low to await any straggling prey, then pounce east or west in an elegantly arcing leap, high or low without hesitation. But this is exactly what lands them in a trap, and they end up dying in the net. But take a yak: it is big like the clouds draped across the heavens. What it's good at is just being big—and of course it cannot catch so much as a single mouse. You, on the other hand, have this big tree and you worry that it's useless. How you could loaf and wander, doing a whole lot of nothing²⁴ there at its side! How far-flung and unfettered you'd be, dozing there beneath it! It will never be cut down by ax or saw. Nothing will harm it. Since it has nothing for which it can be used, what could entrap or afflict it?"

ENDNOTES

A. Literally, "wild horse(s)." Some commentators suggest this is a term for a mirage-like heat haze, which moves through the air like a pack of wild horses seen at a distance. Some take it literally, construing these three lines as describing the results stirred up by Peng's ascent, like the rippling of the waters, or else what he sees when looking downward, the activities of creatures large and small, all breathing life back and forth into each other. Alternate interpretations of the last line would render "Living beings' breathing of life back and forth into each other" or even "The blowing of breath back and forth among things in the process of generation of things!" Here it is interpreted as what Peng might look like from below, the guesses made by those down on the ground. He is unknown, has no "definite identity," because he is so lofty, and he has to be so lofty because he is so big.

23. Following Luo Miandao's interpretation, linking this to the preferred habitat of the little birds featured earlier in the chapter.

24. 無為 *Wuwei*, which in this volume is usually translated as "non-doing." See Glossary.

b. The *Beishanlu* 北山錄 of the Tang monk Shen Qing 神清 records the story of the sage-emperor Tang asking an advisor named Ge 革, “Is there a limit to the above, the below, and the four directions?” Ge answers, “Beyond the limitless, there is again further limitlessness.” The commentary by Huibao states that this passage comes from the *Zhuangzi*, though it is found in no extant manuscript. The character Ge and the name given for the interlocutor here, Ji 棘, are claimed to have been homonyms in ancient pronunciations. The *Liezi* also includes several dialogues between Tang and Ge (or Xia Ge), though not the one quoted in the *Beishanlu*. Whether or not question and answer originally belonged here, or were in fact in the text anywhere, is unknown. If not, this could be a reference to a well-known anecdote, with the emperor’s naïve question being compared to the scoldquail’s blinkered rhetorical question at the end of the following passage.

c. 六氣. Literally, the six *qi*. For *qi*, see Glossary. According to Sima Biao, the six are yin, yang, wind, rain, darkness, and light. Cheng Xuanying, citing Li Yi 李頤, interprets them as the atmospheric conditions of dawn, high noon, sunset, and midnight, together with the energies of heaven and earth generally. Zhi Daolin 支道林, more simply, takes them to be the four seasons together with the general energies of heaven and earth. The character 辯 *bian*, translated as “back-and-forth,” means disputation or argument, the central topic of much of the following chapter. See Glossary. The usage is odd, and several substitutions of homonyms have been suggested, for example 變 meaning “transformation” and 辨 meaning “differentiation,” other important Zhuangzian themes. But replacing the character seems to miss the resonance with the trope of the windstorm sounds as disputations that open the next chapter. The phrase “back-and-forth” here is meant to cover all of these meanings: the shifting weather all around us as the sound of bickering, bantering disputation among many differentiated viewpoints. Each atmospheric state is, as it were, making an “argument,” presenting what is right to it. We are urged to ride what is true both to heaven and to earth, and similarly to hitch our chariots to the disputational deposition of each contrasting atmospheric state in turn. This is what the next chapter calls “Going along with thisness, going by the rightness of the present ‘this.’” 因是 *yinshi*. See Glossary.

d. The three do not seem to be sharply distinguished elsewhere in the text, so these are generally read as three alternate names for the same type of figure. An alternate interpretation would be, “To the Utmost Person there is no self, to the Spirit Man there is no achievement, to the Sage there is no reputation,” meaning that he has no regard for them. Note also that the word “name” (*ming* 名) always has a strong implication of, and can simply mean, “fame, reputation,” even “social position and role.”

e. The reference is to a ritual sacrifice to the ancestors, where the spirit-medium is a stand-in for the deceased, occupying his place and thus receiving the offerings presented to him. The priest is the one who arranges the ritual vessels. The cook prepares the food to be used as sacrificial offerings. Xu You, picking up Yao’s use of the term in reference to himself, here admits that he might well be the “host” or “master,” but in the strange sense implied by Yao’s term: like the impersonator of the dead, he does nothing, and in his person presence and absence, life and death, coincide. He is silent, inactive, majestic, awe-inspiring, sacred. He is the one who receives the offerings of the “cook,” i.e., the ruler, and yet he does not really receive them; they pass through him. If he were to leap over the vessels to take the place of the cook, because the food was ill prepared, he would be relinquishing precisely the qualities that make him worthy of the offering, and thus undermine the ritual even more disastrously than the poor-quality food does. The ruler may be offering unpalatable fare, but to try to fix it would be to give up an even more sacred position, one which alone makes the whole arrangement meaningful. In this version, Xu You wryly also allows that he may be a mere arranger of vessels for the offering, rather than the host, but even so he wouldn’t want to be the cook. In the *Huainanzi*, “Taizuxun,” a slightly modified version of this statement occurs: the spirit-medium doesn’t want to replace the cook

or the vessel-arranger, no matter how poorly they do their job. The *Zhuangzi* version draws the line in a different place, putting the dead-living non-doing impersonator of the dead in the same category as the arranger of the food vessels, and the cook in another. Perhaps this suggests playing both roles at once: the non-doing living-dead pseudo-ancestor and also the mere arranger of the vessels that receive the ceaseless offerings of sustenance to that holy paradoxical being.

F. Many commentators suggest that this sentence should be read to mean, “This describes you perfectly,” taking 時 *shi* as a loan for 是 *shi*, and 女 *nu* as a loan for 汝 *ru*. This is feasible, but the more literal translation given here suggests that it is only right for Shoulder Self to consider these words untrue, for if someone who is “blind and deaf” in this way were to blindly “agree” with them (literally “consider these words right 是其言 *shi qi yan*; cf. Chapter 2, p. 20; for *shi*, see Glossary), he would be like a flirtatious virgin girl, who has not really experienced, does not really understand, what she is agreeing to.

G. Taking *pangbo* 旁礴 as cognate with *banbo* 般礴 as used in Chapter 21, p. 169, following the interpretation of Xuan Ying; elsewhere written *pangpo* 旁魄, *panbo* 盤礴, and *bangbo* 磅礴.

CHAPTER TWO

Equalizing Assessments of Things^A

Sir Shoestrap¹ of Southwall was leaning against his armrest on the ground, gazing upward and releasing his breath into the heavens above—all in a scatter there,^B as if loosed from a partner.^C

Sir Swimmy Faceformed stood in attendance before him. “Who or what is this here?” he asked. “Can the body really be made like a withered tree, the mind like dead ashes? What leans against this armrest now is not what leaned against it before.”

Sir Shoestrap of Southwall said, “How good it is that you question this, Yan^D! What’s here now is this: I have lost me. But could you know² who or what that is? You hear the piping of man without yet hearing the piping of earth; you hear the piping of earth without yet hearing the piping of Heaven.”³

Sir Swimmy Faceformed said, “Please tell me more.”

Sir Shoestrap of Southwall replied, “When the Great Clump⁴ belches forth its vital breath,⁵ we call it the wind. As soon as it begins, raging cries emerge from all the ten thousand hollows, and surely you cannot have missed the rustle and bustle that then goes on. The bulges and drops of the mountain forest, the indentations and holes riddling its massive towering trees, are like noses, mouths, ears; like sockets, enclosures, mortars; like ponds, like puddles! Roarers and whizzers, scolders and sighers, shouters, wailers, boomers, growlers! One leads with a “yeee!,” another answers with a “yuuu!” A light breeze brings a small harmony,

1. The man’s name means shoe strap, but the same character is in Warring States texts also used as a superlative modifier, cognate with 極 *ji*, literally “roof ridge,” meaning “extreme, ultimate, uppermost, pivot.”

2. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

3. Implying either that he does not know it because he hasn’t yet heard the piping of Heaven, or conversely that to “know” it would itself be a failure to hear the piping of Heaven, which is precisely the foreclosure of knowing who is who or what is what. Given the ambiguities fomented about “knowing” in this chapter, perhaps both are implied.

4. *Dakuai* 大塊. Note the recurrence of this rare and unexplained term, seemingly a Zhuangzian coinage, in Chapter 6, pp. 56, as one in a transforming series of alternate names for the unknown cause of illness, of life and death, indeed of all transformation.

5. 氣 *Qi*. See Glossary.

while a powerful gale makes for a harmony vast and grand. And once the sharp wind has passed, all these holes return to their silent vacuity. Have you never seen all their tempered attunements, all their cunning contentions?”

Sir Swimmy Faceformed said, “So the piping of the earth means just the sound of these hollows. And the piping of man would be the sound of bamboo panpipes. What then is the piping of Heaven?”

Sir Shoestrap said, “It is the gusting through all the ten thousand differences that yet causes all of them to come only from themselves. For since every last identity is only what some one of them picks out from it, what identity can there be for their rouser?^e”

“A large consciousness is idle and spacey; a small consciousness is cramped and circumspect. Big talk is bland and flavorless; petty talk is detailed and fragmented. We sleep and our spirits converge, we awake and our bodies open outward. We give, we receive, we act, we construct, trying to make something of whatever we encounter^f: all day long we apply our minds to our struggles—some straightforward, some deeply buried away, some dogging us closely. The small fears leave us nervous and depleted, the large fears leave us stunned and blank. Shooting forth like an arrow from a bowstring: thus is our presumption as we arbitrate right and wrong. Holding fast as if to sworn oaths: thus is our defense of our victories. Worn away as if by autumn and winter: such is our daily dwindle, the flailings of a drowning man unable to get him any closer to the shore.^g Pressed on all sides as if sealed in: such is the old drainage ditch, the rut in which we’re stuck, the mind left on the verge of death with no way back to the bygone vitality.

“Joy and anger, sorrow and happiness, plans and regrets, transformations and stagnations, unguarded abandonment and deliberate posturing—music flowing out of hollows, mushrooms of billowing steam! Day and night they alternate before our eyes, yet no one knows whence they sprout. Let us stop right there, no need to go further! Already it is constantly coming to us day and night, this from which they are all born! Without that there is no me, and yet without me there is nothing picked out from it.⁶ It is something that is always very close to me indeed, and yet still I can never know what is doing the causing here. If there is in fact something in control of causing all this to happen, it is peculiarly devoid of any sign that could identify what it is. Even when its ability to act has been so reliable, it shows no definite form. It would have to be some kind of reality that lacks any definite form, a reality without any single identity.

“The hundred bones, the nine openings, the six internal organs are all present here as my body. Which one is most dear to me? Do you delight in all equally, or do you have some favorites among them? Or are they all mere servants and concubines? Are these servants and concubines unable to govern one another? Or do they take turns as master and servant? If there is a genuine ruler among them, its

6. Analogously, without the wind there would be no sound, but without the holes there would be no particular tone selected out from it, no sound of the wind.

genuineness would have to be of some kind that is the same whether any definite reality could ever be found for it or not.

“We receive of it some one completed form,⁷ a specific fully-formed body, and then we keep that alive only by constantly anticipating its end, grinding and lacerating it against all the things around us, everything it does just flashing by and away like an unstoppable galloping horse—is it not sad? All our lives we labor, and nothing is achieved. Worn and exhausted to the point of collapse, never knowing what it all amounts to—how can we not lament this? What good does it do if others say, ‘To us he is not dead’? The body has decayed and the mind went with it. Can this be called anything but an enormous sorrow? Is human life always and everywhere such a daze? Or could it be only me who is dazed, while there are also others who are undazed? Of humans is there anything or anyone undazed?¹¹”

“And similarly, if we just follow whatever completed form of our minds has so far taken shape,⁸ making that our master and teacher, who could ever be without a teacher? That is something even the most ignorant are always doing without fail. It is not as if the mind is first required to know all the alternating states and then actively selects for itself from among them the one to be taken as master and teacher. For the mind to be able to do that *before* any completed form has already taken shape in it, to make such an affirmation or negation about which form it will regard as right and which as wrong without already having taken some shape—that would be like leaving for Yue today and arriving there yesterday.⁹ This is to regard the nonexistent as existent. The existence of the nonexistent is beyond the understanding even of the divine sage-king Yu—so what possible sense could it make to someone like me?”

“But human speech is not just a blowing of air. Speech has something of *which* it speaks, something it refers to.”¹⁰

“Yes, but what it refers to is peculiarly unfixd. So is there really anything it speaks of? Or has nothing ever been spoken of? You take it to be different from the chirping of baby birds. Is there really any difference? Or is there no difference? Is there any dispute going on there? Or is there no dispute? Is anything demonstrated by it? Or is nothing demonstrated by it?¹ How could any course of activity become so concealed and unnoticed that there could be any question about whether it is a genuine or a false course? How could any act of speaking become so concealed and unnoticed that there could be any question about whether it is right or wrong to say? After all, where could any course veer off to without that

7. *Cheng* 成. See Glossary.

8. *Cheng* 成. See Glossary

9. Cf. the entry for Hui Shi in Chapter 33, p. 273.

10. The question supposes that this, the actual identity of the referent out in the world rather than what is fully-formed in the mind, might be the real basis for affirming and negation, for making judgments of what is “right” and “wrong” and of what is what and who is who. In other words, perhaps the basis for making these judgments is that they are referring to something that is in fact the case.

course thus being present there? Where could any speaking be present without that speech thus being deemed acceptable there?

“But courses qua courses get concealed behind the small formations that they themselves succeed in shaping,¹¹ and speech qua speech gets concealed behind the garlands of honor it itself brings on.^k Hence we have the rights and wrongs of the Confucians and Mohists, each affirming what the other denies and denying what the other affirms. But if you want to affirm what they deny and deny what they affirm, nothing compares to the Illumination of the Obvious:¹²

“There is no thing that is not a ‘that.’ There is no thing that is not a ‘this.’ One is oneself also a ‘that,’ an other, but this is not something one can directly see. Rather, it is known through the understanding,¹³ which thus says¹⁴ ‘Thatness’ emerges from ‘thisness,’ and ‘thisness’ follows from ‘thatness.’ This is its theory of the simultaneous generation of the ‘this’ and the ‘that.’ However, by the very same token, it can say that their simultaneous generation means also their simultaneous demise, and vice versa.¹⁵ When it¹⁶ affirms either one, it simultaneously finds it has denied it; when it denies either one, it simultaneously finds it has affirmed it.¹⁷ By going along with the affirmation it goes along with the denial; by going along with the denial it goes along with the affirmation.¹⁸

“Thus the Sage does not proceed from any one of these alone but instead lets them all bask in the broad daylight of Heaven.^l That is also a way of going along with the rightness of each ‘this,’ going along with ‘thisness’ itself. For to be a ‘this’ is in fact also to be a ‘that,’ and every ‘that’ is also a ‘this.’ ‘THAT’ is then itself already both ‘this’ and ‘not-this,’ both a right and a wrong. But ‘THIS’ is also itself already both ‘this’ and ‘not-this,’ both a right and a wrong. So is there really any ‘this’ as opposed to ‘not-this,’ any right as opposed to wrong? Or is there really no ‘this’ as opposed to ‘not-this,’ no ‘right’ as opposed to ‘wrong’? A state where ‘this’ and ‘not-this’—right and wrong—are no longer coupled as opposites is called

11. *Cheng*. See Glossary.

12. *Ming* 明. See Glossary.

13. Both “known” and “the understanding” here are translations of *Zhi*. See Glossary.

14. Alternately, “But one cannot be seeing from the perspective of an other. It is from one’s own understanding, from knowing oneself, that one knows this [i.e., that every ‘this,’ including oneself, is also a ‘that,’ an ‘other’].” The presence of others is manifested right in the knowledge of self, as the awareness that there is something other than the self.

15. This phrase is attributed to Hui Shi, said of things in general, in which context it means that as soon as things are born, they simultaneously are dying. See Chapter 33, p. 273.

16. I.e., the faculty of conscious understanding.

17. Or: “And this simultaneous affirmability [of their generation and demise] is the simultaneous negatability [of their generation and demise], and vice versa.”

18. Alternately, and more simply: “It goes along with the affirmation, it goes along with the denial. It goes along with the denial, it goes along with the affirmation.” Or: “What is right only according to circumstance is also wrong according to circumstance; what is circumstantially wrong is also circumstantially right.” “Whenever it goes along with any affirmation it also goes along with the negation, and when it goes along with the negation it also goes along with the affirmation.”

Course as axis, the axis of all courses.¹⁹ When this axis 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.

“For you can use the act of indication as an illustration of the unindicated that belongs to all indication, but that is no match for using the unindicated itself as an illustration of the unindicated that belongs to all indication.^M You can use a horse to show the nonhorseness of a horse, but that is no match for using the nonhorseness itself to show the nonhorseness of horses.^N Any single indication is of all heaven and earth. Any single horse is all the ten thousand things.^O

“Something is allowed because some allowing of it has happened. Something is disallowed because some disallowing of it has happened. Courses are formed²⁰ by walking them. Things are so by being called so. Whence ‘thus and so’? From thus and so being affirmed of them. Whence ‘not thus and so’? From thus and so being denied of them. Each thing necessarily has someplace from which it can be affirmed as thus and so, and someplace from which it can be affirmed as acceptable. So no thing is not right, no thing is not acceptable. For whatever we may define as a beam as opposed to a pillar, as a leper as opposed to the great beauty Xishi, or whatever might be from some perspective strange, grotesque, uncanny, or deceptive, there is a course that opens them into one another, connecting them to form a oneness. Their divisions are formations, their formations are destructions.²¹ Thus all things are also free of formation and destruction, for these also open into one another, connecting to form a oneness.^P It is only someone who really gets all the way through them who can see how the two sides open into one another, connecting them to form a oneness. Such a person would not deploy any one particular way of defining rightness, but would instead entrust it to the everyday function of each being. Their everyday function is what works for them, and ‘working’ just means this opening up into one another, their way of connecting. Opening to form a connection just means getting what you get: go as far as whatever you happen to get to, and leave it at that. It is all just a matter of going along with all that is entailed in thisness, going by the rightness of the present ‘this.’ The sense in which everything and everyone is always already doing precisely that, but without knowing it, and without knowing it to be right, is just what we mean by *the Course*.²²

“But to labor your spirit trying to make all things one, without realizing that it is all the same [whether you do so or not],^Q is called “Three in the Morning.”^R What is this Three in the Morning? Once a monkey trainer was distributing chestnuts. He said, ‘I’ll give you three in the morning and four in the evening.’

19. Neither a singular nor a plural reading of *dao* will suffice in this context. The text says literally “. . . is called Course-Axis.”

20. *Cheng*. See Glossary.

21. *Cheng*. See Glossary.

22. Here at last we get the new sense of Dao, “the Great Dao,” “the Dao that is not any particular dao,” “the course that does not guide.”

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 brought them no loss either in name or in fact, but in one case it brought anger and in another delight. He just went along with the ‘thisness,’ relying on the rightness of the present ‘this.’ 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.⁵ This is called Walking Two Roads.”

The understanding of those ancient people really got somewhere! Where had it arrived? To the point where there had never existed any definite thing at all. This is really getting there, as far as you can go. When no definite thing exists, nothing more can be—added! Next there were those for whom specific things existed, but no sealed boundaries between them. Next there were those for whom there were sealed boundaries, but never any rights and wrongs. When rights and wrongs wax bright, the Course begins to wane. What sets the Course to waning is exactly what allows preference for one thing over another to succeed in reaching its full formation.²³ But is there really any waning versus fullness? Or is there really no such thing as waning versus fullness? In a certain sense there exists waning versus fullness, loss versus success. In that sense, we can say that the Zhaos are zither players. But in a certain sense there is no such thing as waning versus fullness, no loss versus success. In that sense we can say, on the contrary, that the Zhaos are not zither players. Zhao Wen strumming his zither, Master Kuang tapping out the time, Huizi leaning on his desk—the understanding these three had of their arts waxed most full. This was what they flourished in, and thus they pursued these arts to the end of their days. They delighted in them, and observing that this delight of theirs was not shared, they wanted to shine its light and make it obvious to others. So they tried to make others understand as obvious what was not obvious to them, and thus some ended their days in the darkness of debating about “hardness” and “whiteness,” and Zhao Wen’s son ended his days still grappling with his father’s zither strings.¹ Can this be called success, being fully accomplished at something? In that case, even I am fully accomplished. Can this be called failure, lacking the full accomplishment of something? If so, neither I nor anything else can be considered fully accomplished.²⁴

Thus the Radiance of Drift and Doubt is the sage’s only map. He deploys no single definition of what is right, but instead entrusts it to the everyday function of each thing. This is what was meant by “using the Illumination of the Obvious.”

Now I will try some words here about “this.” But I don’t know if it belongs in the same category as “this” or not. For belonging in a category and not belonging

23. *Cheng*. See Glossary.

24. The single word 成 *cheng*, depending on its antonym in each case, is translated variously as “fullness,” “completion,” “formation,” “completion,” “fully-formed,” “success,” or “accomplishment” in this and the preceding passages. See Glossary.

in that category themselves form a single category! Being similar is so similar to being dissimilar! So there is finally no way to keep it different from “that.”

Nevertheless, let me try to say it. There is a beginning. There is a not-yet-beginning-to-be-a-beginning. There is a not-yet-beginning-to-not-yet-begin-to-be-a-beginning. There is existence. There is nonexistence. There is a not-yet-beginning-to-be-nonexistence. There is a not-yet-beginning-to-not-yet-begin-to-be-nonexistence. Suddenly there is nonexistence. But I do not-yet know whether “the existence of nonexistence” is ultimately existence or nonexistence. Now I have said something. But I do not-yet know: has what I have said really said anything? Or has it not really said anything?

Nothing in the world is larger than the tip of a hair in autumn, and Mt. Tai is small. No one lives longer than a dead child, and old Pengzu died an early death. Heaven and earth are born together with me, and the ten thousand things and I are one.

But if we are all one, can there be anything to say, anything to refer to? But since I have already declared that we are “one,” can there be nothing to say, nothing to refer to? The one and the saying are already two, the two and the original unsaid one are three. Going on like this even a skilled chronicler could not keep up with it, not to mention a lesser man. So even moving from nonexistence to existence we already arrive at three—how much more when we move from existence to existence! Rather than moving from anywhere to anywhere, then, let us just go along with “thisness,” relying on the rightness of whatever is before us as the present “this.”

For courses have never had any sealed boundaries between them, and words have never had any constant range. It is by establishing definitions of what is “this,” what is “right,” that boundaries are made. Let me explain what I mean by boundaries: there are right and left, then there are roles and duties, then there are divisions and disputes, then there are competitions and struggles. (And this is the kind of thing they call *the Eight Virtues*!)²⁵ As for the sage, he may admit that something exists beyond the six limits of the known world, but he does not make any further assessments²⁶ about it. As for what is within the known world, he may assess it but will not express his own opinion. 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.^U 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 unshown.

The greatest Course is thus always unproclaimed. Greatest argument is that which uses no words. Greatest humankindness is that which is neither human nor kind. Greatest integrity is that which declines nothing. Greatest courage is that

25. *De*. Elsewhere translated as “virtuosity,” “intrinsic virtuosities,” or “intrinsic powers.” See Glossary.

26. *Lun* 論, as in the title of the chapter.

which is unaggressive. For when the guidance of a course becomes explicit, when it becomes clearly and manifestly a course, it ceases to be the Course. When words make an argument, they fail to reach everywhere. When humankindness is constant it cannot be all-encompassing.²⁷ When integrity is pure it cannot be trusted. When courage is aggressive it cannot reach completion.²⁸ These five are rounded on all sides, but people are always trying to make them square.

Hence when understanding comes to stop at what it does not understand, when consciousness comes to rest there where it has no consciousness, it has arrived at the utmost. The demonstration that uses no words, the Course that gives no guidance, the Course that is not a course—who “understands” these things, what could know them? If there is some kind of knowing of them, it could only be what we might call the Heavenly Reservoir: poured into without ever getting full, ladled out of without ever running out, ever not-knowing its own source.^V This is called the Shadowy Splendor.

In ancient times Yao asked Shun, “I want to attack Zong, Kuai, and Xu’ao. For though I sit facing south on the throne, still I am not at ease. Why is this?”

Shun said, “Though these three may continue to dwell out among the bushes and grasses, why should this make you ill at ease? Once upon a time ten suns rose in the sky at once, and the ten thousand things were all simultaneously illuminated. And how much better are multiple virtuosities than multiple suns?”²⁹

Gnawgap asked Baby Sovereign “Do you know what all things agree in considering right?”

Baby Sovereign said, “How could I know that?”

Gnawgap said, “Do you know that you don’t know?”

Baby Sovereign said, “How could I know that?”

Gnawgap said, “Then are all things devoid of knowledge?”

Baby Sovereign said, “How could I know that? Still, let me try to say something about this. How could I know that what I call ‘knowing’ is not really ‘not-knowing’? How could I know that what I call ‘not-knowing’ is not really ‘knowing’? Now let *me* try asking *you* something. When humans sleep in a damp place, they wake up deathly ill and sore about the waist—but what about eels? If humans live in trees, they tremble with fear and worry—but how about monkeys? Of

27. Following those manuscripts that have *zhou* 周 instead of *cheng*.

28. *Cheng*.

29. Yao was the first of the paradigmatic sage-emperors lauded by the Confucians, who ceded his throne to Shun, the second. According to the *Huainanzi*, “In the time of Yao, ten suns rose in the sky at once, scorching the grains and crops, killing the plants and grasses.” The story is meant to show that there can be only a single ruler, just as there can be only a single sun. Many suns will be “too much of a good thing,” killing off the crops. Hence Yao had nine of the suns shot out of the sky, thereby establishing unified rule. Zhuangzi’s parody turns this point on its head. Yao thinks ten different standards of “rightness” will lead to chaos—there must be a single unified truth, a single ruler. Zhuangzi here allows all things their own rightness—and thereby there will be all the more illumination, each thing its own sun.

these three, which ‘knows’ what is the right³⁰ place to live? Humans eat the flesh of their livestock, deer eat grass, snakes eat centipedes, hawks and eagles eat mice. Of these four, which ‘knows’ the right thing to eat? Monkeys take she-monkeys for mates, elks mount deer, male fish frolic with female fish, while humans regard Mao Qiang and Lady Li as great beauties—but when fish see them they dart into the depths, when birds see them they soar into the skies, when deer see them they bolt away without looking back. Which of these four ‘knows’ what is rightly alluring? From where I see it, all the sproutings of humankindness and responsible conduct³¹ and all the trails of right and wrong are hopelessly tangled and confused. How could I know how to distinguish and demonstrate any conclusions about them?”

Gnawgap said, “If that’s the case, then you can’t even tell benefit from harm. Does the Utmost Person really fail to distinguish between benefit and harm?”

Baby Sovereign said, “The Utmost Person is miraculous, beyond understanding!

The lakes may burst into flames around him, but this can’t make him feel it is too hot. The rivers may freeze over, but this can’t make him feel it is too cold. Ferocious thunder may crumble the mountains, the winds may shake the seas, but this cannot make him feel startled. Such a person chariots on the clouds and winds, piggybacks on the sun and moon, and wanders beyond the four seas. Even death and life can do nothing to change him—much less the sproutings of benefit and harm!”

Master Jittery Magpie asked Master Longtall Lumbertree,^w “I have heard the Master relating the claim that the sage does not engage in projects, does not seek benefit, does not avoid harm, does not pursue happiness, does not follow any specific course. He says something by saying nothing, and says nothing by saying something, and thus does he wander, beyond the dust and grime. The Master considered these rude and careless words, but I believe they are the practice of the Mysterious Course. What do you think?”

Master Longtall Lumbertree said, “These words would send even the Yellow Emperor into fevers of confusion. How could that fellow Confucius understand them? And you, on the other hand, are judging far too prematurely. You see an egg and try to get it to crow at dawn; you see a crossbow pellet and try to roast it for your dinner. I’m going to try speaking some reckless words. How about you listening just as recklessly? Standing shoulder to shoulder with the sun and moon, scooping up time and space and smooching them all together, leaving them all to their own slippery mush so that every enslavement is also an ennobling—the mass of men are beleaguered and harried by it all, while the sage remains so

30. *Zheng*, the same word translated in Chapter 1 as “true,” as in “the sky’s true color” (p. 3) and “chariot on what is true both to Heaven and to earth” (p. 5). See Glossary.

31. 仁義之端. Possibly a reference to Mencius’s famous doctrine of the natural “sprouts” of the virtues in the spontaneous promptings of human nature. See *Mencius* 2A6.

stupid and dense that he mixes in with all these ten thousand diverse harvests but tastes a single full unmixed ripeness³² in all and in each. For to him each thing is just so, and through the rightness of each, the thisness of each, he lets each enfold each.

“How then do I know that delighting in life is not a delusion? How do I know that in hating death I am not like an orphan who left home in youth and no longer knows the way back? Lady Li was a daughter of the border guard of Ai. When she was first captured and brought to Qin, she wept until tears drenched her collar. But when she got to the palace, sharing the king’s luxurious bed, and feasting on the finest meats, she regretted her tears. How do I know that the dead don’t regret the way they used to cling to life? ‘If you dream of drinking wine, in the morning you will weep. If you dream of weeping, in the morning you will go out hunting.’³³ While dreaming you don’t know it’s a dream. You might even interpret a dream in your dream—and then you wake up and realize it was *all* a dream. Perhaps a great awakening would reveal all of this to be a vast dream. And yet the foolish imagine they are already awake—how clearly and certainly they understand it all! This one is a lord, they decide, that one is a shepherd—what stubborn prejudice! Confucius and you are both dreaming! And when I say you’re dreaming, I’m dreaming too. So if you were to ‘agree’ with these words as right, I would name that nothing more than a way of offering condolences for the demise of their strangeness.^x For actually, even if after ten thousand generations some great sage shows up who knows how to resolve this, it would still be as if he showed up after only a single day.^y

“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 straighten out³⁴ 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’?³⁵

32. *Cheng*. See Glossary.

33. Phrased in the gnomic diction of a dream prognostication text, possibly quoting a well-known folk belief.

34. *Zheng* again, as in note 30.

35. 待彼 *dai bi*. For *dai*, see Glossary. *Bi*, here translated as “other,” is the word used for “that” as opposed to “this” earlier in this chapter.

“What is meant by harmonizing with them by means of their Heavenly Transitions?³⁶ It means ‘right’ is also ‘not right,’ and ‘so’ is also ‘not so.’ If right were ultimately right, its differentiation from not-right would admit of no debate. If so were ultimately so, its differentiation from not-so would admit of no debate. Thus even though the transforming voices may depend on something, it is tantamount to not depending on³⁷ anything at all.^Z

“Harmonize with them all by means of their Heavenly Transitions, follow along with them in their limitless overflowings, and you will be able to fully live out your years—by forgetting each year, by forgetting what should or should not be,³⁸ letting yourself be jostled and shaken by the boundlessness! For that is precisely how to lodge yourself securely in the boundlessness.”

The penumbra³⁹ said to the shadow, “First you were walking, then you were standing still. First you were sitting, then you were upright. Why can’t you decide on a single course of action?”

The shadow said, “Do I depend⁴⁰ on something to make me as I am? Does what I depend on depend on something else? Is my dependence like the case of the snake’s skin or the cicada’s shell?^{AA} How would I know why I am so or not so?”

Once Zhuang Zhou⁴¹ dreamt he was a butterfly, fluttering about joyfully just as a butterfly would. He followed his whims exactly as he liked and knew nothing about Zhuang Zhou. Suddenly he awoke and there he was, the startled Zhuang Zhou in the flesh. He did not know if Zhou had been dreaming he was a butterfly, or if a butterfly was now dreaming it was Zhou. Now surely Zhou and a butterfly count as two distinct identities, as two quite different beings! And just this is what is meant when we speak of transformation of *any* one being into another—of the transformation of all things.^{BB}

36. 天倪 *tian ni*. I.e., their Natural Transitions, or more concretely, their natural, nonde-liberate, rotating “Skylike” Transitions. *Ni* means literally “beginnings” or “child” on the one hand and “divisions” on the other, put together here to form the meaning “transitions”—a beginning that crosses a division. The term also figures importantly in Chapter 27, p. 225. We may perhaps see it as the alternative to 封 *feng*, “sealed boundaries”: interfaces between opposed things that are also transitions or pivots between them, rather than walls that only keep them separate.

37. 待 *Dai*. See Glossary.

38. 義 *Yi*. Elsewhere translated as “Responsible Conduct,” “Responsibility,” “Appropriate Conduct,” “Rightness,” “Duty,” “Justice,” “Conscientiousness,” or “Righteousness.” See Glossary.

39. A mythical creature, described as the shadow of the shadow, or the faint dimness around the edge of a shadow. But the name literally means “the Neither of the Two,” presenting a conceptual rhyme with “Walking Two Roads.”

40. 待 *Dai*. See Glossary.

41. Personal name of Zhuangzi, putative author of this text.

ENDNOTES

A. “Assessment” here renders 論 *lun*, meaning a verbally expressed viewpoint or discussion on some matter, a discourse that weighs relevant factors, but generally with the intent of rendering a judgment to track an *inequality*, expressing a position on what is so and what is right and what is valuable as opposed to what is not. An “equalizing assessment” is thus a bit of a paradox, which the translation is designed to capture. An attempt is made here also to preserve the ambiguity of this title, which can be parsed either as 2-1 or as 1-2, thus meaning either “Assessments that Equalize Things” or “Equalizing the Assessments made by all Things, and by extension, all things so assessed.” The word 物 *wu*, rendered as “thing(s)” here and throughout this chapter, is in other contexts translated as “being(s),” and denotes not only inanimate objects, but also living creatures and even sometimes abstract entities.

B. Luo Miandao is the only commentator I have found to offer something other than a glaringly ad hoc interpretation of this character 嗒 *ta*, tracking it closer to its literal *Shuowen* meaning of “to lick” or perhaps speculating from its visual form, thereby reading it as meaning “to shut the mouth.” On this basis Luo reads this passage as describing three actions in quick succession: “Southwall Master Shoestrap leaned against his table. Then he looked up toward the sky and exhaled his breath up into it. But then he closed up his mouth toward it, as if cutting loose from a partner,” or more daringly, “. . . But then stuck out his tongue at it, as if ending a collaboration.”

C. *Qi'ou* 其耦. Literally “his plowing partner,” interpreted variously as his wife, as his sense of the presence of other people, as his own body as a double, or, interpreted through character substitution, as a lodging place (*yu* 寓) or an idol (*ou* 偶). If the reference is to pulled plowing, with a puller in front and a steerer in back (still practiced in some parts of China), the image might be of being cut loose from the steerer, the controller of direction or purpose that stands “behind” one’s activity, like the “true ruler,” the controlling self causing and controlling one’s moods and actions, that is queried below. Loss of the partner would then correspond with Ziqi’s remark below using the same verb for loss: “I have lost me.” The loss of the “me” resonates with the inability to find a “blower” behind Heaven’s piping. If it is the puller who is lost, on the other hand, the steerer falls away in a discombobulated heap, losing the static bodily organization previously enforced by his role in that work, which also has resonances here. If the practice alluded to is side by side plowing, we may think of the plowing partner as a double or mirror image which has now vanished, again pointing to the I/me and this/that and right/wrong relations below. Something of the same sense obtains if the term *ou* is used here in its more original and concrete sense, according to the *Shuowen*: the implement that enabled paired plowing, the long two-man plow-handle. The meaning would then be, “as if letting go of his end of a two-man plow,” which would suggest that the work he had been participating in then went on without him, and perhaps began to circulate around an axis rather than continuing in a straight line.

D. Yan 偃, the personal name of Sir Swimmy Faceformed, means “to lie down, supine, prone,” or “bend down,” which is here given the importance of wind imagery in this passage, perhaps an allusion to *Analects* 12:19: “The noble man’s virtuosity is to be like the wind; the small man’s virtuosity is to be like the grass. When the wind blows against it, the grass must bend down (*yan*).” So we would perhaps translate the name as “Bentdown” or “Blownover” or some such thing. But Sir Swimmy Faceformed’s name seems to be a play on the name of Confucius’s disciple Yan Yan 言偃, who has the same personal name (Yan, “blownover”) and the same courtesy name (Ziyou, “Sir Swimmy”), but not the same surname (Yancheng, “Faceformed” as opposed to the real disciple’s surname, Yan 言, which actually means “speech,” a word that figures heavily in this chapter). The surname Yancheng, on the contrary, perhaps nods toward Confucius’s favorite disciple, Yan Yuan 顏淵, also known as Yan Hui 顏回, who appears under his own name in Chapters 4 and 6 and many other places in the *Zhuangzi*.

E. In other words, since all knowable identities—tones, positions, characteristics—are produced by the differences in the holes themselves, what specific identity (tone) is then left to assign to the blower? The wind itself is in a sense soundless, because all sounds of it are made what they are by their specific holes. An alternate rendering of this important line: “It blows forth in ten thousand different ways, allowing each to spontaneously be just what it is. Each takes what it chooses for itself—but then who could it be that activates them all?” Another: “Gusting through this multitude, every one of them different, it yet allows each to go its own way. The taking up of something is done by themselves, so what rouser could there be?” Many commentators accept the textual variant 已 *yi* (“to cease”) for 己 *ji* (“oneself”), so that the line would mean perhaps: “It blows forth the ten thousand differences, but also allows them to cease on their own. They take up both [their beginning and their ending] on their own accord—who then is the rouser?” A. C. Graham offers a third reading, based on Wen Yiduo’s not meritless suggestion that the *xian* 咸 (“all”) makes more grammatical sense as a loan for *jian* 緘 (“to seal up”), so that 其自已 (也) 緘 becomes neatly parallel to 其自取怒 if not for the one pesky 也. The meaning would then be something like, “Who is it that, blowing forth all the ten thousand differences, makes their self-endings into sealings and their self-selections into rousings?” The question then concerns the beginning and end of each thing, compared to the beginning and end of each wind-tone: How to do they begin themselves and end themselves, precede themselves to self-select and outlive themselves to self-limit? How can a mind choose its master without being there in advance to choose it, and thus already having a master that chooses? The answer would remain as ambiguous as in the other reading, playing on the spontaneity of the choosing and ending and its ambiguous relation to causative agency, to a doer.

F. The two clauses are a double translation of the same four characters. See “Notes on the Translation.”

G. Be it noted that 溺 the character translated as “drown” here can also be read to mean “urine,” and several commentators, including Lin Yunming and Lu Shuzhi (not to mention the esteemed Rev. James Legge), take it that way. The passage then means, “such is our daily dwindling, like a stream of urine that has made its journey, and can no longer be made to journey back.” Taking the grammar even more strictly, and ignoring the quasi-parallelism of the rhythm, we would have something even more eyebrow-raising, literally “it is (as in) the case of urine, where that which makes it is unable to cause it to come back.” We could then translate: “such is our daily dwindling, (like) the inability of that which pisses forth the urine to suck it back in.” This would perhaps be a telling ante-upping of the critiques of causality and control just touched on in the question posed about the blower of the sounds, and the questions about the “genuine ruler” below: what puts it forth can in no way control its course or take possession of it. Compare the analogy of the Heavenly Mechanism to spitting in Chapter 17 (p. 139), and the scatological illustration of omnipresence in Chapter 22 (p. 178).

H. This sentence and the final clause of the preceding sentence constitute a “double translation.” See “Notes on the Translation.”

I. A triple translation. See “Notes on the Translation.”

J. *Dao* 道. This is the first time this famous character appears in the *Zhuangzi*, without having been given any prior explanation or introduction. Due to its parallelism with *yan* 言 (speech, words) here, I take it in its ordinary contemporaneous sense, meaning any course of action undertaken to attain some pre-valued goal, or the discourse that guides and directs such activity, which allows for a tightly coherent reading of the argument being put forward here, and sets up for the new expanded and ironic sense of *dao* to emerge later in this chapter: the *dao* that is not a *dao* 不道之道 which is also called “the Great Dao” 大道: the precise opposite of the purpose-guided activity denoted by *dao* in its ordinary sense. Many if not most prior readings, on the contrary, take the sentence here as a sudden invocation of “the Dao,” a

preestablished idea of an omnipresent entity of some kind, as we see developed in the roughly contemporaneous *Daodejing*, and which does seem to be invoked in the “Outer” and “Miscellaneous” chapters of the *Zhuangzi*. But there is no trace of knowledge of the *Daodejing* or other (recently excavated) metaphysically inclined texts in the Inner Chapters. Hence, it seems to make more sense to see this chapter as an independent derivation of the new sense of Dao, occurring before our eyes.

k. Alternately, reading 隱 *yin* to mean “to depend on” rather than “to obscure” as many commentators do, the preceding four lines would mean, “What could courses be thought to depend on such that some would be judged true and others false? What could words be thought to depend on such that some would be judged right and others wrong? Where after all could a course go off to without being replaced there? Where could words be replaced without being acceptable there? But [the judgments of] courses depend on the small achievements they form, and [the judgments of] words depend upon the honor and glory they acquire.” This could perhaps resonate back to the question about the source and controller “behind” actions and words above, upon which they putatively depend, but which has proved to be systematically undiscoverable.

L. Or, if we take the antecedent *zhi* to carry over all this way as the referent of the pronoun, “Thus the Sage does not follow it anywhere but instead simply basks it in the broad daylight of Heaven,” where “it” is the faculty of conscious knowing or understanding. On this reading, the sage does not take conscious knowledge and its conscious values as his teacher or guide, nor does he eliminate its function of judging and preferring. Instead, he allows it to function normally, but also sees it as simply a natural function in the world, a function of judgment that has just been shown to always ramify into alternate judgments and positions precisely by virtue of the unavoidable structure of this/not-this (*shi/fei*) involved in *any* judgment.

m. Here we see why it is claimed above that “what words refer to is peculiarly unfixed.” This is an allusion to two propositions that come to be associated with the “logician” Gongsun Long (cf. Chapters 17 and 33): the claim that “All things are capable of being pointed out [lit., ‘fingered’], but pointing out can never be pointed out” (物無非指，而指非指) and the claim that “A white horse is not a horse” (白馬非馬). Gongsun Long’s method in the first case is to show that the indicator is never indicated, relying on equivocation in the term *zhi* 指. In the first instance of *zhi* in his proposition, it means the indicated object, in the second case it means the indicating act. The act of indicating some “this” always fails to indicate the act itself, and thus a present act of “pointing out of this” is never pointed out as “this,” so the act of indicating some “this” is never itself “this.” All other things are “this,” but the pointing out of “this” can never be “this.” But if so, the act of pointing out is not anything in particular. And if it is not anything in particular, it cannot do any pointing out, so nothing is pointed out. Hence, because the pointer is never pointed to, nothing is pointed to. Gongsun’s essay, as we have it, stops there, going round and round: all things are *zhi* but *zhi* is not *zhi*; all things are *zhi* because they are not, and vice versa. Indication is by definition non-indication, and that is what indicates what all things are. So we arrive the long way around at Zhuangzi’s own point, the impossibility of maintaining a mutually exclusive relation between “this” and “that,” between being and non-being, between meaning and meaninglessness, between any two opposites. Zhuangzi, too, wants to show that “this” is never merely “this,” but he suggests an alternate method: to show that *this* is also *that*, simply use the “illumination of the obvious” to look at *this* from the perspective of “that,” a perspective that it necessarily posits precisely by being a “this.” “This” is then immediately seen as a “that” (what I call “this,” another, the existence of which is required as a contrast when I call this “this,” can call “that”; to be aware that I have a particular perspective is to be aware of the possibility of other perspectives). Thus indicating-as-this is always also indicating-as-that: indicating-as-this, distinguishing this from that, always fails to indicate, always fails to distinguish this from that, also indicates otherwise. That is using the unindicatability “of” (this “of” here meaning “inherently belonging to”) the indicated as such

to show that all indications fail to indicate, rather than, like Gongsun Long, having to set up the absolute dichotomy of indicator and indicated to do the same job.

n. A similar point is then made with respect to another paradox of Gongsun Long's: "A white horse is not a horse." Gongsun's point is that "white horse" and "horse" are, strictly speaking, two distinguishable meanings: one indicates a shape and a color, and one indicates only a shape, and indicating a shape and color is not the same as indicating only a shape. If I ask for a white horse and you bring me a horse—but one that is yellow or black—you have not brought me what I asked for. So he is using a (yellow or black) horse to show that (this yellow or black) horse is not (that white) horse. Hence he has shown that horses are not horses, by means of horses. A more radical implication, not pursued by Gongsun, is gestured toward in his text: since horses with no color would be equivalent to no horse at all, and the request for a horse of any particular color is not answered by bringing (just any) horse, there is no horse as such. But if there is no horse as such, there are no white horses either. Zhuangzi wants to arrive at a radicalized version of the same conclusion—a horse is not a horse, "this" is not merely "this," but is also "not-this"—but does so merely by pointing out that if "horse" is defined as "this," it must posit "non-horseness" as its corresponding "not-this," which will also be a "this" with its own perspective, for which "horse" is no longer "this." Hence non-horseness "belongs to" horseness as such: that is the non-horseness "of" any horse. Non-horseness thus being internal to horse, a horse is never simply a horse. He can adopt the more radical conclusion: there are no horses-to-the-exclusion-of-non-horses. But this also means there are no non-horses to the exclusion of horses. So whatever is pointed out also involves "horse." So getting there the Zhuangzi way, as spelled out in the following paragraph, allows him also equally to say: each thing is a horse, or all things are horse.

o. To spell out the thrust of Zhuangzi's critique here, we might translate this whole passage more elaborately: "To use the act of pointing out (in contrast to that which is pointed out) to show how the act of pointing out can point to anything but the pointing itself, as Gongsun Long does, accomplishes less than using what is not pointed out in the act of pointing out—the contrasting 'that' which is *not* the pointed-out 'this'—to show how the pointed out can never be pointed out as claimed, i.e., to the exclusion of the other, the not-pointed-out. To use a particular horse to show that another horse is not definable as no more or less than horse per se, as Gongsun Long does, is less interesting than using the nonhorseness that belongs to any horse, the nonhorseness that is necessarily involved in any determination of horseness, to show that no horse is ultimately definable as no more and no less than horse per se. The latter method is better in that it shows that we can equally say that heaven and earth are what is pointed out in any pointing out, and thus that all things can be pointed out by pointing out *any* single thing, e.g., one horse, one pointing."

p. In other words, these things are formed by their division from one another, and from dividing this way of dividing off from other possible ways of dividing, from the openness to alternate divisions that precedes this division. But these formations are themselves thus also destructions—destruction both of that which precedes the division and of all the alternate possible divisions that it allows. Further, as discussed above, these formations also bear in themselves their own destruction, since every formation and division off of a "this" posits a "that" which is itself a "this," with respect to which the first "this" is a "that," undermining its claim to "thisness." It is possible also to take the referent here to be not "these things" but "the particular course that unifies them," in which case the meaning would be, "Its [i.e., that particular course's] dividing off is a formation, and its formation is thus always a destruction." The particular course that connects any two things as one "this" forms by being divided off from all other possible courses.

q. The reference to "laboring the spirit" is echoed in Zhuangzi's rebuke of Huizi (Hui Shi) at the end of Chapter 5, pp. 50–51, and the assertion of oneness as a definite conclusion is echoed in Huizi's teaching reported in Chapter 33, p. 273, that "Heaven and Earth are one body." Thus

it is quite possible that we have here a distinction between Huizi's logical monism as a definite conclusion and Zhuangzi's proposal of infinite this/that onenesses whereby oneness and non-oneness end up being the same, and thus that there is no need to defend either monism or pluralism against the other. See also Chapter 6, "Their oneness was oneness, their non-oneness was also oneness," p. 55.

r. Lu Deming reports an alternate parsing by Cui Zhuan, which would give a radically different reading: 已而不知其然謂之道勞, 神明為一而不知其同謂之朝三: "To let this happen without knowing it is so or right is called 'the Course(s) doing the labor.' But to make things one with one's spirit and intelligence without realizing the sameness [of whether you do or not] is called 'Three in the Morning.'"

s. The text here has 天鈞, "Heaven's potter's wheel," but many commentators interpret this as a substitute for the visually very similar but less mysterious phrase 天均, "Heaven's equality," found in Chapter 28. The latter implication can perhaps be taken as folded into Zhuangzi's imagery here: the potter's wheel as an image of the precise manner in which all the positions of affirmation and negation just described, the music of the various holes, are to be treated equally as products of the unknowable toneless wind of Heaven. They are not merely generated by an unknown source but, as we have just seen, are mutually generating as soon as any one of them appears. The indeterminate center of the wheel is Heaven; all points on the periphery as it spins are the various positions, each one of them establishing the spin over to its contrary on the opposite side just by establishing itself. The two meanings converge in the consideration of the even distribution of clay made possible by the constant spinning of the wheel: the potter's wheel's very instability, its constant motion, is what makes things equal. In all of Zhuangzi's coinages involving the word "Heaven," it is useful to experimentally substitute the words "Natural," "Undesigned," "Spontaneous," or "Skylike." Hence one might retranslate this phrase as either "Potter's Wheel of Nature" or perhaps, more strikingly, "the Skylike Potter's Wheel." (See *tian* in Glossary.) Note also that Chinese cosmology considers Heaven, the sky, to be "rotating": the stars and constellations turn in the sky, and the seasons—the sky's varying conditions—are brought in a cyclical sequence. This turning of the seasons is what makes things exist and grow. The turning of the potter's wheel sky brings life, as the potter's wheel creates pots. The "Qifa" chapter of the *Guanzi*, a text of "Legalist" orientation, states, "To give commands without understanding fixed principles is like trying to establish [the directions] of sunrise and sunset while standing on a turning potter's wheel." It is significant that Zhuangzi uses an image of instability that others employ to critique the relativism of shifting perspectives as a solution to the same. This is the deliberate irony of the use of the verb "rest" in this context, which is connected to the idea of the unmoving center of the spinning wheel, the stability in the midst of this instability without ever eliminating it, instead enabling it: Walking Two Roads at once. Cf. "Tranquility Turmoil" of Chapter 6, p. 58.

t. This illustrates why it is correct to say either "the Zhaos are zither players" or "the Zhaos are not zither players." Zhao Wen was a famous zither (*qin*) player, and tried to teach the art to his son as the family business; the deliberately ambiguous phrase translated "the Zhaos," i.e., the Zhao clan, could also be interpreted simply to mean "Mr. Zhao." The referent is "peculiarly unfixed." Just as it is a selective generalization to say the Zhaos are zither players, since in fact only Zhao Wen has success (*cheng*) at it (only part of the clan plays the zither, selected and named as representative of his identity from a certain perspective), it is also a selective generalization even to say that Zhao Wen himself succeeds at it: only part of him does (not his toes, for example), selected and named as representative of his identity from a certain perspective.

u. A "double translation." See "Notes on the Translation."

v. Or "Skylike Reservoir." Here the Heavenly Reservoir (天府 *tianfu*) is construed as a name *not* for "the Course that is not a course," but for what would be able to "know it,"—i.e., to know

it by not knowing it, by coming to rest in what it does not know; in other words, the Daoist's wild-card mind, rather than its object, the Course. Note the similar Zhuangzian phrases for Daoist subjectivity, e.g., "The Numinous Reservoir" (靈府 *lingfu*) in Chapter 5 (p. 49). Both "know" and "understand" in this passage are renderings of *Zhi* (see Glossary). Compare also "the know-how of not knowing" in Chapter 4, p. 37, and "the true knowing" which is the Genuine Person's non-knowing state of mind in Chapter 6, pp. 53–55.

w. The names of these interlocuters suggest someone perched so high on what he depends on that he is terrified, posing a question to that one on which he depends, the tree, which towers into the heavens like Peng's flight but also is so "long" that it extends into the world, like the lumber this particular kind of tree also becomes, making the desks, zithers, and other things humans depend on.

x. This phrase has given commentators many headaches. It is Zhuangzi's coinage, used in modern Chinese to translate "paradox." Both Wang Pang and Zhu Boxiu give readings that support this, reading the two characters as contrasted in meaning: "Just right but [regarded by the mass of people as] super weird." More generally it is blandly glossed as something like "The Supreme Swindle," or "The Ultimate Monstrosity." Taking the phrase more literally, the present translation is a bit more adventurous. The implication is that to merely judge these paradoxical words as "true" or "right" (*shi*) is a way of killing off their salutary strangeness, and then eulogizing the corpse with these laudatory titles "true" and "right." Better to leave them unjudged and fully strange, evoking the Radiance of Drift and Doubt. Note that this speech begins with a repudiation of taking the reported wild outlandish words as either true or false, and also the unusual phrase 是其言, "to affirm these words as right," used in just the same sense in Chapter 1, p. 7.

y. I.e., it is just as likely to happen tomorrow as in ten thousand years—for it can never happen. These words are not to be "agreed with as right," taken as knowledge about what is what, but to be catalyzingly strange, to lead to the illumination of the obvious, to the Radiance of Drift and Doubt, "stupid and dense" like the Sage. But the phrase translated "in a single day" is literally "morning and night," which could be rendered, ". . . this would be just like him showing up constantly every morning and every evening." So a further layer is perhaps also to be found here: if just once, after a thousand years, you meet someone who resolves this quandary, you will then realize you have been meeting such persons day and night, i.e., constantly, that though in the literal sense it is impossible to resolve it, the nonlinear resolution of it is going on every morning and every night. That is, everyone one meets is living with and through and in this unresolved quandary, this inseparability of every this and not-this, which is its only resolution.

z. The sounds of the wind, the voices of the debaters, may depend on and wait for a true rouser, but this has turned out to be indistinguishable from depending on nothing, for this rouser can have no identity and thus is as if nonexistent. In another way, the sounds of the wind, the voices of the debaters, may depend on one another to render a judgment on which is right and which is wrong, but in fact they can never straighten each other out, each being right from its own perspective, so in the end they are not mutually dependent at all for their rightness. In fact, it is just their full dependence on one another, the mutual entailment of "this" and "that," that renders them independent. This idea of total dependence equaling total independence will be illustrated in the final two stories of the chapter.

aa. When unshed, the skin and shell are so dependent on the snake and cicada, moving exactly as those bodies move, that they are parts of one entity. But as such they are essential to its movement, so much so that the motion of snake and cicada on which the motion of the skin and shell depends also depends on the skin and the shell. Similarly, "this" depends on "that," and vice versa—which depends on which? Either can be seen as depending on the other,

precisely because of how closely and inseparably they are dependent on one another, and thus either can be seen as the real cause of what the other does, on which the other depends. It is only when shed that the skin and shell come to be viewed as a pure “other,” a mere shadow of the form, seemingly entirely inert, a mere lifeless husk, to be pushed around entirely passively and dependently. But in this state when the body no longer depends on it, it no longer depends on the body either.

BB. Expanding on the theme of dependence and independence of the previous story: once I think of that which depended on me as an other (Zhou remembering the butterfly he dreamed: the butterfly’s existence depends on Zhou), I find that this means it could equally be said that I have been depending on *it* (the butterfly dreaming to be Zhou: Zhou’s existence depends on the butterfly). This is the structure of all things, of every “this” and “that,” necessarily distinguished from one another but in such a way that “that” being a dependent aspect of “this” can never be distinguished from “this” being a dependent aspect of “that.”

CHAPTER THREE

*The Primacy of Nourishing Life*¹

The flow of my life is always bound by its banks, but the activity of the understanding consciousness is constrained by no such limits.^A When something thus bounded is made to follow something unbounded in this way, it is put in danger. And to try wielding further understanding to redress this danger only puts it into deeper danger still. It² may do good, but not to the point of getting anywhere near a good name;³ it may do evil, but not to the point of getting anywhere near punishment—for it tends toward the current of the empty central meridian^B as its normal route. And this is what enables us to maintain our bodies, to keep the life in them intact, to nourish those near and dear to us, and to fully live out our years.

The cook was carving up an ox for King Hui of Liang.⁴ 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, going beyond mere skill. When I first started cutting up oxen, all I saw for three years was oxen,⁵ and yet still I was unable to see all there was to see in an ox.⁶ But now

1. The title of this chapter could also be interpreted to mean “Nourishing the Host [or Master] of Life,” which is how many commentators take it. Alternately, it could mean “What Is Primary in Nourishing Life.”

2. I.e., the life in me, when not forced to follow the directives of conscious knowledge.

3. 名 *Ming*, the same word elsewhere translated simply as “fame” or “reputation” and even unmodified “names.”

4. Identified as “the King of Wei” mentioned in the penultimate story of Chapter 1.

5. Or, “All I could see [when I looked at the ox] was the actual ox”—rather than the spaces within it where the knife could go.

6. Some manuscripts have an additional *quan* 全 in this sentence, which then would mean “When I first started carving up oxen, all I saw was the intact ox, but now after three years, [it is as if] I have never seen any intact ox there at all.”

I encounter it with the imponderable spirit in me^C rather than scrutinizing it with the eyes. For when the faculties of officiating understanding come to rest, imponderable spiritlike impulses begin to stir,^D relying on the unwrought perforations.^E Striking into the enormous gaps, they are guided through those huge hollows, going along in accord with what is already there and how it already is. 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 sharp 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 if it 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 whoosh! 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 it all around me, both disoriented and satisfied by it all. Then I wipe off the blade and put it away.”

The king said, “Wonderful! From hearing the cook’s words I have learned how to nourish life!”

When the Honorable Ornate Highcart went to see the Rightside Commander, he was astonished. “What manner of man are you, that you are so singularly one-legged?⁷ Is this the doing of Heaven or of man?”

He answered, “It is of Heaven, not man. Heaven, in its generation of each thing as ‘this,’ always makes it singular, unique, alone. Man, in characterizing each thing by its appearance, always groups it with something else.^F Thus I know that whatever it is, it is Heaven, not man. The marsh pheasant finds one mouthful of food every ten steps, and one drink of water every hundred steps, but he does not seek to be fed and pampered in a cage. For though his spirit⁸ might there reign supreme, it would do him no good.”

When Lao Dan^G died, Graingrind Misstep went to mourn for him, but after yowling thrice he immediately departed. His disciple asked, “Weren’t you a friend of the master?”

“Yes,” he said.

“Then is this the proper way for you to mourn him?”

7. Presumably having had his foot cut off as a punishment, and thus also having been relieved of the post for which he got his (now ironically appropriate) official title.

8. 神 *Shen*. See endnote C.

“Indeed it is. At first I thought there would be his kind of people there, but then I saw that this was not the case. When I went in there to mourn, I saw the elders among them weeping as if for their sons, and the young among them weeping as if for their mothers. With such as these gathered there, I, too, would no doubt have proceeded to utter some unsought-for words and weep some unsought-for tears. But this would be to flee from the Heavenly and turn away⁹ from what is real, forgetting what one has received, which is why the ancients called such things ‘The punishment for fleeing from Heaven.’ When it came time to arrive, the master did just what the time required. When it came time to go, he followed along with the flow. Resting content in the time and finding his place in the flow, joy and sorrow had no way to seep in. The ancients called that ‘The Lord’s Dangle and Disentangling.’ Those fingers¹¹ can do no more than manage the firewood, but the fire moves on, its ending unknown.”

ENDNOTES

A. “Activity of the understanding consciousness” in this context renders 知 *zhi*. See Glossary. This sentence is often interpreted to mean “My life is limited, but knowledge is unlimited.” On this reading, “life” refers to the duration of a human lifespan, while “knowledge” is interpreted as the body of all knowable things to be learned. The point would then be that my lifespan is too short to learn all there is to learn, and hence the pursuit of learning is a futile, even dangerous endeavor. But this reading of both 生 *sheng* (life) and 知 *zhi* is not consistent with the rest of the Inner Chapters, nor the usual usage in texts of this period generally, where the former refers primarily to the process of coming to be in general, and the latter primarily to the faculty of conscious knowing, including the conscious commitment to values of good and bad, right and wrong, rather than the field of things to be known. Nonetheless, something of this sense of the inexhaustibility of knowables is not irrelevant to the points being made in this chapter. More directly, though, the meandering path of a river forming its own definite but zigzag shape between two banks should be kept in mind as an analogue to the definite but undirected motion of the knife in the butcher’s story to follow, of life not controlled by conscious values or ideals.

B. 督 *Du*. In Chinese medicine this term, which in other contexts means “controller,” is used for the current of energy that runs vertically through the middle of the human back. The image of a flowing current connects to the opening trope of the chapter of a river between banks, and to that of the butcher’s knife running through the hollows in the ox to follow. This flow tends toward the central (hence, if left to itself, never going too far toward either good or

9. Following the manuscripts that have *bei* 背 instead of *bei* 倍, or reading the latter as equivalent to the former, in its sense of “opposition,” 反也 as given in its *Shuowen* definition. Taking the latter character instead in its more usual sense, as Guo Xiang does, the meaning would be “To double the emotions.” But I have serious doubt that 情 without modifier could be used to mean “emotions” at the time this text was written.

evil), unseen (hence opposed to “the knowing mind”), and the real controller (as opposed to the knowing mind’s pretensions to control and direct life).

c. 神 *Shen*. See Glossary. The word is used to denote both the spirits of the dead and of nature to whom sacrificial offerings are made, and also the consciousness of humans when alive, but it is most commonly characterized not as a cognizing faculty that is transparent to itself, but rather as something unpredictable and beyond understanding, a sense it retains when used as an adjective, as in the following sentence. Hence usually translated in this work as “spiritlike” or “imponderable spirit.”

d. Following Fan Gengyan: “What moves only after investigating that which it monopolizes the control over is called ‘officiating conscious knowing.’ To let the hand go and release the attention, attaining whatever comes without intention, is called the spirit’s desires.” 專司所察而後動，謂之官知，從手放意，無心而得，謂之神欲。 The proximity of the previous line about the eyes and the common use of *guan* in later times to refer to the sense organs specifically have disposed many to read the parallelism as follows: “Sense-knowledge stops and spirit-desire operates.” But this reading may bring some danger of assimilating Zhuangzi’s point here to a familiar “inner spirit good, outer senses bad” position, where the controlling spirit of the human being with knowledge of unchanging or immaterial truths and values is to be exalted over the out-of-control senses deceived by appearances and sense-pleasures. This sort of thinking would be sharply at odds with the rest of this chapter and with the *Zhuangzi*’s thought in general, where the problem is not that sensory knowledge undermines the rightful dominance of intellect or spirit, but the hegemony of the intellect distorting our interaction with the world and impeding the imponderable spiritlike operations both within and without. Nevertheless, on purely philological grounds, in the present context it is not impossible to read *guan* as meaning “knowledge of the sense-organs,” understood as delineating a contrast not with spirit as self-knower and executor of higher purposes but with spirit as unknowable and free of all purpose, inasmuch as we do find the trope describing the “nine openings” (including not only the two nostrils, two ears, two eyes and mouth, but also the *urethra and anus*) as the “officials” in the microcosm of the body, serving the “heart” as ruler, in possible contemporaneous texts like the “Xinshushang” of the *Guanzi*. We try to include this meaning here with the broad term “faculties.” However, the definite usages of the *guan* without modification to mean the five sense organs do not appear unmistakably until Xunzi (third century BCE) (e.g., his “Tianlun” and “Zhengming”), so I don’t think it can be assumed as a term with a fixed meaning at the time this *Zhuangzi* chapter was written, probably a century or so earlier. In so far as this passage may be taken as serving to explicate the opening passage of the chapter, where the topic is the relation between 生 *sheng* and 知 *zhi*, the reference to *zhi* as the understanding consciousness, characterized as “officiating,” makes better sense of the passage. It is precisely the role of *zhi* as officiating, i.e., as something that life is forced to “follow,” that is there critiqued. Indeed, as a verb *zhi* itself can sometimes be used to mean “control.” As an alternative to all of these possibilities, parsing the parts of speech completely differently, it is also possible to read this line to mean, “The senses know how to find their proper resting places and go no further, and then the imponderable spirit is readied for action.”

e. 天理 *Tianli*. Most literally, “Heavenly configuration,” i.e., the preexistent perforations, the lines in the grain in a thing (in this case, the marbled lines in the flesh of the ox) along which it is most easily cut. This is the only occurrence of this character *li* in the Inner Chapters, and, judging by extant texts, the first time in Chinese history that the binome *tianli* is used. This term would later come to stand for a crucial category in Neo-Confucian metaphysics, in which context it is sometimes translated as “the Principle of Heaven” or “Heavenly Pattern.” The meaning here is much more literal. The term *li* can refer to the optimal way of dividing up and organizing a raw material to suit human purposes, or the nodes in the material along which such division can most easily be done. In this context, it remains closely connected to a

still more literal meaning, the pattern of lines on skin (*couli* 腠理), which is probably the concrete image inspiring the creation of this resonant new term here.

F. Following Hu Yuanjun's reading of *youyu* 有與 and *du* 獨. Cf. also *Shenzi*, "Duli," on the harm of illegitimate children as potential claimants to the throne: 疑則動, 兩則爭, 雜則相傷. 害在有與, 不在獨. "If there is doubt on which one is legitimate, someone will take action. If there are two, there will be struggle. If there is admixture, they will harm one another. The harm lies in *grouping with something else, not in what is singular.*" Each thing as born is uniquely what it is; it is man who groups things into categories and thus judges some to be unnatural, in comparison to others in the normatively identical grouping. Many readers, however, take the one-leggedness to be a birth anomaly rather than a punishment, and thus interpret "Heaven caused this person to be born with this singularity (of one-leggedness), for there is that which bestows on humans their (various) appearances (i.e., Heaven)."

G. Also known as Laozi, traditionally considered the author of the *Daodejing*, although there is no reference either to this text or to any such authorship in the Inner Chapters. This glaring absence has led some scholars—notably Qian Mu and A. C. Graham—to conclude that the Inner Chapters of Zhuangzi actually predate the *Daodejing*, and possibly even that Lao Dan was a character created right here in this passage of the *Zhuangzi*, who later came to be connected to the *Daodejing*. The subsequent discovery of fragments of the present *Daodejing* in the Guodian bamboo slips, dated to around the mid- to late fourth century BCE, have made the temporal priority of the Inner Chapters to *all* of the passages in the *Daodejing* less plausible, but the completion of that text, its assumption of its present form, and its linkage to the name of Lao Dan are still unattested until well after Zhuangzi's death.

H. *Sic*. Some interpreters suggest that this is *zhi* not in the literal sense of finger, but the extended logical sense alluded to in Chapter 2 (p. 15), i.e., "indication, what is indicated," i.e., meanings, things, referents in general: "The indications reach only as far as what is deemed firewood, but when the fire moves on, they have no knowledge of its ending," or perhaps "If the referent is restricted to deeming the firewood, then when the fire is transmitted, there will be no recognition of it in the used-up embers." (Cf. Graham.) Others suggest this is a loan for *zhi* 脂, meaning "fat, fuel," used to serve as firewood: "the fat is exhausted in making kindling, but the fire moves on, its ending unknown." The present translation follows Guo Xiang's sense of the passage, while also trying to nudge the interpretation closer to the grammar of the text, but I think the broader logical and cognitive sense of the term should also be implied: those literal fingers that point and indicate and grasp and execute conscious purposes give a strong image of the endeavor of the activity of the understanding consciousness, the critique of which started this chapter. The immediately preceding image of "The Lord's dangle" is perhaps also relevant to the hand imagery here, and can be read in accord with Wang Fuzhi's sense of the passage as implying achieved freedom *from* the control of Heaven or of God: the fingers, the knowledge, the conscious doings of the Lord end when the fire, our unknowable life flow, moves on in its transformations.

CHAPTER FOUR

In the Human World

Yan Hui went to see Confucius, asking leave to depart. Confucius said, “Where will you go?”

Yan Hui said, “I shall go to Wei.”

“What will you do there?”

“I have heard that the ruler of Wei, having reached the prime of his life, has become quite tyrannical in his ways, making frivolous use of his state without seeing his error. He thinks nothing of the death of his people—nationfuls of corpses fill the marshes, clumped in piles like bunches of plantains.¹ The people there are utterly without recourse. I have heard you say, Master, ‘Leave a well-ordered state and go to one in chaos. At a physician’s door there are always many invalids.’ I wish to take what I have learned from you and to derive some standards and principles from it to apply to this situation. Perhaps then the state can be saved.”

Confucius said, “Ah! You will most likely go and get yourself executed! If you’re following a course, it’s better not to mix anything extraneous into it. Mixing in the extraneous you wind up with multiple courses, which leads to mutual interference, which means constant anxiety.² And yet all your anxiety will not save you.

“The Utmost Persons of old made sure they had it in themselves before they tried to put it into others. If what is in yourself is still unstable, what leisure do you have to worry about the conduct of some tyrant?”

“Do you know what it is that undermines real virtuosity, and what it is that produces conscious understanding² in the first place? Virtuosity is undermined

1. A nearly unintelligible sentence, for which many character substitutions and alternate readings have been suggested. The rendering here is an attempt to take the extant text literally. But the dead might be, for example, “as though ravaged by fire and slaughter” (Graham) or “reckoned in swampfuls like so much grass” (Watson) or “as thick as heaps of fuel” (Legge).

2. 知 *Zhi*. See Glossary. Here the contrast is between genuine virtuosity, which provides the real skill for dealing with such problems, and conscious and purposive manipulation of schemes and skills, “wisdom” and a single-minded will based on preexistent knowledge of principles and standards applied to fixed purposes, such as Yan Hui is aspiring to here.

by *getting a name for it*.³ Conscious understanding emerges from *conflict*. A good name is most essentially a way for people to one-up each other, and conscious understanding is most essentially a weapon of war. Both are inauspicious tools, not the kinds of things that can be used to perfect your own behavior.

“And even if your inherent virtuosity were ample, reliable, and firm but without yet reaching through to the point of interconnection with the vital energy of others, and even if you engaged in no contention for the sake of a good name but without yet reaching through to the point of interconnecting with the minds of others, your high-handed display of regulating words about humankindness and responsible conduct⁴ in the face of such a tyrant would just be a way of showing off your beauty at the expense of his ugliness. This is called plaguing others—and he who plagues others will surely be plagued in return. So you are in danger of being plagued, are you not? Conversely, if he happens to be the type who takes delight in worthy men such as yourself while despising men of lesser quality, why would you want to change him in the first place?”

“On the other hand, if you just accept everything anyone says, the princes of the state will surely take advantage of you in their jostlings with one another. Your eyes will be dazzled by it, your countenance flattened by it, your mouth busied with it, your face expressive of it—and finally your heart and mind will be completely formed by it. Then it will be like using fire to put out a fire, or pouring water on a drowning man—nothing more than augmenting the already excessive. Beginning in this way, you’ll just keep following the flow until even your sincerest words are untrustworthy—and then you’re certain to end up dead at the feet of the tyrant.

“In ancient times, Jie killed Guan Longfeng and Zhou killed Prince Bi Gan.⁵ These were men who cultivated their own persons, devoting themselves to their love of the masses below and thus resolutely remonstrating with their rulers above. The rulers did away with them because of their impeccable characters. This is what comes from love of a good name. Yao attacked Cong Zhi and Xun Ao, and Yu invaded You Hu. Their nations were laid to waste and their bodies slaughtered. They were incessant in their use of force and insatiable in their quest for substantial goods.⁶ All these people were seekers of substantial goods and good names,

3. “Getting a name for it” here means both “finding a name for it, naming it,” and “getting fame for it, getting a *good* name for it.” What undermines any virtue (=virtuosity, intrinsic powers) is identifying it as a virtue, getting recognized and praised for it, and/or consciously valuing it and pursuing it.

4. 仁義 *Renyi*. See Glossary.

5. Guan Longfeng was beheaded after remonstrating with Jie, the last emperor of the Xia dynasty. Prince Bi Gan had his heart cut out after remonstrating with Zhou, the last emperor of the Shang dynasty, who, according to legend, said at the time, “I’ve heard that a sage’s heart has nine apertures in it,” and then cut it out of Bi Gan’s chest to see.

6. *Shi* 實, “substantial goods,” often paired and contrasted with “name,” denotes the reality that the name ostensibly refers to. Often the name or reputation is contrasted to the actual performance of deeds, including virtuous deeds: “substantial goods” would mean living up to one’s name, doing the job as described. Here that might mean the war exploits of the rulers, or

of properties and reputations—hasn't anyone taught you even this? The destructive power of reputation and substantial goods cannot be overcome even by sages, much less you! But I'm sure you've thought of some way around all this. Let's hear what you've got."

Yan Hui said, "Proper in external demeanor, I shall appear modest and empty, but I will constantly be making effort, single-mindedly focused on my real purpose.⁷ Would that work?"

Confucius said, "No, no! How could that ever work? Stuffed inside with aggressive resolve but presenting an ever-changing appearance to the world so as to accommodate common opinion, manipulating the impressions of others to win a place in their hearts, you'd be making even the gradual advance of real virtuosity impossible, not to mention its development to the vastness you seek. If you cling without yourself transforming, externally accommodating but internally imperious to critique—how could that ever work?"

Yan Hui said, "But in this I will be internally upright but externally adaptable, and I will speak only in preexisting sayings linked to antiquity. To be internally upright is to be a follower of the ways of Heaven. Such a one knows that Heaven looks upon both himself and the 'Son of Heaven' equally as sons. Would he then care whether his words were pleasing or displeasing to others? Such a one is seen by others as an innocent child. This is what I mean by being a follower of Heaven.

"To be externally adaptable, on the other hand, means to be a follower of the ways of man. To bow and salute is the ceremony that goes with being someone's underling. Others do it, so would I dare not to? He who just does whatever others do will not be criticized by those others.

"To speak in preexisting sayings linked to antiquity means to be a follower of the ways of the ancients. Although one seems to speak only accepted dogmas, in reality a criticism is hidden in it—but it was the ancients who said so, not me! In this way, although upright, one cannot be attacked. This is what I mean by being a follower of the ancients. Would this work?"

Confucius said, "No, no! How could that ever work? You're like a ruler with a great multitude of policies and methods but without any foreign intelligence. Although this might well allow you to hold your ground without being faulted, that's about all you'll accomplish. How could it have any effect on the tyrant? You are still treating your mind as your teacher and master."

Yan Hui said, "I have nothing more. What then should I do?"

even the sages living up to their reputation as moral watchdogs. But most commentators and translators take the term in this context to mean simply "material gain, property."

7. 端而虛, 勉而一. Yan Hui here speaks of *xu* ("vacuity") to mean external shows of humility, and of *yi* ("unity") to mean single-mindedness of purpose within. This is what he will redescribe below as being "internally upright and externally adaptable," and probably what Confucius criticized above as "mixing courses," a misunderstanding of "Walking Two Roads." Confucius will propose a different meaning of vacuity and unity below, using the same two characters, in describing "the fasting of the mind."

Confucius said, “You must fast! Let me tell you. To have something in mind and then go out and do that thing—do you think this is an easy matter? The bright radiance of Heaven does not suit those who look on this as easy.”

Yan Hui said, “My family is poor, and I have had no wine or meat for many months. Can this be considered fasting?”

Confucius said, “That’s the fasting you do for a religious sacrifice. It is not the fasting of the mind.”

Yan Hui said, “What is the fasting of the mind?”

Confucius said, “You have so single-mindedly focused your will that you have been constantly hearkening to it, not with your ears but with your mind, and not only with your mind but even with your vital energy.^{8B} Instead let your hearkening stay positioned at the ears, your mind going no further than meshing there like a tally.⁹ The vital energy is then a vacuity, a waiting for¹⁰ the presence of whatever thing may come.^C The course alone is the gathering of this vacuity.^D This vacuity is the fasting of the mind.”

Yan Hui said, “When I am not yet able to make something happen in the actual world, I regard myself as this person named Hui. But just where something is actually made to happen there, this Hui has not yet begun to exist. Can that be what you mean by vacuity?”^E

Confucius said, “Exactly. I tell you truly, this way you can go roam around in his cage without feeling the pull of reputation, the pull of all the names. When you’re in there with him your squawkings will just emerge, but when you’re not they will stop. With neither doorways nor protective walls,^F all dwellings will be as one to you. You will be of one household with all but will find temporary lodgings in whatever you cannot avoid—and then you will be close to getting somewhere.¹¹ For it is easy to leave no footprints by doing no walking at all, but difficult to walk somewhere without touching the ground. Deliberate artifices are easy to use when you are being moved by the human in you, but not when you are being moved by the Heavenly in you. You have learned how to fly with wings, but not yet how to fly without wings. You have learned the know-how of knowing, but not the know-how of not-knowing.^G Consider the gaps and cracks

8. *Qi*. Literally, “breath.” See Glossary. Here denoting vital energy but also specifically emotional responses to external situations. “Hearkening” here means both “attending to” and “obeying.” Yan Hui’s whole mind has been obeying his obsessively unified moral will, and his whole person, including his *qi*, has been agitated by its beholdenness to that single-willed mind, taking it as his teacher and master.

9. The ears now no longer subordinated in obedience to the single-minded will but instead opening outward, and the mind tallying with the hearkening of the now outwardly opened ears, rather than controlling the listening by playing the master. The “tally” here is 符 *fu*, literally bamboo pieces that were broken in half as a security to guarantee the authenticity of an official order. The jagged edges of their two halves fit together like jigsaw pieces, ensuring a perfect match of two parts. See Chapter 5, note 1.

10. *Dai*. Elsewhere translated as “depend upon.” See Glossary.

11. Or, reversing the order of the first two characters, as most interpreters do: “Making your real home in the One, let yourself be temporarily lodged in whatever cannot be avoided.”

and hollows in things: it is in the empty chambers that light appears, and all auspicious things come to roost only where there is stillness. Whenever you fail to find such stillness for even a moment, you're just 'galloping around even while sitting.' Instead, allow whatever is brought by the ears and eyes to enter into you without obstruction, kept always outside of the mind's understanding,¹² and even the ghosts and spirits will seek refuge in you, not to mention human beings! This is the transformation of all things, the hinge on which Shun and Yu moved, the lifelong practice of Fuxi and Ji Qu.¹³ How much more should it be so for all of us more fragmentary men!"

Zigao, Duke of She,¹⁴ had been designated envoy to Qi. He asked Confucius for instruction, saying, "The king has given me a heavy mission. The people of Qi treat envoys with great respect but are slow to make any concessions. Even the ordinary folk there are unbudgeable—how much more so the feudal lords! I am quite terrified. You once said to me, 'In all affairs, large or small, there is rarely enjoyment even in success—unless one finds the Course to guide one. Otherwise, if you fail you will have troubles with other people, but to succeed you will have to trouble the balance of your own internal yin and yang. Only a true virtuoso can remain untroubled whether he succeeds or fails.' I am a man who has no special dietary needs, and even when drinking a steaming broth I normally have no need for a cooler, but look at me now: I got my orders this morning and already I am sucking on ice chunks this evening, as if my insides were on fire! I have not yet begun the actual task and already my yin and yang are out of whack. And if the mission turns out to be a failure, I'll surely be menaced by the people around me. Given these two problems, it is just not worth it to be employed as someone's underling! Please give me some advice!"

Confucius said, "There are two great constraining obligations in this world. One is what is fated, one's mandated limitations, and the other is responsibility, doing what is called for by one's position.¹⁵ A child's love for his parents is fated—it cannot be removed from his heart. An underling's service to a boss is responsibility, the response called for by his position; wherever he goes, he is in service to his boss—it cannot be avoided anywhere in this world. Thus I call these the great constraining obligations. To be reconciled to wherever you may have to go in the service you must render to your parents is perfect filial piety, and to be

12. *Xin zhi* 心知. See both terms in the Glossary. This seems to be another way of describing the vacuity that waits for the presence of whatever comes, circumventing the mind's interference, allowing a direct beeline from the senses to the vital energy, now unobstructed, undisturbed, and unstrained because it remains outside the jurisdiction of the commanding mind.

13. Fuxi was the legendary inventor of various cultural innovations, including the Chinese writing system and the trigrams of the *Yijing*, but the otherwise unknown Ji Qu, according to Cheng Xuanying, must have been "an ancient ruler from before the Three Dynasties, when there was no such thing as writing."

14. A high minister and royal family member of the state of Chu.

15. *Yi* 義. See Glossary.

reconciled to whatever may be involved in the service you must render to your boss is complete loyalty. But further, in the service you must render to your own heart, to know that nothing can be done about the sorrow and joy it unalterably puts before you, and thus reconcile yourself to them as if they were fated—this is completely realized virtuosity.¹¹ Being a son or a subordinate, there will inevitably be things you cannot avoid having to do. Absorb yourself in the realities of the task at hand to the point of forgetting your own existence. Then you will have no leisure to delight in life or abhor death. That would make this mission of yours quite doable!

“Let me tell you a little more of what I’ve learned. Human interactions, when handled face-to-face, are founded on mutual trust. But when handled at a distance, they must depend on words to establish reciprocal loyalty. These words have to be transmitted by someone, and there is nothing in the world more difficult than communicating mutual esteem or mutual anger between two people. The esteem gets exaggerated into flattery and the anger into insult. These exaggerations then become outright lies, and once the lying starts trustworthiness is lost, and then the ability to communicate is destroyed—and perhaps the messenger as well. As the maxim says, “Transmit their usual characteristic inclinations, not their occasional exaggerations, and you can probably preserve yourself intact.”

“Another thing: when two people test their skills against one another, it starts out brightly enough but usually ends darkly; when it really gets extreme, they end up engaging in all sorts of outrageous tactics to defeat each other. A drinking ritual is orderly at first but usually ends up in turmoil, and when it really gets extreme, the amusements start to get perverse. All things are like this. They begin in good faith, but in the end they get ugly. They start out simple but end up oversized and unwieldy. Words are like winds and waves, and actions are rooted in gain and loss. Winds and waves can easily shake a man, and gain and loss can easily endanger him.

“So the rage comes forth for no apparent reason and the cunning words fly off on a tangent like the panicked cries of a dying animal with no time to choose. The breath and vital energy come to a boil and with that everyone becomes bloody-minded. As the feeling of being threatened reaches its zenith, the more unlovely states of mind come with it and nobody even notices it—and if they don’t realize what is happening to them, there is no saying where it will all end! Thus the maxim says, ‘Do not compromise your mission, do not hurry it to completion, for these would overflow the proper measure. For compromised missions and hurried completions are dangerous things.’ Beauty is something that comes from taking your time, and once the ugliness takes shape it is too late to change it. Can you afford to be careless? Let yourself be carried along by things so that the mind wanders freely. Hand it all over to the unavoidable so as to nourish what is central within you. That is the most you can do. What need is there to deliberately seek any reward? The best thing is just to fulfill what’s mandated to you, your fate—to go be what you can’t help being. How could there be any difficulty to that?”

When Yan He was appointed tutor to the crown prince of Wei, son of Duke Ling, he went to consult with Qu Boyu.¹⁶ “Here is a man who is just naturally no good. If I find no way to contain him, he will endanger my state, but if I do try to contain him, he will endanger my life. His cleverness allows him to understand the crimes people commit, but not why they were driven to commit these crimes.¹⁷ What should I do?”

Qu Boyu said, “A good question indeed! You must be attentive to him, cautious of him, but also put your own person into proper alignment! Best to be both 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, which will haunt and plague you. 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 commune with him to the point of flawlessness. Don’t you know the story of the praying mantis? It flailed its pincers around to stop an oncoming chariot wheel, not realizing the task was beyond its powers. This is how it is for those with ‘beautiful talents.’ Be attentive, be cautious! If you irritate him by flaunting your talents, you will be in more or less the same position. Don’t you know how the tiger trainer handles it? He doesn’t feed the beast live animals for fear of arousing its lust for killing. He doesn’t feed it uncut sides of meat for fear of arousing its lust for dismemberment. He carefully times out the feedings and comprehends the creature’s propensity for rage. The tiger is a different species from man, but can be tamed through affection for its feeder. The ones it kills are the ones who cross it. On the other hand, a man who loves horses even to the point of gathering their shit and piss in jeweled boxes may still get his skull or chest kicked in if he smacks away a mosquito on the unbridled animal at the wrong time. Despite the best intentions, his solicitousness backfires on him. Can you afford to be careless?”

Carpenter Stoney 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

16. According to commentators, Yan He was a worthy hermit of Lu, but the attribution is doubtful. If the name is made up, it could be translated as “Faceshut.” He also appears in Chapters 19, 28, and 32. The crown prince in question here was later forced to flee Wei after plotting matricide, eventually returning to usurp the throne from his own son. Qu Boyu was a minister of the state of Wei contemporaneous with Confucius, who praised him as an exemplar of self-correction and adaptability appropriate to circumstance. See *Analects*, 14:25, 15:7. He also appears in Chapter 25.

17. Guo Xiang and others take this to mean that his own poor governance is the cause of the crimes committed by his subjects.

which could have been hollowed out to make into ships. It was surrounded by marveling sightseers, but the carpenter walked past it without a second look.

When his apprentice finally got tired of admiring it, he caught up with Carpenter Stoney and said, “Since taking up my axe to follow you, Master, I have never seen a tree of such fine material¹⁸ as this! And yet you don’t even deign to look twice at it or pause beneath it. Why?”

Carpenter Stoney 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.”

Back home that night, the tree appeared to Carpenter Stoney 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 they die young, failing to fully live out their Heaven-given lifespans. They batter themselves with the vulgar conventions of the world, as do all the other things of the world. 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 things, objects—how then should we objectify each other? We are members of the same class, namely, *things*—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 Stoney 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 Stoney said, “Hush! Don’t talk like that! Those people came to it for refuge on their own initiative. 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 protects, what protects it, is not this crowd, but something totally different. To praise it for fulfilling its responsibility in the role it happens to play—that would really be missing the point!”¹⁹

Sir Shoestrap the Southland Unk²⁰ was traveling in the hills of Shang when he came across a huge tree. He marveled at it, for the horses from a thousand chariots could have cooled themselves in its shade. “What sort of tree is this?” said Master Shoestrap. “It must be of unusually fine material.” Looking up at its branches, he saw that they were too twisted and gnarled to be used for beams or pillars. Looking

18. 材 *cai*, translated as “talent” or “being worth something” below.

19. 義 *yi*. See Glossary.

20. Either an alternate name for, or a parody of, “Sir Shoestrap of Southwall” from the opening vignette of Chapter 2.

down at its trunk, he saw that it was too splotched and split to be used for a coffin. It stung and stabbed the tongue when licked, and crazed and inebriated the mind for three days when sniffed. Master Shoestrap said, "It turns out to be a worthless tree, and thus it has been able to grow so huge. Ah! This is the worthlessness that the Spiritlike Person relies on!

"In the Jingshi region of Song grow the catalpas, cypresses, and mulberries. The tall ones are chopped down for monkey perches. Those that are three or four spans around are chopped down to make pillars for stately homes. Those that are seven or eight spans around are felled to make coffin shells for the wealthy. Thus they fail to fully live out their natural lifespans, and die before their time under axes and saws. This is the trouble that comes from being worth something.²¹ In the expiation ceremony, cows with white spots, pigs with upturned snouts, and humans with hemorrhoids are considered unfit to be offered as sacrifices to the river god. All shamans know this, and thus they regard these as creatures of bad fortune. But this is exactly why the Spiritlike Person regards them as creatures of very good fortune indeed!

"Take Outspread the Discombobulated: his chin was tucked into his navel, his shoulders towered over the crown of his head, his ponytail pointed toward the sky, his five internal organs were compressed at the top of him, his thigh bones took the place of his ribs. With his sewing and washing he could make enough to fill his mouth, and by pounding the divining sticks and exuding an aura of mystic power²² he could in fact make enough to feed ten men. When the authorities called for troops, he would just present himself among all the others, flailing his arms in his discombobulated way [without any danger of being drafted for military duty]; and when it came time to take on any great labors, his chronic condition exempted him from service. When the authorities handed out rations to the disabled, he got three large measures of grain and ten bundles of firewood. A discombobulated physical form was sufficient to allow him to nourish his body, so that he was able to live out his natural lifespan. How much more can be accomplished with discombobulated virtuosities!"

When Confucius went to Chu, the madman Jieyu wandered past his gate. He was singing this song:

"Oh Phoenix! Oh Phoenix! How your virtuosity has declined!
 You cannot wait for a future era, nor can you recapture the past.
 When the Course is present in the world, the sage perfects himself with it.
 When the Course is lacking in the world, he just lives his own life with it.
 But in the present age, avoiding execution is the best he can do with it.
 Good fortune is lighter than a feather, but no one can carry it for long.
 Trouble is heavier than the earth, but no one can get it to drop away.

21. *Cai*. See note 18 above.

22. I am indebted to Donald Harper, through his student Alan Dagovitz, for suggesting this reading. It suggests a resonance with the shrine tree's strategy for survival.

Confronting the world with your virtuosity—let it rest, give it up!
 Drawing a straight line upon this earth and then trying to walk along it—
 danger, peril!
 The brambles and thorns, which so bewilder the sunlight, they don't im-
 pede my steps.
 My zigzag stride amidst them that keeps my feet unharmed.”²³

The mountain tree plunders itself. The candle fat scorches itself. The cinnamon tree is edible, and thus it gets chopped down. The lacquer tree is useful, and thus it is cut down. Everyone knows how useful usefulness is, but no one seems to know how useful uselessness is.

ENDNOTES

A. We may regard this warning and the following explication as a safeguard against a certain kind of misunderstanding of “Walking Two Roads” as suggested in Chapter 2 (p. 16): it apparently is *not* to be taken to mean keeping to one set of values (one road, one course) internally and applying a second set of values (a second road, a second course) in one's external behavior, or holding to two sets of values at once. The alternative form of twoness is revealed in the deployment of “vacuity” in the “fasting of the mind” below.

B. The standard reading of these lines interprets them quite differently, along the following lines: “Unify your will! Listen with the mind rather than with the ears. Further, listen with the vital energy rather than with the mind.” On this reading, concentration of the will is considered a good thing, and one is instructed to listen to the goings on in the world, and in other people, not with the mind but with a unified vital energy, which itself becomes the empty openness that thereby connects without prejudice with the vital energy of others. Listening with the vital energy thus becomes also listening *to* the vital energy, which is regarded as an undivided continuum. This is of course perfectly feasible. The present reading, however, arguably puts less strain on the grammar (requiring no transposition of the first two characters, allowing the descriptive negative *wu* 无 to stand as is rather than reading it as equivalent to the imperative *wu* 勿, and providing a clear antecedent for the pronoun *zhi* 之 serving as object of the verbs, i.e., the will or overall aspiration itself) and has a clearer connection to the preceding discussion, viewing this as a repudiation of Yan Hui's previous single-minded obsession with his goal, the kind of unity of purpose he has been displaying all along and has explicitly proposed above as a method, for though he has suggested a multitude of tactics, his *zhi* 志 (will or overall longterm aspiration) has been unwavering.

C. Alternately, continuing the standard reading, “For the ears are halted at what they hear. The mind is halted at whatever matches [its preconceptions]. But the vital energy is a vacuity,

23. Jieyu's crazy words have already been referenced in Chapter 1, p. 6. The present song is a parody of his words in the *Analects* 18:5: “Phoenix! Phoenix! How your Virtuosity has declined! The past cannot be corrected, but the future can be still be pursued! Let it rest, give it up! To involve yourself in governing now can only lead to danger!”

a waiting for the presence of whatever thing may come.” Or again, following Guo Xiang’s parsing: “But one whose listening stays at the ears and whose mind stays just where it interlocks perfectly with the vital energies becomes rather a vacuity that waits for the presence of whatever thing may come.” This would suggest a transformation of both the mind and the vital energy such that they can now “reach through to contact” the minds and vital energies of others, as Confucius recommended earlier in the dialogue. On any reading, this passage delineates a different kind of “unity” — *yi* and “emptiness” 虛 *xu*, in contrast to the type of *yi* and *xu* already suggested by Yan Hui above (see note 7). Most venturesomely, this passage can be parsed in yet a different way, rendering: “In unifying your will so single-mindedly, you ceased listening to things with your ears and instead listened with your mind. If analogously you cease listening with your mind and instead listen with your vital breath-energy, your hearing will go no further than the ears, and your mind will go no further than perfectly interlocking with its objects like a tally. For this vital breath-energy is an empty openness that waits for whatever may come, able to depend on all things. The Course is the only gathering of that empty openness. That empty openness is the fasting of the mind.”

D. This translation accommodates both the traditional reading, which imports an implicit preposition here (hence, “What gathers in emptiness is only the Course”), and the literal reading without the preposition (hence, “But the only thing that gathers openness is *a/the* C/course”). A Course, by definition, is an accumulation of emptinesses, a gathering of open spaces laid end to end.

E. Many traditional commentators, as well as modern translators, interpret Yan Hui’s words here as follows: “Before putting [this fasting of the mind] into practice, I was really Hui. But once I put it into practice, there has never been any Hui.” Reading the *shi* as a full noun, “reality, real deeds,” rather than (somewhat anachronistically) as the adverb “really,” and taking *zi* to mean “from” instead of “self,” “the meaning would be something like, “Yan Hui said, ‘Before I put this instruction into practice, the reality of the deed comes from someone named Hui. But after I do so, there turns out never to have been any such person named Hui.’”

F. Reading *dao* 壻 for *du* 毒, following Li Zhen (and as in *Daodejing* 51), taking this phrase as roughly equivalent to the parallel phrase in *Zhuangzi*, Chapter 22, p. 177, *wumen wufang* 無門無房.

G. *Zhi* appears four times in this sentence. See Glossary. Some interpreters take the sentence in the opposite sense, with a first-person rather than second-person implied subject: “I have heard of flying with wings, but never of flying without wings; I have heard of knowing by means of knowing, but never of knowing by means of nonknowing”—meaning that such things are impossible.

H. Following Xuan Ying’s interpretation, and reading the *buyi* 不易 to mean “unchanging” of a total contrasted pair as a whole, as for example it is used by Wang Chong, *Lunheng*, “Wu-xing”: 天地不變, 日月不易, 星辰不沒, 正也: “That heaven and earth do not change, that the sun and moon do not alter, that the stars and constellations do not fall, this is what is normal.”

CHAPTER FIVE

Fragmentations¹ Betokening Full Virtuosity

In the state of Lu there was a man called Kingly Crowbait whose foot had been chopped off as a punishment. Yet somehow he had as many followers as Confucius himself. Steady Season² questioned Confucius about it.

“Kingly Crowbait is a one-footed ex-con, and yet his followers divide the state of Lu with you, Master. When he stands he offers no instruction, and when he sits he gives no opinions. And yet they go to him empty and return filled. Is there really such a thing as a wordless instruction, a formless way of bringing the mind to completion?³ What kind of man is he?”

Confucius said, “That man, my master, is a sage. Only my procrastination has kept me from going to follow him myself. If he is master even to me, how much more should he be so to those who are lesser than me. I shall bring not only the state of Lu but all the world to follow him!”

Steady Season said, “Here he is, a one-legged ex-con, and yet he reigns over you like this. He must be quite extraordinary! How exactly does he make use of his mind?”

Confucius said, “Life and death are a great matter, but they are unable to alter him. Even if heaven and earth were to topple over, he would not be lost with them. He discerns what is unborrowed, so he is not transferred away when all other things are. He looks on the alterations of all things as his own fate, and thus holds fast to their source.”

1. Literally, “Tallies” 符 *fu*, of Full Virtuosity. These *fu* were bamboo pieces that were broken in half as a security to guarantee the authenticity of an official order. The jagged edges of their two halves fit together like jigsaw pieces, ensuring a perfect match of two parts from the same original whole. Zhuangzi views the broken bodies of the cripples in this chapter through this trope. The only other use of this term in the Inner Chapters, outside of this title which was perhaps added later, is found in Confucius’s instructions about “the fasting of the mind” in Chapter 4 (see note 9, p. 37).

2. Chang Ji 常季. The name might be translated more strongly as the oxymoron “Invariable Season,” a trope of some relevance to some of what follows in the rest of this chapter. The same highly loaded word, 常 *chang*, is used below by Chang Ji to modify “mind, heart,” translated as the phrase “invariable state of mind.” See Glossary.

3. 成 *Cheng*. See Glossary. This line could also refer to Kingly Crowbait himself rather than his instruction: “A completeness of mind that however shows itself in no external form.”

“Please tell me more.”

“Looked at from the point of view of their differences, even your own liver and gall bladder are as distant as Chu in the south and Yue in the north. But looked at from the point of view of their sameness, all things are one. If you take the latter view, you become free of all preconceptions about which particular objects might suit the eyes or the ears. You just release the mind to play in the harmony of all virtuosities. Seeing what is one and the same to all things, nothing is ever felt to be lost. This man viewed the chopping off of his foot as nothing more than the casting away of a clump of soil.”

“For his own sake, then,” Steady Season said, “he uses his understanding⁴ to discover [the capacities of] his mind,⁵ and then makes use of that mind of his to develop an invariable state of mind.⁶ But why then should other beings esteem him so?”

Confucius said, “People cannot see their reflections in running water, but only in still water. Only stillness can still the multitude to the point of genuine stillness. Though all life forms receive their vitality from the earth, it remains constantly replete only in the pine and the cypress, so they remain lush and green both summer and winter. Although all life forms receive their vitality from Heaven, it was Shun alone who turned out aligned and balanced,⁷ which happened to have some fortuitous power to align other living beings as well. And that alone was how he aligned them all.

“The proof that one is holding fast to the origin can be seen in true fearlessness. A brave warrior, even if only one man facing a host of enemies, will heroically throw himself into the thick of battle. If a man’s quest for glory, for mere name, can give him such self-control, imagine how much more fearless is a man who takes heaven and earth to be his own bodily organs^A and the ten thousand things to be his own guts,^B a man who is merely lodged for the moment in some particular limbs and trunk and head, a man who regards even his own eyes and ears as merely images perceived. He sees everything his consciousness knows as more of the same oneness, and thus his mind nowhere undergoes death. Someday he will just choose his day to continue off into the distance, climbing along as before on the borrowed.^C It is others who have decided for themselves to follow him—how

4. 知 *Zhi*. See Glossary.

5. I.e., realizing that the mind has the power to view things in various ways, either as different or as one.

6. I.e., thereupon choosing to view things in the way that makes for a constant state of mind, and sees the constancy and oneness of things. The term could mean either “a sustainable state of mind” or “a mind focused on what is sustainable,” or, more likely, both since in this passage these two seem to imply one another. It can also mean “normal, ordinary, usual,” which may motivate Chang Ji’s question: in addition to this state of mind concerning only himself, by definition there is nothing special about it, so why does it have such a powerful effect on others? Note again that this term 常 *chang*, which means “sustainable” or “constant,” is often rendered more grandiloquently as “eternal,” which would have this passage speaking of “The Eternal Mind.” See Glossary.

7. *Zheng* 正. See Glossary.

could such a man ever be willing to make it his business to concern himself with mere *beings*?”

Shen Tujia, a one-footed ex-convict, was a fellow student of Zichan⁸ under Uncle Dim Nobody. Zichan said to him, “When I leave, you wait behind for a while, or if you leave first, I’ll wait behind.” The next day they were again seated side by side in the same small hall and Zichan said, “I said you should wait behind when I leave, and I’d wait behind when you leave. Now I’m about to go—will you wait behind or not? You see a holder of political power and you don’t give way—do you think you’re equal to a holder of power?”

Shen Tujia said, “Here at our master’s place is there really such a thing as a holder of power? You delight in your office and push others behind you. I have heard that a bright mirror gathers no dust; if dust gathers there, it wasn’t really bright to begin with. Long interaction with a truly worthy man should free you from error. Now it is our master whom you claim to esteem, and yet you still talk like this. Is that not a mistake?”

Zichan said, “A man in your condition, and yet you still think you can wrangle over goodness with Yao the sage king. In light of the condition of your own virtue, don’t you think you should critique yourself instead?”

Shen Tujia said, “There are many who dress up their mistakes to make themselves think they should not lose a foot, but very few who do not dress up their mistakes, knowing they have no particular entitlement to retain that foot. Only a true virtuoso can understand what is unavoidable and find peace in it as his own fate. If you play around near Archer Yi’s target, lurking near the bull’s-eye, it is only normal to get hit. If you manage to escape being hit, that’s just fate, random good luck. Many two-footed people laugh at me for having one foot, which always used to infuriate me. But as soon as I arrived here at our master’s place, everything fell away, bringing me back to where I’d started from. It’s as if the master cleansed me with his goodness without my even realizing it. I have studied under him for nineteen years and never once in all that time have I been aware that I was one-footed. Here you and I have been wandering together on the inner side of the corporeal—is it not wrong of you to seek me on its outer side?”

Zichan’s face changed suddenly, jolted as if by a swift kick. “Please say no more about it!” he said.

There was this ex-con in Lu, whose feet had been mutilated as a punishment, named Toeless of Unk Mountain. He heeled his way over to see Confucius, who said to him, “You were careless in your past behavior and thus have ended up in this condition. Isn’t it a little late to come to me now?”

Toeless said, “I just didn’t understand where to direct my labors and undervalued my own body, and so I am lacking a foot; but as I come to you now I still

8. Zichan (d. 522 BCE) was prime minister of Zheng during the Spring and Autumn period, who died when Confucius was still young. Confucius praised him for both his policies and his personal qualities. I find no evidence of a pre-Qin person named Shen Tujia, but I cannot discern any relevant implication of the name either.

have retained something worth more than a foot, which I am trying to keep whole. Heaven covers all things. Earth supports all things. I used to think that you, sir, were just like heaven and earth—I never imagined you would instead say something like this!”

Confucius said, “It was rude of me. Won’t you please come in and teach me what you’ve learned?”

But Toeless departed. Confucius then said, “Learn from this, my disciples! For Toeless is a one-footed ex-convict, yet he still endeavors to learn, so as to make up for the ugliness of his past behavior. How much more should you do so, you who still have your intrinsic virtuosities whole and intact!”

Toeless said to Lao Dan,⁹ “Confucius is certainly far from being an Utmost Person, isn’t he? Why does he go around imitating you so subserviently? He must be seeking some bizarre, deceptive, illusory, freakish thing like a good name, not realizing that the Utmost Person views such things as handcuffs and leg chains.”

Lao Dan said, “Why don’t you simply let him see life and death as a single string, acceptable and unacceptable as a single thread, thus releasing him from his fetters? How would that be, do you think?”

Toeless said, “Heaven itself has inflicted this punishment on him—how can he be released?”

Duke Ai of Lu consulted with Confucius, saying, “There’s this ugly man in Wei named Sad Horsehead Humpback. When men are with him they can think of nothing else and find themselves unable to depart. When women see him, they plead with their parents, saying they would rather be this man’s concubine than any other man’s wife—this has happened at least a dozen times already! And yet he’s never been heard to initiate anything of his own with them, instead just chiming in with whatever they’re already doing. He has no position of power with which to protect their lives and no stash of wealth with which to fill their stomachs, and on top of that he’s ugly enough to startle all the world. So there he is, chiming in with them instead of presenting anything new of his own, his understanding limited to his immediate surroundings, and yet male and female come together before him wherever he goes. I figured he must have something special, so I called him to my court to take a look at him. He was indeed ugly enough to astonish all the world. It took a few weeks before I could see him as actually human. But after a few months, I started to trust him. My state had no prime minister, so I offered the post to him. Looking trapped and put upon, he was vague and evasive when he finally responded, seeming to reject the idea. I was embarrassed, but in the end I prevailed upon him to accept control of the state. But before long he left me and vanished. I was terribly depressed, as if a loved one had died, unable to take any pleasure in my power. What kind of man is this?”

Confucius said, “I was once sent on a mission to Chu where I saw some piglets still nursing at the teats of their dead mother. After a short while they suddenly

9. Laozi, legendary author of the *Daodejing*. See Chapter 3, note G.

looked very startled and bolted away from her. They could no longer see themselves in her, could find no similarity to themselves there. What they loved in their mother was not her physical form but what set that form into motion. When a war casualty is buried he does not care whether he is adorned with camouflage feathers, and a footless man has no love for shoes—in both cases the fundamental thing has already been lost. Now the women in the emperor's harem are not allowed to pare their nails or pierce their ears. When soldiers stationed abroad get married, they are for a time exempted from all missions. If such value is placed on an undamaged body, how much more accrues to a person whose intrinsic virtues are whole and undamaged? Now this Sad Horesehead Humpback says nothing and yet is trusted, achieves nothing and yet is loved, to the point of inspiring you to hand over your state to him, fearing only that he wouldn't accept it. His original capacities must be whole and intact even though his intrinsic virtuosity takes no definite external form."

Duke Ai asked, "What do you mean by wholeness of his original capacities?"

Confucius said, "Death and life, surviving and perishing, failure and success, poverty and wealth, superiority and inferiority, disgrace and honor, hunger and thirst, cold and heat—these are the transformations of events, the proceedings of fate. Day and night they come to us, one replacing another, and yet our understanding¹⁰ can never compass what it is that begins them. So there is no need to let them disrupt our harmony, and we must deny them entrance into our Numinous Reservoir.¹¹ That is what allows the ease of its harmony to open so completely, without loss in any exchange,^D what keeps it flowing on day and night without cease, joining in everywhere as the springtime of each being. Connecting with each thisness, the rightness of whatever is here now, the life-giving season continually comes to arise in one's own mind.¹² This is what is called keeping the original capacities whole and intact."

"Then what do you mean by intrinsic virtuosity that takes no definite external form?"

"When water is perfectly still, it can serve as a standard of levelness. When the internal is preserved, the external will remain unshaken as well. Virtuosity really

10. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

11. Cf. "Heavenly Reservoir," in Chapter 2 (p. 18), which is described as "poured into without ever getting full, ladled out of without ever running out, ever not-knowing its own source." Both denote the state of mind of the Zhuangzian person.

12. "... each thisness, the rightness of whatever is here now" here renders 是 *shi*, "this/right." On *shi* as this/right, see Chapter 2, *passim*, and Glossary. Alternate interpretations of this very obscure sentence: "Taking up whatever comes, one's own mind gives rise to just the moment for it"; "Whatever you encounter, the timely [response] arises in your mind"; "Continuing every rightness, it is always the life-giving season in your mind"; "In contact with whatever is there, the moment takes shape in your own mind"; "Receiving the rightness of every 'this,' all its seasons come forth within your own mind"; "Taking up the rightness of every 'this,' it is in one's own mind that the life-giving season is ever emerging."

just means the practice of forming new harmonies.¹³ So the intrinsic virtuosity that remains unexpressed in any one definite form is something from which all beings find themselves unable to depart.”^E

On another day, Duke Ai told this story to Minzi,¹⁴ commenting, “I used to think that in sitting on my throne and ruling the empire by maintaining standards for the people and protecting them from death I was already doing a perfect job. Now that I have heard the words of the Utmost Person, I fear I have not lived up to my post. By neglecting my personal welfare, I’ve ruined my state. And Confucius and I, we are not ruler and subject. We are simply each the companion of the other’s intrinsic virtuosities! Hunchback Limpleg, the lipless cripple, presented himself to Duke Ling of Wei, who was so delighted with him that when he saw the unimpaired, their necks looked freakishly long to him. Jarsize Goiter presented himself to Duke Huan of Qi, and in that case, too, the ruler was so delighted that when he saw the unimpaired, their necks looked freakishly long to him. Thus where the intrinsic virtuosities excel, the physical form is forgotten. But people are unable to forget the forgettable, and instead forget the unforgettable—true forgetfulness! Thus, although the sage may sometimes go wandering in them, the understanding¹⁵ is to him merely a bastard son, obligations and agreements merely glue, virtuosities mere continuations of something received, skill merely salesmanship. The sage makes no plans, so what use would he have for the understanding? He is unsplit, so what use would he have for glue? He loses nothing, so what use would he have for the attainments of virtuosities? He is not for sale as a commodity, so what use would he have for salesmanship? These four are his nourishment from Heaven, the Heavenly Sustenance. Since he receives his sustenance from Heaven, what use would he have for the human? He has the physical form of a human being but not the characteristic inclinations of a human being. Since he shares the human form, he lives among men. Since he is free of their characteristic inclinations, right and wrong cannot get at him. Minute and insignificant, he is just another man among the others. Vast and unmatched, he is alone in perfecting the Heavenly that is his.”

Huizi said to Zhuangzi, “Can a human being really be without the characteristic human inclinations?”

Zhuangzi said, “Yes.”

“But without the characteristic human inclinations, how can he be called a human being?”

“A course gives him this demeanor,^F Heaven gives him this physical form, so why shouldn’t he be called a human being?”

13. Alternately, depending on how we take *xiu* 修, “Virtuosity is really just an ornamental form giving a definite shape to the fullness of the harmony within.” or “Virtuosity is just a way of repairing the completeness of harmony.”

14. A disciple of Confucius.

15. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

“Since you call him a human being, how can he be without the characteristic human inclinations?”

Zhuangzi said, “Affirming some things as right and negating others as wrong are what I call the characteristic inclinations.¹⁶ What I call being free of them means not allowing likes and dislikes to damage you internally, instead making it your constant practice to follow along with the way each thing is of itself, going by its spontaneous affirmations, without trying to add anything to the process of generation.”

Huizi said, “If someone doesn’t add to the process of generation, how can he even continue to exist as a person?”

Zhuangzi said, “His course gives him a certain demeanor, Heaven gives him a certain physical form, and he doesn’t damage himself internally with likes and dislikes. Now you, on the other hand, treat your spirit like a stranger and labor your vitality, whether reciting your disputations under the trees or nodding off across your dried-wood desk. Heaven dispatched this physical form of yours, and here you are using it to crow on about ‘hardness’ and ‘whiteness!’”^G

ENDNOTES

A. Following Xuan Ying’s interpretation.

B. Reading *fu* 腑 for *fu* 府.

C. The term *dengxia* 登假 here means literally, “To climb upon the borrowed,” but it is usually interpreted through character substitution to mean “To climb into the distance,” or, using another substitution, “To ascend upon the rosy glow of the clouds.” This is an official euphemism sometimes used to describe the death of an emperor—he has ascended into the distance, over the clouds. The implication of both death and ascension is to be retained in reading the odd usage of this term here. Cf. Chapter 6, page 54.

D. Many commentators opt to follow the variant of this sentence that appears in *Huainanzi*, “Jingshen xun” 淮南子, 精神訓 where 充 *chong* replaces 兌 *dui*. The meaning would then be, “That is what allows the ease of its harmony to open into all things but without thereby losing its fullness. . . .”

E. The point seems to be that since virtuosity is (we now learn) really just a name for the process of forming new harmonies, its power is limited whenever it takes any definite shape, because the number of items that harmonize with any definite entity are always finite; the harmony-forming virtuosity with no single shape can thus form harmonies with anything. As a consequence of the indeterminability of the source of the transforming perspectives, the Zhuangzian person is free of a fixed identity, empty of fixed forms. This is compared to still water, empty of any particular motion. This state “gives life” to each “this,” like the springtime,

16. This sentence is also often read to mean, “That is not what I mean by the characteristic inclinations.”

affirming and enhancing each one. Hence all creatures find themselves drawn to it, needing it for their existence as still water is needed as a standard of levelness.

F. Following Lu Huiqing, I read this not as “the Course,” the metaphysical source of all things, presented as almost another name for “Heaven” and as the giver of the human body, since we have heard so far no mention of any such entity in this text, but as “the human course,” which gives a person his specific behavioral demeanor and recognition as a member of that type of being. He behaves and appears like a human because his practice of the human way has made him so. His physical body, on the other hand, was given by Heaven, i.e., actual natural process. Ruan Yusong offers a similar interpretation.

G. The status of abstract qualities like “hardness” and “whiteness,” their relation to specific white and hard beings and to what degree they can exist in separation from one another, were among the topics hotly debated by the ancient Chinese logicians, Huizi among them. See Chapter 33, as well as the Introduction and the essay “Zhuangzi as Philosopher” at <https://www.hackettpublishing.com/zhuangziphil>. The last remark is sometimes seen as ironically invoking the “Piping of Heaven” from Chapter 2.

CHAPTER SIX

The Great Source as Teacher

“To understand what is done by Heaven, and also to understand what is to be done by the human, that is to reach the utmost.”¹

“To understand what is done by Heaven”: Heavenly, skylike, that is how things are born.^A

“To understand what is to be done by the human”: that would be to use what your understanding understands to nourish what your understanding does not understand. You could then live out all your Heaven-given years without being cut down halfway. And that would indeed be the richest sort of understanding.^B

However, there is a problem here. For it is only through its relation of dependence² on something that our understanding can be considered correct,³ but what it depends on is always peculiarly unfixed.⁴ So how could I know whether what I call the Heavenly is not really the human? How could I know whether what I call the human is not really the Heavenly? Let us say instead, then, that there can be “a Genuine Understanding” only after there is such a thing as someone who is himself genuine even while being human—human yet genuine, genuine yet human: the Genuine-Human.^C

And what would the Genuine-Human be like? The Genuine-Humans of old did not revolt against their inadequacies, did not aspire to heroic accomplishments or perfection,⁵ made no plans to be distinguished persons.⁶ In this way, they could be mistaken without feeling any regret, could be correct without self-satisfaction.

1. As with the “words are not just chirping” assertion in Chapter 2 (p. 13), we seem to have here the putting forth of a tentative position, perhaps a conventional stance, which is then considered, analyzed, and deconstructed.

2. 待 *Dai*. See Glossary.

3. “Correct” here is 當 *dang*, which literally denotes a matching up between two things.

4. According to the discussion in Chapter 2, the meaning of the terms by which the understanding identifies things depends on what we identify as “this” and “that” (*shi* and *fei*), which, as a function of our shifting perspectives, is peculiarly unfixed.

5. 成 *Cheng*. See Glossary. Meaning here “to heroically aspire to be perfect,” “to be complete,” or “to have achievements and success.”

6. Following Lu Shuzhi, reading the text as is. Many commentators substitute 事 *shi* for 士 *shi*, making the phrase read “did not plan their affairs.”

And thus they could ascend the heights without fear, submerge into the depths without getting drenched, enter the flames without feeling hot. Such was the way their understanding was able, in its very demise, to climb along its various borrowings and ascend through the remotest vistas of the Course.⁷

The Genuine-Humans of old slept without dreaming and awoke without worries. Their food was plain but their breathing was deep. Genuine-Humans breathe from their heels, while the mass of men breathe from their throats, submissive and defeated, gulping down their words and just as soon vomiting them back up. Their preferences and desires run deep, but their Heavenly impulse runs shallow.

The Genuine-Humans of old understood nothing about delighting in life or abhorring death. They emerged without delight, sank back in without resistance. Whooshing in they came and whooshing out they went, nothing more. They neither forgot where they came from nor inquired into where they would go. Receiving it, they delighted in it. Forgetting all about it, they gave it back. This is what it means not to use the mind to fend off the Course, not to use the human to try to help out the Heavenly. Such is what I'd call being human yet genuine, genuine yet human: the Genuine-Human.

Such persons—their minds are intent,^D their faces are tranquil, their foreheads are broad and plain. They are cool like the autumn, warm like the spring; their joy and their anger intermingle with the four seasons. They find something fitting in their encounter with each thing; their ultimate end is unknown. It is thus that if a sage uses force, he may destroy a nation without losing the hearts of its people. Or his bounty may enrich ten thousand generations, but not because he harbors any love for mankind. Hence he who takes active delight in helping beings reach success is not a true sage. He who favors his intimates lacks true humankindness. He who is beholden to the seasons of Heaven is not a truly worthy man. He who does not open himself to the interchanges of benefit and harm is not a truly noble man. He who works for a name and thereby loses himself is not a truly distinguished man. He who goes to his death on account of anything but his own genuineness is not a true man of service.^E Xu Buxie, Wu Guang, Bo Yi, Shu Qi, Qi Zi, Xu Yu, Ji Tuo, and Shentu Di⁸ served in the service of others, took comfort in the comfort of others, suited themselves to what suited others, but failed to take comfort in their own comfort, to suit themselves to what suited themselves.^F

The Genuine-Humans of old seemed to do whatever was called for, but were not partisan to any one faction.⁹ They appeared to be in need, but accepted no

7. *Dengxia* 登假. See Chapter 5, note C.

8. All legendary figures who sacrificed their lives in the service of loyalty to a ruler or to an ideal of some sort.

9. The following few lines are among the most irreducibly ambiguous in all world literature. To give the reader some sense of the overlapping possibilities, the notes will provide some of the alternate readings. For this line: "The Genuine-Humans of old were towering without

assistance. Taking part in all things, they were solitary but never rigid.¹⁰ Spreading out everywhere, they were empty but never insubstantial. Cheerful, they seemed to be enjoying themselves. Impelled along,¹¹ they did whatever could not be stopped. They let everything gather within them, but still it manifested outwardly to the world as their own countenance.¹² They gave it all away, but still it all rested securely within them as their own intrinsic virtuosity.¹³ Leprous with symptoms,¹⁴ they seemed just like everyone else. Haughty, nothing could control them. Unbreached, they seemed to prefer to close themselves off. Oblivious, they would forget what they were saying.¹⁵

They took punishments as their own body, ritual as their wings, understanding¹⁶ as a temporary expedient, and virtuosity as a sliding along. Taking punishments as their own body, how graceful was their slaughter! Taking ritual as their wings, they were able to get around in the world. Taking understanding as a temporary expedient, it arose for them only when the situation made it unavoidable. Taking virtuosity as a sliding along, it was so to speak just as one's feet are able to reach the foundation beneath one step after step,^c and yet so genuine was their humanness that it came across as the diligent steps of painstaking practice.

Thus their liking of something was a oneness with it and their disliking of something was also a oneness with it; what they liked and what they disliked, their liking and their disliking, were all the oneness.¹¹ Their oneness was oneness, and their non-oneness was also oneness. In their oneness, they were followers of the Heavenly. In their non-oneness, they were followers of the human. This is what it is for neither the Heavenly nor the human to win out over the other. And that is what I call the Genuine-Human.

Life and death are fated, and that they come with the regularity of day and night is of Heaven—that which humans can do nothing about, simply the way things are. Now some people look on Heaven as a father and therefore love it. But why not love even more that which towers beyond it? Some people look on having a ruler as something that surpasses any individual's self, on account of which they

collapsing." Or: "The Genuine-Humans of old fulfilled their responsibilities to others without being partisan to them."

10. Reading *gu* 孤 for *gu* 剛. Leaving the text as is, it would mean something like: "Firmly contoured but not rigid," or, "Firm but not prickly."

11. Or: "Steeply imposing . . ."

12. Or: "Pooling it all in, their personal presence yet somehow seemed to advance into the world." Or: "When they sequestered themselves away, their personal presence nonetheless seemed to advance into the world."

13. Or: "When they joined with others, they nonetheless rested securely in their own intrinsic virtuosities."

14. Following the reading of *li* 厲 provided by Wang Yu in his notes to his father Wang Fuzhi's commentary, leaving the character unsubstituted. Chapter 2 (p. 15) uses the same character unambiguously to refer to leprosy. Many commentators, however, suggest replacing this character with *guang* 廣, meaning "Broad[-minded]. . . ."

15. Or: ". . . what they had said." Or: ". . . what they were going to say."

16. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

can gladly accept death. Why not gladly accept death on account of what does so even more genuinely?

When the springs dry up, the fish have to cluster together on the shore, blowing 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,¹⁷ we'd be better off forgetting them both, letting their courses melt away in their transformation.

The Great Clump burdens me with a physical form, labors me with life, eases me with old age, rests me with death. Thus what makes my life something good is what makes my death something good; considering my life good is what makes me consider my death good.¹ For you may hide a boat in a ravine or a net in a swamp, thinking it is secure there. But in the middle of the night a mighty one comes along and carries it away on his back, unbeknownst to you in your slumber. When the smaller is hidden within the larger, there remains someplace to which it can escape. But to *hide the world in the world*, so that there is nowhere for it to escape to, then it has the vast realness of a thing eternal.

This human form is merely a circumstance that has been met with, just something stumbled into, but those who have become humans take delight in it nonetheless. Now the human form during its time undergoes ten thousand transformations, never stopping for an instant—so the joys it brings must be beyond calculation! Hence the sage uses it to roam and play in that from which nothing ever escapes, where all things are maintained. Early death, old age, the beginning, the end—this allows him to see each of them as good. People may try to emulate him as their model, but how much more it would be to bind oneself equally to each and all of the ten thousand things, to let oneself rely on¹⁸ each transformation, on all transformation!¹

For that Course has its realness and reliability, but without any deliberate deeds¹⁹ and without any definite form, actual and true but only through non-doing and formlessness.² Though it can be passed along to others, it cannot be received and possessed by them; and conversely, though it can be got, it cannot be shown. A spontaneous rooting of itself wherever it is, it has firmly maintained itself since ancient times, since even before heaven and earth were there;²⁰ it is how both the ghosts of the dead and the Lord-on-High become as imponderably spiritlike as they are, how both heaven and earth come to be what they are.³ It goes above the summit without being high, beneath the nadir without being deep. It precedes heaven and earth without being of long duration, elder to the earliest antiquity without being

17. Yao the premier sage-king has appeared several times already. Jie is the last emperor of the Xia dynasty, which ended in the sixteenth century BCE, a legendary symbol of tyranny, cruelty, and all-around wickedness, whose excesses were used to justify the Shang dynasty's overthrow of the Xia.

18. *Dai*. See Glossary.

19. *Wuwei*. See Glossary.

20. I.e., heaven as opposed to earth, the division between heaven and earth that establishes each of their identities as such.

old.^M Mr. Hoghide²¹ got it and thereby gave support to all of heaven and earth. Mr. Fuxi²² got it and thereby tapped into the generative matrix of vital energy, the Qi-mother. The Big Dipper got it and thereby has remained undeflected since antiquity. The sun and moon got it and thereby have continued on without cease since antiquity. Moldable Clay²³ got it and thereby tapped into Mt. Kunlun. Pingyi²⁴ got it and thereby roams the great rivers. Shoulder Self got it and thereby made his home on Mt. Tai. The Yellow Emperor got and thereby ascended the clouds of heaven. Zhuan Xu²⁵ got it and thereby made his home in the Dark Palace. Yu Qiang²⁶ got it and thereby took his stand at the Northern Extremity. The Queen Mother of the West got it and thereby took her seat on Mt. Shaoguang—none knows her beginning or her end. Pengzu²⁷ got it and thereby remained alive from all the way back in the time of Emperor Shun of the Youyu clan down to the time of the Five Hegemons. Fu Yue²⁸ got it and thereby assisted Wuding in taking possession of the world, and thereafter rode upon the Dongwei galaxy, mounted upon the Qiwei constellation, and assumed his place arrayed among the stars.^N

Sir Sunflower the Southside Unk said to Lady Solostride, “You are old and yet your face is still that of a child. How?”

Lady Solostride said, “I have been instructed in the Course.”

Sir Sunflower said, “Can I be taught this Course?”

Lady Solostride said, “No, no! How could you? You are not the right person for it. Now Leanon of Divination Bridge was someone who had the innate capacities of a sage, but he lacked the Course of a sage. I had the Course of the sage, but no student with the innate capacities of a sage. So I decided to teach him, thinking he would immediately become a sage. That’s not exactly what happened, though telling the Course of a sage to one who already has the innate capacities of a sage was indeed quite easy. Still, I had to keep at him, and after three days of expounding it to him, he was able to expel from his mind all under heaven, the entire known world. After I kept at him for another seven days, he was able to expel

21. According to Cheng Xuanying, a sovereign from the days before writing existed. He is mentioned again in Chapter 26, but nowhere else in extant pre-Qin sources.

22. Later sources describe Fuxi as co-creator (with his sister Nüwa) of the human race, as well as the creator of the Chinese writing system and the trigrams of the *Yijing*, not to mention hunting, marriage, agriculture, cooking, and animal husbandry. He and his sister are depicted as having the faces of humans and the intertwining bodies of snakes.

23. Kanpi, said to be god of Mt. Kunlun, but mentioned nowhere else in extant pre-Qin sources. Possibly another name for Qian Qie 鉗且, mentioned in *Huainanzi*.

24. The god of the Yellow River.

25. Like the Yellow Emperor, often listed as one among the Five Ancient Thearchs.

26. According to later sources, god of the sea, grandson of the Yellow Emperor, with the face of a human and the body of a bird, with snakes hanging from his ears.

27. See Chapter 1, p. 3.

28. Said to have been a prisoner who worked as a builder, but then was seen by King Wuding of Shang (r. 1250–1192 BCE) in a dream and elevated to the position of prime minister.

from his mind the existence of any definite things. After I kept at him for nine days more, he was able to expel all coming to be born and all life, including his own. With his own life fully cast out, dawn broke through everywhere. With dawn breaking through, whatever showed anywhere was the one and only. Seeing everywhere the one and only, there was no division of past and present. Free of past and present, he could enter the unborn and undying, what kills all life without death, begins all life without beginning. It is something that sends all things off and welcomes all things in, destroys all and completes all. Its name is Tumultuous Tranquility. This Tranquil Turmoil! It reaches its completions,²⁹ comes to take its shapes, only through its turmoil.”

Sir Sunflower said, “But where did *you* learn of this?”

Lady Solostride said, “I learned it from the son of Aided-by-Ink, who learned it from the grandson of Caught-in-Recitation, who learned it from Look-and-See, who learned it from Heard-in-a-Whisper, who learned it from In-Need-of-Labor, who learned it from There-in-the-Singing, who learned it from Dark-Oblivion, who learned it from Joined-in-the-Void, who learned it from Doubt-Beginning.”

Sir Worship, Sir Transport,³⁰ Sir Plowshare, and Sir Comealong were talking. One of them said, “Who can see nothingness as his own head, life as his own spine, and death as his own backside? Who knows the single body formed by life and death, existence and nonexistence? I will be his friend!” The four looked at one another and laughed, feeling complete concord, and became friends. Suddenly, Sir Transport took ill. Sir Worship went to see him. Sir Transport said, “How great is the Creator of Things, making me all tangled up like this!” For his chin was tucked into his navel, his shoulders towered over the crown of his head, his ponytail pointed toward the sky, his five internal organs at the top of him, his thigh bones took the place of his ribs, and his yin and yang energies in chaos. But his mind was relaxed and unbothered. He hobbled over to the well to get a look at his reflection. “Wow!” he said, “The Creator of Things has really gone and tangled me up!”

Sir Worship said, “Do you dislike it?”

Sir Transport said, “No, what is there to dislike in such a demise?³¹ Perhaps he will transform my left arm into a rooster; thereby I’ll be announcing the dawn. Perhaps he will transform my right arm into a crossbow pellet; thereby I’ll be hunting down an owl to roast. Perhaps he will transform my backside into a pair of wheels and my spirit into a horse; thereby I’ll keep on riding along—will I need any other vehicle? Anyway, getting it is a matter of the time coming, and losing it is just something else to follow along with. Content in the time and finding one’s place in the process of following along, joy and sorrow are unable to seep in.”³¹

29. *Cheng*. See Glossary. This includes the meanings that it “forms, comes to be, is accomplished and reaches perfection” only through turmoil.

30. *Ziyu* 子輿, which is the courtesy name of both Confucius’s disciple Zeng Shen and the student of his student, Mencius.

31. Precisely what was said about Lao Dan, Chapter 3, p. 31.

This is what the ancients called ‘the Dangle and Release.’ We cannot release ourselves—being things ourselves, we are always tied up by other things. But it has long been the case that mere things cannot overpower Heaven. What is there for me to dislike about it?”

Suddenly Sir Comealong fell ill. Gasping and wheezing, on the verge of keeling over, he was surrounded by his weeping wife and children. Sir Plowshare, coming to visit him, said to them, “Ach! Away with you! Do not disturb his transformation!” Leaning across the doorway, he said to the invalid, “How great is the Process of Creation-Transformation!^p What will it make you become, where will it send you? Will it make you into a mouse’s liver? Or perhaps an insect’s arm?”

Sir Comealong said, “A child obeys its parents wherever they may send him—north, south, east, or west. Now yin and yang are much more to a man than his parents. If they send me to my death and I disobey them, that would make me a traitor—what fault would it be of theirs? For the Great Clump burdens me with a physical form, labors me with life, eases me with old age, and rests me with death. What makes my life good is what makes my death good; that I consider my life good is what makes me consider my death good.^q Now suppose a great master smith were casting metal. If the metal jumped up and said, ‘I insist on being nothing but an Excalibur!’ the smith would surely consider it to be an inauspicious chunk of metal. Now if I, having happened to stumble into a human form, should insist, ‘Only a human! Only a human!’ Creation-Transformation would certainly consider me an inauspicious chunk of person. So now I look upon all heaven and earth as a great furnace, and the Process of Creation-Transformation as a great blacksmith—where could I go that would not be all right? Total sleep comes, then startled wakings.”

Sir Berrydoor, the elder Sir Reversal, and Sir Zitherspread came together in friendship, saying, “Who can be together in their very not being together, doing something for one another by doing nothing for one another? Who can climb up upon the heavens, roaming on the mists, twisting and turning round and round without limit, living their lives in mutual forgetfulness, never coming to an end?” The three of them looked at each other and burst out laughing, feeling complete concord, and thus did they become friends.

After a short silence, without warning, Sir Berrydoor fell down dead. Before his burial Confucius got the news and sent Zigong to pay his respects. There he found them, one of them composing music, the other plucking the zither, and finally both of them singing together in harmony:

“Hey Berrydoor, hey Berrydoor!
Come on back where you were before!
Hey Berrydoor, hey Berrydoor!
Come on back where you were before!
You’ve returned to what we are really,
While we’re still humans—wow, yippee!”

Zigong rushed forward and said, “May I venture to ask, is it ritually proper to sing at a corpse like that?”

The two of them looked at each other and laughed, saying, “What does this fellow understand about the point of ritual?”

Zigong returned and reported this to Confucius, asking, “What kind of people are these? They do not cultivate their characters in the least, and they treat their bodies as external to themselves, singing at a corpse without the least change of expression. I don’t know what to call them. What sort of people are they?”

Confucius said, “These are men who roam outside the lines. I, on the other hand, do my roaming inside the lines. The twain can never meet. It was vulgar of me to send you to mourn for such a person. For the previous while he had been chumming around as a human with the Creator of Things, and now he roams in the single vital energy of heaven and earth. Men such as these look upon life as a dangling wart or swollen pimple, and on death as its dropping off, its bursting and draining. Being such, what would they know about which is life and which is death, what comes before and what comes after? Borrowing different things at various times, they are always lodged securely somewhere in the same overall body. They forget all about their livers and gallbladders, cast away their eyes and ears, reversing and returning, ever finishing and beginning but knowing no ultimate origins or endpoints. Oblivious, they loaf and wander uncommitted beyond the dust and grime, far-flung and unfettered in the great work of doing nothing in particular.³² Why would they do something as stupid as practicing conventional rituals to impress the eyes and ears of the common crowd?”

Zigong said, “Since you know this, Master, which zone is really your home-ground?”

Confucius said, “Me? I am a casualty of Heaven—you and me both.”

Zigong said, “Please tell me more.”

Confucius said, “Fish create³³ fish in water, and humans create humans in the Course. Those who create and are created in the water just dart past each other through the ponds and their nourishment is provided. Those who create and are created in the Course simply do nothing for one another, do nothing for any particular goal,³⁴ and the life in them becomes stable. Thus it is said, the fish forget one another in the rivers and lakes, and humans forget one another in the arts of the Course.”

32. *Wuwei*. See Glossary.

33. *Sic. Zao* 造, the same word used above to mean “create” in “Creator of Things” and “Creation-Transformation.” The word can also mean “approach, arrive, meet,” so I and others have interpreted this phrase simply to mean “meet each other,” “set one another in motion,” “develop one another,” “complete one another,” and so on. The present translation aims to present the full bald strangeness of the expression and its metaphor: the nourishment of the self-creating and other-creating fishes is the water in which they forget each other.

34. *Wuwei*, which is elsewhere translated simply as “non-doing.” See Glossary. The term appeared above in the opening proclamation of the three friends in this story, where it meant “not doing anything for one another,” parallel to the fish who create each other by forgetting each other here.

Zigong said, “But please explain to me about these freakish people.”

Confucius said, “They are freakish to man but normal to Heaven. So it is said, he who is a petty man to Heaven is to humans a noble man, while he who is a noble man to Heaven is to humans a petty man.”

Yan Hui went to question Confucius. “When his mother died, Mengsun the Prodigy wailed but shed no tears, unsaddened in the depths of his heart, observing the mourning but without real sorrow. Lacking tears, inner sadness, and real grief, he nonetheless gained a reputation throughout Lu as an exemplary mourner. Is it really possible to have a reputation that is utterly at odds with reality? I find the whole thing very strange.”

Confucius said, “This Mr. Mengsun has gotten to the end of the matter, beyond mere knowing. For when you try to distinguish what is what but find it is impossible to do so, that is itself a way of deciding the matter. This Mr. Mengsun understands nothing about why he lives or why he dies. His non-knowing applies equally to what went before and what is yet to come. Having already transformed into some particular being, he takes it as no more than a waiting for the next unknown transformation, nothing more. For indeed, how could someone still in the midst of a transformation know anything about what he will be when done with this transformation, about what he has not yet transformed into? And how could someone who has undergone a transformation know anything about what has already transformed away, what is over and gone? Even to think I am being specifically here right now with specifically you; is it just that we have not yet begun to awaken from this dream? As for him, his physical form may meet with shocks but this causes no loss to his mind; what he experiences are morning wakings to ever new homes rather than the death of any previous realities. This Mr. Mengsun alone awakens. Others cry, so he cries too. And that is of course the only reason he does so.

“We temporarily get involved in something or other and proceed to call it ‘myself’—but how can we know if what we call ‘self’ has any ‘self’ to it? You dream you are a bird and find yourself soaring in the heavens, you dream you are a fish and find yourself submerged in the depths. I cannot even know if the person speaking right now is dreaming or awake. An encounter with something pleasurable does not reach the smile it inspires; a burst of laughter does not reach the jest that evoked it.³⁵ But when you rest securely in the displacement, constantly dropping away each transformation as it goes, then you enter into the oneness of the clear sky, of empty Heaven.”

Master Thinkyou went to see Xu You.³⁵ Xu You asked him, “How did Yao instruct you?”

Thinkyou said, “He told me to devote myself wholeheartedly to humankindness and responsible conduct, and to speak clearly of right and wrong.”

35. Xu You, a recluse to whom the sage-emperor Yao tried unsuccessfully to cede the empire, appears also in Chapter 1 and many other places throughout this book.

Xu You said, “Then what on earth did you come here for? Yao has already tattooed your face with humankindness and responsible conduct, and de-nosed you with right and wrong. How can you ever roam in the far-flung and unconstrained paths of wild unbound twirling and tumbling?”

Thinkyou said, “Nonetheless, I’d like to roam at least around its outskirts.”

Xu You said, “Not possible. The blind have no way to take part in the fineness of a lovely face, and the sightless have no way to take part in the marvel of vividly embroidered garments.”

Thinkyou said, “But Wuzhuang lost his beauty, Juliang lost his strength, the Yellow Emperor lost his wisdom,³⁶ all from being knocked about in the great smelting and hammering. How do you know the Creator of Things will not wipe away my tattoo and restore my nose, making me intact to follow you?”

Xu You said, “Ah! It is indeed unknowable. I will speak to you of the broad outlines then: My teacher! My teacher! He destroys all things, but he is not being just.³⁷ His bounty reaches all things, but he is not being kind.³⁸ He is an elder to the remotest antiquity, but without being old. He covers and supports heaven and earth and carves out all forms, but without being skillful. It is all the play of his wandering, nothing more.”

Yan Hui said, “I am making progress.”

Confucius said, “What do you mean?”

Yan Hui said, “I have forgotten humankindness and responsible conduct.”

Confucius said, “That’s OK, 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 OK, 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, dispersing my physical form and ousting my understanding³⁹ until I am the same as the Transforming Openness.⁵ This is what I call just sitting and forgetting.”

Confucius said, “The same as it? But then you are free of any preference! Transforming? But then you are free of any constancy! You truly are a worthy man! I beg to be accepted as your disciple.”

36. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

37. *Yi*. Elsewhere “responsible,” “responsible conduct,” “duty,” “appropriateness,” and so on. See Glossary.

38. *Ren*. See Glossary.

39. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

Sir Transport and Sir Berry were friends. After ten days of freezing rain, Sir Transport said to himself, “Berry must be in distress.” He packed up some rice to ease his friend’s hunger. When he got to Berry’s gate, he heard a sound somewhere between singing and weeping, accompanied by the strum of a zither, forming the words: “Father? Mother? Heaven? Man?” Unable to sustain the sound, the voice collapsed brokenly as it rushed through the lyric.

Sir Transport entered and said, “Why do you sing such words?”

Sir Berry said, “I have been thinking about what could have caused me to reach this extreme state, and I can find no answer. My mother and father would surely never wish to impoverish me like this. Heaven covers all equally, earth supports all equally, so how could heaven and earth be so partial as to single me out for impoverishment? I search for some *doer* of it all but cannot find anything—and yet here I am in this extreme state all the same. This must be what is called Fate, eh?”

ENDNOTES

A. 天而生也 *tian er sheng ye*. This simple four-character phrase is extremely rich with ambiguities. Most literally, it might be rendered, “It is Heaven and birthing.” To be “skylike” in early Chinese context means to be unobstructed, untouchable, rotating in a circle, open, all-covering, uncontrived, prior to and beyond all human manipulation, beyond all human control and purposes. The character *sheng* means life, birth, generation, producing, emergence, bringing about in general; and since no specific object is given, we can assume this applies to all beings. It should be noted too that all “beings” here includes also all possible states and conditions, as when Zhuangzi uses this term to ask where various moods and states of mind and perspectives “are born” (Chapter 2, p. 12). But it is not clear if this implies “Heaven means simply the very generating of things,” or “Heaven is what generates things,” or most literally “Heaven is what simply produces,” answering simply the question about what it is that Heaven does. It could also mean “the Heavenly is, for any being, the condition in which it is born,” making Heaven a sort of adverb and the implicit “beings” the subject of “birth.” Both senses can perhaps be covered by the deliberately ambiguous sentence, “That is how all things are born.” The use of the noun “Heaven” here as a condition perhaps implies further, “Just by being Heaven, it is what simply produces,” or “Just by being Heaven, it is the very emergence of things,” i.e., that what we mean when we speak of “the Heavenly” is simply the very bringing about of the emergence of whatever emerges. Loosely paraphrased, the whole phrase would then mean, “Since Nature or Natural means how things are when born, what Nature does is just to give birth to things.” Since Zhuangzi notes several times that “where all these states of being emerge from is something the understanding cannot know,” this “emergence per se” is presumably what the next sentence refers to as “what the understanding doesn’t understand,” what is to be nurtured by “what the understanding understands.” Alternately, the phrase *tian'er* could be understood adverbially, “in a Heavenly manner”—on which reading see note B. Note further that one alternate manuscript has an intriguing variant: 失而生也 *shi er sheng ye*. “To know what Heaven does: it is to suffer loss, to go wrong, to be lost, and thus generate life.”

b. *Zhi* 知 has appeared in this passage nine times already. See Glossary. All the various senses of the term should be kept in mind throughout this passage: Understanding, intelligence, cleverness, knowing, consciousness, wisdom, knowledge. Alternately, these two sentences could be interpreted, “One who understands what Heaven does would live in the Heavenly manner. One who understands what man does uses what his understanding understands to nourish what his understanding doesn’t understand.” But even if read this way, this claim is still rejected in the following paragraph, as we would expect: *understanding* what Heaven does, in the usual Zhuangzian view, does not enable living the Heavenly life.

c. In other words, in the literal sense there is not really any such thing as Genuine Understanding, i.e., either true and justified objective knowledge or a reliable faculty for making cognitive judgments. But if we want to retain the term Genuine Understanding, it can only mean an aspect of a Genuine-Human, “genuine” now no longer meaning “accurate” but rather genuine in the sense that Genuine-Humans are genuine: though taking shape as a human, also remaining rooted in their own nonhumanhood, in the Course. This term Genuine yet Human (*zhenren*) is a *prima facie* oxymoron: “human” is used here to mean “artificial, contrived,” and thus as a precise antonym of the “genuine,” of the uncontrived, of the Heavenly. Here the two opposites are brought together. The author will henceforth use the term *Genuine Understanding* only to indicate the state of mind of the oxymoronic Genuine-Humans, who are not an object of claimed accurate knowledge but simply stipulated as the author imagines them, admittedly and unapologetically according to his own present perspective. This state of mind may be compared to what other chapters called “the Heavenly Reservoir” *tianfu* 天府 (Chapter 2, p. 18), and “the Numinous Reservoir” *lingfu* 靈府 (Chapter 5, p. 49), or “the know-how of not-knowing” *yiwuzhizhi* 以無知知 (Chapter, 4, p. 37), and perhaps also the “Numinous Platform” *lingtai* 靈臺 as used in Chapter 19 (p. 155) and Chapter 23 (p. 189).

d. *Sic*. Since this makes little sense, most commentators substitute 忘 *wang*, rendering, “Their minds forget.” However, Fang Yizhi remarks: “This empty use of the word “intent” is most extraordinary. There is no way to fathom it. They have nothing but this one intent, so their faces are tranquil.”

e. The last negated item in this series, *yiren* 役人, has usually been taken to be a verb-object construction meaning “to put others in one’s service.” But parallelism to the terms negated above (all naming ideal types of persons or virtues, rather than activities) points to an adjective-noun construction instead. The parallelism is sometimes addressed by loosely nominalizing the phrase into “a user of men.” But roughly contemporaneous usage of this binome seems always to denote “man of service, one who serves others, a person devoted to service, servant,” sometimes as a humble self-designation, “your servant here.” Further, the historical martyrs for justice that are then listed are all critiqued as “serving in the service of others,” and there, too, *yi* preceding *ren* in a noun phrase (internally duplicating the *yiren*) means “to serve others,” not “to put others into service.” The point there is clearly to critique “serving others” rather than pointing out a failure of a claimed commanding of the service of others: these martyrs served in the service of others rather than serving in the service of themselves; what they claimed but failed to truly do was faithfully serve, not to put others in their service. But the real man of service is one who serves and is reconciled to death on account of only his own genuineness, not his duty to a ruler. A similar idea is expressed below: “Some people look on having a ruler as something that surpasses any individual’s self, on account of which they can gladly accept death. Why not gladly accept death on account of what does so even more genuinely?” With this adjustment, it is possible to adopt something close to the traditional reading of this passage, which I tried to circumvent in my 2009 translation for this reason. The other alternative, grammatically just barely possible, is to interpret all these phrases in the reverse sense, as I did then (here modified): “So he may take joy in unobstructed interchange with all things, but he is not being a ‘sage.’ He may have a certain intimacy with others, but he is not being a ‘kind

and humane person.’ His timeliness may be Heaven-like, but he is not being a ‘worthy man.’ Benefit and harm may not get through to him, but he is not being an ‘exemplary man.’ He may do what his designated role requires, ignoring his personal interests, but he is not being a ‘steadfast knight.’ He may lose his life without regarding it as the loss of what is most genuine to him, but he is not being ‘a man devoted to service.’” On this alternate reading, the negation signifies only that the action is “not due to being” a sage, a nobleman, and so on, i.e., “to do X is not something that pertains (only) to being a Y; he does X, but not because he is a Y, as expected.” The entire passage then hangs on wordplay in a repeating pattern: they did X, which is a phrase that would in its normal sense be taken to describe a Y type exemplar; but all the terms in X can be read in a different sense, which is what really describes what these Genuine-Humans did; so they did so-called “X” in this other sense without thereby being Y. The lack of a contrastive marker (e.g., 而 *er*) argues against this reading, but the lack of the *zhe* we might expect for a full negative copula (e.g., 樂通物者非聖人也, “one who delights in clearing the way for things is not a sage”) argues slightly against the traditional reading. Neither solution seems entirely satisfactory—or perhaps we are meant to enjoy the ambiguity here: both readings fit interestingly in the overall thematics of the chapter.

F. A double translation. See “Notes on the Translation.”

G. Reading 丘 as a miscopying of 氏, as suggested by Wu Yanxu, and seeming to correspond to the edition commented upon by Guo Xiang and Cheng Xuanying, both of whom gloss the word as meaning “foundation.” Without this substitution the sentence is pretty inexplicable.

H. A double translation. See “Notes on the Translation.”

I. A double translation. See “Notes on the Translation.”

J. Usually read, “People may try to model themselves on him. But why not emulate all the more what ties all things together, on which depends even their slightest transformation, on which depends the total mass of transformation that they are!” Taking this as a further description of the sage rather than of the Course, as Guo Xiang does, it could also be read to mean, “Even human beings emulate him—but further, much more do all things tie themselves to him, does the total mass of transformation depend on him!” But the most important question in interpreting this crucial line is the direction of dependence denoted: does this refer to *what all transformation depends on* (pointing to either the unique powers of a sage or to a foundational metaphysical Course) or does it mean *what relies on all transformations*? Grammatically, it all hangs on how the 所 is read; the traditional reading assumes that it functions here as a nominalizer for the *object* of a verb, as it normally does in post-Buddhist Chinese usage, when it is consistently contrasted to *neng* 能 to comprise a pair of opposites (能/所), probably to translate unambiguous passive and active verb voicings, which are more tenuous in older Chinese. But in pre-Buddhist writing the 所 is an all-purpose localizer and nominalizer, which can mean either “that which does” the verb that follows it, or (as in the post-Buddhist cases) “that to which is done” the verb that follows. To explain this obvious problem, commentators sometimes simply treat it as an abbreviation of 所以 or 所於, which allows it to function in the “that which does” sense. Cf. two instances in *Zhuangzi* Chapter 19 for this grammatical usage of *zhisuo* X to mean, of what precedes the possessive, “that which does X” rather than “that to which X is done”: *youyu wanwu zhi suo zhongshi* 遊於萬物之所終始 and *tong hu wuzhi suozaotong* 通乎物之所造. In both cases, the *suo* is grammatically simply localizing and nominalizing the verb in a way that is neither exclusively active nor passive. But in these cases it is uncontroversial that this is intended respectively to mean something like “wander where all things begin and end” rather than “wander in that which is begun and ended by all things” and something like “comprehending that from which all things are created” rather than “that which is created by things.” Cf. *Daodejing* 62 for another glaring and undeniable example of this usage (particularly in the Mawangdui A version [Chapter 24]). That text says of Dao that it is “善人之保, 不善人

之所保” Assuming these are not two ways of saying the same thing, the second clause must mean not “that which the bad man protects,” which would make it synonymous with the first clause, but “that which protects the bad man.” If X 之所保 means “that which protects X, then X 之所待 should mean “that which relies upon X.” If we read it in that sense here, it still describes the person who is beyond the sage, and beyond all emulation, the “one who” takes this attitude of tying himself to and being dependent upon all things and all transformations, rather than that “to which” all things are tied and dependent. As we were told in Chapter 4, p. 37, he is an open vacuity, the faster of the mind, who “depends upon, waits for 待, whatever thing may come.” To emulate the sage, who considers all things good, would be to consider “considering all things good” good and “not considering all things good” bad. But instead it would make more sense to forget the sage, as the fish forget each other in the water, and rather in effect to emulate each and every thing, to value equally every transformation, “ride upon all the transformations of the six breaths” as in Chapter 1, p. 5, tie ourselves equally to each thing—not just to the sage who considers all things one and all things good. Their oneness (the all-affirming sage) is one and not-oneness (everything else) is also one. This is the Course described in the next sentence, and precisely describes the condition of “hiding the world in the world” mentioned above.

K. These words would describe any road or pathway: it is really there, it is reliable as a channel that can be traveled, but is an empty space to be passed through, not a doer and not any palpable or visible (i.e., obstructive) entity—rather the lack of a doer and the lack of an entity, the space that allows entities to pass through. Of all courses, these words describe the “Courseness” in general, open allowing and passage, and the course between all courses, the axis of all courses—what we call “the Course.”

L. As any course is by nature prior to whatever develops along that course, to whatever comes into and out of its space, and to all consequences of walking that course.

M. Alternately, taking this not as a metaphysical description but as a continued description of the course of one who ties himself equally to all things and relies on each transformation equally, we might translate: “This course is something real and reliable, but has no deliberate activity and no definite form. It is something that one may transmit but without anything being received, or which may be attained in oneself but without anything of it being perceived by others, for it allows one to root and ground oneself spontaneously [in whatever state of affairs may be prevailing wherever one is, thus keeping from dependence on any one specific state of affairs—to be rooted in oneself rather than any other, to be truly independent (*wudai* 無待), precisely by depending equally on anything]. Such a course has existed firmly [in all the varied situations that have prevailed] since ancient times, even in the situation when heaven and earth were not yet there [for heaven and earth are only one specific arrangement of things, but this is a course allowing one to root oneself in *any* arrangement of things, not just the heaven and earth arrangement]. [It is not produced by heaven and earth, or by the Lord-on-High or any spirit; on the contrary,] it is by this course that the spirits and the Lord-on-High make themselves divine, that both heaven and earth are quickened [each of which is what it is by rooting itself in the situation it finds itself in, by charioting on and depending on any and every situation, so that they are truly independent]. In this way, when one is above the summit it is without endeavoring or considering oneself to be high (*buweigao* 不為高), but merely because one is going along with the thiness of that height, temporarily going by its rightness; when beneath the nadir it is done without endeavoring or considering oneself to be deep. By the same token, what precedes Heaven and Earth does not do so by endeavoring to be long-lasting, or considering itself long-lasting, or really being long-lasting (*buweijiu* 不為久). What has lasted since prior to the earliest antiquity does not do so by endeavoring to achieve old age, or considering itself old, or even really being old (*buweilao* 不為老).”

n. The Cui edition of the text, as recorded by Wang Shumin, continues on here: “—was born without father or mother, underwent death as an ascension into the distance, going on until his body finally vanished entirely three years later. All of which is to say that imponderable spirit can never be definitively named once and for all.”

o. A double translation of *wang* 亡.

p. Note that “the Creator of Things” 造物者 from the dialogue between Sir Worship and Sir Transport (which is the courtesy name of Confucius’s disciple Zeng Shen and also of Mencius) is, in this dialogue between Sir Plowshare and Sir Comealong, replaced by “Creation-Transformation” 造化者 or (without the *zhe*) “the Process of Creation-Transformation” 造化, as well as yin and yang, and “The Great Clump” 大塊 (which we encountered above, not only in this chapter but in the opening trope of Chapter 2). Though they share the premise of the inseparable continuity of nothingness, life, and death agreed upon at the beginning of the story, it seems that the piously anthropomorphic trope of the first dialogue, though a step in the right direction, must be expanded and transcended into the further morphings presented in this dialogue—and indeed even further in those that follow in this chapter.

q. A double translation. See “Notes on the Translation.”

r. Reading *pai* 俳 for *pai* 排, the latter being perhaps mistakenly transposed from the following line. Fan Gengyan suggests *fei* 誹 as in *feixie* 誹諧, which amount to the same meaning. Leaving the character unsubstituted would yield, “When you stumble into a pleasant situation there is no time even to smile, and when a smile bursts forth there is no time to arrange it in some particular way,” adopting Chen Shouchang’s reading. Others take the *buji* 不及 in the sense of “not as good as,” which yields something like, “Just going wherever you please is not as good as laughing, and giving a laugh is not as good as just taking your place in the sequence of things.”

s. Reading *huatong* 化通 for *datong* 大通 (“Great Openness”), as in the parallel passage in *Huananzi* 淮南子, “Daoyingxun.” 道應訓.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Sovereign Responses for Ruling Powers^A

Gnawgap asked Baby Sovereign four questions, and the answer to each was the same: “Don’t know.”¹ Gnawgap then went leaping in ecstasy to tell Master Pajama about it. Master Pajama said, “So now you finally *understand*² this, it is something you *know*? But a Mr. Youyu³ is no match for a Mr. Tai.⁴ A Youyu still harbors humankindness in his breast, with which he tries to constrain other human beings, foisting it on them as the very essence of the human.^B He may be able to win people over to him that way, but in doing so he never leaves behind the nonhuman: regarding others as wrong on account of their nonhumanness.^C A Tai, on the other hand, falls asleep on the spot without ceremony and wakes to where he is all wide-eyed,⁵ sometimes thinking he’s a horse, sometimes thinking he’s an ox.^D Such understandings⁶ are what are most real and reliable, such virtuositities are what are most deep and genuine. For it is precisely this that keeps him from involvement in the nonhuman: in regarding others as wrong on account of their nonhumanness.”

Shoulder Self went to see crazy Jieyu,⁷ who said to him, “What did Starting Sun-center⁸ tell you?”

Shoulder Self 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.”

1. Cf. Chapter 2, p. 18, and also Chapter 22, p. 174.

2. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

3. The sage emperor Shun.

4. According to Cheng Xuanying, a name for Fuxi, sometimes regarded as the first progenitor of the human race, with a human face and a serpent’s body. In other myths, however, he is credited with the invention of cultural institutions such as marriage and the eight trigrams of the *Yijing*.

5. Compare this to *Huainanzi* Chapter 6: *wojuju, xing xuxu* 臥踞踞, 興盱盱, as proposed by Wang Shumin.

6. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

7. See Chapter 4, p. 42, and *Analects* 18:5.

8. Or perhaps “Noontide Beginning.”

Jieyu said, “These are just ways of cheating the intrinsic virtuosities. 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? He goes forth only after he himself is aligned, certain only that he is capable of doing whatever he is currently doing. A bird avoids the harm of arrows and nets by flying high, and a mouse burrows in the depths beneath the shrines and graves to avoid poisons and traps. Have you ever equaled the ‘non-knowledge’⁹ of these two little pests?”

Heavenroot roamed along the sunny slopes of Mt. Yin, until he came upon a nameless man on the banks of the Liao River. He said to him, “How is the world to be managed?”

The nameless man said, “Away with you, you boor! What an unpleasant question! I am in the midst of chumming around as a human being with the Creator of Things. When I get tired of that, I’ll ride off on a bird formed from the unkempt wisps of the air, out beyond the six extremities of the known world, roaming in the homeland of nothing at all, thereby taking my place in the borderless wilds. Why do you have to come here to bother my mind with this business about ordering the world?”

But Heavenroot asked the same question again. The nameless man then said, “Let your mind roam in the flavorless, mingle your vital energy with the deserted silence, follow the self-so of each thing, the way it already is before any interference, without allowing yourself the least bias. Then the world will be in order.”

Sir Brightside Homebody¹⁰ went to see Lao Dan, saying, “Here is a man, quick on his feet, aggressively proactive, with a profound comprehension of things and a capacious intelligence, who studies the Course without fatigue. Can such a man be compared to a clear-sighted¹¹ sovereign?”

Lao Dan said, “Compared to a sage, he is a petty official or diviner bound to his craft, laboring his own body and terrorizing his own mind. The beautiful patterns of the tiger and the leopard bring on the hunters that kill them; the monkey’s grace and the dog’s rat-catching bring on the leashes that bind them. Can these be compared to a clear-sighted sovereign?”

Sir Brightside Homebody, jolted as if kicked, said, “I beg to ask about how a clear-sighted sovereign governs.”

Lao Dan said, “When a clear-sighted sovereign rules, his achievements cover all the world, but they seem not to come from himself. His transformations are bestowed on all things, and yet the people do not rely upon him. There is

9. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

10. Often identified by commentators, in spite of the morphed surname, as Yang Zhu 楊朱, commonly cited as the philosopher of self-interest as opposed to the Mohist philosophy of altruism. See, for example, *Mencius* 7A26.

11. 明 *ming*. The same word is translated as “Illumination of the Obvious” in Chapter 2, p. 14.

something unnamable about him that allows all creatures to delight in themselves. He is one who takes his stand in the unfathomable and wanders his way where there is nothing at all.”¹²

There was a shaman in Zheng named Allseasons¹³ who could discern whether people would live or die, survive or perish. He knew how long their lives would be and what turns their fortunes would take, giving the exact year, month, week, and date for each event like some kind of god. When the people of Zheng caught sight of him, they would turn and run. Liezi¹⁴ went to see him, and his mind became quite intoxicated. He returned and told Huzi¹⁵ about it, saying, “I used to think your Course was the ultimate, but now I see that there is something beyond it.”

Huzi said, “I have only finished showing you its outward ornament, not yet its inner reality. Have you really mastered this Course? A multitude of hens with no rooster can produce no chicks. You use the Course to browbeat the world, insisting that they believe in it, and that is why this man can get a grasp of you and read your fortune on your face. Bring him here, and I will show myself to him.”

The next day, Liezi brought the shaman to see Huzi. He came out and said to Liezi, “Alas! Your master is as good as dead! That is not a living being in there! He has at most a few weeks left. I saw something very strange in him, something resembling wet ashes.”

Liezi went in, his collar drenched with tears, and reported these words to Huzi. Huzi said, “Just now I showed him the mien of earth, its sprouts neither stirring nor straightening.¹⁶ He must have seen in me the incipient pulsion that can go on to block out all intrinsic powers.¹⁷ Try bringing him again.”

The next day, Liezi brought the shaman once more. He came out and said, “Your master is lucky to have met me! He’s recovering, there are healthy signs of life! I could see his blockage moving into balance.”

Liezi went in and reported this to Huzi, who said, “Just now I showed him the soil of heaven. Unaffected by both names and realities, by both renown and substantial gain, the incipient pulsion nonetheless comes forth from the heels. He

12. Alternately, “. . . and wanders his way through both nonbeing and being.”

13. Alternately, “Allrunts,” “Runtfeel,” or “Seasonfeel.”

14. Master Lineup, who has already appeared riding the wind in Chapter 1, p. 5.

15. If translated, perhaps something like “Master Winepot” or “Master Waterjug.”

16. 正 *Zheng*. See Glossary.

17. “Incipient pulsion” is 機 *ji*, literally a crossbow trigger, the minute activating force that calls forth large effects. Huzi’s future fate is being predicted on the basis of the directions of future development misread into these present pulsions, taken by the shaman in isolation from one another. “Intrinsic powers” is 德 *de*, elsewhere translated as “virtuosity,” “intrinsic virtuosity,” or “virtue.” See Glossary.

must have seen in me the incipient pulsion that can develop into all he regards as good.¹⁸ Try bringing him again.”

The next day, he brought the shaman yet again to see Huzi. He came out and told Liezi, “Your master is an incoherent mess, I have no way to read his face. Have him get himself together, then I’ll come back to do a reading.”

Liezi went in and reported this to Huzi, who said, “Just now I showed him the vast gushing surge¹⁹ in which no one thing wins out. He must have seen in me the incipient pulsion that could go on to balance all vital energies. The frothing of a salamander’s^E swirl is the reservoir. The frothing of still water is the reservoir. The frothing of flowing water is the reservoir. The reservoir has nine names, nine aspects, and I have shown him three of them.²⁰ Try bringing him again.”

The next day Liezi brought him to see Huzi again. But before the shaman had even come to a halt before him, he lost control of himself and bolted out the door. Huzi said, “Go after him!” But Liezi could not catch up with him. He returned and reported to Huzi, “He’s gone! I cannot catch him!”

Huzi said, “Just now I showed him the unbegun-to-emerge-from-my-source, where I and he both together are a vacuity that is nonetheless serpentine in its twistings, admitting of no understanding of who is who or what is what. It thus seemed to him something endlessly collapsing and scattering, something flowing away with every wave.²¹ This is why he fled.”

That was when Liezi realized he had not yet begun to learn. He returned to his home and did not emerge for three years, cooking for his wife, feeding the pigs as if he were serving guests, remaining remote from all endeavors and letting all the chiseled carvings of his character return to an unhewn blockishness. Solitary like a clump of soil, he stood his physical form up on the earth, a mass of chaos and confusion.²² And that is how he remained to the end of his days.

Not doing, not being^F a corpse presiding over your good name;
Not doing, not being a repository of plans and schemes;

18. For this transitive attributive usage of *shan* (“to regard as good”), see Chapter 6, p. 56 and p. 59.

19. 冲 *chong*. The word means to flush something out with a surge of water, but is also used to denote the apparently derivative meanings of both “emptiness” (open space) and “harmony.” One may combine these ideas into the image of a cleansing flush of water that empties, and that restores harmony by washing away all one-sided cloggings, that blends all the elements by allowing fluid interconnections between them. The water imagery is not without relevance in the present context.

20. The *Liezi* gives all “nine names of the reservoir”: the salamander’s swirl, still water, flowing water, gushing water, dripping water, pouring water, stagnant water, rippling water, and irrigating water.

21. Alternately, “In going along with things, it becomes now a collapsing and scattering, now a flow of waves.”

22. Following Xuan Ying’s reading.

Not doing, not being the one in charge of what happens;
 Not doing, not being ruled by your own understanding.²³

In this way, embody the endlessness and roam where there is no sign, fully living through whatever is received from Heaven without thinking anything has been gained, thus remaining a vacuity, nothing more. The Utmost Person uses his mind like a mirror, rejecting nothing, welcoming nothing, responding but not storing. Thus he can overcome all things without harm.

The emperor of the southern sea was called Swoosh. The emperor of the northern sea was called Oblivion. The emperor of the middle was called Chaotic Blob. Swoosh and Oblivion would sometimes meet in the territory of Chaotic Blob, who always waited on them²⁴ quite well. They decided to repay Chaotic Blob for such bounteous virtue.²⁵ “All men have seven holes in them, by means of which they see, hear, eat, and breathe,” they said. “But this one alone has none. Let’s drill him some.” So every day they drilled another hole.

Seven days later, Chaotic Blob was dead.

ENDNOTES

A. The title of this chapter is usually interpreted as something like “Responses to Emperors and Sovereigns,” parsing its three characters as 1-2 rather than 2-1. All the other Inner Chapters that parse unambiguously divide as 2-1. The two ambiguous cases are 2 and 6, and a strong argument can be made for a 2-1 parsing of the title of Chapter 6 (“The Great Source as Teacher,” as contrasted to “taking the mind as teacher” 師心 criticized in Chapters 2 [p. 13] and 4 [p. 37]). While I myself have adopted a 1-2 parsing of the title of Chapter 2, I believe it involves a deliberate punning (meaning discourse that equalizes things and an equalizing of all discourses of things), which I’ve tried to preserve by means of the deliberate ambiguity of the translation “Equalizing Assessments of Things.” The same may be said for this title. It consists of the kind of responses to questions *about* ruling that show real sovereignty, or the best of all ways to respond to rulers. These responses are suitable *for* rulers both in the sense of suitable for rulers to use and suitable to use in dealing with rulers and ruling. The 王 *wang*

23. *Zhi*. See Glossary. Alternately, “Not doing, not being the proprietor of wisdom.” But the current reading, though it strains the grammar of the parallelism a little, is consistent with Zhuangzi’s critiques of “taking the mind as teacher” (p. 13, p. 37) or the giving of precedence to “life” over “knowing” as the “ruler” (*zhu*, as here) in the opening of Chapter 3 (p. 29).

24. 待 *Dai*. See Glossary.

25. 德 *De*, elsewhere “virtuosity,” “intrinsic virtuosities,” or “intrinsic powers.” See Glossary.

here is thus similar to the 主 *zhu* in the title of Chapter 3. It is perhaps significant that 帝 *di* is a term for supreme power in both the political and religious realms, which may explain why the story of the Zhuangzian response to Allseasons the shaman is also included here. Wu Yi has also suggested the possibility of separating the usually combined *di* and *wang* in this title. (See Wu Yi, p. 276.)

B. “Constrain” and “essence” double-translate *yao* 要. See “Notes on the Translation.”

C. *Feiren* 非人, construed as a verb-object, means “to consider others wrong,” i.e., to disapprove of or critique other people, but construed as a negatively modified noun, also means “nonhuman.” We may thus suspect some complex and deliberately paradoxical punning in this passage. Shun, precisely in confining himself and others to humanness, is ironically said to “never exit the nonhuman,” for it is on that basis that he considers something in them, or some among them, nonhuman (not *truly* human) and wrong. Conversely, one who is “sometimes thinking he’s a horse, sometimes thinking he’s an ox” is ironically said to “never enter the nonhuman”—for he considers no one wrong on account of their nonhumanness, and sees even being ox or horse as not definitely exclusive of the range of the identity of humanness. (Perhaps as the identity of “Zhuang Zhou” never enters into the “non-butterfly” and “butterfly” never enters into “non-Zhuang Zhou.” Since each could be the dream of the other, an aspect of the other, they are not two mutually exclusive identities; the “this” never enters into the “not-that,” for it too is “that.” See Chapter 2, p. 14, pp. 16–17.) Perhaps embedded here is a reference to the Mencian claim that anyone who lacks the sentiments of commiseration, of shame and dislike for what is inappropriate, of yielding and modesty, of approval and disapproval (*shifei* 是非)—the so-called “four sprouts” that can be grown into the Confucian virtues of Human-kindness, Responsible Conduct, Ritual, and Wisdom—is “not human” (非人 *feiren*). See *Mencius* 2A6.

D. Compare the butterfly dream at the end of Chapter 2.

E. There has been much debate about what creature is meant here. Sima Biao suggests a “whale,” and some commentators go the other way and suggest a swarm of small guppies. It is perhaps significant that Zhuangzi here chooses a word that can mean *either* an enormous whale or a very small fish. “Salamander” is the literal meaning of the character used, but it should be remembered that this most likely refers to the “Giant Salamander” found in China (*andrias davidianus*), which can reportedly grow to six feet in length. The resonance of this image with the opening story in Chapter 1 of the enormous fish Kun should be noted; the salamander is an amphibian, transforming from an aquatic to a terrestrial creature in the course of its life, and also has the capacity to regenerate lost limbs (cf. the lost feet in Chapter 5)—a fitting Zhuangzian symbol.

F. This translation is an attempt to capture the embedded pun on the crucial Daoist term 無為 *wuwei* (“non-doing,” i.e., absence of deliberate activity) in each of these phrases. See Glossary.

THE OUTER CHAPTERS

CHAPTER EIGHT

Webbed Toes

A web of flesh joining the toes together, an extra finger branching off from the hand—yes, they do indeed emerge from one’s own inborn nature,¹ but they are still extraneous to the intrinsic powers² of the hand and of the foot. A “dangling wart or swollen tumor”³—yes, they do indeed emerge from one’s own body, but they are still extraneous to the body’s inborn nature. And those who have excessive sidegrowths⁴ in their humankindness and sense of responsibility⁵ and then put these into action, yes, they can even be correlated to the five internal organs!⁶ But this is not the true and unskewed condition⁷ of the Course and its intrinsic powers.

For to web the toes together is to add useless flesh. To branch something off from the hand is to plant a useless finger. And when excessive sidegrowths are made to web together and branch from the uncontrived realities of the five organs, it leads to perverse and distorted applications of humankindness and responsibility, and even to excesses and sidegrowths of the powers of seeing and hearing. Such webbing of something extraneous to the power of seeing disrupts the five colors, and corrupts patterns and forms—is not the flashiness of the blue and yellow

1. “Inborn nature” translates *xing* 性. This is the first appearance in our text of this term, so important in subsequent Chinese thought, notably absent from both the Inner Chapters and the *Daodejing*.

2. “Intrinsic powers” translates *De* (“virtue”) when applied to something other than a human being. When applied to a human being, the same word is usually translated as “virtuosity” in the Inner Chapters, and “intrinsic virtuosity” in the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters. See Glossary.

3. The expression appears in Chapter 6, to which this is perhaps an allusion.

4. Reading *pang* 旁 for *fang* 方, following Ma Qichang.

5. *Renyi*. Elsewhere translated as “humankindness” and “responsible conduct,” among other things. See Glossary.

6. Liver, heart, spleen, lungs, and kidneys, which some thinkers were coming to correlate with the five cardinal Confucian virtues of humankindness, ritual, good faith, responsible conduct, and wisdom, respectively, thereby moralizing the natural world and naturalizing Confucian morality by rooting it in the nature of the body itself.

7. 正 *zheng*. See Glossary.

embroideries on the ceremonial garments an example? But that is what people like Li Zhu⁸ really accomplish. Excessively sharp hearing disrupts the five notes and corrupts the six tones—are not the soundings of the Yellow Bell mode and Great Tube mode on the bells, chimes, strings, and woodwinds an example? But that is what people like Master Kuang⁹ really accomplish. Branching extensions of humankindness and responsible conduct uproot the intrinsic virtuosities and obstruct the inborn nature in exchange for a good name. Are not the trumpeted fanfares that drum everyone forward in pursuit of some unreachable standard an example? But that is what people like Zeng Shen and Shi Yu¹⁰ really accomplish. The excess webbing of disputational acumen lead to the manipulation of verbal phrases as if piling bricks or twining cords, sending the mind wandering around amid “hard” and “white,” “same,” and “different.” Are not all the useless discussions with their wearying stagger toward honor an example? But that is exactly what people like Yang Zhu and Mo Di¹¹ really accomplish.

All of these describe a course of excess webbing and side-branchings, not the true and unskewed condition of the world. To be truly unskewed¹² just means not to lose the uncontrived condition of the inborn nature and its allotment of life. In this, what is joined is not so because of extra webbing and what is branched is not so because of additions. The long is not excessive and the short is not deficient. The duck’s neck may be short, but lengthening it would surely pain him; the swan’s neck may be long, but cutting it short would surely grieve him.

When we see that what is long by inborn nature is not to be cut short and what is short by inborn nature is not to be lengthened, all the worries that go with trying to remove them disappear. So I have to surmise that humankindness and responsible conduct are not the uncontrived condition of man! Otherwise, why do those “humane men” always look so wracked with worry? Put it this way: if the toes are webbed together, cutting them loose will draw tears, and if the extra finger branches off from the hand, uprooting it will cause weeping. Whether something is added or something is taken away, the sorrow is the same. These days the “humane men” gaze wide-eyed into the distance worrying about all the world’s troubles, while the inhumane men mutilate the uncontrived condition of their inborn nature and allotment of life by gorging themselves on wealth and rank. Thus do I surmise that humankindness and responsible conduct are not the uncontrived

8. A paragon of sharp eyesight.

9. A paragon of musical skill.

10. A disciple of Confucius (teacher of Confucius’s grandson Zisi, who was the teacher of Mencius) and a historiographer of the state of Wei (mentioned approvingly, though perhaps with some reservations, in *Analects* 15:7), respectively, treated here as paragons of moral virtue.

11. Yang Zhu is traditionally considered an advocate of extreme egoism, and Mo Di (i.e., Mozi, founder of the Mohists) an advocate of extreme altruism. Here both are taken as paragons of philosophical disputation. Compare *Mencius* 7A26.

12. 正正者 *zhengzhengzhe*. For *zheng*, see Glossary.

condition of man! For from the Three Dynasties on down, what a racket and rumpus the world has become!

Any rectification that requires hooks, ropes, compass, or T-square is really a hacking up of the inborn nature. Any consolidation that requires ropes, cords, or glues is really an invasive attack on the intrinsic powers. And bending and scraping before ritual and music, warmly eulogizing humankindness and responsible conduct “to comfort the hearts of everyone in this world”—all that is really just a way of destroying the normal and sustainable state of things.¹³ The normal and sustainable state of things is to curve without needing a hook, to be straight without needing a carpenter’s line, to be round without needing a compass, to be angled without needing a T-square, to be attached without needing glue, and bound together without needing cords.

All living beings in the world spring to life as if lured forth, not knowing how they are born. Obliviously they all come to have what they have somehow, without knowing how they do so. In this, past and present are alike, for this is something that can never be lacking. So what are humankindness and responsible conduct doing wandering around in the midst of the Course and its intrinsic powers, trying to fasten everything together as if with glue and knotted cords? All they do is cast the world into confusion. Now a small confusion is easily remedied, but a great confusion can alter the inborn nature. How do we know this? Ever since that Mr. Yu¹⁴ starting waving his humankindness and responsible conduct around to stir up the world, everyone has spurred his allotment of life to a gallop after these ideals—is this not altering the inborn nature by means of humankindness and responsible conduct?

Let me try explaining it. From the time of the Three Dynasties on down, everyone in the world has altered his inborn nature for the sake of some external thing. The petty man sacrifices himself for profit, the distinguished man sacrifices himself for fame, the noble man sacrifices himself for his clan, the sage sacrifices himself for the world. Though the goal to which each devotes himself may differ, along with the reputations thereby gained, all of them are the same in harming their inborn natures by sacrificing themselves to some external thing.

Goodie and Mealticket were herding sheep, and both of them lost their herds. Asked for the reason, Goodie said he was busy studying, while Mealticket said he was busy gambling. Though they devoted themselves to different goals, they were alike in losing their sheep. Now Bo Yi¹⁵ died in pursuit of fame at the foot of Mt. Shouyang, while Robber Zhi¹⁶ died in pursuit of profit at the top of

13. 常然 *Chang ran*. For *chang*, see Glossary.

14. An irreverent way of referring to the ancient sage-emperor Shun, a Confucian paragon of perfect governance.

15. Another Confucian paragon of virtue, who, along with his brother Shu Qi, starved himself to death rather than eat the rice of the Zhou dynasty, which he disapproved of because to establish it the Zhou family had usurped its own ruler’s authority, by military force.

16. Stock example of extreme evil and lawlessness; see also Chapter 10. He stars in the eponymous Chapter 29 of this book.

Mt. Dongling. They died for different things, but they were alike in damaging their lives and harming their inborn natures. So why must we say that Bo Yi was right and Robber Zhi was wrong? Everyone in the world is sacrificing himself for the sake of something or other. Those who do so for the sake of humankindness and responsible conduct are praised by the vulgar as noble men, while those who do so for the sake of wealth are condemned as petty men. But they are all alike in sacrificing themselves. So are there really any such things as “noble men” and “petty men”? In that they damage their lives and harm their inborn natures, Robber Zhi is no different from Bo Yi. Why should one be praised as a noble man and the other condemned as a petty man?

So to subordinate your inborn nature to humankindness and responsible conduct, even if you succeed like Zeng Shen and Shi Yu, is not what I call good.¹⁷ To subordinate your inborn nature to the five flavors, even if you succeed like Yu Er,¹⁸ is not what I call good. To subordinate your inborn nature to the five tones, even if you succeed like Master Kuang, is not what I call acute hearing. To subordinate your inborn nature to the five colors, even if you succeed like Li Zhu, is not what I call acute vision. What I call good is not humankindness and responsible conduct, but just being good at what is done by your own intrinsic virtuosity. Goodness, as I understand it, certainly does not mean humankindness and responsible conduct! It is just fully allowing the uncontrived condition of the inborn nature and allotment of life to play itself out. What I call sharp hearing is not hearkening to others, but rather hearkening to oneself, nothing more. What I call sharp vision is not looking to others, but rather looking to oneself, nothing more. For to see others without seeing oneself, to gain some external thing without finding oneself, is to find the success of others without finding one’s own success, “to take comfort in the comfort of others but not in your own comfort.”¹⁹ In taking their comfort in something other than their own comfort, Robber Zhi and Bo Yi are alike. Both perverted and distorted themselves. As for me, since I am not entirely shameless in the face of the Course and its intrinsic powers, I venture to engage in neither the lofty deeds of humankindness and responsible conduct nor in the debased practices of perversity and self-distortion.²⁰

17. 臧 *zang*, rather than the usual word used by Confucians such as Mencius to mean moral good, 善 *shan*.

18. Paragon of culinary discernment, apparently.

19. Cf. Chapter 6, p. 54, to which this is perhaps an allusion.

20. The author rejects both so-called “good” and “evil” in favor of a position between them. This is typical of Chapters 8–11 and the first part of Chapter 12, and builds on a reading of the *Daodejing*, which this author often quotes. The original human nature is seen here as prior to the distinction between good and evil, but which, if undisturbed by “ideals” of goodness, functions naturally, lacking both moral turpitude and moral virtue. It can then be redefined as another kind of “good,” as here. See Chapter 9 for a fuller description of this author’s conception of “the inborn nature and its uncontrived condition.” The definitiveness of this specific nature is to be contrasted to the “lack of fixed identity” evoked by the Inner Chapters, and the idea of “neither good nor evil” is to be contrasted to the “both ‘good’ and ‘evil’” view set forth there, for example at the start of Chapter 3 (p. 29).

CHAPTER NINE

Horse Hooves

Here are the horses, able to tramp over frost and snow with the hooves they have, to keep out the wind and cold with their coats. Chomping the grass and drinking the waters, prancing and jumping over the terrain—this is the genuine inborn nature of horses. Even if given fancy terraces and great halls, they would have no use for them. Then along comes Bo Le,¹ saying, “I am good at managing horses!” He proceeds to brand them, shave them, clip them, bridle them, fetter them with crupper and martingale, pen them in stable and stall—until about a quarter of the horses have dropped dead. Then he starves them, parches them, trots them, gallops them, lines them up neck to neck or nose to tail, tormenting them with bit and rein in front and with whip and spur behind. By then over *half* of the horses have dropped dead.

The potter says, “I’m good at managing clay! I round it until it matches the compass, square it until it matches the T-square.” The carpenter says, “I’m good at managing wood! I curve it until it matches the arc, straighten it until it corresponds to the line.” Do you suppose the inborn nature of the clay or the wood wishes to match a compass, T-square, arc, or line? And yet somehow or other, generation after generation bursts into songs of praise: “Bo Le is so good at managing horses! The potter and carpenter are so good at managing clay and wood!” And this is the same error made by those who “govern,” who “order” the world.

In my opinion, someone who was really good at ordering the world would not go about it like that. For the people, too, have their own constant inborn nature. To be clothed by their own weaving, fed by their own plowing—these are the intrinsic virtuositities in which they all share. All as one, without faction—this is just the way Heaven tosses them out. So it was that in the age of the full realization of the intrinsic virtuositities, their actions were solid and full but their gaze was distant and blank.² For in those days, there were no paths or trails through the mountains, no boats or bridges over the ponds; all creatures lived together,

1. Renowned as a trainer of horses.

2. Tentative reading of a mysterious description, literally, “Their steps full-full, their gaze summit-summit.” Alternately, taking 蹟 for 顛 and reversing these two sentences and crisscrossing their predicates, we might get, “Their vision was packed to capacity, while their steps seemed teetering and precarious.” This would be a description of tentative, directionless movement

merging their territories into one another, the birds and beasts multiplying to form herds and flocks, the grasses and trees growing thick and unhampered, so one could tie a cord to a bird or beast and take a stroll with it, or bend down a branch to peep into a bird's nest. For in those days when the intrinsic virtuosities were fully realized, the people lived together with the birds and beasts, bunched together with all things. What did they know about "noble men" and "petty men"? So simpleminded,³ without understanding, their intrinsic virtuosities remained undivided and never left them. So simpleminded, not wanting anything in particular—that is what it means to be undyed and unhewn. Undyed and unhewn, the inborn nature of the people was realized.

Then along came the sages. Limping and staggering after humankindness, straining on tiptoe after responsible conduct, they filled everyone in the world with self-doubt. Lasciviously slobbering over music, fastidiously obsessing over ritual, they got everyone in the world to take sides. For unless the undyed and unhewn are mutilated, what can be made into libation goblets? Unless the white jade is broken, what can be made into the ritual scepters and batons? And unless the Course and its intrinsic powers are broken down, what can be picked through to select out humankindness and responsible conduct?⁴ Unless the inborn nature is divided off from its uncontrived expression,⁵ how can you make use of ritual and music? Unless the five colors are disordered, what can be formed into designs and decorations? Unless the five tones are disordered, what can be forced into step with the six modes?⁶ The mutilation of the unhewn raw material to make valued vessels is the crime of the skilled carpenter. The destruction of the Course and its intrinsic powers to make humankindness and responsible conduct is the fault of the sage.

Horses dwelling out on the plains chomp the grasses and drink the waters there. When pleased, they twine and rub their necks together. When angry, they turn their backs and kick. The understanding⁷ of horses goes no further than this. If you put yokes and poles on their necks and level them down with crossbars and shafts, they will come to understand a bit more: how to split the shafts, wriggle

through the untamed, animal-crammed environment. For another depiction of the apparently cautious tentativeness of the Daoist's motions, compare *Daodejing* 15.

3. Reading 侗 for 同.

4. Cf. *Daodejing*, 18. Alternately: "Unless the Course and its intrinsic powers were abandoned, why would anyone choose humankindness and responsible conduct?"

5. Or: "Unless you remove yourself from the uncontrived expression of the inborn nature. . . ."

6. These three lines could also be interpreted as "If the inborn nature were not divided off from its uncontrived expression, what use would there be for ritual and music? If the five colors were not disordered, who would bother with designs and decorations? If the five tones were not disordered, who would bother getting in step with the six modes?" This would be a bit of a shift in the argument, though; the present translation reads the whole paragraph as riffing on the structure of the trope enunciated at its end, of mutilating or breaking apart raw material to make culturally valued items from the fragmentary remains thereof.

7. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

out of the yokes, butt the hood, spit out the bit, and gnaw through the reins. Hence it is really Bo Le's fault that the horses came to understand how to feint, and from there even how to rob and steal.

Likewise, in the days of Hexu,⁸ the people stayed at home without knowing what they were doing, ventured out without knowing where they were going. Filling their mouths they were merry; drumming their bellies they amused themselves. This was the extent of the people's abilities. Then along came the sage, bending and twisting over ritual and music to reform the bodies of the world, dangling humankindness and responsible conduct overhead to "comfort" the hearts of everyone in the world. Only then did the people begin groping on tiptoe in their eagerness for knowledge. From there it was inevitable that they would end up struggling for profit and advantage above all. And this, all this, is really the fault of the sages.

8. Commentators agree only that this is the name of a figure of remote predynastic antiquity. The name might mean something like "Radiance for Everyone."

CHAPTER TEN

Breaking into Trunks

To protect your trunks, your sacks, your cabinets from thieves who would break into them, rifle through them, bust them open, no doubt you will bind them tightly with seals and ropes, secure them firmly with latches and locks. This is what common sense calls *wisdom*.¹ But when a great thief arrives, he will take the cabinet on his back, haul off the trunk, shoulder the sack, and make off with it—fearing nothing more than that the seals, ropes, latches, and locks are not secure *enough*. So this thing you’ve been calling “wisdom”—is it anything more than the piling up of loot for the really great thieves?

Let me try to explain this further. Is there anything at all that the conventional world calls “wisdom” that is not really just piling up loot for the great thieves? Are there any so-called sages who are not just guards in the service of the great thieves? How do I know this is so? The state of Qi was in olden days so densely populated that one could peer over to the neighboring village and hear its dogs and chickens. The territory reached by Qi’s fishing nets and plows exceeded two thousand square miles. And in all the shrines and temples, in every province and hamlet and town, there was no corner that was not regulated by the rules of the sages. Then one day Tian Chengzi killed the ruler of Qi and took his state. But what he stole was not only the state; with it he took possession of the laws and regulations devised by the sagely wisdom. So although Tian Chengzi may have been called a thief, he lived as securely as the sage-kings Yao and Shun. Smaller states dared not criticize him and larger states dared not attack him, and his family held on to the throne of Qi for twelve generations.² Did he not then steal, along with the state of Qi, the wise and sagacious rules by which to protect his thieving self?

1. “Wisdom” throughout this chapter translates *zhi* 知, the same character usually translated as “knowing consciousness,” “intelligence,” “understanding,” “cleverness,” and so on, in the Inner Chapters. Here, its association with the sages tilts the implication toward “wisdom.” See Glossary. In the final paragraph of the chapter, the same character is used as a verb, translated simply as “know.”

2. The demise of Qi twelve generations after Tian Chengzi did not occur until 221 BCE with the advent of the Qin dynasty. Since this is long after the putative death of the historical Zhuang Zhou, Qian Mu and many others point to this as good evidence that this chapter, or at least this passage, is written by a later author.

Let me try explaining it. Is not everything worldly convention calls “perfect wisdom” really just the piling up of loot for the great thieves? Are not all the so-called perfect sages really just bodyguards for the great thieves? How do I know this is so? In olden days, Guan Longfeng was beheaded, Bi Gan had his heart torn out, Chang Hong got drawn and quartered by chariots, Wu Zixu was tossed into the river to rot. The worthiness of these four could not save them from execution.³

Once Robber Zhi’s disciple asked him, “Do robbers also have the Course?”

Zhi said, “Where can one go without the Course? To guess where the treasure is hidden is sagacity. To be the first to go in is courage. To be the last to leave is responsible conduct. To judge whether a job can succeed or not is wisdom. To distribute the loot equally is humankindness. No one can become a great robber without these five virtues!”

From this we can see that, while it is true that the good man cannot stand without the Course of the sage, Robber Zhi could not operate without it either. But since there are more bad men than good men in the world, the sage benefits the world little and harms the world much. Hence it is said, “When the lips are gone, the teeth get cold. Because Lu brought such thin liquor, Handan was besieged.”⁴

When a sage is born, great robbers arise. So it is only when you destroy the sages and pardon all the thieves and robbers that the world can become well ordered! When the streams dry up, the valleys empty; when the hills are leveled, the reservoirs are filled; and once the sages die, great robbers will no longer arise. Then the world will be at peace and without trouble! But if the sages do not die, great robbers will never stop.

To try to govern the world by doubling the number of sages would merely double the profits of the great robbers. If you create pounds and ounces to measure them with, they’ll steal the pounds and ounces and use them to rob you further. If you make scales and balances to regulate them with, they’ll steal the scales and balances and use them to rob you more. If you create tallies and seals to enforce their reliability, they’ll steal the tallies and seals and use them to rob you too. If you create ideals of humankindness and responsible conduct to regulate them

3. All four were virtuous ministers who met these gruesome fates because they tried to reform their rulers’ behaviors. The sagely law is what granted the rulers the authority to destroy these repositories of sagely law.

4. According to Cheng Xuanying, this refers to the time King Xuan of Chu called Duke Gong of Lu to court. The latter arrived late, and with offensively thin liquor as a gift. A dispute ensued, leading to Chu’s attack on Lu. Handan was the capital of the state of Zhao, an ally of Chu. With the Chu armies occupied in attacking Lu, Handan was left open to an attack from King Hui of the state of Liang. Lu Deming says, instead, that Chu invited feudal lords from both Zhao, which brought thick liquor, and Lu, which brought thin liquor. The Chu steward asked to taste some of the thick liquor from the Zhao guests, but when they refused to give him some, in his anger he switched the liquors of Zhao and Lu for gifts to the king of Chu, who, feeling insulted by Zhao, besieged Handan.

with, why, they'll just steal humankindness and responsible conduct and use them to rob you all the more.

How do I know this is so? He who steals a belt buckle is executed, but he who steals a state becomes a feudal lord. Humankindness and responsible conduct are always among the properties found in the homes of the feudal lords. Have they not also stolen humankindness and responsible conduct and all the sagely wisdom?

So as long as the great robbers continue to go scot-free—as long as these feudal lords continue to be exalted—they will keep stealing humankindness and responsible conduct, together with the weights, measures, scales, balances, tallies, and seals that ensure their advantage, even if you reward them with high rank for refraining or threaten them with execution for persisting. Doubling the profits of the Robber Zhis of the world to the point where they can never be stopped—it is all the fault of the sages!

Hence it is said, “The fish should not leave the deep pool, and a nation’s sharp weapons should not be displayed to the people.”⁵ The sages are the sharpest of all the world’s weapons, and should not be displayed. Hence only when sagacity is destroyed and wisdom abandoned will the great robbers disappear.⁶ Smash the jades and crush the pearls, and the small robbers will not arise. Burn the tallies and shred the seals, and the people will become plain and straight. Break the measures and split the scales, and the people will no longer bicker and fight. Only when we decimate the sagely laws throughout the world will it be possible to talk sense with the people. Only when we uproot and scramble the six modes, burn up all the flutes and zithers, and plug up the ears of Master Kuang will the people of the world be able to hang on to their keen hearing. Only when we destroy patterns and ornaments, scatter the five colors, and glue up Li Zhu’s eyes will the people of the world be able to hang on to their keen vision. Only when we destroy the hooks and rope-levels, abandon the compasses and T-squares, and break Carpenter Chui’s fingers will the people of the world be able to retain their own skills. Hence it is said, “Great skill seems like clumsiness.”⁷ Only when we cut away the virtuous practices of Zeng Shen and Shi Yu, restrain the mouths of Yang Zhu and Mo Di, and cast away humankindness and responsible conduct will the intrinsic virtuosities of all the people of the world mysteriously merge together as one.⁸

When everyone keeps his bright vision to himself, the world will no longer be light-blinded. When everyone keeps his keen hearing to himself, the world will no longer be fettered. When everyone keeps his wisdom to himself, the world will no longer be confused. When everyone keeps his intrinsic virtuosities to himself, the world will no longer go awry. Zeng Shen, Shi Yu, Yang Zhu, Mo Di, Master

5. *Daodejing* 36.

6. Cf. *Daodejing* 19. In both cases, “sagacity and wisdom” could be interpreted to mean “sages and wise men.”

7. *Daodejing* 45.

8. 玄同 *Xuantong*. Cf. *Daodejing* 56.

Kuang, Carpenter Chui, and Li Zhu all put their virtuositities on display outside themselves, using their radiance to disorder the world—but these are things for which standards are of no use.

Do you know how things were in the times when virtuosity was fully realized? In the olden days of the clans of Rongcheng, Da'ting, Bohuang, Zhongyang, Lilu, Lixu, Xuanyuan, Hexu, Zuntu, Zhurong, Fuxi, and Shennong,⁹ the people knotted ropes as their only records,¹⁰ delighting in their food and clothes and enjoying their own customs and dwellings. Neighboring countries could see each other in the distance, their dogbarks and cockcrows were audible to one another, but all their lives the people had no occasion to travel from one to the other.¹¹ This was the time of perfect order. But nowadays it has gotten to the point where they make the people crane their necks and stand on tiptoe, saying, "In such and such a place there is a worthy man!" They pack their provisions and head out to find him, abandoning their own parents and dropping their service to their own rulers, their footprints littering the territories of various feudal lords and their carriage tracks crisscrossing for thousands of miles. This is all because the people in high places have such a love of wisdom. It is precisely the sincerity of their love of wisdom, coupled with constant lack of the Course, that throws the world into such disorder.

How do we know this is so? Much wisdom in the use of crossbows and arrows, traps and nets, plots and schemes, throws the birds of the sky into disorder. Much wisdom in the use of hooks, bait, nets, poles, and lures throws the fish of the waters into disorder. Much wisdom in the use of traps, nets, snares, and lattices throws the beast of the woodlands into disorder. The wiles of wisdom become like a kind of gradual poisoning, rigidifying and unmooring "hard" and "white," disjoining and muddying "sameness" and "difference," and end up casting the people into a muddle of disputation. Thus it is that each and every great disorder of the world is caused by the love of wisdom.

Everyone in the world knows enough to find out about what they don't know, but none knows enough to find out about what they already know.¹² Everyone knows enough to disapprove of what they consider bad, but none knows enough to disapprove of what they have come to consider good.¹³ This is the reason for the great disorder, which violates the brightness of the sun and moon above and melts away the kernel of vitality¹⁴ within the mountains and rivers below, toppling the ordered succession of the four seasons in between. All creatures, down to the

9. According to Sima Biao, these twelve are all ancient sages from predynastic times.

10. As a reminder, like tying a string around one's finger, of exactly one presently non-apparent thing that for some reason will need to be attended to.

11. See *Daodejing* 80.

12. *Zhi* 知 appears four times in this sentence. See Glossary.

13. Alternately, "Everyone knows to disapprove of what they are bad at, but none knows to disapprove of what they are already good at."

14. 精 *Jing*. See Glossary.

smallest wriggling and fluttering insects, have thus lost touch with their inborn natures—that is how profoundly the love of wisdom disrupts the world! Abandoning all the many types of generative impulse within them,¹⁵ they instead insist on laborious subservience. Letting go of the peaceful blandness of non-doing,¹⁶ they instead delight in ideas and plans full of tsk-tsk jibber-jabber. And it is this tsk-tsk jibber-jabber that has thrown the world into its present disorder!

15. Following manuscripts which here have *ji* 機, not *min* 民.

16. *Wuwei*. See Glossary.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Being There and Giving Room^A

Being there, letting the people be—I have heard of such things. Or releasing others from your custody, giving them some room. But I have never heard of anyone actually *governing* other people, *ordering* them. You just let them be for fear that otherwise their inborn natures will get flooded away. You just release them and give them room for fear that otherwise their intrinsic virtuosities¹ will get displaced. And as long as their inborn natures are not flooded away and their intrinsic virtuosities are not displaced, what further order need there be?

But when Yao² “ordered” the world in ancient times, everyone got so jubilant about it, the propensities of their inborn natures^B were so pleased by it, that they lost their tranquility. When Jie³ “ordered” the world, on the other hand, everyone got so broken up about it, the propensities of their own natures⁴ so embittered by it, that they lost their contentment. But whatever is devoid of tranquility and contentment cannot be an intrinsic virtuosity, and whatever is not an intrinsic virtuosity can never be sustained for long.

Are people overjoyed? That is an overdevelopment of yang. Are people outraged? That is an overdevelopment of yin. When both yin and yang get overdeveloped, the four seasons do not arrive when they should, and the cold and hot do not achieve their harmony. And in the end this comes back to harm the people’s own bodies, knocking their joy and their anger out of their proper positions so they drift randomly here and there. Then they lose control of their own calculations and plans, with no middle course taking shape between the extremes. That’s when everyone gets caught up in high-handed self-discipline or nitpicking blame or ostentatious independence or fierce aggressions,^C and from there you get things like the criminal behavior of a Robber Zhi or the moralistic conduct of a Zeng Shen or a Shi Yu. People get so *good* that even the whole world is insufficient to reward their goodness, or so *bad* that even the whole world is inadequate to punish

1. *De*. Translated “virtuosity” in the Inner Chapters, “the intrinsic virtuosities” (for human beings) or “the intrinsic powers” (for nonhuman beings) elsewhere. See Glossary.

2. Sage king, exemplar of virtue.

3. Tyrant, exemplar of vice.

4. See note B.

their evil. Even the vastness of the whole world is no longer enough for their punishment or their reward!

And so, from the Three Dynasties on down, all anyone has really been doing is madly laboring to devise more and more punishments and rewards. How then could they have any leisure to rest content in the dispositions of their inborn natures and allotments of life? Do you perchance delight in your keen vision? That just means you are flooding them⁵ away with sights. Do you delight in your keen hearing? You're flooding them away with sounds. Do you delight in humankindness? You are thereby disordering the intrinsic virtuosities.⁶ Do you delight in responsible conduct? You are contravening the unwrought structures.⁷ Do you delight in ritual? You're fostering contrivance. In music? You're fostering debauchery. In sagacity? You're fostering artifice. In wisdom? You're fostering fault-finding. If everyone were to rest content in the dispositions of their own inborn nature and allotment of life, it would be quite all right to preserve all eight of these delights, or equally all right to let them go. But when no one rests content in the dispositions of his own inborn nature and allotment of life, people start getting all chopped up and bound down and backed up and tied in by them,^D and it is thus that the world becomes disordered.

Since people started to honor and cherish these things, the confusion of the world has run very deep indeed. When an instance of them is past, do you think they just let it go? No, they fast and restrain themselves when speaking of it, they kneel in reverence to advance it, they drum and sing to celebrate it in dance. When they have reached such a point, what can we possibly do about it?

So if a noble man cannot escape having to oversee the world, there is no better option than non-doing.⁸ For it is only by non-doing that one can rest content in the dispositions of one's own inborn nature and allotment of life. Thus "he who values what he does with own self more than he values doing something about the world is worthy of having the world entrusted to him. He who cherishes what he does with his own self more than he cherishes doing something about the world is worthy of having the world given to him."^E Thus if a noble man can keep from dissipating the faculties of his five internal organs and from being yanked along by his seeing and hearing, he will dwell right where he is, motionless as a corpse, and yet will manifest like a dragon, as silent as an abyss yet sounding out like thunder, as imponderable as a spirit in his actions yet everywhere complied with like Heaven itself. Remaining at his own ease in non-doing, all the ten thousand things will then gather and ripen around him. What leisure would we have, then, to worry about ordering the world!

Towering Eagleye asked Lao Dan, "But if you don't order the world, how can you improve the human heart?"

5. "Them" here refers back to dispositions of the inborn nature and allotment of life.

6. *De*. See Glossary.

7. *Li*. See Glossary.

8. *Wuwei*. See Glossary.

Lao Dan said, “Be careful not to meddle with the human heart! The human heart is something that springs up when pushed down, sometimes ascending and sometimes descending, sometimes the prisoner and sometimes the executioner. How soft and restrained and pliable it is, yet how firmly and roughly and sharply and severely it chisels and cuts. So hot it smolders to fire, so cold it freezes to ice, so swift that in the interval between glancing up and glancing down it has already twice touched points beyond the four seas. It dwells still like an abyss, it moves like the overhanging heavens—stampeding and haughty, allowing nothing to tie it down. Such is the human heart!

“In olden times the Yellow Emperor disturbed everyone’s heart with human-kindness and responsible conduct and because of this Yao and Shun ended up wearing away the flesh of their thigh bones and the hair of their calves in their efforts to nourish the bodies of all the people of the known world. They worried their five internal organs trying to be humane and responsible, tasking their blood and breath to conform to laws and standards. But even with all their efforts, there was something there that could never be subdued. It was for this reason that Yao exiled Huan Dou to Chong Hill and cast the Three Miao Chiefs out to Sanwei, banished the Minister of Works to the City of Darkness⁹—that is how little they were able to subdue the world! And the same kind of thing went on all through the Three Dynasties, until the whole world was living in a constant state of terror. Below there were Jie and Robber Zhi, above there were Zeng Shen and Shi Yu, and from there finally arose the Confucians and Mohists. Thereafter the joyful and the angry doubted one another, the wise deceived the fools and the fools deceived the wise, the good and the bad condemned each other, the devious and the trustworthy ridiculed one another, and thus has the world gone further into decline. Discordant in the greatest of their intrinsic virtuositities, their inborn natures and allotments of life either rotted or overflowed. Everyone became eager for wisdom, until even the ordinary people of the world exhausted themselves in their search for it. And then saw and ax were applied to shape and control them, ropes and marking cords were used to lay waste to them, hammer and gouge were used to cut them into shape. Thus was everyone in the world forced to pile on and clamber over each other, in total chaos, and the crime that caused it all was this attempt to meddle with the human heart. That is why worthy men keep themselves hidden in the caves and crags at the foot of great mountains, while lords of states commanding ten thousand chariots tremble with dread in their ancestral temples. Nowadays corpses killed in all sorts of different ways lie around in heaps, pillowed one on the other, while prisoners in cangues push one another along between them—the punished and the dead longingly gazing at one another from afar. And now the Confucians and the Mohists come along standing apart from them all on tiptoe and rolling up their sleeves amidst the manacles and fetters. Ach! What a monstrous extreme they have reached in their shamelessness, in their obliviousness to their own disgrace! I am far from convinced that sagacity and wisdom are anything more than the fitted wedges that hold the cangues together,

9. See *Shujing*, “Canon of Shun.”

or that humankindness and responsible conduct are anything more than the interlocking bolts that fasten the shackles. How can we be sure that Zeng Shen and Shi Yu are not the first whizzing arrows heralding the arrival of Jie and Robber Zhi? That's why I say, 'Cut off sagacity and abandon wisdom! Then the world will be in order.'"¹⁰

The Yellow Emperor had been Son of Heaven for nineteen years, and his ordinances were in effect throughout the empire. He heard that Master Broadrange Complete was living in the Hills of Kongtong¹¹ and thus went to meet with him, saying, "I have heard that you, my master, have broken through to the perfect Course, and it is about the purest kernel¹² of the perfect Course that I venture to inquire. For I wish to collect the purest kernel of heaven and earth to assist the growth of the five grains, so as to nourish the people. I also wish to put the yin and yang into service so as to bring all living beings to maturity. How can this be done?"

Master Broadrange Complete said, "You are trying to find out about the very substance of things. But once you attempt to bring it into your service in this way, it becomes just the remains of things. If you attempt to govern the empire from there, the clouds and vapors will rain down before they have converged, the plants and trees will drop their leaves before they have yellowed, and the light of the sun and moon will increase to the point of desolating the land. With this flattering mind of yours snipping and snapping away like that, how could you be worth talking to about the Perfect Course?"

The Yellow Emperor withdrew, gave up his kingdom and built for himself a solitary hut, spreading in it a mat of white rushes and dwelling there unoccupied for three months, after which he went off again to look for Master Broadrange Complete. When he finally found the man, he was lying stretched out with his head toward the south; the emperor shuffled toward him submissively on his knees, twice bowing with his face low to the ground, and asked, "I hear that you, my master, have broken through to the Perfect Course. I venture to ask how to govern the body so that it may long endure."

Master Broadrange Complete sat up briskly, saying, "What a great question! Come, I will tell you of the Perfect Course:

The purest kernel of the perfect Course—
Vague and dark, dark and vague!
The ultimate reach of the Perfect Course—
Dim and silent, silent and dim!
Not looking, not listening,
Through your stillness hug close your spirit.
The body will then spontaneously straighten itself.
You must be still, you must be limpid,

10. Cf. *Daodejing* 19.

11. "Empty-Same, Void-Join"

12. 精 *Jing*. See Glossary.

Not laboring your body,
 Not unsettling the pure seminal kernel of vitality in you
 And then you can live long.
 When the eye sees no thing and the ear hears no thing
 And the mind knows no thing—
 Then your imponderable spirit will hold fast to your body,
 And then the body can live long.
 Be cautious over what is within you
 Close yourself to what is outside you,
 For much knowledge is what will destroy you.”

He continued, “I have now tunneled for you a way through the top of the Great Radiance to the source of Ultimate Yang, made for you a gate into the Dimmest Darkness to the source of Ultimate Yin. Heaven and earth each have that which they control, and yin and yang each have that which they contain.^F Just carefully guard and protect your own body, and all those things will spontaneously grow sturdy. Holding to their oneness, I dwell in their harmony, and thus have I cultivated myself for 1,200 years without any decay to my body.”

The Yellow Emperor bowed twice and kowtowed, saying, “This is why Master Broadrange Complete is to be called Heaven itself!”

Master Broadrange Complete said, “Come, I will tell you about that. That thing is inexhaustible, but people all think it has an ending. That thing is unfathomable, but people all think it has a limit. Those who attain my Course at their highest will be emperors and at their lowest kings. Those who lose my Course at their highest may see the light but at their lowest will become dirt again. All of these many things here that flourish in this way are born from the dirt and return to the dirt. So I will leave you and enter the gate of the inexhaustible, to wander in the fields of the unlimited. I participate in the light of the sun and moon; I join in the constancy of Heaven and Earth: what matches me I merge with and then ignore; what remains far from me I simply ignore!¹³ Thus, though all men must die, I alone endure!”

Generalissimo Cloud wandered eastward over the wind-whirled branches until he happened upon a certain Vast Obscure. Vast Obscure was at that moment enjoying himself,¹⁴ slapping his buttocks and hopping about like a sparrow. Generalissimo Cloud saw him and stopped short. He then stood at attention and said, “Venerable Sir, who are you? Why is the venerable sir doing this?”

Without pausing in his buttock slapping and sparrow hopping, Vast Obscure answered Generalissimo Cloud: “I’m enjoying myself.”

13. A bit more venturesomely: “Whatever plays the role of my own self I merge with to the point of unknowing; whatever stays aloof from my own self is to me already consigned to unknowing.”

14. 遊 *You*. The same word is elsewhere translated as “playing,” “roaming,” or “wandering” (as in the title of Chapter 1).

Generalissimo Cloud said, “We¹⁵ would like to ask you a question.”

Vast Obscure lifted his head to look at General Cloud, saying only, “Uch!”

Generalissimo Cloud persisted: “The energies¹⁶ of heaven have become disharmonious, the energies of earth have become knotted and clogged; the six energies¹⁷ have gone out of proportion with one another, the four seasons have been missing their marks. What I wish to do is combine the purest kernels of the six energies to produce nourishment for all living beings. How can this be done?”

Vast Obscure went on slapping his buttocks and hopping like a sparrow. Dropping his head away he said only, “I have no idea! I have no idea!” Generalissimo Cloud could ask no further.

Three years later, again traveling in the east, Generalissimo Cloud passed through the wilds of Yousong and again happened to encounter Vast Obscurity. Overjoyed, Generalissimo Cloud rushed toward him, saying, “Heaven, have you forgotten us? Has Heaven forgotten us?” He then twice bowed low, touching his head to the ground, wishing to hear instructions from Vast Obscurity.

Vast Obscure said, “Drifting and floating, not knowing what seeking. Reckless and mad, not knowing where headed. It is play alone that holds the reins, enabling my prospectless gaze.¹⁸ What more could our majesties¹⁹ know?”

Generalissimo Cloud said, “I also consider myself reckless and mad, but still the people follow me wherever I go. I can’t help what these people do—and now they have all come to depend on me! Please give me at least one word of advice!”

Vast Obscure said, “Dark Heaven will not bring to completion anything that disorders the regularities of the heavens and violates the dispositions of things. The herds of animals now disperse, the birds sing through the night, calamities come to the grasses and trees, disasters reach even the insects. Alas! This all comes from the error of trying to govern human beings!”

Generalissimo Cloud said, “What then should I do?”

Vast Obscure said, “Alas! You are really poisonous! Off, off I go, away from here!”

Generalissimo Cloud said, “It is a rare and difficult thing to meet with you, O Heaven! Please give me just one word!”

Vast Obscure said, “Ach! The nourishing of the mind! Just stay in the state of non-doing and all things will transform themselves. Drop your body away, vomit out your precise powers of hearing and vision, sink^c yourself into the forgetting of things, become vastly merged in fluidity and darkness, unleash your mind and

15. The royal “we”; the generalissimo uses the self-designation reserved for emperors.

16. *Qi*. See Glossary.

17. See Chapter 1, p. 5.

18. Reading 妄 as 望, following Wang Shumin. Without the substitution, the meaning would be, “It is play that holds the reins, which is what enables us to survey all with no delusions.”

19. Again the royal “we.”

release your spirit until you are left like a still and silent desert, like there is no soul in you. All things throng and flourish, but each returns to its root.²⁰ Each returns to its root, and yet they do not know it! Mixed and blended, in chaos and confusion—as long as they live they are never separated from it! If they knew it, they would then be separated from it! They do not ask its name, they do not spy out its character: thus do all things generate themselves!”

Generalissimo Cloud said, “Heaven has bestowed on me its inner power,²¹ revealed to me its silence! All my life I have sought them, and now I have found them!” He bowed low twice, touching his head to the ground. Then he arose, bid farewell, and went on his way.

Ordinary people of the world are always pleased when others agree with them and displeased when others differ with them. The reason they want people to agree with them and don’t want people to differ with them is because of their ambition to be someone, to go beyond the ordinary multitude. But precisely because they have this desire to go beyond the ordinary multitude, they fail to go beyond the ordinary multitude! They depend on the multitude to settle themselves into a position they have derived from it, but that is never a match for the real multitude of skills possessed by the multitude!¹¹

And thus when these people try to manage a state for someone, they merely canvas what was profitable to the Three Dynasties, without seeing the havoc this brings. This is to throw that person’s state at the mercy of chance—and how slim a chance there is that this state will not then be lost! The chances of preserving the state are then not even one in ten thousand: it becomes more than ten thousand times more likely for them to lose the state than to save it.

How sad it is that the possessors of territory do not understand this! For to possess territory is to possess a very great thing, and one who possesses so great a thing cannot do so by being a mere thing himself. Only by never becoming a thing even when he is a thing can he let things be things.²² One who understands that letting things be things is done by not being a thing does much more than merely govern all the people of the world! He appears and disappears anywhere in the six directions, roaming through the nine regions, solitary in going and solitary in coming. This is what is called being a solitary existence, being the sole possessor.²³ And the sole possessor, the solitary existence, may be called the noblest of all.

20. Echoing *Daodejing* 14.

21. *De*. See Glossary.

22. Alternate reading, following Guo Xiang’s parsing: “For to possess a territory is to possess a very vast thing, and one who possesses so vast a thing cannot treat that thing as a mere thing. It is because he does not treat them as mere things that he is able to let things be things.”

23. 獨有. Alternately, “this is called a unique possession,” or “this is called possessing what no one else possesses,” or, read in another way, “this is called being the sole existent, the only thing that exists.”

The teaching that comes from a truly Great Man is like a shadow cast by a body or an echo raised by a sound. When questioned, he responds, thus getting to the bottom of the questioner's concern, a perfect match with each person in the world. When he is still he raises no echo and when moving he has no fixed direction. He takes you back and forth, a turbulence that wanders and plays without start or end, emerging and submerging unescorted, as beginningless as the sun. Whether singing forth his expositions or manifesting his physical body, he remains merged in the great sameness. Being the great sameness, he is without any definite self. Having no self, how then could he possess what he has? Those who saw what is there, who saw what there was to possess, were noble men of old. But those who see what is not there, those who see the nothing, are friends both of heaven and of earth.

What are ignoble, and yet must be depended upon? *Things*. Who are of low status, and yet must be followed? *The people*. What are unseen, and yet must be dealt with? *Tasks*. What are coarse, and yet must be set forth? *Laws*. What is far from one's heart, and yet must be taken on personally? *Responsible conduct*. What is most near to oneself, and yet must be widely extended? *Humankindness*. What is restrictive, and yet must be accumulated? *Ritual*. What is down in the very center of oneself but must be exalted? *Intrinsic virtuosities*.²⁴ What is a single continuity and yet must constantly change? *The Course*. What is imponderably spiritlike and yet always requires our action?! *The Heavenly*.

Thus the sages contemplate the Heavenly but do not try to assist it, find completion in intrinsic virtuosity but tie nothing to it, go forth along their Course but make no plans. They associate with others through humankindness but do not rely on it, cleave closely to responsible conduct but do not accumulate it, respond with ritual but observe no taboos. They take on tasks without declining them, equalize all before the law without disordering their relations, rely on the people without making light of them, follow the lead of all things without discarding them. For though things, all things, are precisely what are never worth doing anything about, one can nevertheless never avoid doing something about them.

Those who do not understand the Heavenly cannot purify their intrinsic virtuosities. Those who are obstructed in their Course go wrong wherever they go. How sad it is not to understand one's Course!

And what is meant by "one's Course"? There is a Course of Heaven and a Course of Man. The Course of Heaven is to be exalted in non-doing. The Course of Man is to be always fettered in doing. The ruler's part is the Course of Heaven and the minister's part is the Course of Man. How far apart they are, the Course of Heaven and the Course of Man! This must never be neglected!

24. *De*. See Glossary. Alternately, "What is in the middle but must also be lofty?"

ENDNOTES

A. “Being there” reads the word 在 unmodifiedly in its default intransitive sense, as it appears in the contextlessness of the separated title. In the actual opening sentence, it reads transitively, meaning “to let be there, to regard and accept as being there.” The translation endeavors to capture the experience of both readings as it would occur to a first-time reader.

B. There is only one possessive here, preceding “nature,” which could be either singular or plural. This could mean “each delighting (in) his own nature”—meaning either that their natures are delighted or that they are delighted by their own natures—but some (e.g., Zhang Songhui) take it to mean “taking delight in his, Yao’s, nature.”

C. Following the interpretation of Lu Xixing.

D. Following Lu Huiqing’s reading.

E. These two lines are almost but not quite identical to the last lines of *Daodejing* 13. The variant in the received Wang Bi version of that text says rather, “Thus he who values his body as if it were the world is perhaps the one to whom the world can be entrusted; he who loves his own body as if it were the world is perhaps the one to whom the world can be given.” 故貴以身為天下，若可寄天下，愛以身為天下，若可託天下。 The grammar and meaning here are closer to the wording in both Mawangdui texts: “He who values doing something about the self over doing something about the world. . . .” 貴為身於為天下。

F. Following the interpretation of Cheng Xuanying.

G. *Lun* 淪 for *lun* 倫.

H. Following Wang Xianqian’s interpretation.

I. *Bukebuwei* 不可不為. Alternately, “What has imponderable efficacy (even without acting) yet never fails to act?” Or: “What is imponderable but must nevertheless be enacted by us?” The translation here instead follows Guo Xiang’s interpretation, evidently taking this surprising line to mean something like “Heavenly activity is divine and thus without activity, something one cannot *do*, and yet one mustn’t [deliberately] *not do* it [either].” In other words, the divine activity of Heaven, which is precisely what we cannot actively and deliberately “do,” is equally falsified if we actively and deliberately refrain from doing it.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Heaven and Earth

Though heaven and earth are vast, their transformations reach everywhere evenly. Though the ten thousand things are many, their ordering is everywhere one. Though the people are multitudinous, what governs them one and all is true rulership. True rulership begins in the intrinsic virtuosities and reaches completion in the Heavenly. Thus it is said that in the dimmest antiquity, rulership of the world was accomplished simply through non-doing.¹ That means relying only on the Heavenly and on the intrinsic virtuosities, nothing more.

Contemplating the meaning of the word in this manner, via the Course, all the world's "rulership" may be put right. Contemplating their role-divisions via the Course, the responsibilities of all lords and servants of the world may be clarified. Contemplating their abilities via the Course, all the officials of the world may be properly ordered. Contemplating everything everywhere via the Course is thus to be fully equipped with responses to all things.

Hence the intrinsic virtuosities are what can bring unobstructed success everywhere between Heaven and Earth, and the Course is what proceeds through all the ten thousand things. A person in power must rule his people by assigning the right tasks to them, and their skills must be developed by allowing their own abilities to attain real artistry in these tasks. Their skills must be integrated into the tasks; the execution of their tasks must be integrated into each fulfilling his responsibilities; the fulfillment of responsibility must be integrated into the intrinsic virtuosities; the intrinsic virtuosities must be integrated into the Course; and the Course must be integrated into the Heavenly. Thus it is said, "Here is how the ancients tamed the world: having no desires, all in the world had all they needed. Non-doing, all in the world was transformed. Being still as an abyss, all the people settled into stability." As the *Record* says, "Penetrating to the one continuity, all the myriad tasks are completed. Free of any intention for gain, attaining only freedom from any intention,^A all the ghosts and spirits yield."

The Master said, "The Course is what covers and carries all things—how vast it is, vast like an ocean! The noble person must gouge out his entire heart and mind to make space for it! The doings of non-doing: that is what is meant by the Heavenly.

1. *Wuwei*. See Glossary.

The various expressions of non-doing: that is what is meant by the intrinsic virtuosities. Cherishing other people and creating benefit for all beings: that is what is meant by humankindness. Seeing commonalities in what is different: that is what is meant by vastness. Proceeding in one's deeds without embanking oneself against what is different: that is what is meant by capaciousness. Possession of all the ten thousand differences:² that is what is meant by wealth. Thus, holding fast to one's intrinsic virtuosities is called maintaining the strand, and bringing them to completion is called taking one's place in the world. Following the Course is called lacking nothing, and not letting external things blunt one's aspiration is called being undamaged.

“When noble people are clear on these ten things, how encompassing they are in their service to the vastness of their own minds! How fluid and fecund they are, being the passing on of all things! Such people leave the gold hidden in the mountains, leave the pearls hidden in the depths of the sea, see no profit in goods and riches, stay away from rank and wealth. Taking no joy in long life and finding no sorrow in early death, they feel no glory in success and no shame in failure. Forgetting both long life and early death, success and failure are to them not even worth mentioning. They do not try to snap up all the profits of the era as their private share, or to exert sovereignty over the world as a way to reach a position of shining prominence. What shines for them is rather to understand that all things comprise a single treasury, that life and death comprise a single shape.”

The Master said, “The Course: what an abyss is its every dwelling place, and yet how limpid is its clarity! If metal and stone did not partake of it, they would have no way to ring out their sounds. Hence metal and stone, though they are equipped with sounds, do not ring out unless struck. And of all the ten thousand things, what could affix the Course to any one definite place?

“As for one with the intrinsic virtuosity of a king, all he does is go his way in plainness and simplicity; he would be ashamed to have full understanding of his own doings. Rather, he roots them all in the source and connects his understanding only to the imponderable. Thus his intrinsic virtuosities become expansive, and whenever his mind goes forth, it gathers some further thing in.³ Without the Course, the body cannot live, and without its intrinsic virtuosities, the life in it cannot shine forth. Someone who can maintain his body, fully develop the life in him, firmly establish his intrinsic virtuosities and make manifest the Course—is he not a person of kingly virtuosity? Vastly he gushes forth, and yet all things follow along with him in his every sudden emergence and surging action. Such is what is called a person of kingly virtuosity. He peers into the darkest dark, he listens where there is no sound. Within the darkest dark alone he sees daybreak. Within the soundless alone he hears harmony. Thus even in the depths below the deep, he can discern a something definitely present, and even in the more imponderable

2. *Wanbutong* 萬不同. The identical phrase appears in Chapter 2 to describe what is blown through by “the piping of Heaven,” p. 11.

3. Alternately, “. . . his mind goes forth only when some external thing takes hold of it.”

than the imponderable, he can discern a certain subtle quintessence. Hence, in his contact with all things, though utterly lacking anything to give, he somehow provides what they seek, and though galloping forth on the instant, he somehow tracks where they are coming from, providing something for each and all—large or small, long or short, far or near.”^B

The Yellow Emperor traveled north of the Red Waters, where he ascended the slopes of Mt. Kunlun to cast his gaze over all the south. When he returned home he discovered he had lost his Dark Pearl there. He sent Knowinghood⁴ to search for it, but Knowinghood could not find it. He sent Li Zhu the Clear-sighted to search for it, but Li Zhu could not find it. He sent Insulted⁵ the Eloquent to search for it, but Insulted could not find it. Then he sent Imageless,⁶ and Imageless found it. The Yellow Emperor exclaimed, “How strange! Imageless is the one who was able to find it!”

The teacher of Yao was Xu You, whose teacher was Gnawgap, whose teacher was Baby Sovereign, whose teacher was Pajama. Yao asked Xu You, “Gnawgap can be taken as a counterpart of Heaven itself, can’t he? Through Baby Sovereign, I have invited him to come meet with me.”⁷

Xu You said, “Danger! This will be a hazard to the whole world! Gnawgap is the kind of person who is clear-sighted and sharp-eared, astute and wise, and because he is so perceptive, he is always quick and nimble of mind. He was born with natural endowments that surpass others, but as a consequence he tries to take possession of the Heavenly through the human.⁸ He is very astute about prohibiting wrongdoing, but has no understanding of what produces the wrongdoing in the first place. Would you allow him to serve as a counterpart of Heaven? He would try first to depend on the human without the Heavenly, then would root everything in the personal self while disidentifying with the physical body, then would honor conscious knowledge and let it spread like wildfire, then would make himself a cause at the beginning of every thread, then would become the cord that binds all things together, then would elicit a response wherever he looks, then would respond as appropriate to everything, and then would transform along with things without any constancy. So how could he be sufficient to be a counterpart of Heaven? Nevertheless, just as there are various branches of a family coming from a common ancestor, perhaps such a person could serve as a father to all the people. But he definitely could not be the father to the father to all the peoples!

4. *Zhi* 知, personified here as in the opening story of Chapter 22.

5. *Chigou* 喫話, literally “eat insult.” Translated in keeping with the names given to the other fanciful personifications in this passage. Generally taken as a representative of dispute and argument.

6. *Xiangwang* 象罔.

7. Presumably, to ask him to become emperor in Yao’s place.

8. I.e., he uses his superior human endowments (received from the undeliberate activity of Heaven) to deliberately grasp the Heavenly.

For he is the kind of leader who produces disorder through his very governing—a calamity to those who serve him and a thief to those who rule him.”

Yao was taking in the sights at Hua. The border warden there said, “Wow! A sage! Let me bless the sage! May the sage have long life!”

Yao said, “I decline.”

“May the sage have wealth!”

Yao said, “I decline.”

“May the sage have many sons!”

Yao said, “I decline.”

The warden said, “Long life, wealth, and many sons are what all people want. Why do you alone have no desire for them?”

Yao said, “Many sons bring many fears. Wealth brings many worries. Long life brings many humiliations. These three things do not nourish one’s intrinsic virtuosities. Therefore I must decline.”

The warden said, “At first I took you for a sage, but now I see you are merely a noble man. Heaven in generating the people always gives them some vocation. With many sons each given his own vocation, what would you have to fear? If you had wealth but shared it with others, what worries would you have? A sage dwells like a quail and eats like a hatchling,⁹ passing by like a flying bird that leaves no trail behind. When the empire proceeds along the Course, he joins in the shared prosperity. When it does not, he cultivates his intrinsic virtuosities at his leisure. After a thousand years he gets bored with the world and thus leaves it behind, ascending with the immortals, riding upon those white clouds up to God’s own ancestral village. Those three problems never reach him, for his own person remains ever free from misfortunes—what humiliations could he have?”

The warden then turned to go. Yao followed after him, imploring, “Please, tell me more!” But the warden said, “Away with you already.”

When Yao was ruling the world, he elevated Sir Lofty the Total Unk to the position of feudal lord. But then Yao passed the throne on to Shun, and Shun passed it on to Yu. When that happened, Sir Lofty abdicated his position as feudal lord and went back home to till his land. Emperor Yu went to see him and found him plowing in the open fields. Yu hurried toward him, bowing low in submission, then stood and asked, “In the past when Yao was ruling the world, you, my master, took your place as a feudal lord. Then Yao gave the throne to Shun and Shun gave it to me, and my master then resigned his post and came home to plow his land. May I venture to ask the reason for this?”

Sir Lofty said, “Back when Yao ruled the world, the people were encouraged even without rewards, and stood in awe even without penalties. Now you employ penalties and rewards, and the people have become inhumane. From there the efficacy of their intrinsic virtuosity decays and even corporal punishments come

9. That is, according to Zhu Boxiu, has no fixed dwelling and takes whatever food is given by the mother.

into use. The chaos to come in future times begins from this. Get out of here, why don't you? Do not disturb my work!" And he continued with his vigorous plowing, never looking back.

In the great beginning, what there was was nothing—devoid of definite being, unnameable by any name. There arose from this continuity a unity but without yet any definite form. Accessing this, making it their own, things come to life; their appropriation of it is what is known as their intrinsic virtuosities. When definite shapes have not yet emerged, but in the undivided continuity certain tentatively distinct portions appear, this is called their individual allotments of life. As motion that also stays and maintains itself, distinct living beings emerge, and when these beings become complete, each producing its own distinct structural coherence, this is called their physical bodies. Those physical bodies become protective preservers of imponderable spirit, in each case with its own specific styles and laws, which we call their specific inborn natures.

When the inborn nature is cultivated, it can be brought back to the intrinsic virtuosity until it becomes just as it was in the beginning. Being the same as it was, it is open like space, and being open like space, it is vast, joining in the chirpings of all beaks. When one joins in the chirpings of all beaks, it is with all of heaven and earth that one has joined. This joining is a merging into oblivion, as if stupid, as if swooning. This is called the Obscure Virtuosity,¹⁰ none other than the Vast Accord.

The Master asked Lao Dan, "There are some people who try to order¹¹ the Course, as if it were a matter of banishing something or someone: affirming and denying, accepting and rejecting.¹² The debaters have a saying: 'Divide hard and white sharply and clearly, so they stand out as if hanging in empty space like cornered eaves.' Can such people be called sages?"

Lao Dan said, "These are petty officials or diviners bound to their craft, laboring their bodies and terrorizing their minds, as the rat-catching of dogs brings on the leashes that bind them,^c and the grace of monkeys brings them down as captives from the mountain forests. Qiu,¹³ I will tell you something that you have never yet been able to hear, let alone speak. Even among those who are physically intact from head to toe, those who really have the ears to hear it, who have the hearts and minds for it, are already very few. But as to those with physical form who manage also to maintain coexistence with that which has no shape and no form—there is no one there at all. Our own motions and stoppings, our deaths

10. 玄德 *Xuande*. Cf. *Daodejing* 10, 51, 65.

11. 治 *Zhi*. To work on or treat something; the same word is used to mean "to order" or "to govern" in the political sense, as is rejected in the opening trope of Chapter 11. But the term *zhidao* is general usage for working on or practicing a particular course. Cf. Chapter 16, p. 131.

12. Or, "They make acceptable what is unacceptable, they affirm as so what is not so."

13. The personal given name of Confucius.

and our lives, our falls and our arisings—even these are never done by ourselves! As long as there is any ‘ordering of it,’ it is still entirely confined to the human. To forget all about external things and forget all about Heaven is what is called forgetting the self—and it is forgetting the self that is called really entering into the Heavenly.”

General Gateway Sprout^D went to see Seasonal Breakthrough, and said, “The ruler of Lu addressed me, saying, ‘I request to receive instruction from you.’ I declined, since it had not been commanded. But afterward I did tell him something. I’m not sure if it was correct or not, so I’d like to try repeating it to you. I told the Lord of Lu, ‘You must be respectful and restrained, selecting and promoting the public-spirited and conscientious among the people without the slightest partiality. Then who among the people would dare not to cooperate with you?’”

Seasonal Breakthrough burst out laughing and said, “As a description of the intrinsic virtuosities of a true emperor or king, sir, your words are like a praying mantis flailing its arms madly to stop an oncoming carriage—ridiculously inadequate to the task! If he did try to do as you instructed, he would be as if putting himself at a precarious height, as if loading his observation towers with all sorts of valuable goods. Many would then be those plodding toward him, flocking in his direction.”

“Your words leave me in a daze, sir!” said General Gateway Sprout, alarmed and astonished. “Even so, I beg you to at least tell me something about the general meaning.”

Seasonal Breakthrough said, “A great sage’s way of ‘ordering’ the world is to shake up and scatter the minds of the people, making that a source of instruction that alters all their customary ways. The thievery of their hearts is thus extinguished, enabling each to advance his or her own unique aspirations. He just accords with the spontaneous action of each one’s own inborn nature, so much so that the people do not even know where it comes from or what makes it so. How could such a one be willing to look up as if to an elder brother to the way Yao and Shun instructed the people, or conversely look down on them as younger brothers swirling in the dark of his dregs? It is only where one’s desires are the same as one’s intrinsic virtuosities that the heart and the mind find their home.”¹⁴

Zigong had traveled south to Chu and was passing over the northern bank of the Han River on his way back to Jin when he saw an old man working on his vegetable garden. The man had dug tunnels that led into the well, and was bearing jars of water to pour into them, exerting himself mightily but accomplishing very little. Zigong said to him, “There is a machine for this, which can irrigate one hundred plots of earth in a single day. It produces enormous results with very little effort. Wouldn’t you like to have one, sir?”

The gardener looked up at him and said, “How does it work?”

14. Following the interpretation of Lu Xixing. Alternately, “What he desires is only to be in full consonance with his intrinsic virtuosity and make his home there.”

Zigong said, “A piece of wood is carved into a lever, heavy in the back and light in the front, which raises the water as if hand-pulled, as quick and abundant as if it were boiling over. It is called a well-sweep.”

The gardener’s face showed some anger, but then he smiled and said, “I have heard my teacher say, ‘Where there are clever machines, there will necessarily be clever machinations, and where there are clever machinations, there will necessarily be mechanical hearts and minds.’ Once the mechanical heart is lodged in your breast, purity and simplicity are no longer complete in you. When purity and simplicity are no longer complete, the imponderable spirit and life in you will become unsettled. When the spirit and life in you are unsettled, the Course cannot carry or be carried^E by them.’ It’s not that I didn’t know about this thing; it’s that I would be ashamed to use it.”

Zigong squinted at the man, then lowered his head in shame, making no reply. After a while, the gardener said, “Who are you, sir?”

“A disciple of Kong Qiu,”¹⁵ said Zigong.

The gardener said, “Oh—are you then not one of those who studies broadly so as to imitate the sages, sighing out a lot of nonsense to deceive the crowds, plucking your zither strings and singing your melancholy dirges in solitude to sell your name to the world? If you would just forget all about your spirit and vital energy and let your bodily form fall away, then you might be all right! You cannot even order your own body—what leisure do you have to order the world? Away with you! Don’t impede my work!”

Zigong, embarrassed to the point of losing his composure, looking very anxious and not knowing what to do with himself, traveled on another thirty miles before he started to feel better. His disciple then asked him, “Who was that man earlier? Why did you look so crestfallen and discomfited when you saw him, unable to recover all day?”

Zigong said, “I used to think there was only one really human person in the world.¹⁶ I didn’t know that there was also this man. I have learned from my master that in doing tasks one should seek approval and in doing work one should seek results, that it is the way of the sage to accomplish much with little effort. But this man alone says no. One who holds to the Course keeps his intrinsic virtuosities whole, and when these are whole, the body is also whole, and thus the imponderable spirit is also whole. The wholeness of the spirit is the way of the sage. That means to throw your life in with the ordinary people, moving together with them and never knowing where you’re going. So complete in obliviousness, in purity! Accomplishment, profit, machinations, skill—all these are forgotten in this man’s mind. This man does not go where he has no will to go, does not do what he has no mind to do. Though all in the world may praise him, getting exactly what he means, he would disregard it without a second thought. Though all the world may blame him, not getting what he means, he would obviously ignore it. Neither

15. I.e., Confucius.

16. I.e., his teacher Confucius.

praise nor blame can add to or subtract from him in the least. This is what is called a person whose intrinsic virtuosities are whole and intact! As for me, I am just someone tossed about on the wind and waves.”

When they returned to Lu, he told the story to Confucius. But Confucius said, “That guy is just a bogus practitioner of the arts of Mr. Chaotic Blob. He knows their oneness, but does not know their twoness; he knows the first step but not the second step.^f He orders what is internal but does not order what is external. But to shine with pure white light to the point of entering the primal plainness, non-doing to the point of returning to the unhewn, embodying the inborn nature to the point of clasping the imponderable spirit to oneself, but thereby playing one’s way through the vulgar everyday world—that would really be something worth being astonished over! As for the actual arts of Mr. Chaotic Blob, how could either you or I be in any position to recognize such things?”

Earnest Daze was heading eastward toward the Great Chasm when he ran into Garden Breeze on the shore of the Eastern Sea. Garden Breeze asked, “Where are you going?”

Earnest Daze answered, “I am going to the Great Chasm.”

“What will you do there?”

“The Great Chasm is something that can be poured into without ever being filled, ladled from without ever running dry.¹⁷ I’m going to play around in that.”

Garden Breeze said, “Do you have no concerns about the ordinary people, all the normal multitude of ordinary folk with their two eyes set side by side? I’d like to hear you speak about sagely government.”

Earnest Daze said, “Sagely government? Allot posts according to fitness, give promotions according to ability. Know thoroughly each man’s disposition and deeds and allow him to do what he does well. Then all will act and speak spontaneously from what is in themselves, and yet everyone in the empire will be transformed. Then with even a flick of the hand or a tilt of the face from you, all the people from the four directions are sure to come to you. This is what is called sagely government.”

“I’d like to hear about the overall virtuoso.”

“An overall virtuoso is someone who dwells without thought, moves without calculation, harbors no ideas of right and wrong or beautiful and ugly. Benefiting all within the four seas is his only pleasure. Providing for everyone is his only peace. How sorrowful he seems, like an infant who has lost his mother! How bewildered, like a traveler who has lost his way! He has more than enough wealth for his own use but doesn’t know where it has come from. He has enough to eat and drink, but doesn’t know how he got it. Such is the appearance of a virtuoso.”

“I would like to hear about the Spirit Man.”

17. The same phrase appears verbatim in Chapter 2, describing the knowledge of the Course that is not a course, p. 18.

“Mounting the imponderable spirit and riding on the radiance, together with his own physical body he is completely obliterated and gone.¹⁸ This is precisely how he shines broadly on all things, fully developing his own allotment of life and fully realizing his own dispositions. Joy then comes to heaven and earth and all cares dissolve away completely. All things then return to their own true dispositions. This is called Vanishing into the Chaos.”

Ghostless Gate and Redspread Fullproof were observing the troops of King Wu when the latter said, “He is certainly no match for that man of the Yu clan.¹⁹ That is why he has encountered this trouble.”

Ghostless Gate asked, “Was everything in the empire already well ordered when that man of the Yu clan came to order it? Or was it after it was in disarray that he ordered it?”

Redspread Fullproof said, “If your hope is to order everything in the empire, the man like that of the Yu clan is not even worth considering. That man applied medicine to wounds as if offering a wig to a bald man, doctoring when the sick come demanding it, a ‘filial son’ out picking medicinal herbs to repair the health of his ‘adoring father,’ looking miserable all the while—that is something a real sage would be ashamed to do. In the age of the full realization of the intrinsic virtuosities, the worthy are not esteemed and the able are not employed. Those above are like the upper branches of a tree, and the ordinary people are like wild deer below. They are upright and proper without knowing it is ‘responsible conduct,’ love and care for one another without knowing it is ‘humankindness,’ are true without knowing it is ‘loyalty,’ reliable without knowing it is ‘trustworthiness.’ They have effects on one another just by obliviously wriggling around, never considering themselves to be doing anyone any favors. Thus they go their ways but leave no trace, doing their deeds but leaving no record.”

Filial children who do not flatter their parents and loyal ministers who are not sycophantic to their rulers are the greatest of ministers and children. When a child agrees with everything his parents say and approves of everything they do, even common opinion calls him an inferior child. When a minister agrees with everything a ruler says and approves of all his actions, even common opinion calls him an inferior minister. But they do not understand that the same should be applied in all such cases, should apply to common opinion itself! For when a person affirms as true whatever common opinion affirms as true and approves as good whatever common opinion approves as good, common opinion somehow fails to call that person a sycophant and a flatterer. Does that mean that common opinion is of greater dignity than any parent and more to be respected than any ruler? Call a man a flatterer and he flushes with anger; call him a sycophant and he boils with rage—and yet he remains a sycophant and a flatterer to the end of his days, weaving metaphors and embellishing figures of speech so as to gather a crowd, never

18. *Sic.*

19. The sage-emperor Shun.

offending them from beginning to end, from root to branch. He dresses in his hanging robes, displaying his fine colors, adjusting his appearance and expression, trying to win the favor of the whole world—how is it that he does not call himself a sycophant and a flatterer?

To follow others, going along with their ideas of right and wrong, and yet claim not to be one of the crowd—that is the height of foolishness. But someone who knows he is a fool is not the biggest fool, just as someone who knows he is confused is not so greatly confused. The greatly confused are those who will never get free of confusion to the end of their days, and the biggest fools are those who never become aware of their foolishness. When three people are walking together and one of them is lost, they can still reach their destination. This is a small confusion. But if two of them are lost, they will just exhaust themselves without ever getting anywhere, because the majority are confused. At the present time, the whole world is confused, and though I may earnestly wish and pray otherwise, it would do no good. Is it not tragic?

Great music makes no impression on the ears of villagers, but play them “Snap the Willow” or “The Magnificent Flowers” and they will light up with pleasure. Thus it is that lofty speech finds no quarter in the minds of the mass of men, and in the end the utmost speech is no longer even spoken: vulgar conventional speech finally wins out. Because of the clanging of two earthenware pots, the fine tone of a single bronze bell is drowned out, and so we will never get where we are trying to go. Just so is the whole world now drowning in confusion, and though I may fervently wish and pray otherwise, how could that do any good? To know that it does no good and yet still insist on doing it—that would be just adding one additional confusion. It is better to let it go and push no more. So I shall push no more. For to what was that lament of mine comparable? To a leper woman who gives birth in the middle of the night, hurrying in great agitation to find a torch so she can take a look at the newborn, fearing only that it might resemble herself.⁶

When a hundred-year-old tree is chopped apart to make ritual vessels and painted in lovely greens and yellows, the detritus is thrown in a ditch. If you compare the ritual vessel with the detritus in the ditch, they undoubtedly differ in terms of their beauty and ugliness; but they are alike in having lost their inborn nature. Robber Zhi and men like Zeng Shen and Shi Yu undoubtedly differ in the righteousness of their conduct,²⁰ but they are equal in having lost their inborn nature.

There are five ways to thus lose one’s inborn nature. First, the five esteemed colors mess up the eyes so that they can no longer see well. Second, the five esteemed tones mess up the ears so that they can no longer hear well. Third, the five esteemed fragrances infiltrate the nose, besieging and irritating the brow. Fourth, the five esteemed flavors sully the mouth, diseasing and impairing it. Fifth, preferences and dislikes unsettle the heart and mind, making the inborn nature flighty and unstable. All these five things are harmful to the life in us.

20. Yi. Elsewhere translated as “responsible conduct,” “responsibility,” “duty,” “justice.” See Glossary.

So what the Yangist and Mohists think they have attained, setting themselves apart and straining as if on tiptoe, is not what I call attainment. When what they have attained is only their own confinement, can that be called an attainment? If so, we may say that a caged dove or owl has also attained something. Their likes and dislikes of external sights and sounds make woodchips, detritus, of what is internal to them, while externally they constrain their bodies with their leather caps, their feathered bonnets, their tablets of authority and their long ritual girdles. Thus they become inwardly stuffed full with their confining barricades of these woodchips, while outwardly they are bound by heavy cords, and yet there they are, bound up in their cords all bright-eyed and cheery, thinking they have achieved something great. If so, then criminals with chained arms or manacled fingers, or tigers and leopards caught in sacks and cages, can also be said to have really achieved something great!

ENDNOTES

- A. A double translation. See “Notes on the Translation.”
- B. Replacing 修 with 近, as Wang Yu reports appears in one manuscript version, and adding to the end of this phrase the characters 各有所具, as in the parallel passage in *Huainanzi*, “Yuandaopian.”
- C. Reading 成思 as a garbling of 來累, as suggested by Sun Yirang, hence as isomorphic with the parallel passage in Chapter 7 (p. 69).
- D. Following those manuscripts that have *wen* 菀 for *mian* 勉.
- E. A double translation. See “Notes on the Translation.”
- F. A double translation. See “Notes on the Translation.”
- G. Following the interpretation of Xuan Ying: my pushing to end confusion is one more confusion, so I am just afraid that the world is like myself, confused and controlling—just as the leper’s only fear is that her child is also a leper.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Heaven's Course

Heaven's course is to circulate without accumulation, and it is thus that all the ten thousand things come to completion. An emperor's course is to circulate without accumulation, and it is thus that all the empire coalesces around him. A sage's course is to circulate without accumulation, and it is thus that all within the four seas yield before him. Clear-eyed toward Heaven, unblocked in sagacity, coursing freely in every direction through all the intrinsic virtuosity of a true king or emperor, he does what he does spontaneously, all oblivious, for what he experiences is never anything but stillness. Yet the sage is not still because he thinks it is *good* to be still. He is still simply because nothing in the world is sufficient to disrupt his mind.

When still, water reflects back a clear image of even the whiskers and the eyebrows, and the evenness of its surface is a standard of levelness for even the greatest carpenter. If stillness makes water so bright and clear, how much will it do so for the kernel of imponderable spirit¹ within us! The stillness of a sage's mind is a looking glass for heaven and earth, a mirror for the ten thousand things. This emptiness and stillness, this placidity and flavorlessness, this silence and quiescence, this non-doing² is the even level of heaven and earth, the full realization of the Course and its intrinsic powers. Thus emperors, kings, and sages all find their rest there. Being at rest, they empty, and once emptied the actual comes to fill them. To be filled with the actual in this way is to take one's place in relationship with all things.³ Being empty, they become still, and once still they spring into motion. One who moves thus always succeeds. Being still, they non-do, and once thoroughly non-doing all demands fall rather on the busy-bodies. Thus does non-doing bring contentment and ease. Worry and sorrow can find no place in those who are content and at ease, and the years of their lives are many.

For this emptiness and stillness, this placidity and flavorlessness, this silence and quiescence, this non-doing—this is the root of all things. Understanding this

1. 精神 *Jingshen*. See Glossary.

2. *Wuwei*. See Glossary.

3. Xi Tong cites a textual variant in some manuscripts, giving *bei* 備 in place of *lun* 倫. This would give a meaning along the lines of the following: "At rest, they become empty. From their emptiness comes fullness, and this fullness is their completeness."

and using it to face south was what made Yao the emperor he was. Understanding this and using it to face north was what made Shun the imperial subject he was. When applied in a high position, it is the virtuosity of true emperors, kings, and Sons of Heaven. When applied in a low position, it is the course of hidden sages and uncrowned kings. When dwelling in retirement and wandering at leisure, it is through this that the deference of the gentlemen of the rivers, seas, mountains, and forests is won. And when actively bringing comfort to the world, it is through this that great deeds are done, fame is achieved, and the world is unified. As stillness it makes one a sage and as movement it makes one a king. Non-doing, one is yet honored. Unhewn and unadorned, there is yet no one in the world who can compete with such beauty.

To clearly understand the intrinsic powers of Heaven and Earth is what is called the great root and the great source. This is to harmonize with Heaven. Applying it to bring all in the world equally into accord is to harmonize with humanity. Harmonizing with humanity produces the music, the joy,⁴ of humanity. Harmonizing with Heaven produces the music, the joy, of Heaven.

Zhuangzi said, "This teacher of mine! This teacher of mine! Grinding up all of the ten thousand things, yet without being violent! Spreading nourishment to ten thousand generations, yet without being kind! Older than the highest antiquity, yet without being long-lived! Supporting and covering Heaven and Earth, shaping and carving the myriad forms, yet without being skillful!"⁴ This is what is meant by the music, the joy, of Heaven.

Thus it is said, if you have come to know the music and the joy of Heaven, your life is just Heaven's own activity, and your death is just the transformation of all things. When you are still, you share the intrinsic powers of the Yin; when you move, you share the undulations of the Yang. Thus one who knows the music and the joy of Heaven is free of any resentment of Heaven, of any criticism of humans, of any bondage by things, of any punishment from ghosts. Thus we can say that his motion is heaven and his stillness is earth. The instant his mind settles, he finds he is king of the world. Ghosts of the dead do not harass him, and his own living spirit does not weary him. The instant his mind settles, all things yield to him. That is a way of saying that he extends his stillness and emptiness to all of heaven and earth, through all the ten thousand things. This is what is called the music and the joy of Heaven, by which the heart of the sage shepherds all things under Heaven.

The intrinsic virtuosities of true emperors and kings have their source only in heaven and earth, are ruled only by the intrinsic powers of the Course, are constant only in non-doing. Non-doing, one simply makes use of whatever the world offers and still always has more than enough. Doing, one is used by the world and never has enough. This is why the ancients esteemed non-doing above all.

4. Compare the almost identical passage in Chapter 6, p. 62.

But when those above are non-doing and those below are non-doing as well, those below exert the same intrinsic powers as those above. If those below exert the intrinsic powers of those above, they cannot be their subjects. And if those below engage in doing, but those above also engage in doing, those above share in the same course as those below, and if they are sharing in the same course as those below, they cannot be their lords. So those above must be non-doing, served by what the world offers, while those below must engage in doing, being of service to the world. This is their unchanging course, allowing no replacement. Thus those who ruled the world in ancient times did not make any plans for themselves, even when their understanding encompassed all of heaven and earth. They did not explain themselves, even when their rhetorical skill was capable of minutely carving out the ten thousand things. They did not do anything themselves, even when their abilities outstripped all within the four seas.

Heaven does no producing of things, yet the ten thousand things transform. Earth does no growing of things, yet the ten thousand things are nourished. Emperors and kings do nothing, engage only in non-doing, yet the deeds of the world get accomplished. Thus it is said, there is nothing more imponderably spiritual than Heaven, nothing more richly endowed than Earth, nothing vaster than true emperors and kings. That is why it is said that the intrinsic virtuosities of true emperors and kings are a counterpart of heaven and earth. This is the Course that makes heaven and earth their chariot, makes the ten thousand things their galloping team, and makes all manner of people functionaries in their service.

The root lies with those above while the trivial secondary branchings lie with those below. The essential depends on the ruler, the minutiae depend on his officers. The deployment of the three armies and the five hosts is a mere derivative branch of the intrinsic virtuosities. Benefitting and harming with rewards and punishments, inflicting the five penalties, is a mere derivative branch of real education. Ritual, law, standards, procedures, the detailed comparison of nominal duties with actual performance, these are all mere derivative branches of real governance. The tones of bells and drums, the display of feathered flags and banners, these are mere derivative branches of real music, real joy. Weepings and wailings of various intensities, coarse straw and white hempen garments in their various gradations, these are mere derivative branches of real grief. These five kinds of derivative branches should only be taken up if combined with the circulation of the pure kernel of imponderable spirit within us, with the stirrings of the mind's own arts. For there were indeed among the ancients those who engaged the study of these derivative branches, but never did they make them primary.

The ruler precedes, the subjects follow. The father precedes, the sons follow. The elder brother precedes, the younger brothers follow. The elder precedes, the younger follows. The male precedes, the female follows. The husband precedes, the wife follows. The hierarchies of honored and lowly, first and following, are the activities of heaven and earth, and thus the sage takes their image as a model. Heaven is exalted, earth is lowly; such are the positions of the illuminations and spirits. Spring and summer precede, autumn and winter follow; such is the

sequence of the four seasons. In the transformation and production of the ten thousand things, each bud and swath has its own form. In the battle of flourishing and decay, each transformation and change finds its flow. For heaven and earth are the most imponderably spiritual of all things, and yet they, too, have their order of precedence between exalted and lowly, first and last; how much more so must these be present in the Course of humankind! In the ancestral temple, we honor our relatives. In the royal court, we honor rank. In the villages and towns, we honor age. In working at tasks, we honor ability. These are the sequential orderings of the Great Course. To speak of the Course and yet to critique its sequential orderings is to negate the Course itself. If we speak of the Course and yet negate its guidance, how can we take such a Course?

For this reason, the ancients who clearly understood the Great Course first got clear about Heaven, and next went on to the Course and its intrinsic powers. Once they were clear on the Course and its intrinsic powers, they next went on to humankindness and responsible conduct. Once they were clear on human-kindness and responsible conduct, they next went on to maintaining allotted role-divisions. When those were clear, they moved on to the relation of objects to their names, of actual performance to prescribed tasks. When that was clear, they moved on to assigning duties accordingly. When that was clear, they moved on to the examination and evaluation of duties performed. When that was clear, they moved on to approval and disapproval, right and wrong. When that was clear, they moved on to rewards and punishments. When that was clear, both the dull and the intelligent were put in their appropriate positions, both the noble and base occupied their proper ranks, the humane and able as well as those of lesser talents got to do what built upon their own true attributes. Divisions of duties were made always according to ability, works were required always according to the roles so assigned. This is how the ancients served those above them and shepherded those beneath them, how they ordered things and cultivated their own persons. They had no use for wisdom and planning, for they always relegated it all to the Heavenly in them. This is called the Great Peace, the most perfect form of governance.

The *Document* says, “There are objects and there are names, actual performances as against prescribed tasks.” So the ancients did indeed have things like objects and names, performances measured against prescribed tasks, but this was not what they considered primary. For when the ancients spoke of the Great Course, it was only after these four other steps that they considered names and objects, jobs and performances, and it was only after these eight other steps that they had anything to say about punishments and rewards. If from the very beginning they had suddenly spoken of name and object, job and performance, it would have meant they did not know the proper root. If from the very beginning they had suddenly spoken of rewards and punishments, it would have meant they did not know the proper start. Such words that turn the Course upside down, theories so at variance with the Course, are what put one under the rulership of others—how could they be used to rule others? If from the beginning they spoke of jobs and performance and punishments and rewards, that would be knowledge of the

tools of governance, but not of the Course of governance. Such tools can be of some service in the world, but can be of no service in putting the world at one's service! Such persons are mere disputers, men of a single corner. The ancients did have ritual, laws, standards, procedures, job requirements, and job performances, compared and collated in all their minutiae, but these were only the means used by the inferiors to serve their superiors, not the means by which the superiors shepherded the inferiors.

In ancient times, Shun asked Yao, "How do you, the Heavenly monarch, employ your heart and your mind?"

Yao said, "I stay free of arrogance in my treatment of the helpless, and I do not abandon the poor. I feel the pain of those who die, taking care of their orphaned children and pitying their widowed wives. This is how I employ my heart and my mind."

Shun said, "That's very pretty and all, but it is not yet great."

Yao said, "What then?"

Shun said, "With the intrinsic virtuosity of the Heavenly, even what is put forth is tranquil and still. The sun and moon shine down and the four seasons come and go, just as day and night have their regular sequence, just as the clouds drift along and then the rain comes forth."

Yao said, "Then I have been all gummed up, stuck in my own pointless agitations! You are merged with the Heavenly, while I have only been merged with the human."

It was heaven and earth that the ancients considered really great; that is what the Yellow Emperor, Yao, and Shun shared in admiring. What did those kings of ancient times ever actually do? To them it was all just heaven and earth and nothing more.

Confucius was planning to go west to deposit his works in the archives of Zhou. Zilu advised him, saying, "I have heard that the officer in charge of keeping the archives is one Lao Dan,⁵ who has given up his office and retired to private life. If my master wishes to deposit his works, he should go to see that man and follow his advice."

Confucius said, "Excellent idea!"

He then went off to see Lao Dan. But Lao Dan would not permit the deposit. So Confucius tried to persuade him, offering his interpretation of the Twelve Classics. Lao Dan interrupted him, saying, "Too diffuse. Get to the point."

Confucius said, "The essential point lies in humankindness and responsible conduct."

Lao Dan, "Tell me: are humankindness and responsible conduct the inborn nature of man?"

Confucius said, "Yes, they are. Without humankindness the noble man cannot complete himself, and without responsible conduct he cannot live. Humankindness

5. Laozi, legendary author of the *Daodejing*.

and responsible conduct are thus the inborn nature of the Genuine Human. What further could he engage himself in?"

Lao Dan said, "Tell me, what do you mean by humankindness and responsible conduct?"

Confucius said, "To concern oneself about the happiness of all living things in the depths of one's heart, to love and care for everyone all-inclusively and without bias, this is the true character of humankindness and responsible conduct."

Lao Dan said, "Ach! That's pretty much what all you latter-day people say.⁶ To love and care for everyone all-inclusively, isn't that rather far-fetched? And to be without bias—that is itself a bias! You, sir, seem to desire that all in the world are never devoid of your shepherding! Well, heaven and earth have their own inherent regularity, just as the sun and moon have their own inherent brightness, the stars and constellations have their own inherent arrangement, the birds and beasts have their own inherent ways of flocking together, the trees and plants have their own inherent ways of standing themselves in place. You, sir, must release each to its own intrinsic powers and let them proceed accordingly, push each forward only on its own course, for that is already perfection, already a kind of arrival. What use is there then to go on with this militant advocacy of humankindness and responsible conduct, avidly pounding a drum for battle with the vehemence of a man 'seeking his lost son'?^B Ach! You, sir, are just disordering the inborn natures of human beings!"

Gent Wholeweave went to see Laozi, asking, "I had heard that you, sir, are a sage. I have thus not shirked the long journey that brought me here, wanting only to see you, finding new lodgings a hundred nights in a row and walking until the soles of my feet were calloused, never daring to rest. But now that I have met you, I see that you are no sage! It is as if the rat-hives are brimming over with your discarded leftover food, while you abandon to their own devices those who are lost on the side roads. That shows a real lack of humankindness. Here you have endless provisions of both the raw and the cooked stretched out before you, and yet you hoard and gather it to yourself, giving it no recognizable shape."^C

Laozi was silent, giving no reply.

Gent Wholeweave came back the next day to see him again, saying, "Yesterday I was feeling so stingingly critical of you, but now I have settled back into a more balanced state of mind. Why is it so?"

Laozi said, "I too take myself to be someone without the slightest skill, knowledge, spirituality, or sagacity. If you had yesterday called me a cow, I would have said I was a cow. If you had called me a horse, I would have said I was a horse. If one is actually a certain way and yet refuses to acknowledge it when called by that name, one is harmed not once but twice. But I was just yielding as I am always yielding; I did not yield because there was something in particular worth yielding to."

6. Alternately, "There is danger in the last phrase," or, conversely, "That last phrase was almost right."

Gent Wholeweave, tracing his steps, waddled backward out of Laozi's shadow, and then advanced, asking, "How should I cultivate myself?"

Laozi said, "Your appearance is like a steep and forbidding embankment, your eyes are aggressive, your forehead is like another set of cheekbones, your mouth growls and roars, your demeanor is self-righteous, like a horse pulled up short by its tether. When you move, you are constrained; when you put something forth, it flies out like a trigger has been tripped; you examine and evaluate everything, clever and artful, glaring and overbearing. This is why you give such an impression of utter fraudulence. If a person like you were found out in the border regions, he would surely be branded a thief!"

The Master said, "The Course has no ending even in what is most vast, nor is it absent even in what is most minute. Thus are all the ten thousand things present in it, thus is it present in all things.^p How broad and vast! There is nothing it does not include and accept. How deep! It is impossible to fathom it. Whether governing by punishments or through the influence emanating from one's intrinsic virtuosities, whether exuding humankindness or practicing responsible conduct, all are mere derivative branches of the imponderable spirit. So who but an Utmost Person can settle any of it in some definite place? The Utmost Person possesses all the world—is it not vast? And yet it is not enough to bind him. Though all the people of the world may be struggling over the handles of power, he does not join in; he discerns what alone is unborrowed, so he is not swept away by the hunt for profit. By developing to the utmost the genuineness of things, he is able to hold to their root. Thus he puts heaven and earth outside himself, casts off the ten thousand things, his imponderable spirit forever unconfined. Unobstructed in the Course, merging with its intrinsic powers, he puts humankindness and responsible conduct out to pasture and allows ritual and music in only as temporary guests. For the heart and mind of the Utmost Person have a firm foundation on which to settle.

"What this age values and takes as its guide, its course, is written text. But written texts are no more than words. Words do have something valuable about them: their meanings and ideas. But those meanings and ideas come from something else, and what they come from cannot be transmitted in words. And yet the people of this age, due to the high value they put on words, transmit only the writings. Though this age so esteems them, I do not regard them as worthy of esteem. What these people value about them is not what is really valuable about them. For whatever we can see by looking is only shapes and forms. Whatever we can hear by listening is only names and sounds. Alas! This age takes shapes, forms, names, and sounds as sufficient to attain the reality of that something else. But shapes, forms, names and sounds are ultimately not sufficient to get at what is real there. Thus 'those who know do not speak, and those who speak do not know.'⁷ But how could the present age understand this!"

7. Cf. *Daodejing* 81.

Duke Huan was reading up in his pavilion, while Wheelwright Flatty was hewing a wheel below. Putting down his hammer and chisel, he ascended and asked Duke Huan, “Sir, may I ask what sort of words you are perusing?”

The duke said, “The words of the sages.”

“Are those sages still alive?”

“They are dead,” said the duke.

“Then what you are perusing is no more than the dregs and dust of the ancients.”

Duke Huan said, “Does a wheelwright dare pass judgment on what his ruler reads? If you can explain yourself, well and good. If not, you shall die.”

Wheelwright Flatty said, “I am looking at it from the point of view of my own profession. In hewing a wheel, if I spin slowly and make the hub too loose, it attaches easily to the crossbar but not firmly. If I spin quickly and make it too tight, I have to struggle to attach it, and it still never really gets all the way in.^E I have to make it not too loose and not too tight, my hand feeling it and my mind constantly responsive to it. I cannot explain this with my mouth, and yet there is a certain knack to the procedure. I cannot even get my own son to grasp it, so even he has no way to learn it from me. Thus I am already seventy years old and still here busily hewing wheels as an old man. The ancients died, and that which they could not transmit died along with them. So I say that what you, my lord, are perusing is just the dregs and dust of the ancients, nothing more!”

ENDNOTES

A. 樂 A double translation. See “Notes on the Translation.” The same character means both “joy” and “music”; the translation attempts to preserve both readings at once, assuming that the double meaning is intentional, if metaphorical.

B. This seems to be a phrase used in military strategy to denote an attitude of extreme vehemence. Cf. the “Gongquan” chapter of the *Weiliaoli*: “Seek out the enemy as if seeking your lost son; attack the enemy as if saving a drowning man.” Lao Dan’s twist, bringing the strategists’ repurposing of moral-humane fervor as a trope for battle lust back to critique the morality itself, is a rhetorical tour de force. Thanks to Professor Ting-Mien Lee of the University of Macau for pointing out the connection.

C. The exact nature of Shicheng Qi’s critique is quite difficult to construe. Taken literally and without character substitution, it is an abrupt complaint about Laozi’s wastefulness, stinginess, unkempt habits, greed, and meanness to his otherwise unknown sister: “Your leftover food is cast into the rat-infested piles of earth, and yet you sent away your younger sister. That was inhumane. Cooked and uncooked food remain unconsumed before you, and yet you hoard and pile it up without limit.” The translation here, following Lu Deming’s interpretative intervention concerning 妹 (=末) and Ma Qichang’s concerning 無涯 (=無形), attempts to construe the whole remark as an extended metaphor about Laozi’s unkind refusal to make his

teachings more user-friendly, as a benevolent and skillful sage and teacher would, instead letting his bounties of wisdom go to waste, remaining inaccessible to those still lost in superficialities.

D. A double translation. See “Notes on the Translation.”

E. Following the gloss provided by Wang Fuzhi’s son, Wang Yu.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Spinning of the Heavens

The heavens: are they spinning? The earth: is it standing still? The sun, the moon: are they vying back and forth for position?

What is in charge of spreading all this before us? What nets and tethers all of this together? What remains itself unoccupied by any activity and yet shoves all this around to make it happen?

Could it be: there is some mechanism that cannot help itself?

Could it be: they spin and turn and are unable to stop themselves?

Do the clouds make rain?

Does the rain make clouds?

What so lavishly puts all this forth?

What remains itself unoccupied by any activity and yet in a symphony of lascivious joy goads it all on?

Winds rise in the north, head east, head west, rise as if vacillating back and forth. What is inhaling them, exhaling them? What remains itself unoccupied by any activity and yet gusts through and scatters it all in every direction? I venture to ask why it all happens!

That's when the shaman Allseasons beckons.^A "Come, I will tell you!" he says. "Heaven has Six Extremities,¹ and Five Constants.² When emperors and kings accord with them, they are able to govern well, but when they violate them, there is disaster. The things described in the Nine Divisions of the Luo writings^B bring good governance to perfection, and virtuosity to completion. Thus they surveil the territories under their possession, and all in the world supports them! They may be called the supreme emperors!"

1. According to Cheng Xuanying, the same as the six coordinates 六合: the four directions plus up and down. But see note B.

2. 五常 *Wuchang*. According to Cheng Xuanying, the same as the five agents 五行: wood (vegetable), fire, soil, metal (mineral), water. In later times this term comes to refer to the five Confucian virtues (humankindness, ritual, good faith, responsible conduct, and wisdom), with which the five agents are often correlated. See note B.

Washaway,³ the Grand Overseer of Shang,⁴ asked Zhuangzi about [Human-] kindness.

“Tigers and wolves are kind,”^c Zhuangzi said.

“What do you mean?”

“The parents and children among them feel mutual affection—can you say they feel no kinship with their kind, that they’re unkind?”

“But I am asking about *perfect* kindness.”⁵

“To really reach the state of kinship, perfect kindness, is to feel no kinship with anyone.”

“I have heard that without the feeling of kinship there is no love, and without love there is no filial piety. Surely perfect kindness cannot be lacking in filial piety!”

“Not so,” Zhuangzi said. “Reaching perfect kinship, perfect kindness, is a lofty thing; it is quite impossible to talk about it in terms of filiality. And by this I don’t mean it goes beyond filiality, but just the contrary: it does not even reach filiality. When a traveler to the south reaches the city of Ying, he may turn around to gaze northward, but he will never be able to see Mt. Ming in the north. It is just too far away. Hence I say it is easier to be filial out of respect than out of love. And it is easier to be filial out of love than to forget your parents. It is easier to forget your parents than to get them to forget you. It is easier to get them to forget you than to forget the whole world. It is easier to forget the whole world than to get the whole world to forget you. Real virtuosity like this leaves behind even Yao and Shun: not *doing* anything at all, but bestowing its nourishing bounty on ten thousand generations, though no one in the world is ever aware of it. How could this be matched by those who just go around mouthing off and sighing about kindness and filiality? All such things as filiality and fraternity, humankindness and responsible conduct, loyalty and faithfulness, resoluteness and integrity—these are all just ways of forcing yourself to act, thereby enslaving your own intrinsic virtuosities. They merit no special esteem. Hence it is said, ‘The noblest are those who scorn even the highest rank of the nation; the wealthiest are those who abandon even the greatest riches in the nation; the most ambitious discard even fame and honor.’ Thus does their Course run unmuddied.”

Fullyformed⁶ of Northgate said to the Yellow Emperor, “When I heard you perform the Xianchi music in the wilds of Dongting, I was at first terrified. As it continued, I became weary and lethargic, and by the end I was in a state of total confusion—cast into chaos, speechless, unable to get a hold of myself!”

3. 蕩.

4. The state of Song, of which Zhuangzi was a native, territory of the descendants of the deposed Shang dynasty imperial family.

5. 至仁 *Zhiren*. The first character can mean both “to arrive” and “perfect,” which is relevant to Zhuangzi’s ensuing answer.

6. *Cheng*. See Glossary.

The emperor said, “That’s just as you should be! I performed it by means of what is distinctively human but attuned it to the Heavenly, advancing it in terms of ritual responsibilities yet rooting it in the Great Clarity. For perfect music—which is perfect joy—must start out by resonating with human affairs while also according with the inherent structures of the Heavenly.⁷ It must run its course through all the Five Virtues⁸ but still accord with what is unforced in things, their spontaneous self-affirmations.⁹ Only then can it concordantly adjust the four seasons within it, bringing all things into its great harmony. The four seasons arrive in it one after the other, and all things are produced accordingly. Now flourishing, now declining, the peaceful and warlike in it group into their own regularities. Sometimes clear, sometimes turbid, the yin and the yang adjust to each other to form a harmony. The sound becomes an onrush of light, stirring all the hibernating insects to life. I startle them up with sudden thunder and lightning, without overture or conclusion, without head or tail, now dead, now living, now rising, now falling. Invariable only in its endlessness, no single specific thing in it can be depended upon. That’s why you were terrified.

“I then continued to play out that harmony of yin and yang, brightened with the light of the sun and moon. The sound was now a capability to either expand or contract, able to either soften or harden freely. That was now what was equal and the same in every transformation, controlled by no constant precedent or purpose; coming to a valley it perfectly filled the valley, coming to a pit it perfectly filled the pit. But in fitting any opening, it yet maintained its imponderable spirit, taking on the measure of each thing it encountered. It sounded out all liltingly lovely, making impressions all loftily lit, thus enabling the ghosts and spirits to remain stationed in their darkness and also the heavenly bodies to remain moving along in their proper proportions. I let it stop and roost in every limitation, but also let it flow unstoppably beyond each of them. You tried to find a way to conceive it but could not understand it; you looked for it but could not see it; you chased after it but could not catch up with it. All at once you were standing in the midst of a Course that opens out in all directions, leaning against a withered tree and inadvertently moaning along. Your eyes met with frustration in their quest to see it, your strength was defeated in its attempt to catch it. But since the self in you could not catch up with it, your body filled the expanses of space, following along with all its serpentine changes. This is why you were wearied to the point of such lethargy.

“I went on to play out these unwearying sounds, adjusting them now to the self-so mandates of things.⁹ The tones then mingled and chased each other, forests of sounds springing up in clumps but taking no identifiable form, spreading into activity without pulling one another along; too dim and obscure to settle into any

7. 天理 *Tianli*. Cf. Chapter 3, p. 30, note E, and see Glossary, *Li*.

8. Traditionally understood to refer to humankindness, responsible conduct, ritual propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness. This unexplained reference, assuming prior familiarity with the term, suggests a late Warring States dating for this passage.

9. 自然之命 *ziran zhi ming*. For *ziran*, see note D. For *ming*, see Glossary.

definitely identifiable tones. The music sprang into motion from no specifiable place, rooted in the recesses of indistinction and oblivion. Some would call it death, some would call it life; some would call it fruit, some would call it flower—moving, flowing, scattering, escaping, controlled by no unvarying tone. People of the world are thus cast into doubt about it, and can only verify its existence by turning to the sages. For a sage is someone who understands what kind of realness it has and accomplishes all through such mandates: a Heavenly impulsion that remains forever unrevealed and yet includes thereby the workings of all the five tones at their many tasks.⁹ Just this is called the Heavenly Music, the Heavenly Joy, the wordlessness in which the heart finds its delight. Thus we have the song of praise sung by the man of the Youyan clan:¹⁰ ‘Listening for it, I hear no sound; looking for it, I see no shape. It fills heaven and earth, encompassing the world’s outermost limits.’ You want to listen, but can find to place to receive it, nowhere to make contact with it. That’s why you were confused.

“Music, joy, begins as terror, and so it always comes at first as a calamity. I follow up on that by inducing lethargy, because of which it escapes you. Then I finish it off with confusion, for that is what brings the foolishness. When the foolishness comes upon you, you are coursing in the Course. For then the Course can carry you along, keeping you right there with it wherever it goes.”

Confucius was traveling in the west in Wei. Yan Yuan asked Maestro Jin, “How do you think the Master’s journey is going?”

Maestro Jin said, “It’s such a shame! Your master is finished!”

Yan Yuan said, “How so?”

Maestro Jin said, “Before a straw dog¹¹ is set out for the ceremony, it is kept in a bamboo box and wrapped in embroidered cloths, and the representative of the dead and the priest engage in self-mortifying fasts to prepare themselves to receive it. After the ceremony is over, however, people trample over its head and back; then the custodian collects the remains for incineration, and that’s the end of it. If someone were to gather it back into its bamboo box and again wrap it in its embroidered cloths, taking it home with him and setting it above him as he lived out his days and sleeping beneath it at night, he would not only be disturbed by restless dreams, but would certainly be again and again terrorized by blinding nightmares. Now your master here has gathered up the straw dogs once set out by the former kings, gathering you disciples to live your days and sleep your nights beneath them. That is why a tree was cut down on him in Song and his footprints were wiped away in Wei, why he was thwarted in Shang and Zhou—are these not the restless dreams he got as a result? Then he was caught between Chen and Cai, at death’s door after getting no cooked food for a week—was that not a blinding nightmare? For traveling on water, there is nothing better than a boat. But for traveling on land, there is nothing better than a carriage. If you tried your

10. The sage-emperor Shennong, “the divine farmer,” inventor of agriculture in distant antiquity.

11. Cf. *Daodejing* 5.

whole life long to push a boat along on dry land because it's a good vehicle for the water, you would not get it to budge even a few feet. Are not the past and the present as different as water and land? Are not the ways of Zhou and Lu like the boat and the carriage? Now he tries to practice the ways of Zhou in the state of Lu—that is like pushing a boat over dry land: a lot of toilsome labor with no result, which will surely bring calamitous harm to his own person. He has not learned the methodless tradition, which responds to all things without being thwarted by any of them.

“And by the way, have you alone never seen a well-sweep? When the end is pulled it lowers, when released it rises again. It lets itself be pulled up or down by a person; it does not try to pull the person up or down, and thus whether it is up or down, it causes no offense to the person. Similarly, the rituals and principles and standards and measures used by the Three Sovereigns and the Five Emperors are not esteemed because they were all the same, but because of the good governance they produced in each case. They are like hawthorns, pears, oranges, and grapefruits—their flavors are completely different and opposed to each other, but all of them are pleasing to the tongue. Thus rituals, principles, standards, and codes must change in response to the times. If you dress up a monkey in the robes of the Duke of Zhou, it will surely bite and gnaw and rip at them, not satisfied until it has torn them completely off of its body. If we really look at the difference between the past and the future, we see that it is as great as the difference between the monkey and the Duke of Zhou.

“Once the great beauty Xishi had a pain in her chest and went around her neighborhood glaring goggle-eyed at everyone she met. An ugly neighbor saw this and took it to be what was beautiful about her, and so started going around with her hands clutching her chest, giving everyone a goggle-eyed glare. When the rich men of the neighborhood saw her, they shut their doors tightly and refused to go out. When the poor men saw her, they grabbed their wives and children and ran away. This ugly neighbor knew that Xishi's scrunched angry glare was beautiful but she didn't know what made it beautiful. Such a pity! Your master is finished!”

Confucius was fifty-one years old and still had not heard the Course. So he went south to Pei to see Lao Dan.¹² Lao Dan said, “So you have come! I have heard that you are the most worthy man among the people of the north. Have you then attained the Course?”

Confucius said, “Not yet.”

Lao Dan said, “How have you sought it?”

Confucius said, “I sought it in standards and procedures, but even after five years of that I had not yet found it.”

Lao Dan said, “How did you seek it after that?”

“I sought it in the yin and yang, but after twelve years of that I still had not found it.”

12. Laozi, legendary author of the *Daodejing*.

Lao Dan said, “No wonder. If the Course could be presented, every man would present it to his ruler. If the Course could be put forth, every man would put it forth to his kinfolk. If the Course could be told, every man would tell it to his brothers. If the Course could be given, every man would give it to his sons and grandsons. The only reason this cannot happen is that, lacking the right host within to receive it, the Course will not reside inside, and lacking alignment on the outside, it can have no effect. If what comes forth from him will not be received by those who are external to him, the sage puts nothing forth. Yet even though others may have no host within to receive it, the sage conceals nothing within either. Names, ideals are shared public tools; no one person should take for himself too much of them. Humankindness and responsible conduct were the temporary lodging huts of the former kings, suitable for a brief overnight stay but not for a long residence—for as soon as anyone is spotted there, a whole lot of *blaming* begins. The Utmost Persons of old temporarily took up humankindness as a way forward, entrusted themselves for a night to responsible conduct, but only so as to wander in the empty wilds of the far and unfettered, feeding in the fields of the sketchy and approximate, finding their place in the gardens of the unborrowed. To be far and unfettered is non-doing.¹³ To be sketchy and approximate is to find nourishment easily. To possess the unborrowed is to never need to pay anything back. The ancients called this the Play that Gathers the True.

“Those who consider wealth to be a definite good are unable to give up their salaries. Those who consider distinction to be a definite good are unable to give up their fame. Those who love power are unable to give control over to others; they are frightened while they hold onto it and grieved when they let it go. And yet they refuse to reflect even fleetingly on what it is that makes them so unable to give it up. These people are the casualties of Heaven.¹⁴ Hatred and favor, taking and giving, reproof and instruction, giving life and killing—these eight are corrective tools. But only those who comply with the vast transformation without the least blockage are qualified to make use of these tools. Thus it is said, ‘Correction must come from the correct.’ When the heart and mind refuse to acknowledge this, the Heaven-gate does not open.”

Confucius came to see Lao Dan and spoke to him of humankindness and responsible conduct. Lao Dan said, “If you are winnowing grain and the dust gets in your eyes, heaven and earth and the four directions may seem to change positions. If your skin is menaced by mosquitos and flies, it can keep you awake all night. This humankindness and this responsible conduct that you speak of in such baleful tones—they really upset our hearts and minds. There is no greater disorder. If only you could allow all in the world to keep from losing their unheven uncontrived state, my child! Then you could move along simply by releasing yourself to the winds, and stand firm just by absorbing in yourself the totality of all the inherent

13. *Wuwei*. See Glossary.

14. See Chapter 6, p. 60. The implication is that they seem to have been born with this terrible handicap: the inability to escape their own one-sided obsessions.

powers. Then how could you still need to go so heroically about, banging a drum to call for battle with the vehemence of a man seeking his lost son?¹⁵ A snow-goose does not need a daily bath to become white, and a crow does not need a daily tarring to become black. So there is no need to dispute about their uncontrived blackness and whiteness, and whatever prospects they may have to bring fame and honor are not worth disseminating. When the streams dry up, the fish cluster together on the banks, gasping and spitting on one another to keep themselves wet and foamed over. But this is no match for forgetting each other in the rivers and lakes.”¹⁶

When Confucius returned from this meeting with Lao Dan, he did not talk about it for three days. His disciples then asked him, “Master, now you have seen Lao Dan; how would you characterize him?”

Confucius said, “Now, in this man, I have finally seen a dragon. When a dragon gathers itself together, it solidifies as a concrete body, and when it scatters itself, it becomes an emblematic pattern; it rides on the mists of the clouds and nourishes itself on the yin and yang. I just stood there with my mouth open, unable to shut it. How could I characterize someone like Lao Dan?”

Zigong said, “So then there really is a person who can be as still as a corpse and yet manifest like a dragon, sounding out like thunder though silent as an abyss,¹⁷ springing forth into motion just as heaven and earth do? Might it be possible for me also to go see him?”

Thereafter, with an introduction from Confucius, he went to visit Lao Dan. Lao Dan was sitting down in his guest hall with his legs stretched out, and answered faintly, “My years roll on and away. With what warnings would you try to restrain me?”

Zigong said, “The Three Kings and the Five Emperors all governed the world in different ways, but the fame they acquired for it was the same. But you alone do not regard them as sages. Why?”

Lao Dan said, “Come a little closer, child! What do you mean by ‘different ways’?”

He answered, “Yao gave the throne to Shun, Shun gave it to Yu. Yu used his own strength but Tang used the army. King Wen complied with the evil King Zhou and dared not rebel, while his son King Wu rebelled against Zhou, unwilling to submit to him. Thus I said they all employed different ways.”

Lao Dan said, “Come a little closer, child! I will tell you how the Three Emperors and Five Sovereigns ‘ordered the world.’ The Yellow Emperor ordered the world by making the hearts and minds of the people focus on unity, so that when someone didn’t cry at the death of his parents, nobody blamed him. Yao ordered the world by making the people’s hearts and minds all focus on kinship affection, so that when someone killed the killer of his parents, no one blamed him. Shun ordered the world by making the people’s minds focus on competition,

15. See note 2, Chapter 13.

16. Repeating verbatim a line also found in Chapter 6, p. 56.

17. See the almost identical expression in Chapter 11, p. 90.

so that the women would give birth after ten months, but five months later each one of those babies could already speak and before the age of three each had already become a full-on somebody. It was then that people began to die young. Yu ordered the world by causing the people's hearts and minds to focus on making changes, so that leaders had definite intentions and armies obeyed whatever orders they were given, saying that 'to kill a thief is not really murdering a person.'¹⁸ People divided themselves into different types, and each considered his own type the whole world. Thus the world was gripped in great terror, and the Confucians and Mohists arose. It was with their rise that there first came to be the whole idea of ethical roles and relationships, the result being that now men have to take daughters as their wives.¹⁹ What can I say? I tell you, the Three Emperors and Five Sovereigns sure did 'order the world'—well, that is what people call it, but in reality there is no greater disorder than what they brought about. The so-called wisdom²⁰ of the Three Emperors violated the brightness of the sun and moon above and clashed with the pure energy of the mountains and streams below, and brought everything presented by the four seasons crashing down in between. Their wisdom is crueler than a scorpion's tail. Even rarely-sighted beasts in the field have thus become unable to find rest in their own inborn natures and allotments of life. And yet these people regarded themselves as sages. Such shamelessness—is it not shameful?"

Zigong just stood there, unsteady on his feet as if jolted by a kick.

Confucius said to Lao Dan, "I have studied the Six Classics—the *Book of Odes*, the *Book of Documents*, the *Record of Ritual*, the *Classic of Music*, the *Classic of Changes*, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*—for what I consider to be quite a long while, so that now I know them quite thoroughly. I have used this knowledge to explain to seventy-two miscreant rulers the Course of the ancient kings, as well as the footprints left by the ways walked by the Duke of Zhou and the Duke of Shao, and not one of them has put what I teach into practice. How great is the difficulty of convincing human beings! How difficult it is to make the Course known to them!"

Lao Dan said, "It's lucky for all of us that you've never met a ruler who had the wherewithal to bring such 'order' to the world! Those Six Classics are indeed just the stale footprints of the former kings—how could they be that which leaves the footprints? Now your present words are just further footprints. Footprints are produced by the gait, but they are not the gait itself. White herons gaze at each other, and before they move the pupils of their eyes, the transformative power of their fertility has disseminated. The male insect sings into the breeze and the female responds downwind, and with that the transformative power of their

18. This proposition is proposed and defended in the *Mohist Canons*, "Xiao Qu."

19. This could mean either that marrying a woman now requires recognizing her as the daughter of her father and thus entering into the network of familial relationships thereby entailed, or, as Guo Xiang thought, it could be a reference to incest.

20. *Zhi*. See glossary.

fertility has been disseminated. Each type naturally has a male and a female, and thus does the transformative power of their fertility disseminate. The inborn nature of one cannot be exchanged for another; the allotment of life of each cannot be changed; time cannot be stopped; the Course cannot be blocked. If their Course is attained, whatever they do is right. If it is not, whatever they do is wrong.”

After that, Confucius did not leave his house for three months. When he came to see Laozi again, he said, “I get it! Crows and ravens hatch their young, fish exchange milt, every wisp-wasp of a creature however meager is involved in transformation: whenever a younger brother is born, the older brother weeps. For a long time I have failed to be a companion to transformation, failed to be human as a way of participation in transformation. If a person is not a person as a form of participation with transformation, how can he transform others?”

Laozi said, “There you have it, Qiu!”

ENDNOTES

A. Reading 招 as 招, as suggested by Xuan Ying. The name then may be an abbreviated version of the name of the wizard who was stumped by Huzi in Chapter 7.

B. Probably a reference to the “Great Plan” (洪範 *Hongfan*) chapter of the *Shangshu* 尚書, which was linked to the “Luo Inscription,” a numerical magic square arrangement of the numbers 1 to 9 derived from the markings discovered on the back of a tortoise emerging from the Luo River. The eponymous plan, too, was divided into nine items, the first of which is the putatively earliest revelation of precisely the five agents (see note 2 above). The ninth and final item finishes with a reference to “the six extremities,” enumerated not as the six coordinates, but as the six states of extreme misfortune to be avoided: misfortune leading to short lifespan, sickness, worry, poverty, wickedness, and weakness. So the shaman’s reference to “the Six Extremities and the Five Constants” might be a back-to-front shorthand way of indicating the entire nine-point plan disclosed in that text.

C. “Humankindness,” “kind,” “kindness” throughout this passage are all translations of the same word, *ren* 仁. See Glossary. Zhuangzi is playing on the ambiguities of implication built into the semantic range of the word, which means the human sense of kinship with other humans (or, in later Confucianism, with all things), expanded to mean the moral sentiments of humaneness and kindness, but rooting these meanings in the basic denotation of the sense of kinship as such, or being-of-a-kind, or being the exemplar or caretaker of the (human) kind, and thus as intrinsically linked to filial piety.

D. 自然 *Ziran*. A double translation. See “Notes on the Translation.” I take the *ran* in *ziran* here to mean “it is so” both in the sense of “a thing being what it is” and “a claim being correct,” as we see it used also in Chapters 2, 17, and 27. *Ziran* denotes both how things come to be without any external interference (e.g., from the norms of the Five Virtues), and the rightness to themselves entailed in becoming and being that way when judged not by those external norms but by whatever happens to be normal to themselves.

E. Adapting Lu Shuzhi’s interpretation of *wuguan* 五官. Compare *Huainanzi*, “Bingluexun”: “The mutual formation of things is subtle process; only a sage can understand its ultimate

reaches. The drum does not join in the five tones, and thus it is the master of the five tones; water does not join in with the five flavors, and thus it is what adjusts the five flavors to each other. The general does not join into the tasks of the Five Officers (*wuguan* 五官), and thus is the supervisor of the Five Officers.” The five tones are here compared to the multiple officials controlled by the non-doing sage, by the silent or indeterminate tone that belongs to none of them and never appears among them.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Graven Intentions

Committing to their own intentions as if they were engraved in stone, exalting their own practices, isolating themselves from the world, distancing themselves from common customs, grandiloquently holding forth to criticize and disparage others, concerning themselves only with their own loftiness—this is what is to the liking of those distinguished men of the mountains and valleys who are always censuring the world, those who sit like withered trees, those who are drawn to the deep abysses.

Talking all the time about humankindness and responsible conduct, about loyalty and trustworthiness, about reverence and temperance, about deference and yielding, concerning themselves only with the cultivation of their characters—this is what is to the liking of those distinguished men who try to bring peaceful order to the world, those itinerant scholars who are always teaching and instructing others.

Speaking of great achievements to establish great renown, showing proper obeisance to both rulers and ministers, rectifying those of both higher and lower rank, concerning themselves only with government—this is what is to the liking of those distinguished men in the royal courts, who honor their lords and strengthen their states, trying to expand their achievements so that all will be absorbed into their polity.

Heading to marshes and lakes and dwelling in remote areas, going fishing in some quiet hideaway, concerning themselves only with non-doing¹—this is what is to the liking of those distinguished men of the rivers and seas who avoid society and live a life of leisure.

Breathing in and out with puffs and roars, spitting out the old breath to take in the new, hanging like a bear and stretching like a bird, concerning themselves only with health and long life—this is what is to the liking of those distinguished men who manipulate their vital energies, who nourish their bodies in hopes of living as long as old Pengzu.

But to be lofty though without any carved-in-stone intentions, cultivated though without humankindness and responsible conduct, governing though without merit and fame, at leisure though without confinement to the rivers and

1. *Wuwei*. See Glossary.

seas, long-lived though without manipulating the vital energies, forgetting everything yet possessing everything, placidly limitless and yet trailed by every form of beauty—this is the Course of heaven and earth, the intrinsic virtuosity of sages.

Thus it is said that tranquility and placidity, silence and solitude, open space and non-doing, these comprise the even level of heaven and earth, the very stuff of the Course and its intrinsic powers. And thus is it said that what sages do is simply leave off everything and take their rest there. Being at rest in it, they are balanced and at ease. Being balanced and at ease, they are tranquil and placid. Being balanced, at ease, tranquil, and placid, worries and sorrows cannot enter, unwholesome energies cannot infiltrate. Thus their intrinsic virtues remain whole and intact, their imponderable spirits remain unimpaired. And thus is it said that the lives of sages are just Heaven's own activity, and their deaths are the transformation of all things. In their stillness they share the intrinsic powers of the Yin, and in their movement they share the undulations of the Yang.² They do not take the initiative to anticipate either good fortune or bad; they do not respond until touched off, do not move until pressed upon. They spring into activity only when it has become impossible not to. They rid themselves of wisdom and precedent, and follow instead the inherent structures³ of the Heavenly. Thus they are free from the calamities of Heaven and free from the bondage of things, free of criticism from humans and free of blame from ghosts. Their lives are like a floating along, their deaths are like a coming to rest. They do not ponder or calculate, do not plan or scheme. Bright they are indeed—but without shine. Reliable they are indeed—but without predictability. In sleep they have no dreams, and in waking they have no worries. Their imponderable spirits are pure and unalloyed, their consciousnesses unblocked and unstopped. Open and empty like space, tranquil and placid, they merge with the intrinsic powers of Heaven.

Thus it is said that sorrow and happiness are swerves from the intrinsic virtues, that joy and anger are oversteppings of the Course, that liking and disliking are misplacements of the inherent virtues. It is when the heart and mind are without sorrow or happiness that their inherent powers reach perfection; it is when they are unified and unchanging that their stillness reaches perfection; it is when they oppose nothing that their openness reaches perfection, it is when they associate themselves with nothing that their placidity reaches perfection, it is when they are in conflict with nothing that their purity reaches perfection.

Thus it is said, when a body labors without rest it is soon worn out, and when the pure kernel of our vitality⁴ is put to use without cease it is severely toiled—and when toiled so, it soon gets used up. The nature of water is to be clear as long as it is free from admixture, and to be level as long as it is undisturbed. But on the other hand if it is pent up and not allowed to flow, it also cannot remain clear. This is an apt image of the inherent powers of the Heavenly. Thus it is said that

2. Cf. Chapter 13, p. 110, where the preceding two lines appear verbatim, said not of “the sage” but of “one who knows the music of Heaven.”

3. 理 *Li*. See Glossary.

4. 精 *Jing*. See Glossary.

to be pure and unmitigated with nothing extraneous added in, to be unaltered in one's stillness and unity, to be placid in one's non-doing, to be in motion but only through the activities of the Heavenly: this is the Course that nourishes the imponderable spirit in us.

Now someone who possesses a sword made in Gan or Yue will carefully store it away in a box, not daring to make use of it lightly because of its unsurpassed preciousness. The pure kernel of imponderable spirit⁵ in us flows simultaneously in all directions, never reaching any limit; above it interfaces Heaven, and below it coils into the Earth, transforming and nourishing the ten thousand things. It is impossible to represent it with any image, so it is given the name "Sameness with the Lord on High." But the Course of plainness and purity is to hold fast to imponderable spirit alone. Holding it without losing it, you become one with the spirit, and when the quintessence of this oneness refines to the point where it is thoroughly unobstructed, you join into the interconnections of the Heavenly. There is a folk saying about this: "The multitude care about profit, the incorruptible men of distinction value fame, the worthy men esteem their aspirations—but the sages value only the pure kernel of vitality." "Plainness" means mixing nothing extraneous in, and "purity" means keeping the imponderable, the spirit, undiminished. It is those who can embody such purity and plainness that are called the *Genuine-Human*.

5. 精神 *Jingshen*. See Glossary.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Repairing the Inborn Nature

There are some who try to repair their inborn nature by recourse to conventional learning, thinking this can return it to its initial state. There are some who try to unseat their desires by recourse to conventional thinking, believing this will bring them clarity. Such people may be called truly benighted.¹

The ancients who practiced the Course used their tranquility as nutriment for their conscious understanding. Conscious understanding did arise for them, but it was not employed in the service of any deliberate doings. Thus they can be said also to have used their conscious understanding as nutriment for their tranquility. When conscious understanding and tranquility can come together and nourish one another in this way, a harmonious coherence² of the two emerges from the inborn nature. Inherent virtuosity is just this harmony, and the Course is just this coherence. Their inherent virtuosity came to contain everything in itself—and just this is real humankindness. Their Course came to arrange all things into mutual coherence one with another—and just this is truly responsible conduct. Their responsible conduct shone brightly so that other beings come to feel kinship with them—and just this is real loyalty. They were pure and genuine within and reverted to this even in their emotional dispositions—and just this is real music, real joy. The sincerity of their conduct showed even in their faces and bodies, and accorded with the elegant patterns of culture—and just this is real ritual.

And yet, when practiced universally,³ ritual and music disorder all the world. For when the correctness belonging to another is applied to oneself, it only beclouds one's intrinsic virtuosities. These must not venture outward to impose upon

1. Omitting the second 俗, and parsing the parallelism as suggested by Jiao Hong. Alternately, taking 欲 for the second 俗 as suggested by Zhu Dezhi and as seemingly assumed in Guo Xiang's comment, the meaning would be: "They have already tailored their inborn nature to accord with convention, and now wish to use learning to seek a way to return it to its initial state; they have already reconfigured their desires to accord with convention, and now use thinking as a way to extend their understanding of them."

2. *Heli* 和理. On *Li*, see Glossary.

3. Or, reading 偏 for 遍 as Guo Xiang does, "practiced one-sidedly"!

others, for whenever they are made to venture outward, imposing on other beings, the inborn natures of those other beings will be in every case lost.

These ancients, in this state of undivided obliviousness, remained in communion with everything in the world and yet found a tranquil solitude there. At that time yin and yang were in harmonious stillness, the ghosts and spirits brought no disturbances, the four seasons found their right measures, the ten thousand things remained unharmed, so no living thing met with a premature death. Although people did have some conscious understanding, they had no use for it. This is what is called utmost unity. At this time no one did anything deliberately; whatever happened always happened spontaneously, not done by anyone.⁴

But then such intrinsic virtuosities went into decline, and it was then that people like Sui ren and Fuxi⁵ started to manage the world and do things with it. The people of the world complied but were no longer in unity. When the intrinsic virtuosities further declined, people like Shennong and the Yellow Emperor⁶ started to manage the world and do things with it. The people of the world were secured but no longer compliant. When the intrinsic virtuosities further declined, people like Tang and Yu started to manage the world and do things with it, introducing derivative practices like governing and transforming the people, thus splintering the purity and scattering the unhewn, chopping up the Course for the sake of goodness, imperiling the intrinsic virtuosities for the sake of moral conduct. Thereafter they dismissed their inborn natures and followed their minds instead. Minds then came to know and recognize only other minds, interacting only through their understandings, which can never be enough to bring stability to the world. Then they supplemented it with elegant patterns of culture, and augmented it with erudition. But the elegant cultural patterns ended up destroying the materials they embellished, and the erudition ended up drowning the mind. And then the people started to become really confused and disordered, with no means by which to restore their inborn natures and dispositions, no way to return to their initial state.

Looking at it this way, the world has lost the Course and the Course has lost the world. The world and the Course, in their interaction, have lost each other. How could a person of the Course then emerge in the world? How could the world emerge in the Course? The Course has no way to appear in the world and the world has no way to appear in the Course, so even when sages do not hide themselves in mountains and forests, their intrinsic virtuosity remains hidden. Hidden but not hiding themselves—that is what the ancients meant when they talked about hidden ones, hermits. They did not conceal themselves, but they were not seen. They did not keep their words within, but their words went nowhere. They did not hide their understanding, but their understanding did not go forth. This was because the times they were fated to live in were greatly out of step with them.

4. Cf. *Daodejing* 51.

5. The first to use fire to cook food and the first to domesticate animals, respectively.

6. Both of whom were said to have launched punitive expeditions to suppress rebels against their regimes.

If the fated times had been just right, they would have been extremely active presences in the world, bringing it back to unity but without leaving any traces in it. But since the fated times were not right, they failed miserably in the world, rooting themselves deeply in the profoundest stillness and waiting for a change. This was their course for preserving their own lives. The ancients who practiced this in their persons did not use disputation to embellish their conscious understanding; and they did not use conscious understanding to plumb the depths of the world, did not use conscious understanding to plumb the depths of their intrinsic virtuosities. They dwelt in their own places in solitude and returned to their own inborn natures. What deliberate activity did they then need to engage in? The Course surely does not proceed through petty practices, nor is intrinsic virtuosity made manifest through petty knowledge. Petty knowledge harms intrinsic virtuosity, and petty practices harm the Course. Thus we may say that all they did was get their own selves into balanced alignment, nothing more. Delighting in completeness, in remaining intact, is what they called fulfilled aspiration. What the ancients called fulfilled aspiration did not mean obtaining ceremonial carriages and caps of rank and wealth. It meant simply that nothing could further augment their happiness. But nowadays when people speak of fulfilled aspiration, they just mean getting the carriages and the caps of rank and wealth. But even when these are on the body, they do not touch the inborn nature and allotment of life. When things like this happen to come, they are just temporary lodgers in one's life. As temporary lodgers, their coming cannot be prevented, but their going also cannot be stopped. Thus [the ancients] did not indulge in aspirations for carriages and caps, nor did they compromise with convention for fear of failure or privation. They were as happy with the one as with the other, and thus they were without worry. But nowadays the loss of these temporary lodgers in one's life causes unhappiness. Looked at in that way, although people may be happy, they have never stopped being desolate. Hence I say, those who forsake themselves for external things, who lose their inborn natures to convention—these are people who have turned themselves upside down.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Autumn Waters

The time of autumn waters had come, and all the streams were pouring into the Yellow River. The expanse of its unobstructed flow was so great that a horse on the other bank could not be distinguished from a cow. The River God was overjoyed, delighting in his own powers, believing all the world's beauty now to be encompassed within himself. Flowing eastward, he arrived at the Northern Sea. Casting his gaze toward the east, he saw no end to the waters. It was then that his face began twisting and turning, a whirlpool of features, in his attempt to take the sea in his sights.

He then addressed Ruo of the Northern Sea¹ with a sigh: "There is a saying in the outlands: 'He who hears the Course a mere hundred times believes no one can compare with him.' This describes me perfectly. When I first heard that there are those who belittle the erudition of Confucius and the righteousness² of Bo Yi, I didn't believe it. But now I have seen your vastness with my own eyes. If I had never come here to your gate, I might have become a laughingstock to the masters of the Great Purview!"³

Ruo of the Northern Sea said, "You cannot discuss the sea with a well turtle, for he is limited in space. You cannot discuss ice and snow with a summer insect, for he is fixed in his own time. And you cannot discuss the Course with a nook-and-corner scholar, for he is bound by his doctrines. Now that you have emerged

1. The god of the sea.

2. 義 *Yi*, elsewhere translated, when paired with *ren* (Humanity), as Responsibility or Responsible Conduct. See Glossary. Bo Yi together with his brother Shu Qi starved themselves to death rather than join the violent Zhou revolution against the allegedly corrupt Shang dynasty, or even to take part in Zhou society or eat its grain. For this righteous refusal even to the point of death, they are thus often cited as exemplars of strict allegiance to "responsible conduct": given their duties and responsibilities, in their role as sworn subjects of the Shang, it would not be right to violently overthrow one's own ruler (though their deed is often interpreted more broadly as a principled opposition to violence as such).

3. 大方 *dafang*. In Chapter 20 (p. 158) and Chapter 25 (p. 216), the same term is translated as "the Vast Ambit." It also appears in Chapter 24 (p. 205), translated as "the Great Scope."

from your dusty banks and had a look at the great ocean, you finally realize how hideous you are! Only now can you be spoken to about the Great Coherence.⁴

“There is no body of water in the world larger than the ocean. All the rivers revert to it ceaselessly, yet it is not filled. It leaks away at Weilu continuously, yet it is not emptied. Unchanging in both spring and autumn, it is unaffected by either floods or droughts. Its superiority to all the streams and rivers is beyond calculation, but I have never for this reason thought much of myself. For if I compare myself to all the beings taking shape between heaven and earth and receiving vital energy from the yin and yang, I see that my position between heaven and earth is like that of a small stone or a tiny weed on a vast mountain. Having thus seen my own insignificance, what conceit could I have? For are not the four seas, calculated against the space between heaven and earth, like a swirling hollow on the surface of a vast lake? Are not the central states, calculated against all the known world, like grains of rice lost in a granary? We number the types of creatures at ten thousand, and man is but one of them. And even in the nine regions crowded with humans, where they are able to grow their crops and ride their boats and carriages, a single person is just one among the throng. Among the ten thousand things, is not the human realm like the tip of a hair on the body of a horse? What the Five Emperors unified, what the Three Hegemons fought for, what the humane men worry themselves about, what the diligent men of distinction labor themselves over is nothing more than this. Bo Yi was considered worthy of fame for renouncing no more than this, Confucius was considered erudite for talking about no more than this—such was their conceit! Does it not resemble your previous conceit over your waters?”

The River God said, “Then I should consider heaven and earth large, and the tip of an autumn hair small—is that right?”

Ruo of the Northern Sea said, “Not at all. For there is no end to the comparative measuring of things, no stop to the changing times, no constancy to the ways things can be divided up, no fixity to their ends and beginnings. Thus when a person of great wisdom contemplates both the far and the near, he does not find what is small to be paltry nor what is great to be much, for he knows that comparative measurings are endless. Scanning the evidences of both ancient and modern times, he does not find the lofty and distant to be dispiritingly great nor the cramped and nearby to be in need of improvement, for he knows that the temporal changes of things are endless. Understanding their fillings and emptyings, he can gain them without joy and lose them without sorrow, for he knows that there is no single constant way of dividing them up. Comprehending their clearings and smearings,^A he does not rejoice in finding himself alive nor bemoan his death, for he knows that there can be no fixity to their finishes and starts. What man knows is far less than what he does not know. The time he exists is insignificant compared to the time he does not exist. It is because he tries to exhaust this vastness with this meagerness that he bewilders and frustrates himself. From this point of view,

4. 理 *Li*. See Glossary.

how can we know that the tip of a hair can delimit the ultimate measure of smallness, or heaven and earth the fullest expanse of vastness?”

The River God said, “The debaters of the world all say, ‘The most subtle has no physical form, and the most vast is unencompassable.’ Is this correct?”

Ruo of the Northern Sea said, “Looking at the vast from the viewpoint of the tiny, it appears inexhaustible. Looking at the tiny from the viewpoint of the vast, it becomes unclear. ‘The subtle’ just means what is small to the point of indistinctness, and wherever our limits are overflowed is the fullest reach of ‘the vast.’ So these terms are suited to different uses, as determined by the situation. But both the subtle and the coarse are limited to the realm of things with definite form. What has no form can be distinguished by no quantities; what cannot be encompassed can be exhausted by no quantities. What can be discussed in words is just the coarser aspect of things; what can be reached by thought is just the subtler aspect of things. But what words cannot describe and thought cannot reach cannot be determined as either coarse or subtle.

“So the conduct of a Great Man harms no one, but he places no special value on humankindness and beneficence. His actions are not motivated by profit, but he does not despise those who slavishly subordinate themselves to it. He does not fight over wealth, but he places no special value on yielding and refusing it. He doesn’t depend on others, but he places no special value on self-sufficiency, nor does he despise the greedy and corrupt. If his own conduct is unconventional, he places no special value on eccentricity and uniqueness, and if his own action follows the crowds, he does not despise it as obsequious flattery. All the honors and stipends in the world are not enough to goad him to action, and all its punishments and condemnations are not enough to cause him shame, for he knows that right and wrong cannot be definitively divided, and that no border can be fixed between great and small. I have heard it said, ‘A man of the Course has no reputation; perfect virtuosities achieve no gains; a Great Man has no definitive identity’⁵—for all divided portions are for him perfectly bound to one another.”⁶

The River God said, “From within things or without, then, where is the standard that can divide the more from the less valuable, the great from the small?”

Ruo of the Northern Sea said, “From the point of view of the Course, no being is more valuable than any other. But from the point of view of itself, each being is itself worth more and all the others are worth less. And from the point of view of convention, a thing’s value is not determined by itself.

“From the point of view of their differences, if we consider something big because it is bigger than something else, no thing is not big. If we consider it small because it is smaller than something else, no thing is not small. When you can understand the sense in which heaven and earth are just like a grain of rice and

5. Cf. Chapter 1, p. 5.

6. This sentence could also mean, “For he shrinks his allotment to its absolute minimum,” or “For he keeps himself perfectly confined within his allotment,” or perhaps, “For he keeps himself perfectly confined within the allotment of each thing.” Alternately, it could mean “the division [between each of these pairs of opposites] has shrunk to its absolute minimum.”

the tip of a hair is just like a mountain range, you have grasped what determines their differences. If we consider something to be worthy because it achieves something, there is no thing that is not worthy. If we consider it to be unworthy because it fails to achieve something, there is no thing that is not unworthy. When you understand the sense in which east and west are opposed to each other and yet indispensable to one another, you have determined what divides the allotments of their achievements. From the point of view of the inclinations of various beings, if we judge something to be right because there is some way to view it as right, then no thing is not right. If we judge it to be wrong because there is some way to view it as wrong, then no thing is not wrong.⁷ When you understand the sense in which Yao and Jie each considers himself right and the other wrong, you have grasped the operation of their inclinations. In olden times Yao yielded the throne to Shun and Shun became a true emperor, but Kuai yielded the throne to Zhi and Zhi was destroyed.⁸ Tang and Wu fought for the throne and became rulers, but Duke Bo fought for the throne and perished.⁹ From this point of view, the propriety of struggle or of yielding, the conduct of a Yao or a Jie, is given different values at different times, none of which can be taken as a constant. Pillars and crossbeams can be used to ram down a wall, but not to plug a hole, for this requires a different kind of tool. A great stallion can gallop a thousand miles in a day, but it cannot catch mice as well as a cat, for that requires a different kind of skill. Kites and owls can catch a flea or discern the tip of a hair on a dark night, but in the daytime they are blinded and cannot even make out a mountain range, for that requires a different inborn nature. So if someone says, ‘Why don’t we make only rightness our master and eliminate wrongness, make only order our master and eliminate disorder?’ this is someone who has not yet understood the coherence of heaven and earth¹⁰ and the realities of the ten thousand things. That would be like taking heaven alone as your master and eliminating earth, or taking yin alone as your master and eliminating yang—an obvious impossibility. If someone nonetheless insists on talking this way, he is either a fool or a swindler. The rulers of the Three Dynasties sometimes yielded their thrones and sometimes passed them on to their sons; those who did either at the wrong time, contravening the current conventions, were called usurpers, while those who did either at the right time, in accord with current conventions, were called righteous¹¹ men. Silence, River God, silence! How could you know which gateways lead to worthiness and which to worthlessness, or wherein reside greatness or pettiness?”

7. This could mean either “. . . because someone can consider it right or wrong,” or “because there is something in it that can be considered right or wrong.”

8. This ill-fated attempt to imitate the ancient sage-kings occurred in the state of Yan in 316 BCE.

9. In the state of Chu, in 479 BCE.

10. *Li*. See Glossary.

11. *Yi*. Elsewhere translated “responsibility,” “responsible conduct,” “duty,” “justice.” See Glossary.

The River God said, “But then what should I do? What should I not do? How shall I decide what to accept, what to reject, what to pursue, what to renounce?”

Ruo of the Northern Sea said, “Taking the point of view of the Course: what could be worthy, what could be worthless? The question points to their reciprocal overflowings, back and forth. Not restricting your will to any of them, you limp the great stagger of the Course. What is greater, what is lesser? The question points to the bloomings of their witherings, the bounties put forth by their declines. Not unifying your conduct along the path of any of them, you go along uneven and varied with the Course. So strict and rigorous as when a nation finds its ruler, his intrinsic virtuosities unbiased and equally there for all! Giving forth so continuously as when revelers find their shrine, its blessings unbiased and equally there for all! Extensive, it is endless like the four directions, lacking utterly any boundary or limit. Comprehensively embracing all things, to whom could it give any special protection? This is called the methodless, the directionless, the locationless.^B With all things leveled in its oneness, which is long and which is short? The Course has no end or beginning, while creatures are born and die, coming to no reliable completion. Now empty, now full, things do not remain positioned in any one fixed form. The years cannot be held on to, time cannot be stopped; waxing and waning, filling and emptying, each end is succeeded by a new beginning. This is a way of describing the method of their great rightness,¹² doing just what they ought to do in the greatest sense, conveying the mutual coherence of all things.¹³ The becoming of things is like a galloping horse, transforming with each movement, altering at each moment. What should you do? What should you not do? No matter what, you will be spontaneously transforming!”

The River God said, “In that case, what value is there in the Course?”

Ruo of the Northern Sea said, “When you understand the Course, you will be able to see through to this coherence,¹⁴ and then you will certainly understand what is appropriate to each changing situation. This will keep you from harming yourself with things. Those who have fully realized their intrinsic virtuosities can enter fire without feeling hot, enter water without drowning. Neither heat nor cold can harm them, the birds and animals do not impinge upon them. This is not to say that they treat these things lightly, but rather precisely that they discern where there is danger, remaining calm in both good and bad fortune, careful about what they flee and what they approach. Thus nothing can harm them. Hence is it said, the Heavenly is internal while the human is external. The intrinsic virtuosities belong to the Heavenly. Those who know which activities are of the Heavenly and which are of the human root themselves in the Heavenly and position themselves comfortably in whatever they attain from it. Advancing and retreating, shrinking and expanding according to the time, they return always to what is most basic, most constrained, and yet bespeak the ultimate reaches.”

12. 義 *Yi*. See Glossary.

13. 理 *Li*. See Glossary.

14. 理 *Li*. See Glossary.

The River God said, “What do you mean by the Heavenly and what by the human?”

Ruo of the Northern Sea said, “That cows and horses have four legs is the Heavenly. The bridle around the horse’s head and the ring through the cow’s nose are the human.^c Hence I say, do not use the human to destroy the Heavenly, do not use the purposive to destroy the fated, do not sacrifice yourself for the sake of mere names in the hope of gain. Hold onto this carefully and you may be said to have returned to what is genuine in you.”

The unipede adores the millipede, the millipede adores the snake, the snake adores the wind, the wind adores the eye, and the eye adores the mind. The unipede said to the millipede, “Hopping around on my single leg, I manage to get from place to place, but it requires all my skill. And yet you are somehow able to manage ten thousand legs at the same time. How do you do it?”

The millipede said, “It’s not like that. Haven’t you ever seen a person spit? He gives a hock and all at once the big globules come flying forth like innumerable pearls and the little droplets go spreading out like mist, raining down in a tangle. In my case, all I do is set my Heavenly impulse into action—I have no idea how it’s done!”

The millipede said to the snake, “I can move along on all these feet of mine, but it is still no match for the way you do it with no feet at all. How can this be?”

The snake said, “How could the motions of the Heavenly impulse be altered? What use would I have for feet?”

The snake said to the wind, “I move along by putting my spine and flanks into action—at least there seems to be something there doing it. But you come whooshing up from the Northern Ocean and all at once you are whooshing off into the Southern Sea, as if there is nothing there doing it at all. How can this be?”

The wind said, “True, I can whoosh up from the Northern Ocean and just as suddenly into the Southern Sea; but whoever so much as points a finger against me, or slithers through me as you do, has instantly defeated me. Nonetheless, I alone am capable of snapping massive trees in two and tossing whole houses into the sky. I use all my small defeats to make one great victory. But the really great victory of this kind is something accomplished only by the sage.”

When Confucius traveled to Kuang, the people of Song surrounded him in multiple ranks, and yet he went on singing and strumming his strings without pause. Zilu, going in to see him, asked, “How can you be so happy, Master?”

Confucius said, “Come, I will tell you. I’ve been trying to avoid failure for such a long time, and yet here it is—that is fate. I’ve been seeking success for so long, and yet it still eludes me—that’s due to the times. In the days of Yao and Shun, no one in the world was a failure, but this was not thanks to their wisdom.¹⁵ In the days of Jie and Zhou, no one in the world was a success, but this was not due to any failure of their wisdom. It was just the circumstantial tendencies of the

15. 知 *Zhi*. See Glossary.

times that made it so. To travel over water without fearing the sharks and dragons is the courage of the fisherman. To travel over land without fearing rhinos and tigers is the courage of the hunter. To view death as no different from life even when the blades are clanging in front of one's face is the courage of the warrior. And to know that success depends on fate and failure on the times, to face great calamities without fear, this is the courage of the sage. Relax, Zilu! My fate is already sealed."

A short while later, a soldier came in with a message saying, "We surrounded you because we thought you were the insurrectionist Yang Huo. Since we have realized our mistake, we ask leave to yield way to you and withdraw."

Gongsun Long said to Prince Mou of Wei, "When I was young I studied the Course of the former kings; when grown, I came to understand the practice of humankindness and responsible conduct. I could combine the same and the different, separate 'hard' and 'white,' make the not-so appear so and the unacceptable appear acceptable. I had confounded the wisdom of all the philosophers and stopped the mouths of all the debaters. I thought I already understood everything. But now that I have heard Zhuangzi's words, I am bewildered and lost in their strangeness. Does his rhetorical skill surpass mine? Is my knowledge unequal to his? At this point, I barely know how to open up my beak! I venture to ask for some clarification of this."

Prince Mou leaned against his armrest and let out a great sigh, then gazed up into the heavens and laughed. "Don't tell me you've never heard the story about the frog in the sunken well? He said to the tortoise of the Eastern Ocean, 'How happy I am! I jump about on the railings and beams of the well and rest on the ledges left by missing tiles along its walls. When I splash into the water it supports my armpits and holds up my chin, and when I tread in the mud it submerges my feet up to the ankles. The surrounding crabs and tadpoles are certainly no match for me! For to have such mastery over one whole puddle of water like this, possessing all the joy of this sunken well—that is the utmost! Why don't you come in and have a look sometime?' But before the tortoise could even get his left foot in, his right knee was stuck in the opening. So he pulled himself back out and told the frog about the ocean: 'Its vastness exceeds a distance of a thousand miles, its depth is beyond the measure of a thousand fathoms. In Yu's time the lands were flooded for nine years, but its waters did not rise. In Tang's day there were seven droughts in eight years, but its shores did not recede. Unpushed and unpulled by either a moment or an eon, unreceded and unadvanced by either little or much—that is the great joy of the Eastern Ocean!' When the well-frog heard this, his mind scattered in all directions with astonishment, beside himself in his puniness.¹⁶ Now for the intellect,¹⁶ which doesn't even know the limits of its own affirmations and negations, of right and wrong, to contemplate the words of Zhuangzi—that is like a mosquito trying to carry a mountain on its back, or an inchworm trying to scurry across the Yellow River. It cannot be done. Your

16. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

intellect, not knowing how to make sense of these most wondrous words of his, instead taking delight in its own momentary gains—is it not a frog trapped in a sunken well? As for him, no sooner had he gone traipsing across the Yellow Springs¹⁷ than he was off climbing through the blue of the heavens, free of both south and north, unobstructed and released in all the four directions, submerged in the unfathomable depths. Devoid of both east and west, he begins anew in the dark obscurity and returns to the Great Openness. For you to rigidly seek him out with your acute discernment, searching for him with disputations, why, that’s just like trying to survey Heaven through a tube, or to measure the depth of the earth with an awl. Isn’t it just too small? You’d do best to simply forget about it and go your way. Haven’t you heard about when Yuzi of Shouling tried to learn the gait of the people of Handan? Before he was able to master this local skill, he had forgotten his original gait and had to return home on his hands and knees. If you don’t get out of here, you might lose your original skills and be left without a career!”

Gongsun Long, unable to close his mouth or lower his tongue, broke into a run and bolted away.

Zhuangzi was once fishing beside the Pu River when two emissaries brought him a message from the King of Chu: “The king would like to trouble you with the control of his realm.” Zhuangzi, holding fast to his fishing pole, without so much as turning his head, said, “I have heard there is a sacred turtle in Chu, already dead for three thousand years, which the king keeps in a bamboo chest high in his shrine. Do you think this turtle would prefer to be dead and having his carcass exalted, or alive and dragging his tail through the mud?” The emissaries said, “Alive and dragging his tail through the mud.” Zhuangzi said, “Away with you then! I too will drag my tail through the mud!”

When Huizi was prime minister of Liang, Zhuangzi went to see him. Someone said to Huizi, “Zhuangzi is coming; he wants to take your place as prime minister.” Huizi was greatly alarmed and ordered a search for Zhuangzi throughout the land for three days and three nights. Zhuangzi, when he got there, said to him, “In the south there is a bird called Yuanchu, have you heard about it? This bird rises from the Southern Sea and flies to the Northern Ocean, resting only on the sterculia tree, eating only the fruit of the bamboo, and drinking only from the sweetest springs. But once there was an owl who had found a rotten mouse carcass, who saw the Yuanchu passing overhead and started screeching at it, ‘Shoo! Shoo!’ Are you trying to shoo me away from your state of Liang?”¹⁸

Zhuangzi and Huizi were strolling along the bridge over the Hao River. Zhuangzi said, “The minnows swim about so freely, following the openings wherever they take them. Such is the happiness of fish.”

Huizi said, “You are not a fish, so whence do you know the happiness of fish?”

17. The postmortem underworld.

Zhuangzi said, “You are not I, so whence do you know I don’t know the happiness of fish?”

Huizi said, “I am not you, to be sure, so I don’t know what it is to be you. But by the same token, since you are certainly not a fish, my point about your inability to know the happiness of fish stands intact.”^F

Zhuangzi said, “Let’s go back to the starting point. You said, ‘*Whence* do you know the happiness of fish?’ Since your question was premised on your knowing that I know it, I must know it from right here, up above the Hao River.”^G

ENDNOTES

A. *Tan’tu* 坦塗. This has become a conventional phrase meaning “level road,” derived from a reading of this passage, on the basis of the very common interchangeable use of 途 and 塗. But since this phrase seems to be parallel to no less than three dyads of contrasted terms (*far/near*, *ancient/modern*, *filling/emptying*), and is meant to be relevant to undermining the fixed distinction between life and death, an attempt is made here to discern a contrasting pair here that would pertain to a changed understanding of life and death.

B. A triple translation of 無方 *wufang*. See “Notes on the Translation.”

C. Note the stark difference between this passage and the position put forth in the Inner Chapters, which makes the distinction between the Heavenly and the Human only to overturn it into unknowability, and even provisionally is only willing to say that neither should overpower the other (Chapter 6, p. 53). Here, on the contrary, the Heavenly definitively means the spontaneous, while the Human means the deliberate and artificial; the two terms have definite contents, and these can be unproblematically known, and “the inherent powers belong to the Heavenly.” Compare Chapters 8 and 9, which also offer a fixed definition of the content of the Heavenly inborn nature.

D. With Wang Shumin, reading 嬰 for 規.

E. Note the rhetorical similarity of this passage to the beginning of Chapter 1.

F. In other words, your refutation of my position depends on your acceptance of the principle that one being cannot know what another being experiences, which only further proves my point that you cannot know the happiness of fish.

G. In other words, my saying “this is the happiness of fish” is exactly as valid or invalid as your saying “how do you know the happiness of fish?” In both cases we were responding to our own sense of someone else’s subjective state: Zhuangzi to his sense of the fish being happy, Huizi to his sense of Zhuangzi believing that he knows fish-happiness. If my claim is invalid (because all I really know is my own experience, and what I’m calling “fish-happiness” is really just an aspect of my experience over here), then your claim is also invalid (because you, too, really know only your own experience, and what you’re calling “Zhuangzi believing fish-happiness” is really just an aspect of your own experience of Huizi-hearing-Zhuangzi-say-he-thinks-the-fish-are-happy, over there). In that case, we are both just playing around in our own mental pool, and what you say over there has nothing to do with me, and hence cannot refute what I’m doing over here. Conversely, if your claim is valid, then by whatever miracle you’re able to know what you claim I experience over here (i.e., your apprehension of my “belief in fish-happiness” from over

there in your experience, though not being me), I am also able to really know from over here what fish experience over there (“being happy”), though not being the fish. An unstated premise here is that, because what words refer to is “peculiarly unfixed” (Chapter 2, p. 12), there is no essential difference in the ultimate knowability of meaning between something stated in an explicit verbal statement (i.e., Zhuangzi’s “That is the happiness of fish”) and any other natural phenomenon (i.e., the fish’s frolicking around): all are always interpretive guesses that admit of no certainty. Thus in whatever sense and to whatever extent you are capable of succeeding in knowing and critiquing my position, I am capable of succeeding in knowing fish-happiness. Either way your objection fails. If you are able even to understand my claim enough to object to it, as a belief or claim occurring elsewhere, beyond yourself, you have admitted its premise; in rejecting my claim, you admit it. To just the extent that it is questionable, it is defensible, no more and no less. Just as my refutation of your objection implicitly accepted its premise, your objection to my initial claim implicitly demonstrated it. As a further wrinkle, Zhuangzi is saying, “I know their enjoyment down there from our enjoyment up here”—a friendly meta-joke suggesting that the debate itself is an enjoyment, and thus in a deeper sense there is no disagreement—which also resolves the apparent refutation (really you are not disagreeing, we are agreeing to enjoy arguing) while also preserving it (without the argument and refutation there would be no enjoyment). As in the case of Zhuangzi and the butterfly, which “surely count as two distinct identities” (Chapter 2, p. 21), and the Inner Chapters generally, Zhuangzi’s notion of oneness here depends on the multiplicity of distinct identities and viewpoints, not on collapsing them into literal unity. It is just that each perspective, precisely by dwelling in its own perspective, necessarily posits other perspectives as part of *its own* experience, and thereby undermines the certainty but also establishes the equal permissibility of its own experience. To be a this is always also to be a that; there is no way to isolate one from the other. So self-knowledge is also intrinsically other-knowledge, but precisely for that reason is no more (or less) certain about itself than about the other. The “knowledge” in both cases is really no more than a constantly transforming stream of moment-by-moment interpretive descriptions of an ongoing series of many-sided this-that moments of experience, forming part of the total process of mutual transformation.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Reaching Utmost Happiness

Is there such a thing as reaching utmost happiness?^A Or is there not? Is there a way to keep one's body alive, or is there not? What should we be doing, what should we depend upon, what should we avoid, what should we situate ourselves in, what should we approach, what should we depart from? What should we delight in, what should we abhor?

What everyone in the world honors is wealth, high rank, long life, and others thinking well of them. What they delight in is physical security and comfort, rich flavors, lovely clothes, alluring forms, fine tones, and music. What they despise are poverty, low status, early death, and others thinking ill of them. What they suffer from are a body unable to obtain ease and comfort, a mouth unable to obtain rich flavors, a figure unadorned by lovely clothes, eyes unable to see alluring forms, ears unable to hear fine tones and music. If they cannot obtain these things, how worried and terrified they become!

But this is a really foolish way to treat one's own body. The wealthy torture their bodies, frenzied by work, accumulating so much wealth that they are unable to use it all. This is treating one's own body as an outsider. The people of high status worry all day and then into the night about how well or poorly they are doing. This is treating one's own body as a stranger. Anxiety is born the moment a human being is born, and when the long-lived become stupid and benighted, this anxiety lasting on and on and refusing to die—what suffering this is! This is treating one's own body as a distant outsider.

Martyrs for a cause are regarded by everyone in the world as good men, but their goodness is not enough to keep their bodies alive. So I am not sure whether this goodness is really any good or whether it isn't really any good. Is it good? Clearly not good enough to keep their own bodies alive. Is it not good? Clearly good enough to keep *other* people alive. Thus it is said, "If your loyal remonstrance is not heeded by the ruler, remain kneeling compliantly and don't wrangle with him any further." Thus when Zixu went on with his wrangling,¹ it brought

1. Continually warning the king of Wu about imminent attack from Yue. His warnings were unheeded, and his motives for such insistence doubted. In 484 BCE he was finally forced to commit suicide.

mutilation to his body. If he had not continued his wrangling, though, he would not have achieved such fame.

I don't know: is there anything that is really good, or isn't there?

Nor do I know whether what the ordinary people nowadays do, what they find their happiness in, is really happiness or not. I notice that when the ordinary people consider something happiness, they all throng after it in a mad dash, so definite and certain, like they can't stop themselves. And yet they all continue to call this happiness. But I don't have any way to judge that to be either happiness or not happiness.

I don't know: is there really such a thing as happiness, or isn't there?

As for me personally, I regard *total lack, non-doing*,^b as the real happiness. And yet this is just what ordinary people regard as the greatest suffering of all. But I say, "When you reach happiness, 'happiness' is totally lacking; when you reach honor, 'honor' is totally lacking."²

What is right and what is wrong have never yet been stably determined in this world. But though this is so, non-doing can stably determinate what is right and what is wrong. The reaching of happiness, keeping the body alive—it is only non-doing that comes close to maintaining this. Let me try to explain what I mean. It is by non-doing that the sky is clear. It is by non-doing that the earth is tranquil. When these non-doings join together, there occur the transformations by which all things are generated. So oblivious, so unheeding, emerging from nowhere! So unheeding, so oblivious, devoid of any likeness! All things busily working their works emerge from the root of this non-doing! Thus it is said, "Heaven and earth do nothing, and yet there is nothing they do not do."³ But as for human beings, who among them can attain to this non-doing?

When Zhuangzi's wife died, Huizi went to offer his condolences. He found Zhuangzi squatting on the floor singing, accompanying himself by pounding on an overturned washtub held between his splayed legs.

Huizi said, "You live with someone, raise children with her, grow old with her—not crying over her death is enough already, isn't it? But to go so far as to pound on a washtub and sing, isn't that going too far?"

Zhuangzi said, "No, it's not. When this one first died, how could I not feel grief just like anyone else? But then I considered closely how it had all begun: previously, before she was born, there was no life there. Not only no life: no physical form. Not only no physical form: not even energy.⁴ Then in the course of some heedless mingling mishmash a change occurred and there was energy, and then this energy changed and there was a physical form, and then this form changed and there was life. Now there has been another change and she is dead. This is how she participates in the making of the spring and the autumn, of the

2. I.e., there is no longer any awareness of happiness or honor as goals or even as objects of consciousness; really inhabiting any state, X, is to forget Xness.

3. Cf. *Daodejing* 37, 48.

4. *Qi*. Literally "breath," elsewhere translated as "vital energy." See Glossary.

winter and the summer. For the moment a human lies stiffened here, slumbering in this enormous house. And yet there I was getting all weepy, even going on to wail over her. Even to myself I looked like someone without any understanding of fate. So I stopped.”

Unk Discombobulated and Unk Sliding Onefoot were gazing at the dark grave mounds of the Earl of Oblivion in the empty wastes of Kunlun, where the Yellow Emperor had been laid to rest. Suddenly a willow started sprouting out of Uncle Onefoot’s left elbow. His mind was really stumbling over it, very much disliking it.

“Do you dislike it?” asked Unk Discombobulated.

“No, no! Why should I dislike it? Life is a borrowing. What is generated and regenerated through borrowing is just so much dust and dirt. Death and life are day and night. You and I came here to gaze at the process of transformation, and now the transformation has reached my own self. Why should I now instead dislike it?”

Zhuangzi traveled to Chu, where he came upon an empty skull, all whitened and brittle but still retaining its shape. He poked it with his riding crop and then asked it, “Did you come to this because your greed for life made you do something out of order, sir? Or did you come to this in the service of some failing state, meeting with the punishment of an ax or hatchet? Or did you come to this because of some evil behavior that brought disgrace to your parents and wife and children? Or did you come to this because cold and hunger overtook you? Or did you come to this simply because your springs and autumns brought you to it?”

When he had finished with his questions, Zhuangzi hugged the skull toward him as his pillow and went to sleep on it. But in the middle of the night, the skull appeared to him in a dream, and said, “Your words sound like those of a skilled debater. But considered closely, all I see in them are the burdens that are always tying down the living. When you are dead, all such things are gone. Do you want to hear about the joys of being dead?”

“Yes, I do,” Zhuangzi said.

“When you’re dead, you have no ruler above you, no subjects below you, none of the tasks of the four seasons. Floating untethered and with nothing to do,^C heaven and earth are to you as spring and autumn. Even the happiness of a king on his throne cannot surpass that.”

Zhuangzi did not believe him. “If I could make the controller of fate restore your body to life, fashioning again your bones and flesh and skin, and return you to your parents and your wife and your children, to your old home and all your friends, wouldn’t you want that?”

The skull knitted its brows, glaring at him intensely, and said, “Why in the world would I sacrifice the happiness of a king on his throne to return to the toils of being a living person?”^D

When Yan Yuan traveled east to Qi, Confucius looked very worried. Zigong leaned off his mat and asked, “Your little disciple here ventures to ask why you look so worried about Yan Yuan travelling to Qi.”

Confucius said, “A fine question! In olden times Guanzi said something of which I heartily approve: ‘A small bag cannot contain what is large, and a short well-rope cannot draw water from the deep.’ In this way he meant to say that fate forms things in a certain definite way and all forms have certain things for which they are suited, which cannot be augmented or diminished. I am afraid that Hui will talk to the Marquis of Qi about the Course of Yao, Shun, and the Yellow Emperor,⁵ and repeat to him the sayings of Suiren and Shennong.⁶ The marquis will then seek some resonance with it in himself, and he will surely fail to find it. This will confuse him, and such a man’s confusion is what brings doom. Have you alone never heard about it? In olden times a seabird came to roost in the outskirts of Lu. The marquis of Lu took it riding in his chariot to the temple, where he prepared a banquet for it, having the music of the Nine Shao performed for its entertainment and supplying it with the best chops from the butcher for its delectation. The bird looked at it all with glazed eyes, worried and distressed, not daring to eat a bite, not daring to drink a sip, and after three days of this, the bird was dead. The marquis was trying to use what was nourishing to himself to nourish the bird, instead of using what was nourishing to the bird. Those who wanted to nourish a bird with what is nourishing to the bird would let it perch in the deep forest, roam over the altars and plains, float on the rivers and lakes, gorge itself on eels and minnows, fly in formation to wherever it stops and find its place willy-nilly wherever it wants. A bird hates even to hear human beings talking—what use could it have for all this ruckus and noise! If the music of the Xianchi and the Nine Shao were to resonate over the fields of Dongting, the birds there would fly off as soon as they heard it, the beasts there would break into a run and the fish there would dive into the deep, whereas when human beings hear it they all cluster around raptly to watch the performance. Fish thrive when they dwell in water, while humans die there. Thus differently constituted beings necessarily have different preferences. That is why the ancient sages did not require the same ability of everyone, did not assign everyone the same tasks. They titled people only according to their actual abilities, and the duties they imposed were set up to suit what was appropriate to each. This is what is called the hub keeping hold of its spokes by letting each one individually reach it.”^E

Liezi was traveling and had stopped to picnic by the side of the road when he spotted a hundred-year-old skull nearby. Pulling aside the underbrush, he pointed a finger at it and said, “Only you and I know that you have never been the dead one and [I] have never been the living one.⁷ Is it you who is really eating his fill? Is it I who am really enjoying it? How multitudinous are the seeds of things, how

5. All here considered sage-kings.

6. The ancient domesticator of fire and the inventor of agriculture, respectively.

7. Literally, without adding the interpretive bracketed word, “Only you and I understand your never-having-died, never-having-lived.”

minute the wellsprings in them!⁸ When they come into contact with water a filmy surface forms, reaching all the way to the shoreline and becoming the moss that cloaks the frogs and oysters. Then growing on the mounds and hills it becomes plantago grass, which upon finding dense soil becomes crowfoot, the roots of which turn into maggots and the leaves of which become butterflies. These butterflies, which soon transform into insects that resemble cast-off skins and live under stoves, known as the Quduo, become after a thousand days birds called Leftover Drybones, the saliva of which become the Simi bugs, which turn into the Shixi, from which are born Yilus, just as Huangkuangs are born from Jiuyous and Mouruis are born from Fuquans, and as the Yangxi, when combined with long unsprouting bamboo, produces the Qingning, which generates the panther, which generates the horse, which generates humans, who then again return back into minute wellsprings. All things emerge from minute wellsprings, and all go back into them.”^F

ENDNOTES

A. Literally, “arriving at happiness,” which can also mean, “arrived happiness,” i.e., perfect or utmost happiness. However, given the conclusion to this interrogation of this term in the statement *zhilewule* 至樂無樂, “perfect happiness lacks happiness,” the sense seems to be the subjective state of “really reaching the experience of being happy.” The sense of *zhilewule* 至樂無樂 is then the familiar Daoist claim that one who has reached happiness is no longer aware of happiness. Hence we have another “double translation” here (see “Notes on the Translation”). The term “happiness” is written with the same character as the term meaning “music.”

B. Grammatically, the sentence says “I take nothingness (*wu*) as (*wei*) the real happiness,” but the following discussion seems to conflate this with “non-doing” (*wuwei*; see Glossary), as if a second *wei* had dropped out of the text. The translation here tries to cover both meanings.

C. Following Xi Tong in taking *cong* 從 as standing in for *fan* 泛.

D. Following the manuscripts that have 生人 instead of 人間.

E. Adopting Qian Mu’s suggestion to read *fu* 輻 for *fu* 福.

F. The exact identity of all the specific flora and fauna alluded to in this passage is a matter of uncertainty, and is much disputed among commentators, but the intended effect seems pretty clear: a general evocation of the natural world as a surreal whirlwind of bizarre transformations, a setting in which the sudden appearance of a willow growing out of a human elbow, or a living human being turning into dead matter or energy or nothingness, would not be especially out of place.

8. This could mean either “How multitudinous are the seeds of things,” or, following Fang Yizhi’s text, which has 機 for 幾, “Every type of thing, every seed, has minute wellsprings of change in it.” The translation tries to cover both meanings.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Fathoming Life

Those who fathom the real character of the life in us do not labor themselves over the aspects of life that deliberate activity can do nothing about. Those who fathom the real character of fate do not labor themselves over what understanding¹ cannot alter. Although nourishing the body requires external things, some fail to nourish their bodies even with more than enough things. Although the continuance of life requires that the body is not dismembered, some bodies lose the life in them even when still intact. When life comes it cannot be refused, and when it departs it cannot be detained. How sad it is that the people of the world think that nourishing the body is enough to preserve the life in them! But in the final analysis, a nourished body is not sufficient for the preservation of this life—so what in the world could be really worth doing? Though nothing is really worth doing, it is impossible not to do something or other, so our activity itself is simply one more thing that cannot be avoided.

But to liberate your body from always having to be doing something, there is nothing more effective than letting go of the world. When you let go of the world, you are free of entanglements. Free of entanglements, you are balanced and untilting. Balanced and untilting, you are reborn along with each presence that confronts you. With each such rebirth, you have done all that can be done.

Why then is it worthwhile to let go of your concerns and forget all about the life in you? Because when concerns are let go of, the body is no longer labored. When life is forgotten, the pure kernel of vitality² remains undamaged. When the body is intact and the pure kernel of vitality restored, you are one with Heaven. Heaven and earth are the parents of all things. When they come together, a substantial body is formed. When that disperses, a new beginning takes shape. With both body and the pure vitality intact, you can then convey yourself onward. Making the kernel of vitality still more concentrated and pure, you return to the source, thereby assisting in the operations of Heaven.

1. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

2. *Jing*. See Glossary.

Master Liezi³ said to Guanyin, the Guard of the Pass,⁴ “The Utmost Person can walk under water without suffocating, tread on fire without getting scorched, move over the face of all things without trembling. How does he reach such a state?”

Guanyin said, “By preserving his pure vital energy⁵—not through understanding,⁶ skill, resoluteness, or courage. Stay awhile, I will tell you about it! Whatever has an appearance, an image, a sound, or a color is a *being*. How can any being be much different from any other being? How could any of them have what it takes to be the first? For they themselves are nothing more than colors and forms. Hence, there must be a beginning of beings in the formlessness and an end of beings in the unchanging. How could he who finds this, and realizes it fully, be brought to a halt by any mere being? Such a one will position himself in the measure of his place without overflow and yet hide himself away in the proportions of the endless, roaming through that in which all beings end and begin. He unifies his inborn nature, nourishes his vital energy, and merges with his intrinsic virtuosities, thereby opening into the place from which all beings are created. Someone like this keeps the Heavenly in him intact and the imponderable spirit in him free of gaps, so there is nowhere through which mere beings can get at him.

“When a drunken man falls from a cart, he may be hurt but he will not be killed. His bones and joints are no different from those of other men, but the degree of harm done by the fall differs radically, for the imponderable spirit in him forms one intact whole. Having been unaware that he was riding, he is now unaware that he is falling. The frights and shocks of life and death have no way to enter his breast, so he is unflinching no matter how things may clash with him. Finding wholeness in liquor he reaches such a state—imagine then someone who finds his wholeness in the Heavenly. The sage submerges himself in the Heavenly, and that is why nothing can harm him.

“A seeker of revenge does not go so far as to smash his enemy’s weapon, and even the most ill-tempered person bears no hatred for a loose tile that happens to plunk down on his head. This reveals to us a way in which all the world can become peaceful and balanced. It is through this Course that freedom from the chaos of war and from the cruelties of killing can be reached. Do not develop the Heavenly of man, but the Heavenly of Heaven. Developing the Heavenly empowers the life in us; developing the human plunders it. Insatiably partake of the Heavenly, but do not neglect the human either—then even the ordinary people around you will soon come to live by what is genuine in them.”

3. “Master Lineup,” aka “Lineup Banditfend,” who also appears in Chapters 1, 7, 18, 21, 28, and the eponymous Chapter 32.

4. According to legend, the man who detained Laozi when he was leaving the known world for the west, and got him to write the *Daodejing*. He also appears, paired with Laozi, in Chapter 33.

5. Pure *Qi*. See Glossary.

6. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

When Confucius was traveling through the forests of Chu, he came upon a hunchback who was catching cicadas with a glue-tipped stick as if plucking them up with his hand. Confucius said, “How skillful you are! Or do you have a Course?”

The old man said, “I have a Course. For five or six months I practiced piling one pellet on top of another. When I could make a stack of two without it toppling over, already I would lose only very few cicadas. When I could make a stack of three, I could catch nine out of ten. By the time I was able to balance a stack of five, I could catch the cicadas as if plucking them up with my hand. I settle my body like a twisted old stump, my arm as still as the branch of a withered tree. Although heaven and earth are vast and the ten thousand things numerous, I am aware of nothing but cicada wings. Motionless, neither turning nor leaning, I would not trade away a single cicada wing for all of creation. How could I fail to catch them, no matter what I do?”

Confucius turned to his disciples and said, “Using his will undividedly, the imponderable spirit in him converges and solidifies—that would perhaps describe our hunchbacked gentleman here!”

Yan Hui said to Confucius, “When I was crossing the gulf of Goblet Deep, I came across a ferryman who sailed his boat with the grace of a spirit. I asked him if such helmsmanship could be learned. He said, ‘Yes. It is a good swimmer who can usually do it. If he can swim underwater, he can operate a boat even if he has never seen one before.’ I asked him to explain this, but he refused. What did he mean?”

Confucius said, “A good swimmer can usually do it because he has forgotten that the water exists. One who can swim underwater can operate a boat even if he’s never seen one before because to him the surging water is no different from a gentle hill, and a capsizing boat just like an overturning cart. Even if his vessel is tossed and flipped in all directions, it doesn’t get to him, so he is relaxed and leisurely wherever he sails. When a man shoots an arrow to win a tile, he is skillful. But if he is trying to win a silver buckle, he starts getting nervous. And if he’s competing for gold, he almost loses his mind. His native skill is the same in each case, but because he has something to lose, he overvalues the external. Whenever the external is prized, the internal gets clumsy.”

Openout of the Fields was having an audience with Duke Wei of Zhou. The duke said, “I have heard that Invocator of the Nethergizzards⁷ is quite learned on the subject of the life in us. You, my dear sir, have spent some time with him—what did you hear from him about this topic?”

Openout of the Fields said, “All I did there was tend to the outer courtyard, broom in hand; what could I have heard from the master?”

7. Literally invocator of the “kidneys,” which are taken in Chinese medicine to represent the entire urogenital system. Understandably, many commentators take this to be a loan word for other similarly written characters, meaning e.g., “worthyperson,” “firm,” or “tight.”

The duke said, "No need to be so modest! I want to hear what you have to say."

Openout of the Fields said, "What I heard from the master was this: 'One who is skillful in nurturing the life within us goes about it just as if he were herding sheep. He just whips forward the ones he sees lagging behind.'"

Duke Wei asked, "What does this mean?"

Openout of the Fields said, "In the state of Lu there was a man called Lone Leopard, who lived among the rocky cliffs and drank only water, completely isolating himself from the struggles for profit of the ordinary folk. He went on like this for seventy years, and still had the physical glow of a young child. But then one day he had the bad luck of encountering a hungry tiger, which promptly killed and ate him. On the other hand, there was a man called Resolve Unfurled, who rushed off to pay a visit to every rich family and fancy mansion he could find. He went on like this for forty years, and finally he developed a fever from within that killed him off. Lone Leopard nurtured the internal and a tiger ate his external form; Resolve Unfurled nurtured the external and an illness attacked him from within. Both of these men failed to whip forward the one that was lagging behind."

Confucius said, "Do not hide yourself away when you go inside. Do not make a show of yourself when you go outside. Keep yourself planted firmly in the middle. One who can do all three of these will surely attain the greatest renown. When planning a journey on a dangerous road, hearing that even one in ten men are killed, fathers will take the utmost precautions with their sons, and brothers with their brothers, not daring to depart unless they have a large armed escort. Is this not wise? But there is also much to fear when lying in bed or when at table for food and drink. To be unaware of these dangers, taking no precautions against them, would be a real mistake."

The Invocator of the Ancestors, dressed in his solemn black robes, stood over the pigpen and counseled the pigs, saying, "Why should you object to dying? If I offered to feed you grain for three months, keep vigil for ten days, fast for another three, then lay out the mats of white rushes and place your shoulders and rump upon the carved stand, surely you'd be willing to go along with it?" But someone who was planning things from the point of view of the pigs would say, "It would be better to eat bran and chaff, and be left right there in the pen." Planning things from his own point of view, he is willing to go along with having the honors of cap and carriage while still alive and a fancy hearse to bear him to his stately funeral when he dies. Planning things from the point of the pigs, he rejects these things. Planning from his own point of view, he chooses them. Why does he think he's so different from the pigs?

Once, when Duke Huan was hunting in the marshes, with Guan Zhong as his driver, he saw a ghost. The duke took hold of Guan Zhong's hand and said, "Did you see something, Father Zhong?"

"Your servant saw nothing," answered the other.

After returning home, the duke began mumbling to himself until he took ill, remaining at home for several days. Huangzi Gao'ao, an official of Qi, said to the duke, "You are injuring yourself, my lord. How would a ghost be able to harm you? When accumulated energy⁸ is dispersed outward in anger without being recovered, it becomes insufficient for a man's needs within. When it ascends without descending, it makes a man ill-tempered. When it descends without ascending, it makes a man forgetful. And if it neither ascends nor descends, but remains in the place of the heart at the center of the body, it makes a man ill."

Duke Huan said, "But are there really such things as ghosts?"

He answered, "Indeed there are. In the hearth there are the Treaders and in the stove the Tufties. Within the refuse heap inside the gate live the Thunder-lightnings. In the northeast the Doublehead Antfrogs frolic, while the Light-spillers dwell in the northwest. Then there are the Formgones of the water, the Antlerdogs of the hills, the Unipedes of the mountains, the Pacers of the meadows and the Serpentwists⁹ of the marshes."

The duke asked, "What does the Serpentwist look like?"

Huangzi answered, "The Serpentwist is as big as the hub of a carriage wheel and as long as its shaft, robed in purple and capped in red. This creature dislikes the rumblings of chariot wheels, and when it hears them it stands up with its hands on its head. Anyone who is lucky enough to see this creature goes on to become a hegemon of all the states."

Duke Huan burst out laughing and said, "That is what I saw!" Thereupon he put on his official clothes and took his seat at court, and before the end of the day, without his even realizing it, his illness was gone.¹⁰

Master Threadfade was training fighting cocks for the king. After ten days he was asked if the bird was ready. "Not yet," he said. "He's just become vain and confident of his own strength." Asked again ten days later, he said, "Not yet. He still responds to shadows and echoes." Asked again in another ten days he said, "Not yet. He still glares aggressively, his angry strength at full blast." Asked again ten days later, he finally said, "He is almost there. Now, even when another rooster crows, he does not flinch. He appears to all the world like a rooster made of wood, for his intrinsic powers are whole and intact. The other roosters dare not face him: they just turn and run!"

Confucius was viewing the Lu waterfall, which plummets several hundred feet, whitening the waters for forty miles around, impassable to fishes and turtles. And yet he saw an old man swimming there in the torrent. Thinking the man had

8. Qi. See Glossary.

9. *Weiyi* 委蛇. The same phrase appears in Chapter 7, p. 71, used by Huzi as a descriptor of his final manifestation to the shaman Allseasons who was trying to physiognomize him, showing as empty and yet "serpentine in its twistings."

10. This tale presupposes that the reader is aware that Duke Huan of Qi in fact did, with the assistance of Guan Zhong, go on to become hegemon, reigning from 685 to 643 BCE.

attempted suicide due to some suffering in his life, Confucius sent his disciples to run along the bank and try to pull him out. But the old man emerged several hundred paces downstream, walking along the bank singing, his hair streaming down his back. Confucius hurried after him and said, "I thought you were a ghost, but now I see you are a man! Do you have a Course that allows you to tread upon the waters?"

"No, I have no Course," said the old man. "It all starts out in the given, grows through the inborn nature, and comes to perfection in the fated. I enter into the navels of the whirlpools and emerge with the surging eddies. I just follow the Course of the water itself, without making any private one of my own. This is how I tread the waters."

Confucius said, "What do you mean by starting out in the given, growing through the inborn nature, and coming to perfection in the fated?"

"Born among the hills, I first came to feel safely at home there among the hills—that's the given. Gravitating toward the water as I grew up, I then came to feel safely at home in the water—that was my inborn nature. And to be thus and so without knowing how or why I am thus and so—that's the fated."

The woodworker Celebrant was carving a bellstand. When it was done, all who saw it were astonished, as if they had seen the doings of a ghost or spirit. When the Marquis of Lu saw it, he asked, "What technique do you have for this?"

Celebrant replied, "I am just an artisan—what technique could I have? However, there is one thing. When I am going to make a bellstand, I dare not let it deplete my vital energy. Rather, I fast to quiet my mind, and after three days, I no longer presume to care about praise or reward, rank or salary. After five days, I no longer presume to care about honor and disgrace, skill and clumsiness. After seven days, I become so still that I forget I have four limbs and a body. When this happens, for me it is as if the ducal court has ceased to exist. My skill becomes so focused that everything external slides away. Then I enter into the mountain forests, viewing the inborn Heavenly nature of the trees. My body arrives at a certain spot, and already I see the completed bellstand there; only then do I apply my hand to it. Otherwise I leave the tree alone. So I am just matching the Heavenly to the Heavenly. This may be the reason the result suggests the work of spirits!"

Milletman of Eastfield was introduced to Duke Zhuang to exhibit his charioteering skills. He advanced and retreated with the straightness of a taut cord, and swerved left and right in arcs that could have been drawn with a compass. Duke Zhuang, taking the patterns of his motions to be unsurpassable, told him to make a hundred circuits along the same lines. Yan He¹¹ encountered the carriages on the road, and then entered the palace to see the duke, saying, "Ji's horses are going to collapse." The duke remained silent. After a while more, the horses did indeed collapse. The duke asked, "How did you know?" Yan He said, "His horses had

11. See Chapter 4, note 16.

come to the end of their strength but he kept making demands on them. That is why I said they would collapse.”

Chui the Artisan’s swooping freehand arcs could match the lines made with compasses and T-squares, for his fingers transformed along with the thing he was making, his mind never lingering to check or verify. Hence his Numinous Platform¹² was unified and yet unshackled to any one place. The forgetting of the foot means the shoe fits comfortably. The forgetting of the waist means the belt fits comfortably. And when the understanding¹³ forgets right and wrong, the mind fits comfortably. When the encounter with each thing fits comfortably, the internal is not altered and the external is not made master. When everything fits, from beginning to end, even this fitting is forgotten, and that is the perfect fit.

There was a certain man named Grandchild Giveitup who heeled his way into the gate of Master Flatty the Celebrant and declared to him, “When I lived in the villages, never did anyone say I was an uncultivated man. When facing a challenge, never has anyone said I was a coward. And yet when I cultivated the fields, I never got a good crop, and when I served a lord, the time was never right for advancement. So I have ended up being outcast from the villages and exiled from the towns. What crime have I committed against Heaven? Why have I met with this fate?”

Master Flatty said, “Can it be that you’ve never heard how the Utmost Person conducts himself? He forgets his liver and gallbladder and drops away his eyes and ears, drifting oblivious and uncommitted beyond the dust and grime, far-reaching and unfettered in the great work of doing nothing in particular.¹⁴ This is called “Taking action but not relying on it for any credit, helping things grow but not controlling them.”¹⁵ You, on the other hand, embellish your wisdom to astonish the ignorant, cultivating your person to show up the disreputable, all shiny and flashy, as if walking along wielding the sun and moon in your hands.¹⁶ You’ve managed to keep your body with all its nine openings intact, rather than being cut down midway by blindness, deafness, lameness, or deformity. You’re luckier than most! What leisure do you have to resent how Heaven has treated you? Away with you!”

12. 靈臺 *lingtai*. Originally the name of an observation tower built by King Wen, so named because it was claimed that King Wen’s moral charisma was such that as soon as the people heard of his intention to build a tower they voluntarily converged to do the work, completing it rapidly and spontaneously, as if magically, showing the numinous power of humankindness. Here this seems to be taken up as a metaphorical term for the mind, or a particular state of mind. The same term appears in Chapter 23, p. 189. Cf. “Numinous Reservoir” (靈府 *lingfu*), Chapter 5, p. 49.

13. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

14. This sentence appears verbatim at Chapter 6, p. 60.

15. Cf. *Daodejing* 10 and 51.

16. The same words appear verbatim at Chapter 20, p. 160.

Giveitup departed, and Master Flatty took his seat. After a while, he looked up to the heavens and sighed. A disciple asked, "Why do you sigh, Master?" Master Flatty said, "Just now I instructed Giveitup by telling him of the virtuositities of Utmost Persons. I am afraid he will be quite bewildered by it, leading him into great confusion." His disciple said, "Not at all. Let's say Giveitup was in the right, and you, my master, were in the wrong. Well, the wrong certainly has no power to bewilder the right. But let's say Giveitup is in the wrong, and my master in the right. In that case, he was already confused when he came to you. In either case, what harm has been done?"

Master Flatty said, "That's not how it is. Once a bird came to roost in the outskirts of Lu. The ruler of Lu was delighted by it, presenting to it a feast replete with all the finest meats, and having the Ninefold Shao music performed for it. The bird soon started to seem worried and sad, looking around in a daze, not venturing to eat or drink. This is called trying to nourish a bird with what would nourish oneself. To instead nourish a bird as the bird itself would want to be nourished, you should let it perch in the deep forests and glide through the rivers and lakes, allowing it to eat whatever wiggly things it can find—for this creature such a life is as comfortable as walking along on level ground. Now Grandchild Giveitup, an ignorant person of little learning, comes to me and I describe to him the virtuositities of Utmost Persons. That is like taking a mouse for a ride in a carriage or trying to delight a quail with the music of drums and bells. How could he not be bewildered?"

CHAPTER TWENTY

The Mountain Tree

Zhuangzi was traveling in the mountains when he came upon a huge tree, luxuriantly overgrown with branches and leaves. A woodcutter stopped beside it, but in the end chose not to fell it. Asked the reason, he said, “There is nothing it can be used for.” Zhuangzi said, “This tree is able to live out its natural lifespan because of its worthlessness.” When he left the mountains, he lodged for a night at the home of an old friend. His friend was delighted, and ordered a servant to kill a goose for dinner. The servant said, “There is one that can honk and one that cannot. Which should I kill?” The host said, “Kill the one that cannot honk.”

The next day, Zhuangzi’s disciple said to him, “The tree we saw yesterday could live out its natural lifespan because of its worthlessness, while our host’s goose was killed for its worthlessness. What position would you take, Master?”

Zhuangzi said, “I would probably take a position somewhere between worthiness and worthlessness. But though that might look right, it turns out not to be—it still leads to entanglements. It would be another thing entirely to float and drift along, mounted on only the intrinsic powers of the Course—untouched by both praise and blame, now a dragon, now a snake, changing with the times, unwilling to keep to any exclusive course of action. Now above, now below, with momentary harmony as your only measure—that is to float and drift within the ancestor of all things, making things of things but unable to be made anything of by any thing.¹ What could then entangle you? For the likes of Shennong and the Yellow Emperor, this was the only rule.

“But in dealing with the various inclinations of the ten thousand things and the traditional codes for human relationships, we are put in quite a different situation. Union brings on separation, completion brings on destruction, the uncorrupt get ground down, the noble get critiqued, the enterprising get depleted, the talented get schemed against, the untalented get cheated.² How could anything

1. This could be construed as referring to the ancestor of all things, “which makes all things the things they are, but which no thing can make anything,” or to the one who is floating and drifting along there, “making things of things but never made a thing by things”—or both.

2. Alternately, “Whatever is joined gets separated, whatever is completed gets destroyed. The uncorrupt get ground down; the noble get critiqued. Whatever we do we get damaged, so the talented scheme, while the untalented just cheat.”

be counted on to be in every case the one thing needful? Alas, my disciples, note it well: there is nothing for it but the old homeland of the Course and its intrinsic powers!”

When Yiliao of Marketsouth³ went to see the marquis of Lu, the marquis had a worried expression. Master Marketsouth asked, “You look so distressed. What’s the matter?”

The marquis said, “I have studied the Course of the former kings and performed the same deeds as the great former rulers, reverencing the dead and respecting the worthy, which I practice constantly without departing from it for even a moment. And yet all the same I can’t avoid being beset by misfortunes. That’s what distresses me.”

Master Marketsouth said, “It is because your technique for dispelling misfortunes is too shallow. The thick-coated fox and pattern-furred leopard are so still they can dwell in the mountains and forests, and lurk in cliffside caves. They are so cautious that they venture out only at night, staying put all during the day. They are so focused that even if they are hungry or thirsty, they stay hidden and contained, tentatively holding themselves back, keeping to the remote rivers and lakes where they seek their food. And yet for all that, they are still sometimes unable to escape the misfortune of falling into a net or a trap. Is this due to some transgression of theirs? No, it is a disaster brought upon them by their valuable hides. And is not the state of Lu precisely your hide? I would like you to peel the skin off your own body, cast away your hide, cleanse your heart and mind until your desires are gone, leaving you wandering in the wilds where no one goes. Down south in Yue there is an area called the Land of Embedded Virtuosities. The people there are stupid and simple, having few private concerns and desires, knowing how to work but not how to hoard, giving everything away without seeking any return. They know nothing of what duty⁴ deems appropriate nor of what ritual calls for. Heedless and wild, they go their reckless way, with each step dancing on through the Vast Ambit.⁵ When they get born there is occasion for joy, when they die for burial. My wish is that you will leave your state and give up your customary ways, and instead make your way there, helping yourself to the help of the Course.”

The marquis said, “But that course is long and dangerous, over rivers and mountains, and I have neither the boat nor the carriage for it. What should I do?”

3. Xiong Yiliao of Marketsouth appears in *Zuozhuan*, Duke Ai 16, as a man who refused to get involved in a proposed political uprising, unmoved by threats and authority; the uprising failed and peace was restored. He appears in Chapter 24, p. 201, in a tale that associates him with a story of uncertain provenance in which he is a warrior of Chu who stepped out between the warring armies of Chu and Song, and proceeded to juggle nine (or ninety-nine) balls, keeping all but one in the air at all times, a feat so astonishing that it either stopped the battle or, in some versions, so astonishing only the armies of Song that Chu won the battle.

4. Yi. See Glossary.

5. 大方 *dafang*. In Chapter 17 (p. 134), the same term is translated, “The Great Purview.” It also appears in Chapters 24 (p. 205) and 25 (p. 216), translated as “the Great Scope” and “Vast Ambit,” respectively.

Master Marketsouth said, “Just let nothing unbending take shape, retain no fixed dwelling, and these will be your boat and carriage.”

The marquis said, “But the course leading there is dark and long and lonely—who will be my companions? And I have no provisions and no food with me—how will I ever be able to get there?”

Master Marketsouth said, “Minimize your outlay and reduce your desires, and even without any provisions, you will always have enough. You will wade through the rivers and float on the seas, until no shorelines can be found in any direction. The further you go the less you will know of any endpoint. Those who sent you off will all long have turned back from the shore and headed home, so far away from them will you be. For if you exert ownership over others they will entangle you, and if others exert ownership over you they will grieve you. That is why Yao neither exerted ownership over other people nor let himself be owned by them. I want to remove your bondage and take away your grief, instead letting you wander alone with the Course through the Vast Uninhabited. If a person is floating on his two-hulled craft across a river and an empty boat bumps into his, he does not get angry no matter how petty-minded a person he may be. But if there is a person in the other boat, he will shout out, demanding that it be steered clear. If the first shout is not heard, he will shout again, and then again, and by the third shout his tone will have become abusive. In the former case there was no anger, but in the latter case there is, because in the former case the boat was empty and in this case it is full. When a person can wander through the world emptied of self, what can harm him?”

Extravagant of Northchamber was collecting taxes for Duke Ling of Wei to make a set of bells. He built a platform outside the gates of the outermost national wall, and in three months both the upper and lower tiers were completed. Prince Qingji⁶ saw the completed work and asked, “What procedure did you set up to get this done?”

“Here inside the unity I dare not set up anything else,” he replied. “I have heard it said, ‘After all the carving and chiseling, return to the unhewn!’ Naive indeed, its childlike ignorance! Confused indeed, its hesitation and doubt! Such a thicket, so muddled and mixed, how it sends off what goes and welcomes in what comes, for it does not block the one nor retain the other. It complies with them when they are strong and forceful, follows them also when they bend compliantly, goes along with them also when they impoverish themselves. Thus it was that day and night I collected taxes without the least friction. How much more would this be so for those who travel truly great paths?”

When Confucius was besieged between Chen and Cai, he went seven days without eating any cooked food. Grand Duke Letbe went to console him, saying, “You were close to dying, weren’t you?”

6. Son of King Liao of Wu, Prince Qingji fled to Wei to escape his father’s murderer, who assumed the throne of Wu in 514 BCE.

Confucius said, "I was."

"Do you hate the idea of dying?"

"Yes, I do."

Letbe said, "Then let me try to tell you about a Course whereby to keep from dying. There are birds in the eastern sea called lazywills, which fly slow and close to the ground, as if lacking ability to do otherwise, assisting each other by pulling one another along, pressing their bodies together when they roost. None dares go ahead when they advance, and none dares lag behind when they retreat. In eating, none of them dares to be the first, always taking only what the others have left behind. But for this reason not one is ever left out in any of their group formations, and people are in the end unable to harm them. This is how they escape all worries. It is the straight tree that is the first to be cut, the sweet spring of water that is first used up. But you instead have been trying to embellish your wisdom to astonish the ignorant, to cultivate your person to show up the disreputable—so bright and shining, as if you were walking around wielding the sun and moon in your hands!⁷ That is why you have been unable to avoid your current predicament. I have heard of a person of great completion who once put it this way: "Those who boast are credited with no accomplishment; as soon as accomplishment reaches completion, it decays; as soon as fame reaches completion, it wanes. Who can get rid of all fame and credit for accomplishment, returning to the midst of the mass of ordinary people? His Course will flow without settling down in any bright places; his attainments will move along without dwelling in any eminence or fame. So simple and so commonplace will he be that he will seem almost insane; wiping away all traces of his achievements and dispelling any power of position, he will not work for accomplishment or name. Thus he will cast no blame on others, and others will cast no blame on him. Utmost Persons have no reputation. Why do you, sir, so delight in such things?"

"Excellent!" said Confucius. With that he took his leave of his entourage, dismissed his disciples and escaped into the wilds of the great marsh, donning only coarse cloths and furs, eating only acorns and chestnuts, going among the beasts without disturbing their herds, going among the birds without disturbing their alignments. He was then not detested even by the birds and beasts—how much the less so by his fellow humans!

Confucius asked Sir Mulberry Rainwov, "I was twice exiled from Lu, a tree was cut down on me in Song, my footprints were wiped away in Wei, I was put in dire straits in Shang and Zhou, and I was besieged between Chen and Cai. Why have I met with all these hardships, such that my closest associates get increasingly distant, and my disciples and friends get increasingly scattered?"

Sir Mulberry Rainwov said, "Can you never have heard about that fugitive from Jia, a certain Lin Hui? When he was fleeing, he left behind his jade *bi*-pendant, worth a thousand pieces of gold, and instead took his infant child on his back. Someone asked him, 'In terms of the monetary value, the child isn't worth

7. The same words appear verbatim in Chapter 19, p. 155.

as much as the jade. In terms of the worries involved, the child is much more trouble. Why then did you leave your jade *bi*-pendant behind and instead carry your child on your back when you fled?’ Lin Hui said, ‘I was joined to that thing by profit, but I belong together with this one by nature, by the Heavenly.’ What is joined by profit will be abandoned under the pressure of poverty, calamity, distress, or injury. But those that belong together by nature, by the Heavenly, will cling to each other all the more tightly under the pressures of poverty, calamity, distress, or injury. Abandoning each other or clinging to each other—quite a difference! Relationships between noble persons are flavorless like water, while the relationships of petty people are sweet like fruit liqueur. But it is by this flavorlessness that the noble become intimate with each other, while it is by that sweetness that the petty break from each other. What comes together for no reason will come apart for no reason too.”

Confucius said, “I respectfully accept this instruction.” And he then headed back to his quarters, strolling at a relaxed and leisurely pace. From that day on he put an end to his studies and got rid of his books. The disciples no longer bowed before him, but their affection for him began to grow and grow.

On another day, Sir Mulberry Rainwov said further, “When Shun was about to die, he left an order to Yu saying, “Take heed! For the body there is nothing better than moving with the trajectories of things, and for the dispositions there is nothing better than following their lead. Moving with the trajectories, there is no division; following their lead, there is no toil. Undivided and untoiled, one no longer seeks to serve the body by treating it to extraneous embellishments. No longer seeking extraneous embellishments with which to serve the body, one in fact depends on no thing at all.”⁸

Zhuangzi was wearing a patched garment of coarse cloth, with his shoes tied together by strings, when he traveled past the King of Wei. The king asked, “Why are you so worn out, sir?”

Zhuangzi said, “I am not worn out; I am just poor! When a scholar has coursing in him the intrinsic powers of the Course but cannot put them into practice, that really wears him out. The fact that I am dressed in tattered clothes and crumbling shoes is due to poverty, not weariness! It is just a case of what is called ‘not meeting the right time.’ Can you have never seen one of those bounding monkeys? When they can find catalpas and camphor trees or towering cedars, they pull and swing themselves off the branches, dominating the area like a sovereign, and even the eyes of archers like Yi or Peng Meng would be unable to track them. But if they always find themselves only among thorny aspens and brambly bushes, they

8. Both “serve” and “depend on” translate *dai*, which is being punned upon here. See Glossary. Combining the senses, we might more loosely translate as if that verb takes on an unlikely kind of transitivity, i.e., “Undivided and untoiled, one seeks no extraneous embellishments that make the body dependent on them.” Alternately, reading *dai* univocally, we might have, “Undivided and untoiled, one seeks none of the outward embellishments that would make one dependent on the body.”

move cautiously, constantly glancing over their shoulders, shaking with apprehension and trembling with fear. This is not because their bones and tendons have suddenly become stiff and no longer supple; it's just that they are in a situation that is unsuitable to them, and thus have no opportunity to display their abilities. Now to live in the midst of benighted rulers and unruly prime ministers, is there any way not to be worn out, however dearly one might want not to be? Wasn't this clear enough when Bi Gan⁹ had his heart cut out?"

When Confucius was in dire straits between Chen and Cai, for seven days he had no cooked food to eat. Leaning against a withered tree to his left, and banging on a decayed branch with his right, he sang the "Ode of Biao."¹⁰ He had the instrument but could not muster up his technique, had the sound but could not muster up the notes. The sound of the wood and the sound of the man came together in the heart like a plow tearing through the soil.

Yan Hui was standing nearby, with his hands knitted formally at his breast, but his eyes kept shifting over to observe his teacher. Confucius, fearing that the disciple was perhaps making too much of the situation due to his esteem for him, or grieving over it due to his love for him, said, "Hui! It is easy to remain unperturbed by harms coming from Heaven, but difficult to remain unperturbed by benefits coming from man. But there is no beginning that is not also an end. So the human and the Heavenly are really one. Which of the two was it that was singing just now?"

Yan Hui said, "Tell me more about why it is easy to remain unperturbed by the harms from Heaven?"

Confucius said, "Hunger, thirst, cold, heat, poverty that obstructs one's actions—these are the doings of heaven and earth, the outpourings of the circlings of things. It is this that we mean when we speak of 'passing away along with them all.' When you are subject to a sovereign, you dare not reject whatever he puts forth. If this is how one must practice even the course of being a subject to a ruler, how much more must we be so in our dealings with Heaven!"

"What do you mean by the difficulty of remaining unperturbed by the benefits coming from man?"

Confucius said, "When someone is first employed, and then soon begins succeeding in all directions, both rank and salary start arriving and keep coming. These are benefits coming from things, and are not really a part of oneself, for our fate always depends partially on what is external. But a noble man will not stoop to robbery, and a worthy man will not stoop to thievery—so how could I accept such things? Thus I say, No bird is wiser than the swallow, which will not even look at any place that does not suit his eyes. Even if it happens to drop

9. Bi Gan, again, had given moral advice to the wicked Emperor Zhou, who then had the man's heart literally cut out of his chest—to see what the heart of such a great sage really looks like.

10. According to Cheng Xuanying, another name for Shennong, the "Divine Farmer," inventor of agriculture.

something of value there, it will abandon it and hurry off. Yet though it fears human beings, it finds a way to sneak into their midst, finding a place to survive among the village altars of the land and grain.”

“What did you mean by ‘There is no beginning that is not also an ending?’”

Confucius said, “On and on go the transformations of all the ten thousand things, and yet we do not know what it is that brings about their succession, one after another. So how could we know where it ends? How could we know where it begins? We can only right ourselves and await what comes next, nothing more.”

“What did you mean by ‘the human and the heavenly are really one’?”

Confucius said, “That there is the human—that is the Heavenly. That there is the Heavenly—that is also the Heavenly. But that humans are unable to exert ownership over the Heavenly is precisely their inborn nature. So the sage calmly embodies passing away as his own self, and thus does he come to his end.”

Zhuangzi was wandering around Diaoling Park one day when he spied a strange bird flying in from the south, with seven-foot wings and big eyes an inch around. It grazed his forehead as it swooped down and went descending into a grove of chestnut trees. “What kind of bird is this?” he exclaimed. “Such huge wings but it doesn’t get anywhere, such big eyes but it didn’t even see me!” He hiked up his robe and tiptoed over with his crossbow in hand, preparing to shoot it. There he saw a cicada that had just found a lovely spot of shade and forgotten its own existence. A praying mantis was raising its padded hands to seize it, but in its eagerness for gain had in turn forgotten its own existence. The strange bird had thus followed it, seeing some gain there—but in seeing this gain was forgetting what was most genuine to it. Zhuang Zhou then took fright himself. “Ah!” he said. “Living beings certainly do encumber one another, each type calling forth another [as its predator]!” He then tossed away his crossbow and hurried off, pursued by a park ranger shouting accusations.

Zhuang Zhou then went home and did not go out even into his yard for three months. Matrush Fornow followed after him when he finally appeared, and asked, “Why have you not come out even into your yard for such a long time?”

Zhuang Zhou said, “I had been so obsessed with physical forms that I was actually forgetting all about my own body,¹¹ gazing so intently at the turbid water that I lost sight of the clear depths. And I have heard the master say, ‘When you live among those following certain customs, you eventually come to follow those customs yourself.’ Well, I went wandering around Diaoling Park and forgot my own body, just as this strange bird who grazed my forehead went wandering into the chestnut grove and forgot what is most genuine to it, so that the park ranger

11. This sentence makes an unusual contrast between *xing* 形 and his *shen* 身. Both words can commonly mean “physical body,” but the latter means specifically “one’s own body,” as opposed to bodies in general, and very commonly also “one’s own self” in the broader sense of one’s personal life, concerns, welfare, needs, responsibilities, behavior as opposed to public and shared concerns and activities.

there took me as his prey. That's why I haven't wanted to venture out at all, even into my own yard."

Master Brightside¹² was traveling to Song and lodging at a roadside inn. There were two concubines there, one beautiful and the other ugly, but the ugly one was honored while the beautiful one was disparaged. Master Brightside asked why. The little innkeeper told him, "The beautiful one thinks herself beautiful, so I tend not to notice her beauty. But the ugly one thinks herself ugly, so I tend not to notice her ugliness."

Master Brightside said, "Mark it well, my disciples! If you practice worthy behavior but also rid yourself of thinking yourself worthy, where can you go where you will not be cherished?"

12. Often identified by commentators in spite of the morphed surname as another name for Yang Zhu 楊朱, commonly cited as the philosopher of self-interest as opposed to the Mohist philosophy of altruism. See for example *Mencius* 7A26.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Sir Squarescope of the Fields

When Sir Squarescope of the Fields was sitting in attendance on Marquis Wen of Wei,¹ he often spoke of a certain Mr. Valleywork. The marquis asked, “This Valleywork, is he your teacher?”

Sir Squarescope said, “No, he’s just a fellow from around where I, Choiceless,² am living. I speak of him only because when he speaks of the Course he is often on target.”

“So you have no teacher?”

Sir Squarescope said, “Oh no, I do have a teacher.”

“Who would that be?”

“Master Nonresist of the Eastern Wall.”

“In that case, why is that you have never mentioned him?”

“He is the kind of person who is *genuine*: with the appearance of a human being but the empty openness of the sky, of Heaven. He follows along with things yet preserves the genuine in himself; because he is so limpid he manages to receive and contain all things. When beings are off Course, he just puts his own demeanor into alignment, allowing them to realize it on their own, causing all human intentions to melt away. How could I, Choiceless, be worthy even to mention such a person?”

After Sir Squarescope departed, Marquis Wen spent the whole day in a speechless daze. He then called his standing ministers before him and said, “How far beyond the ordinary is the noble person whose intrinsic virtuosities are whole and intact! At first I thought the words of sagely wisdom, all about the practice of humankindness and responsible conduct, were the utmost. But now that I have heard about Sir Squarescope’s teacher, my body unravels and does not want to move; my mouth clamps up and does not want to talk. All my previous learning now seems to me nothing more than dolls of clay, and, the state of Wei, genuinely, just something that ties me down!”

1. Reigned 424–387 BCE and renowned as a patron of learning.

2. Sir Squarescope refers to himself, as is customary, by his own personal name, *wuze* 無擇, which means “Choiceless.”

Sir Snow the Warm Unk was staying in Lu in the course of his journey toward Qi when a certain man of Lu requested a meeting with him. Sir Snow said, “Can’t do it. I have heard that the noble men of these middle states know a lot about ritual duties but have a narrow understanding of the hearts and minds of human beings. I don’t want to meet with him.”

On the way back from Qi he again stayed in Lu for a time, and the same man again requested a meeting with him. Sir Snow said, “He wanted to meet with me before, and now he wants to meet with me again! This guy is definitely bringing something to ‘save’ me with—that is, to irritate me!”³

But in the end he went out and met with the guest, and later came back home sighing. The following day he met with him again, and again he afterward came back home sighing. His servant said, “Every time you meet with this guest you come home sighing. Why?”

“I told you before,” he said. “The people of these middle states know a lot about ritual duties but have a narrow understanding of the hearts and minds of human beings. When he was meeting with me just now he would move forward and backward in patterns that form perfect circles and squares. When he was trying to be relaxed he was either like a dragon or like a tiger. He remonstrated with me as if he were my son, offered guidance as if he were my father. That’s why I sighed.”

Confucius, having met with him, said nothing about it. Zilu asked him, “My master, you have long desired to meet with Sir Snow the Warm Unk, but now that you have had a chance to meet with him, you say nothing. Why?”

Confucius said, “A man such as this makes the Course present to you as soon as you lay eyes on him. There is just no place there for anything one could say.”

Yan Hui inquired of Confucius, saying, “Master, when you walk, I walk with you. When you trot, I trot with you. When you gallop, I gallop. But when you bolt away beyond the dust, I can only stand there watching in amazement from far behind you.”

Confucius said, “Whatever do you mean, Hui?”

Yan Hui said, “When you walk, I walk: I can speak the words you speak. When you trot I also trot: I can make the arguments that you make. When you gallop I also gallop: you speak of the Course, and I also speak of the Course. But when you bolt away beyond the dust, leaving me only able to gaze after you in amazement: that’s when you say nothing and yet are trusted, when you affiliate nowhere but circulate everywhere,⁴ when you serve no particular purpose and yet the people come thronging to you in a torrent, and I have no idea how or why. That’s what I mean.”

Confucius said, “Shall we not look into it then? There is no greater sorrow than the death of the heart and mind—even the death of the whole person is a distant second. The sun emerges in the east and sets at the western horizon, and

3. Playing on two meanings of *zhen* 振: to save and to agitate.

4. Alluding to *Analects* 2:14.

all things without exception find their direction in relation to it. All things that have eyes to look or toes to wiggle manage to do so only in dependence on this, emerging into action in dependence on the daylight. When it appears, they show themselves; when it sets, they vanish. All things are thus: their death depends on something just as their life depends on something. I have received this fully formed body that remains unchanged as it awaits its end, but from the first I have nonetheless been moving in mimicry of all things day and night without the slightest pause, never knowing in what it will end. Like gathering smoke, this body forms, knowing only that fate cannot be determined in advance, and for this reason I instead make sure to pass away every day. You and I are shoulder to shoulder all our lives and yet we lose each other—is it not sad? You are right now seeing more or less all there is of me that can be seen; that other one you speak of is already completely discharged and gone. And yet you search for it as if it should be something existing. You are looking for a horse in an abandoned stall. What you are subservient to in me is something long forgotten, deeply forgotten—as is what I am subservient to in you.⁵ But don't worry about it! Even if you forget the previous me, there remains something of me untouched by any forgetting.”⁶

Confucius went to see Lao Dan, who, having just emerged from his bath and spread out his hair to dry, was lying there looking creepily inert, like some non-human thing. Confucius waited off to the side for a while, but finally showed himself, saying, “Am I seeing things? Is it really so? Just now your body, sir, looked like a dried-up stump dug out of the ground, like you had cast off all things and departed from all people, standing alone in the alone.”

Lao Dan replied, “I have released my mind to wander in the beginnings of things.”

Confucius said, “What does that mean?”

Lao Dan said, “My mind is so trapped in it that it cannot know; my mouth is so gaped by it that it cannot speak. But I will try to opine to you something of what it verges on.⁷ Perfect Yin is solemn and restrained. Perfect Yang is blazing and striving. Yet the solemn and restrained emerges from heaven, and the blazing and striving emanates from earth.⁸ When intercourse succeeds between the two, forming a harmony, all things are born from it. It may be that something pulls their strings, but none can see its form. Ebb and flow, fullness and emptiness, now darkness and now light, the sun changing and the moon transforming—every day something does all this, but none can see its workings. When things are born, there is something from which they sprout; when they die, there is something to

5. More literally perhaps, “For you to submit to me is quite forgetful of you, as it would be quite forgetful of me to submit to you!” Or possibly: “What you serve in me is my deep forgetting, as is what I serve in you.”

6. Which could mean unforgetten, unforgettable, unforgetting, or all of the above.

7. *Qijiang* 其將, literally, “its about-to.”

8. The yin element here emerges from heaven, which is typically considered pure yang, while the yang element emerges from earth, pure yin.

which they return. Beginning and end oppose and revert to one another without any starting point, and no one knows where it comes to an end. What could be the ancestor of it all if not just this?"

Confucius asked, "I venture to ask how to wander in such as that."

Lao Dan replied, "To find this is an experience of utmost beauty and utmost joy. One who finds the utmost beauty and wanders in the utmost joy is called an Utmost Person."

Confucius said, "I would like to hear a method for it."

Lao Dan said, "Herbivorous animals do not mind a change of pasture, and water-born insects do not mind a change of water, for they are undergoing a small change without losing the larger constant. Thus joy, anger, sorrow, and happiness do not enter their breasts. Now the whole world under the sky is the one thing that is shared by all beings. When they have found what they all share and see the sameness of it in all cases, they come to regard their four limbs and all the parts of their own bodies as so much dust and dirt, coming to see death and life, endings and beginnings, as but day and night. Then these things are unable to unmoor them—how much less the tiny distinctions of gain and loss, disaster and good fortune! They can toss away all these subordinate accessories as if tossing away a clump of dirt, for they know that their own bodies are worth more than the accessories. As long as the value lies in oneself, there is no loss in any change of circumstance. One may go through ten thousand transformations and still reach no end. What then is there to worry about? It is into this that one who has taken up the Course finds himself freed."⁹

Confucius said, "Master, your virtuosity equals that of heaven and earth themselves, and yet even you still must make temporary use of these perfect words for the cultivation of the mind—indeed, even the great noble men of ancient times were never able to break free of the need for cultivation."

Lao Dan said, "Not so. The murmuring of water is not something it does deliberately,¹⁰ but is just that very stuff being the way it is. So it is with the intrinsic virtuosities of the Utmost Person—he engages in no cultivation, and yet all things are unable to separate themselves from him. It is like heaven being high of itself, earth being thick of itself, the sun and moon being bright of themselves—what cultivation need they practice?"

Confucius departed and reported the encounter to Yan Hui, saying, "In my relation to the Course I am no better than a pickled insect in a vat of vinegar. If the master had not lifted my lid, I would never have known the vast wholeness of heaven and earth!"

Zhuangzi went to meet with Duke Ai of Lu, who said to him, "In Lu, my good sir, we have a great many Confucian scholars, but not many people who seem to want to practice according to your methods!"

9. Alternately, "Once one has taken up the Course, one is freed of all such things." Or simply, "One who has taken up the Course has understanding of [no more than] this."

10. *Wuwei*. Usually "non-doing." See Glossary.

Zhuangzi replied, “Not so. There are actually very few Confucians in Lu.”

Duke Ai said, “Everyone in the whole country is going around dressed in Confucian garb! How can you say there are very few of them?”

Zhuangzi said, “I have heard that Confucians wear a round cap to show their understanding of the seasons of heaven, and walk in square shoes to show their awareness of the shape of the earth, that they dangle jade blades at their waists to show that they are decisive in rendering judgments and cutting off alternatives when tasks come to them. A noble man may practice this course without wearing its uniform, and not everyone who wears a certain uniform necessarily knows its corresponding course. If you are so certain that this is not so, why not issue an edict throughout the state saying, ‘Anyone who wears this garb without practicing this course will be held guilty of a capital offense and summarily executed’?”

The duke thereupon issued such an edict, and after five days there was no one in all the state of Lu who dared wear the Confucian garments, with the exception of one old fellow who stood in his full Confucian outfit at the duke’s gate. The duke called him in and questioned him about the affairs of state; he was able to turn it a thousand ways, transform it ten thousand times, and still he was never stumped. Zhuangzi said, “So in all the state of Lu there is only this one Confucian—can you call that a great many?”

Boli Xi¹¹ was a man who never let rank or salary enter his heart, and that is why the cattle he fed always grew fat. This is what caused Duke Mu of Qin to forget the lowliness of his position and hand over the government to him. Neither life nor death entered the heart of that clansman of Youyu,¹² and that is why others were so moved by him. When Lord Yuan of Song wanted to have some illustrations drafted, many masters of the brush came to his court. After receiving their instructions and making their formal bows, they all remained standing there in attendance at court, licking their brushes and mixing their ink, with half again as many waiting at the gate. But there was one who arrived late and was loitering around unhurriedly out there without pressing forward to present himself. When he did receive his instructions and had given his bow, he didn’t remain standing there in attendance at all but instead took off immediately for his quarters. When the duke sent someone to check on him there, it was discovered that the man had taken off all his clothes and was dancing around the room, filling it everywhere with his nakedness.¹³ The ruler said, “Well OK! Now that’s a true painter!”

11. A seventh-century BCE statesmen whose fortunes underwent many ups and downs after his state was overthrown, living the life of a cattle-herder before being recognized and offered a post by Duke Mu of Qin for his worthiness, in spite of his lowly status.

12. The sage-emperor Shun.

13. Following the interpretation of Xuan Ying, and also taking *banbo* 般磻 as cognate with *pangbo* 旁磻 as used in Chapter 1, p. 10, elsewhere written *pangpo* 旁魄, *panbo* 盤磻, and *bangbo* 磅磻.

When King Wen was out observing the sights at Zang, he happened to see an old man fishing without ever treating his fishing as fishing. Since it is only by fishing without grasping one's fishing that one can fish with real constancy,^A King Wen wished to raise this man up to office and put him in charge of the state, but because he feared this would cause unrest among his great ministers and his own father and elder brothers, he tried to put this wish out of his mind and forget about it. Yet at the same time he could not bear the way the people of the empire had to live out their days without a heaven over them, a true protector. So the next morning he called in his great officers and announced to them, "Last night I had a dream in which I saw a good man, with dark hair and beard, riding a dappled horse with red hooves on one side. This man commanded me saying, "Hand your government over to the old man of Zang, and then perhaps there will be some hope for the people's recovery!" The ministers were jolted by these words, and said, "It must have been your late father!" King Wen said, "Well, let us do some divination about it and see." The ministers said, "It is the command of your father, and can be nothing besides! What need is there to do a divination about it?"

So he then went to receive the old man of Zang and put him in charge of the state. The old man changed no laws and issued no edicts. But when after three years King Wen went on tour to inspect the state of the nation, he found that the rank and file officers had all destroyed their illicit holdings and disbanded their cliques, that the high-ranking officers didn't bother to develop any special virtuosities¹⁴ of their own, and that no one dared bring alien grain measures within the four borders of the state. In that the rank and file officers destroyed their illicit holdings and disbanded their cliques, there was a real 'esteeming of the shared.' In that the high-ranking officers didn't bother to develop any special virtuosities of their own, all shared in the same work. In that no one dared bring alien grain measures into the country, the feudal lords were free of ulterior intentions.^B King Wen for this reason decided to declare the old man Great Teacher of the Nation, and respectfully facing north toward him begged, "May I extend your government to all in the empire?" But the old man of Zang went blank and made no replay, and then evasively excused himself. The following morning the order was issued,¹⁵ but by that evening the old man had vanished and was never heard from again.

Yan Hui asked Confucius about this incident, saying, "Was even King Wen so imperfect? Why did he need to make up that story about the dream?"

Confucius said, "Hush! Say no more, you! King Wen was fully realized on all fronts! What room is there for your assessments and criticisms? He was merely according with the needs of that particular moment!"

14. *De*. See Glossary.

15. Presumably King Wen's order to try to extend the old man's way of government to the entire empire.

Lie Yukou¹⁶ was demonstrating his archery to Uncle Dim Nobody. He pulled the bow until it bent back all the way, meanwhile balancing a cup of water on his elbow. As soon as he let one arrow fly the next was already in place and ready to go and all at once had already jumped off the string, and so for the next, over and over. But during the whole time he was as still as a statue. Uncle Dim Nobody said, “This is the shooting that shoots, not the shooting that shoots not. Let’s try climbing to the top of a mountain, standing you on a tottering rock cliff over a plunging abyss of a hundred fathoms, and see if you’re still able to shoot so well.”

Thereupon Nobody led him up a high mountain, treading on a tottering rock cliff over an abyss of a hundred fathoms, then took several steps backward until both feet were hanging two-thirds over the edge. He then gestured for Yukou to approach. But the latter had fallen to the ground, dripping sweat down to his heels. Uncle Dim Nobody then said, “The imponderable spirit and energy of an Utmost Person remains unchanged whether he is peering up at the azure sky, diving down to the Yellow Springs, or flying past the edges of the eight extremities of the universe. But here you are, petrified by your own eye-popping ambition—the real danger is inside you, eh?”¹⁷

Shoulder Self asked Sunshu Ao,¹⁸ “Three times you were made Commanding Officer and yet you did not glory in it. Three times you were dismissed from your post but showed no expression of sorrow. At first I had my doubts about you, sir, but now I observe how calmly the breath passes through your nostrils. What special way do you have of applying your mind?”

Sunshu Ao said, “How could I have anything that exceeds what anyone else has? I just see whatever comes as impossible to refuse and whatever goes as impossible to retain. I merely looked on those gains and losses as having nothing to do with me, which I suppose was why I looked unworried. How could I have anything that exceeds what anyone else has? I ask, does what matters reside in those external things or in myself? If in those things, it has nothing to do with me. If in myself, it has nothing to do with those things. So now all I do is dawdle at my ease, gazing about me in all directions¹⁹—what leisure do I have to worry about whether people honor or despise me?”

16. The full name of Liezi: if translated perhaps “Lineup Banditfend.” He appears also in Chapter 1, p. 5; Chapter 7, p. 70; Chapter 18, p. 147; Chapter 19, p. 150; Chapter 21, p. 171; Chapter 28, p. 232; and the eponymous Chapter 32, p. 262.

17. 爾於中也殆矣夫。 Meaning either “It is what is inside you that is truly dangerous, eh?” or else “It is what is inside you that is truly *in* danger, eh?” Or again, taking *zhong* as a verb used with respect to archery, “Truly, it is hitting the target that truly endangers you, eh?” Possibly a complex pun meant to convey all three meanings.

18. An officer in charge of hydraulic engineering in the state of Chu in the sixth century BCE.

19. The exact phrases with which the cook describes his state of satisfaction after carving up the ox in Chapter 3, p. 30.

When Confucius heard about this he said, “The Genuine Persons of Old could not be convinced by the wise nor tempted by the beautiful nor plundered by bandits, and even Fuxi and the Yellow Emperor could not befriend them. Death and life are a great matter, but they effected no change in such people as these—how much less so rank and salary! Being such, their imponderable spirits passed through Mount Tai without getting stuck and entered into the abysmal springs without getting wet, were positioned in the lowest and tightest places without getting distressed, for they filled all of heaven and earth. The more they gave away to others, the more they themselves possessed.”

The king of Chu and the ruler of Fan were sitting together. Over a short period of time, there were three attendants of the king of Chu who declared, “The state of Fan is finished!”²⁰ The ruler of Fan said, “That is not enough to destroy my existence, to destroy what I’m preserving.^c Since the destruction of Fan is not enough to destroy what I’m preserving, the preservation of Chu is not enough to preserve what you’re preserving. From this point of view, the destruction of Fan and the preservation of Chu are equally non-events.”

ENDNOTES

A. Probably an allusion to the story of Jiang Taigong 姜太公, also known as Jiang Ziya 姜子牙 and Lu Shang 吕尚, whom King Wen of Zhou adopted as teacher and who is said to have been the long-anticipated sage who later enabled Wen’s son, King Wu, to overthrow the Shang dynasty and establish the Zhou dynasty. Unappreciated by the Shang rulers, Lu Shang is said to have gone fishing in the wilderness, but with straight nails at the end of his fishing line rather than hooks. King Wen came upon him on a tour of the area and asked how he expected to catch anything with straight rather than curved hooks. Lu Shang said, “I only catch those who want to be caught!” This was taken as a reference to his willingness to be employed by a worthy king such as King Wen or, later, his son Wu. The present sentence is sometimes interpreted, in accordance with this allusion, to mean that the old man was “fishing without a hook on his line. It is only one who can fish without holding on to his hook whose hook functions constantly.”

B. These three lines are suspected by Xuan Ying to be commentary that has found its way into the primary text. They do feel ill-fitting, and the intended meaning in this context is indeed hard to construe. The term translated as “esteeming of the shared” (*shangtong* 尚同) is a slogan (and chapter title) from the *Mozi*. In that context it means something like “esteeming conformity” or, in its alternate form, *shangtong* 上同, “conformity with one’s superiors,” which perhaps best captures the Mohist sense of the term as explained there, which advocates an enforced

20. It is not clear whether this is an announcement of an event that has taken place or a general statement that Fan is doomed, coming from three different attendants over the course of the meeting, whether as a prediction or a threat. In the end Fan was indeed destroyed—by Chu.

conformity of valuations wherein each level of society adopts the moral standards of the level directly above, under threat of punishment. This passage is possibly a deliberately ironic twisting of the meaning of the term with a pun: interpreting *tong* not as conformity but as sharing, the “esteeming of the shared” here is not a conforming upward with the moral values of superiors, but rather a sharing in the common work, in all directions. On this reading the phrase *wuerxin* 無二心, literally “without two minds,” translated “free of ulterior intentions,” should also be a kind of pun, removing the usual moral sense of loyalty in serving a superior officer to the exclusion of private interests (similar to “conformity with superiors”), commitment to a single standard of morality, or to morality instead of private benefit, perhaps meaning instead something closer to “free of distractions.” A less ironic interpretation would be that all these moral virtues of shared values and social conformity as conceived by the Mohists and others really were accomplished, but by the strange noncoercive means suggested here, rather than through threat and punishment.

c. A double translation. See “Notes on the Translation.” Normally this phrase would mean simply, “destroy my existence,” meaning to end my physical survival. I take it that the further meaning is implied as a pun in this context.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Knowinghood Journeyed North

Knowinghood¹ journeyed north beyond Darkwater, ascending the Hills of Hidden Jutting, where he met Nodoing Nosaying. Knowinghood said, “I want to ask you something. What should I think of, what should I consider, in order to know the Course? Where should I settle, what should I serve, in order to rest securely in the Course? What should I follow, what course should I take as my guide, in order to get the Course?” He asked three questions, but Nodoing Nosaying did not answer. It wasn’t that he was unwilling to answer; he did not know to answer, he did not know how to answer, he did not know any answer.²

Having received no response, Knowinghood traveled back to the south of Clearwater, ascending the Hills of Doubt Silenced, and met Wild and Twisty there. He asked him the same questions. Wild and Twisty said, “Ah! This I know! Let me tell you!” But just as he was about to speak, he forgot what he was going to say.

Still having obtained no answer, Knowinghood returned to the Imperial Palace, where he asked the same questions of the Yellow Emperor.

“Only when you think of nothing and consider nothing,” said the Yellow Emperor, “will you know the Course. Only when you settle nowhere and serve nothing will you rest securely in the Course. Only when you follow nothing and take no course as your guide will you get the Course.”

“Now you and I know this,” said Knowinghood, “while the other two do not. Who is right?”

“Only Nodoing Nosaying is truly right,” said the Yellow Emperor. “Wild and Twisty only seems to be right. As for you and me, we are nowhere near. For ‘he who knows does not speak, and he who speaks does not know. Hence the sage practices the teaching of no words.’³ The Course cannot be given, and its intrinsic powers cannot be received. But humankindness can be deliberately faked, responsible conduct can do harm, and ritual is just a mutual swindle. Hence it is said,

1. 知 *Zhi*. Here personified as the questing hero of a kind of adventure story, and thus translated in this preposterous way, which echoes the facetious tone of the original. See Glossary.

2. A triple translation of 不知答 *buzhida*. See “Notes on the Translation.”

3. Quoting *Daodejing* 56 and 2.

‘When the Course is lost, there are the intrinsic powers; when the intrinsic powers are lost, there is humankindness; when the humankindness is lost, there is ritual. Ritual is the fruitless flower of the Course, and the beginning of disorder.’⁴ And also, ‘To practice the Course requires daily diminishment. Diminish again and yet again, until you reach non-doing, doing nothing and yet leaving nothing undone.’⁵ Now you and I have already become *beings*—is it not difficult to return to the root? It is easy only for a Great Man. For life is the follower of death, and death is the beginning of life; who understands the thread that connects them? The birth of man is just a convergence of energy.⁶ When it converges, he lives. When it scatters, he dies. Since life and death follow one another, what is there to worry about? It is in this way that all things are one. People take what they consider beautiful to be sacred and wonderful, and take what they dislike to be odious and rotten. But the odious and rotten transform into the sacred and wonderful, and the sacred and wonderful transform into the odious and rotten. Hence it is said, ‘Just open yourself into the single energy that is the world.’ It is for the sake of this that the sage values oneness.”

Knowinghood said, “I asked Nodoining Nosing, and he gave me no response. Not that he wasn’t willing to answer; he didn’t know any answers. I asked Wild and Twisty, and he didn’t tell me either, although he was just about to. It wasn’t that he decided not to answer; he forgot what he was going to say. Now I have asked you and you know the answer. Why do you say you are nowhere near it?”

The Yellow Emperor said, “The one is truly right, because he does not know. The other seems right, because he forgot. But you and I are nowhere near it, because we know it.”

When Wild and Twisty heard about this conversation, he concluded that the Yellow Emperor was a man who truly knew all about words.

Heaven and earth possess vast beauties but speak no words. The four seasons have their unconcealed regularities but offer no opinions. Each of the ten thousand things is perfectly coherent⁷ but gives no explanations. The sage traces back to the beauties of heaven and earth and thereby reaches through to the coherence of the ten thousand things. Thus it is that “the Utmost Person does nothing⁸, the Great Sage initiates nothing”: that is to say, they merely cast their gaze over heaven and earth. For the illumination of their imponderable spirits is refined to its purest kernel, allowing them to transform every which way along with every otherness. Things die, are born, go round, go square, and no one knows the root of it all. But it is spread out everywhere, and through it the ten thousand things have maintained themselves since time out of mind. Even something as vast as the six directions never gets beyond it; even something as small as a hair in autumn depends

4. Cf. *Daodejing* 38.

5. *Daodejing* 48.

6. *Qi*. See Glossary.

7. 成理 *Cheng Li*. See Glossary for both *Cheng* and *Li*.

8. 無為 *Wuwei*. See Glossary.

on it to take form as a physical body. Each thing in the world to the end of its days is forever rising and falling, never remaining as it was. The yin and the yang and the four seasons go through their cycles, each one finding its place in the sequence. Obscure, it is present, but only by being as if absent. Ever gliding away, it shows no fixed form, and thereby manifests its mysterious power. All things are nourished by it, but without ever knowing it. This is what is called the root and foundation, and it is with this that our gaze may reach the Heavenly.

Gnawgap asked Pajama about the Course.

Pajama said, “Align your body and unify your vision, and the Heavenly harmony will arrive. Gather your understanding⁹ in, unify your thoughts, and the imponderable spirit will come to reside in you. Your intrinsic virtuosities will beautify you, the Course will dwell in you. Just be oblivious to it all, like a newborn calf who seeks no reasons.”

But before he had even finished speaking, Gnawgap had fallen asleep. Pajama was delighted, and broke into song as he strolled away: “Body like withered bones, mind like dead ashes, his real understanding¹⁰ is genuine, using no precedents or purposes to maintain itself. Dim and obscure, free of intentions, unconsultable—what sort of person is this?”

Shun asked an assistant, “Can the Course be attained and possessed?”

He answered, “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?”

“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. Your inborn nature and allotment of life are not your own possessions, they are just a compliance lent by heaven and earth. Your sons and grandsons are not your own possessions; they are just sheddings lent by heaven and earth. So in all our travels we can never really know where we are going, in all our dwellings we can never really know what is maintaining us, in all our eating we can never really know what we are tasting. This is all the bright and vigorous energy of heaven and earth—how could it be obtained and possessed?”

Confucius said to Lao Dan, “You have some leisure today. I venture to ask about the perfect Course.”

Lao Dan said, “You must fast, rinse out your mind, cleanse the pure kernel of imponderable spirit in you until it gleams like snow, and smash your understanding¹¹ to bits! Indeed, the Course is profound, difficult to describe! Nonetheless, I will tell you a few outlying generalities about it. The bright is born from

9. 知 *Zhi*. See Glossary.

10. 知 *Zhi*. See Glossary.

11. 知 *Zhi*. See Glossary.

the dark, and the determinable is born from the formless. The pure kernel of imponderable spirit in us is born from the Course. It is from this pure seminal kernel that the physical body is originally born. All things generate and give form to each other. Those with nine holes in them are born from a womb, those with eight are born from an egg. Before they come there is no trace of them and after they depart they are bound by no limits, traversing no gate and dwelling in no chamber,¹² positioned only in the full-flung vastness of the four directions. He who accords with this is strong in body, unobstructed in thinking, keen of hearing and seeing; he makes no efforts in the use of his mind, responds to things with no fixed method. Heaven cannot help but be high, earth cannot help but be broad, the sun and moon cannot but proceed on their ways, all things cannot but arise and flourish—just this is their Course, is it not?

“Learning does not necessarily make one knowledgeable,¹³ and skill in debate does not necessarily make one wise. This is why the sage eliminates them. What he keeps, what keeps him,¹⁴ is only what is not increased or diminished however one tries to increase or diminish it. So deep and unfathomable—like the ocean! So lofty and towering—it ends and then begins again! To rearrange and measure out the ten thousand things so that nothing is lacking, such is your ‘course of the noble man.’ That is merely something external, is it not? But what the ten thousand things themselves all converge toward for support and can never lack—this is their own Course, is it not?

“These middle kingdoms are populated with ‘human beings,’ and such creatures are ultimately neither yin nor yang. For they dwell between heaven and earth only temporarily assuming the form of a human being, always just on the verge of returning to their source. From the point of view of its root, a living being is just a breath-filled bubble of gelatin. Although some are long-lived and some die young, how much of a difference is there really? It’s all a matter of no more than a single instant—what room is there for the rightness of Yao and the wrongness of Jie? Every fruition, whether down on the ground or up in a tree, has its own coherence.¹⁵ Although humans encounter difficulties in their interactions with one another, this is precisely how they are able to interlock. The sage meets them without rebelling, lets them pass without holding on to them. To respond to them by adjusting and harmonizing with them is the work of the intrinsic powers, but to respond to them as a matter of pure happenstance is the work of the Course itself. This is what enables emperors to flourish and kings to arise.

“Man’s life between heaven and earth is like a white stallion galloping past a crack in a wall; just a sudden whoosh and then it is all over. Pouring and surging forth this way and that, everything emerges; slipping and sinking away, everything

12. Cf. Chapter 4, p. 44.

13. 知 *Zhi*. See Glossary.

14. I.e., what the sage keeps to and protects and what keeps and protects him. See Chapter 6, note J, and also Chapter 4, p. 41. Compare also *Daodejing* 62.

15. 理 *Li*. See Glossary.

is submerged again. One transformation and you are alive, another and you're dead. Living creatures lament it and human beings bemoan it. But this is just the unfastening of the Heavenly bow-sheath and the dropping away of the Heavenly scabbard, the twisting and turning in the chaos until all your yang and yin souls¹⁶ are ready to scatter away and then your body as well—hence, the Great Return!

“The formless takes on a form, the formed veers back to the formless; this is something everyone knows, and not something that needs to be accomplished by any work on the part of the one it's about to happen to. It is something everyone has a theory about, but when it arrives there is no more theorizing. When there is theorizing, that just means it has not yet arrived. When it is seen clearly, that just means it has not really been encountered. So debate about it is no match for silence. The Course cannot be learned, so hearing about it is no match for plugging up your ears. This is called the Great Attainment.”

Master Eastwall asked Zhuangzi, “Where is this Course you speak of?”

Zhuangzi said, “There is nowhere it is not.”

“You must be more specific.”

“It is in the ants and crickets.”

“So low?”

“It is in the grasses and weeds.”

“Even lower?”

“It is in the tiles and shards.”

“So extreme?”

“It is in the piss and shit.”

Master Eastwall made no reply. Zhuangzi continued, “Truly, your question misses the substance of the matter. When a shopper asks a meat inspector to test how fat a hog is, the lower on the animal he checks, the more revealing the results. But if we just cease insisting on specifying one definite locus, it will flee no thing.¹⁷ That's how the perfect Course is, and the same is true of great words. ‘The Ubiquitous,’ ‘The All-pervasive,’ ‘The Omnipresent’—these are three terms with the same meaning. They all point to the same thing. My words were just an attempt to set us wandering in the palace of not-even-anything, merging all together in these descriptions, everywhere inexhaustible! I was just trying to wander with you into non-doing!¹⁸ How flavorless and placid it is! How deserted and transparent! How all-blending yet how in-between! Having diffused my will, I go nowhere

16. *Hunpo* 魂魄. At death the former are said to dissipate into the heavens and the latter into the earth.

17. Following Qian Mu's reading.

18. Or, following Cheng Xuanying's reading, “These [three words] wander in the palace of not-even-anything, merging together into one single assertion which is nowhere brought to a halt! They have been doing nothing together, participating in each other's non-doing!” Alternately, some take the passage as proposing the next step: “Let's try wandering together in the palace of not-even-anything, merging together there for a discussion that is nowhere brought to a halt! Let's try doing non-doing for each other, non-doing together!”

in it, yet I never know where I will arrive, where it will arrive. Coming, going, yet never knowing where it will come to a stop, where I will come to a stop. And when I have already come and gone in it, I still never know where it has ended, where I have ended. Soaring through the vastness, a great knowing enters into it, into me, but without knowing where it comes to a halt.¹⁹

“That which makes beings be, which separates beings into separate beings, is not separated from beings by any boundary. So the boundaries separating off the beings that the beings themselves take on—these are merely boundaries from the side of the beings. The boundaries that do no bounding, the boundlessness that nonetheless bounds—this is what fills and empties beings, what decays and kills them. That is filling and emptying but never filling or emptying; it is rotting and terminating but never rotting or terminating; it is rooting and branching but never rooting or branching; it is congealing and scattering but never congealing or scattering.”

Lovely Lotus Sweetie and Shennong²⁰ were both students under Old Dragon Goodluck. Shennong had shut the door for an afternoon nap against his armrest when Lovely Lotus Sweetie came bursting in and said, “The Old Dragon is dead!” Shennong pulled himself up with his staff and then clanging the staff down to the ground he laughed and said, “The Heavenly One knew I was a vulgar, lazy fool, so he died and abandoned me. It is all over! The master died without even leaving some crazy words to set me off with!”

Lidrock, having come to pay his respects, heard this and said, “All the noble men of the world seek to bind themselves closely to a man who has embodied the Course. Now what this one had attained of the Course was not even one ten-thousandth of an autumn hair, but even he knew enough to take his crazy words to the grave with him. How much more so one who has truly embodied the Course! Looking for it one finds no form, and listening one hears no sound. When people try to describe it they can only say it is a darkness, an obscurity. This is merely how the Course is described; it is not the Course itself.”

This is why, when Great Clarity asked Endless, “Do you know the Course?” Endless said, “I do not know.”

But when he asked the same question of Non-doing,²¹ he was told, “I know the Course.”

“Is your knowledge of the Course specifiable?”

“It is.”

“May I ask its specifications?”

19. Double translations of all four of these assertions, to make explicit what I take to be the deliberate ambiguity of the original text concerning whether it is “I” or “my knowing” or “it” that is coming, going, ending, stopping. See “Notes on the Translation.”

20. “The Divine Farmer,” Legendary sage-king and inventor of agriculture.

21. *Wuwei*. See Glossary.

“I know that the Course can be noble or can be base, can ennoble or can debase, can be bound or can be scattered, can bind or can scatter.²² These are the specifications by which I know the Course.”

Great Clarity reported this to Beginningless, saying, “So between Endless’s not knowing and Non-doing’s knowing, which is right and which is wrong?”

Beginningless said, “Not knowing is profound, knowing is shallow. Not knowing is internal, knowing is external.”

At this, Great Clarity was provoked to let out a sigh. “Not knowing is knowing! Knowing is not knowing! Who knows the knowing of non-knowing?”

Beginningless said, “The Course cannot be heard; whatever is heard is not it. The Course cannot be seen; whatever is seen is not it. The Course cannot be spoken; whatever is spoken is not it. Know that what forms forms has no form! The Course corresponds to no name.”

Beginningless also said, “If someone answers when asked about the Course, he does not know the Course. Though one may ask about the Course, this does not mean one has heard of the Course. The Course is not susceptible to questions, and any questions about it have no answers. To ask after it by asking no questions is to be through with all questions. To answer by giving no answers is to be free from harboring anything within.²³ And to confront the ending of all questions with nothing harbored within—such a one externally sees no time and space and internally is without knowledge of any primordial beginning. So he never does any ‘passing beyond the Kundun mountains’ or ‘wandering in the great void.’”

Radiance asked Nothingness, “Do you exist or do you not exist?” He got no answer, and could see no countenance there, just a darkness, an emptiness. Ceaselessly gazing after him, listening for him, groping for him, he could find nothing to see, nothing to hear, nothing to take hold of. Radiance said, “This is truly reaching it! But who can reach this? Nothingness can be present to me, but never yet the lack of nothingness, for once I have come to it, it becomes the lack only of being—so how, from where, could I come to reach it?”

The Grand Marshal had in his employ an old man of eighty who was still forging harness buckles without the slightest error. The Grand Marshal asked him, “Are you just skillful, or do you have the Course?”

He said, “I have that which I hold to. Since the age of twenty I took delight only in making harness buckles. From then on I neglected all other things, noticing nothing besides harness buckles.”

Thus to make use of things depends on having no use for things, and thereby grows a grasp of their real use. How much more is this the case for that which makes use of all things! What being ever fails to find support in it?

22. Double translations. See “Notes on the Translation.”

23. Alternately, “To question what admits of no questions is to exhaust all questioning. To answer about what admits of no answers is to lose what is within.”

Ran Qiu asked Confucius, “Can the state before there was Heaven and Earth be known?”

Confucius said, “Yes. The past is like the present.”

Ran Qiu could think of no more questions and withdrew, but he returned the next day and said, “Yesterday I asked you if the state before there was Heaven and Earth could be known, and you said it could, that the past was like the present. At the time this was crystal clear, but now it makes no sense to me. May I ask what this means?”

Confucius said, “Your clarity about it yesterday came from receiving it first with the imponderable spirit in you. Your present confusion is because you are now seeking it with something other than your imponderable spirit, is it not? No past, no present, no beginning, no end: before you have descendants you have descendants. Do you get it?”

Ran Qiu could not answer. Confucius continued, “It is enough that you cannot answer! It is not life that produces death, and it is not death that ends life. Do the endings and producings depend on something else then? All have to them that which unifies them as parts of a single body. But if there were something before Heaven and Earth, could it be any specifiable being? What makes beings beings is no being, for as soon as a being has appeared, it is no longer prior to all beings. It may seem as if there is something there, but what seems to be a something is only the endlessness. The endlessness of the sage’s love for others takes its cue from this.”

Yan Yuan asked Confucius, “I have heard you say, ‘Dismissing none, welcoming none.’ I venture to ask for more about how to wander so.”

Confucius said, “The men of olden times changed externally but not internally. Nowadays, people change internally but not externally. To transform along with things is the one way to be unchanging. Securely at peace in them whether they change or not, securely at peace even in dispersing and being dispersed by them, it finds its necessity in never exceeding them in the slightest. Mr. Hogue²⁴ wandered this way in his park, the Yellow Emperor in his garden, Mr. Youyu²⁵ in his palace, and the emperors Tang and Wu merely in their own chambers. If even noble men like these, once they took Confucians and Mohists for their teachers, were made to grind away at each other with right and wrong, how much worse will be the men of the present age! The sage dwells among things without harming them. Because he doesn’t harm them, they cannot harm him either. Because there is no harm either way, he can both welcome them in and usher them out.

“The mountain forests, the great open plains! Shall they make me joyful, shall they fill me with happiness? But even before my joy is done, sorrow has come to take its place. When joy and sorrow come I cannot stop them from coming, and when they go I cannot keep them from going. How sad it is! The people of the world these days are nothing more than lodging houses for external things.

24. See Chapter 6, p. 57.

25. The sage-emperor Shun.

They know all about what they encounter but not about what is never encountered. They know how to deftly deploy their abilities, but they don't know how to deftly deploy their non-abilities. It is impossible to escape from non-knowing and non-ability! Is it not tragic to try to escape from what cannot be escaped? Perfect words eliminate all words. Perfect action eliminates all action. But merely to put what your knowing knows into some kind of order—that is just shallowness.”

THE MISCELLANEOUS CHAPTERS

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Gengsang Chu^A

Lao Dan¹ had a follower known as Gengsang Chu, who, after having grasped a certain side of Lao Dan's Course, traveled north and settled in the Zigzag Mountains. He dismissed the brazenly knowing² among his assistants and distanced himself from the solicitously kind³ among his concubines, living among the lumpen masses and employing only the most callous stablehands as his servants. After three years, Zigzag enjoyed an especially abundant harvest, and the people of Zigzag started saying things like, "When Gengsang Chu first came here, I thought him alarmingly odd. But now I think that, though his daily yield falls short, his yearly yield is above and beyond. Perhaps he is a sage! Why don't we hold festivals for him as our impersonator of the dead, or build a shrine in which to make offerings to him?"

When Gengsang Chu heard about this, he turned toward the south, looking as if he had something pressing on his mind. His disciples were puzzled. "What do you find so strange?" he asked them. "When the energy of spring bursts forth, all the plants come to life. When the treasures of the earth get full access to the autumn, they all mature for harvest. And do you think spring and autumn can do this without availing themselves of something? It is the Course of Heaven that is already moving in them! I have heard that when the Utmost Person dwells corpselike in his little circular cell, the common people are set into a crazed abandon, knowing nothing of what they are or where they're going. But now these little folk of Zigzag are whispering among themselves about setting me up like a ritual vessel in the ranks of the worthy. Am I then a target-man, an ideal? This is why the words of my teacher Lao Dan are now echoing so insistently in my head."

A disciple said, "No need for that. A narrow ditch is too small for a large fish to turn around in, but for the eels and minnows it's a windfall.^B A small hill provides no place for a large beast to hide, but for the little foxes it's a stroke of enormous good fortune. Since the times of Yao and Shun, all the world has been honoring the worthy and elevating the capable, putting whatever is good and

1. Laozi, legendary author of the *Daodejing*.

2. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

3. *Ren*. See Glossary.

advantageous first. It's no surprise then that the common folk of Zigzag are also this way. You should do as they ask, Master!"

"Come here, my little ones!" said Gengsang Chu. "A creature large enough to swallow a chariot, should he go forth from his mountains unescorted, can still fall prey to net or snare. A fish big enough to gulp down a ship, if he is thrown onto the shore, will be menaced even by the ants. This is why the birds and beasts never tire of the heights nor the fish and turtles of the depths. A man who wants to keep the life in his body intact must know how to hide himself, however far away he must go.

"And by the way, what is really worth praising about those two [Yao and Shun]? All their debates and distinctions are like a man drilling a hole in someone's wall and then stuffing it with a straw plug, like selecting which hairs to comb, like counting the grains of rice before you cook them. What benefit does all this meticulous scheming really bring to the world? Elevating the worthy only makes the people compete with each other. Putting the understanding⁴ in charge just makes the people loot one another. Such things can do nothing to enhance the lives of the people. Once they become diligent about their own advantage, the sons will end up killing their fathers and the ministers their rulers, burrowing through walls to rob each other in broad daylight. Mark my words, the root of the truly great disorder lies in people like Yao and Shun, and its branches reach down for a thousand generations. A thousand generations of this and I guarantee it will end up with human beings eating one another for dinner!"

Nanrong Chu^c straightened up on his mat with a jolt, saying, "What then can someone like me, advanced in age, do to live up to what you are saying?"

Gengsang Chu said, "Keep your body whole, hold fast to the life in you, don't let your thoughts get lost in busy calculations, and in three years you will have lived up to it."

Nanrong Chu said, "All bodies are equipped with similar eyes and ears, and yet the blind and deaf cannot use theirs to see and hear. All bodies are equipped with similar minds, and yet the mad cannot use theirs to get control of themselves. All human bodies are basically analogous—is it external things that make them operate so differently, so that some of us, no matter how we may try, just can't do what we set out to do? Now you say to me, 'Keep your body whole, hold fast to the life in you, don't let your thoughts get lost in busy calculations.' I try to learn the Course, but it only reaches as far as my ears."

Nanrong Chu said, "There is no more I can say. A flitting bee cannot bring to term a moth larva on the leaves; the wee chickens of Yue cannot hatch a swan egg. But the big hens of Lu can do it. The basic character of the fowl is present in both, but because of the different stature of their abilities, one is up to the task and the other is not. My abilities are meager, insufficient to transform you. Why don't you go south to see Laozi?"

4. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

So Nanrong Chu set out, shouldering his provisions, and after seven days and nights arrived at Laozi's place. Laozi said, "Did you come here from Gengsang Chu's place?"

Nanrong Chu said, "Yes."

"Why did you bring so many people with you?" Laozi asked. Nanrong Chu snapped his head around in fright to see what was behind him.

"Don't you understand what I mean?"

Nanrong Chu looked down in shame. Then he raised his head with a sigh. "Now I have forgotten my answer, and with it the question I came here to ask."

"Whatever do you mean?" Laozi asked.

Nanrong Chu spoke. "If I know nothing, people call me slow and stupid. But if I get involved in knowledge,⁵ I bring anxiety to myself. If I'm not kind, I harm others, but if I am, I bring trouble to myself. If I don't behave responsibly, I hurt others, but if I do behave responsibly, I burden myself.⁶ How can I escape this dilemma? These three points sum up my problem, about which I have come here, on Gengsang Chu's recommendation, to seek your counsel."

Laozi said, "A moment ago, just looking at the space between your eyebrow and eyelash, I got the whole picture about you. Now your words have confirmed my suspicions. You're all regulated and confined by your own schemes, like someone who has lost his parents and then brandishes a pole to seek them in the depths of the sea. You are yourself the goner! You want so desperately to return to your real dispositions and your inborn nature, but can find no way in. A pitiful sight!"

Nanrong Chu asked to be allowed to lodge there, trying to summon up what he liked about himself and get rid of what he disliked. After torturing himself like this for ten days, he went again to see Laozi, who said, "So you've been trying to rinse it all out of yourself, and it's coming out quite ripe and thick.⁷ And yet there's still plenty of the hateful stuff frothing over in there, eh? Indeed, when there are external things that entangle you, it's useless to come to grips with them by tying up your hands in them—that just connects them up with [what's entangling you] within. And when something inside you is entangling you, it's useless to get a grip on it by further tying yourself up in it—that just connects it up with [what's entangling you] from outside.^D If you are entangled either internally or externally, you will not even be able to maintain hold of the intrinsic powers of the Course, much less releasing your hold on the Course so that you can walk it!"

Nanrong Chu said, "When a sick villager is asked by another villager what ails him, he can describe his sickness. But someone who knows wherein he is sick is not really so sick. When I hear the Great Course, on the contrary, it is like a medicine that just makes the illness worse. I would be content merely to hear of the standard procedure for preserving the life in me."

5. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

6. On (human)kindness and responsible conduct, see Glossary, *renyi*.

7. Or, taking this very obscure line instead as some kind of mixed laundry-boil and cooking metaphor/joke, "So you've been trying to wash yourself pure—well, it seems quite well done now, that stagnant stuff you've pent up in there!"

Laozi said, “The standard procedure for preserving the life in you—well, can you embrace oneness? Can you keep it from slipping away? Can you know good and bad fortune without divining? Can you stop whatever you’re doing? Can you leave off? Can you ignore how it is with others and seek it in yourself? Can you be unconstrained and oblivious? Can you become an infant? An infant screams all day without getting hoarse—the utmost harmony! He grabs hold of things all day without tightly clenching his fist—for the intrinsic powers he deploys come from both himself and the objects. He stares all day without blinking—for he does not one-sidedly privilege the external.⁸ Walk without knowing where you are going, stop without knowing what you are doing, slither along with all things, joining in their undulations. This is the procedure for preserving the life in you.”

Nanrong Chu said, “So is this then the virtuosity intrinsic to the Utmost Person?”

“No. This is just what is called melting the ice and breaking through the freeze—but are you capable of it? As for the Utmost Person, he takes his food from the earth but his joy from Heaven, undisturbed by both people and things, by both benefit and harm. He joins in none of their extravagances, nor in their plans or projects. Unfettered, he arrives. Oblivious, he departs. This is the procedure for preserving the life in you.”

“This then is the utmost,” Nanrong Chu said.

“Not yet,” said Laozi. “A moment ago I asked you if you were capable of becoming an infant. An infant acts without knowing what he’s doing and moves along without knowing where he’s going, his body like the branch of a withered tree and his mind like dead ashes. In this state, neither good nor bad fortune can reach him. And if even good and bad fortune are nothing to you, how can anything human plague you?⁹”

“Empty space is vast and unshifting, and so the radiance of Heaven shines forth through it. When the radiance of Heaven shines forth, it reveals the humanness of the human, the thingishness of things. Hence when a human being cultivates this, an unvarying constancy⁹ is present for him even in this very moment. Having such unvarying constancy, the human takes shelter in him and the Heavenly aids him. Those in whom the human takes shelter are called people of Heaven. Those who are aided by Heaven are called sons of Heaven.¹⁰ His learning is to learn what cannot be learned. His practice is to practice what cannot be practiced. What his arguments demonstrate is what admits of no argument. When his understanding¹¹ stops at and rests on what it does not understand, his knowing on what it does not know, it has reached its perfection. If there is anything in

8. Compare *Daodejing* 55.

9. 恆 *Heng*. See 常 *chang* in the Glossary.

10. Or, taking this as an enactment of the “unvarying constancy” rather than its result, and reading the *she* 舍 as 捨: “Unvarying constancy means that when abandoned by the human, he is instead aided by the Heavenly. Abandoned by the human, he is called a citizen of the Heavenly. Aided by the Heavenly, he is called a Son of Heaven.”

11. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

him that deviates from This, it is winnowed away in [the turning of] Heaven the Potter's Wheel.

“Let your body be moved only by the totality of things.¹² Let your mind spring to life from its rootedness in the unthinking parts of yourself. Let your respect for what is most central within you extend through to reach others. Being thus, if evils still beset you, it is the doing of Heaven, not of man. Hence it will not be sufficient to undermine your completeness, it will not be able to gain entrance to your Numinous Platform.¹³ The Numinous Platform is that which is maintained without ever knowing what is maintaining it and can never be deliberately maintained. If it operates in any way that is not also a revelation of this something that makes it complete and real, it always goes wrong. If its own endeavors end up getting inside it and are not let go of, then every change is really another loss.

“If you do evil openly, you might be punished by humans. If you do it secretly, you might be punished by ghosts. It is only after you have brought both humans and ghosts into your own daylight, understanding both, that you can truly go forth into your solitude. For when you accord with what is within you, you walk in the nameless. When you accord with the external, on the other hand, you aspire only to the expectation of some sort of payment. When you walk in the nameless, even your everyday activities have their own radiance. But when you aspire to the expectation of payment, you become merely a merchant. Everyone sees you tottering on tiptoes, but still you think you're towering above them.

“To go along with other beings all the way to the end is to accept them into yourself. Temporarily putting up with other beings for whatever advantage you can wrest from them, on the other hand, means that even your own body is something you do not accept and shelter—how then can you accept and shelter others? If you cannot accept and shelter others, you will have no intimates, and for one without intimates, everyone—including himself—is just ‘other people,’ complete strangers.

“There is no weapon more fearsome than your own will, for which even an Excalibur is no match. There is no thief greater than the yin and yang, which cannot be escaped anywhere between heaven and earth. But it is not really the yin and yang that pillage us. It is our own minds.

“The Course runs through and connects everything precisely by its division into partial portions. But the formations these make are also destructions.¹⁴ What

12. Alternately, something like: “Supply yourself with adequate material things to support your body.” But 備 *bei* in the rest of this passage is used pointedly to refer to totality in a more robust sense, rather than mere “supply of adequate provisions.”

13. 靈臺 *lingtai*. Originally the name of an observation tower built by King Wen, so named because it was claimed that King Wen's moral charisma was such that as soon as the people heard of his intention to build a tower they voluntarily converged to do the work, completing it rapidly and spontaneously, as if magically, showing the numinous power of humankindness. Here this seems to be taken up as a metaphorical term for the mind, or a particular state of mind. The same term appears in Chapter 19, p. 155. Cf. “Numinous Reservoir” (靈府 *lingfu*), Chapter 5, p. 49.

14. Cf. Chapter 2, p. 15.

is hated about this dividing into portions is just that these portions are then taken to together constitute the totality.¹⁵ What is really hateful about such a totality is that now some definite existence is taken as the totality. This is why people go chasing after the external without turning back, finding only their own ghosts. For to go outside yourself and attain what you're after is called attaining your own death, and the gain that is left as a result of destroying yourself, the only reality left after a destruction, can only be a kind of ghost. It is only their resemblance to the unmanifest and formless that gives stability to manifest forms. Beings emerge, but not from any root. They vanish, but not through any opening. What is solidly real but in no one location, what really endures but has no beginning or end, what emerges but without any opening through which to vanish, is what really has solid reality. What has solid reality but is located in no position is the whole expanse of *space*. What has duration but no beginning or end is the whole expanse of *time*. They are something through which beings are born and die, emerge and vanish, but throughout all this emerging and vanishing they show no form. They are called the Heavenly Doors. The Heavenly Doors are non-being, and it is from such non-being that all beings emerge. Beings cannot constitute their being out of being; they must come forth from non-being. But neither does there exist some entity called non-being. It is 'This' in which the sage hides himself.

"The understanding of the ancients had really got all the way there. Where had it arrived? To the point where, for some, there had never existed any definite thing at all. This is really getting there, as far as you can go. When no definite thing exists, nothing more can be—added!¹⁶ Next there were those for whom there were things, but who saw life as a loss and death as a homecoming, that by which the fixed division into separate identities is brought to an end. Next there were those who said, 'At first there is non-being. Afterward a being is born. Then the living suddenly goes to its death.' They took non-being as the head, life as the trunk, and death as the backside, saying, 'Whoever knows how to hold together being and non-being, life and death, in a single grasp, he will be my friend.' Though these three differ, they are part of a single royal clan, like the Zhaos and the Jings, whose names derive from their official duties, and the Shen clan, whose name derives from their territory. It is only in this sense that they are not the same.

"Being alive is like being a sediment of grime at the bottom of a cooking vessel, ceaselessly dissolving and scattering, which is what we speak of as the shifting rightness of its 'this.' But when you try to talk about shifting rightness, you find it is always other than whatever you have said. Even if you happened to be right about it, it would be impossible to know. Both the stomach and the feet

15. That is, the totality is now viewed as the sum of these definite divided portions with their determinate identities. Alternately, "What is hateful in being a divided portion is that each part then takes itself as the totality." Or "What each hates about being divided off and endowed with only a partial allotment is that the division and allotment is done either by, or with respect to, or for the sake of, a larger totality." Or: "What is hateful about being a divided portion is that each part tries to make itself complete." Or: "What is hateful about being a divided portion is that it means having a reason to try to become complete."

16. Cf. Chapter 2, p. 16.

of the dismembered animal are arrayed during the midwinter sacrifice. They can be separated and yet cannot be separated.¹⁷ In inspecting a house, you make the rounds through its boudoir and ancestral shrine, but you will also not neglect a gander at the outhouse. The definition of what is right adopts the shifting rightness of ‘this.’

“But let us try to talk about shifting rightness. The life in us is the real source of every affirmation of rightness, but we let it be guided by the understanding,¹⁸ so we end up hitching our chariots to affirmations and negations, to ideas of right and wrong. We then think that for every name that exists there must also exist some substantial reality, and thus we come to think our own self, too, must be some kind of substantial concrete stuff.¹⁹ We force other people to take this self of ours as the measure of integrity,²⁰ until even death is not too high a price to pay to meet that measure. In such a state we consider whatever is useful to the world wise, and whatever is useless foolish, honoring success and disgraced by failure. It is this shifting rightness that makes the people of this age regard the likes of the cicada and fledgling dove as being in the right.²¹ For the embrace of the same viewpoint comes simply from themselves being in the same position: they agree because they themselves are in some respect the same.

“When you step on a stranger’s foot in the marketplace, you apologize profusely for your rude carelessness. If it’s your brother’s foot, you laugh it off. But if it’s the foot of someone extremely intimate, like your parent or child, you don’t even mention it. Hence I say: Perfect ritual propriety sometimes lies in ignoring that the other person is even a human being. Perfect responsibility sees no external object, no definite roles.²² Perfect wisdom makes no plans. Perfect humankindness is especially intimate with no one. Perfect trust requires no collateral.

“So just retract the will’s raging arousal. Untie the mind’s entanglements. Undo the constraints on the intrinsic powers. Pierce through the blockages to the Course. It is rank, wealth, prominence, prestige, fame, and advantage that arouse the will. It is appearances, actions, sexual beauty, conceptual coherence,²³

17. The parts may be rearranged, but no matter how you slice it, all the parts are there. The right arrangement during the sacrifice is different from the right arrangement for the living animal—a shifting rightness. But in either case, there has been no real change: all the parts are still there. Cf. the story of the monkey keeper in Chapter 2, pp. 15–16, and the idea of “hiding the world in the world” in Chapter 6, p. 56.

18. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

19. This could also mean, “taking ourselves hostage.” Both meanings might be intended, punning on the character *zhi* 質.

20. Or “We try to control others, taking ourselves as the measure of integrity.”

21. Cf. Chapter 1, p. 4.

22. 至義不物 *zhi yi bu wu*. Literally, “Perfectly responsible conduct does not thing,” i.e., does not objectify itself or anything else as some specific entity. Hence this might also mean, “Perfect responsibility sees no definite object to which one must properly respond,” or “perfectly responsible conduct categorizes no thing into a particular category,” or (as Guo Xiang reads it) “. . . sees nothing as a thing, as not oneself.”

23. *Li*. See Glossary.

emotional energies, and intentions that entangle the mind. It is dislikes, desires, joy, anger, sorrow, and happiness that constrain the intrinsic powers. It is avoiding, approaching, taking, giving, understanding, and ability that block the Course. When these twenty-four items do not disrupt you, the mind becomes aligned. Aligned, it finds stillness, and in stillness, it finds clarity. Once clear, it becomes empty, and once empty, it is able to ‘do nothing, and yet leave nothing undone.’²⁴

“The Course is the full array of intrinsic powers.^F The life in us is the radiance of these intrinsic powers shining forth. The inborn nature is a concrete form taken by the life in us. The motion of the inborn nature is a kind of activity, but when activity becomes deliberate and artificial, it can be called the loss [of that inborn nature]. Similarly, awareness²⁵ is originally an interface with the world, but as understanding²⁶ it comes to be a kind of scheming. What understanding does not know is like what is in one’s peripheral vision, seen out of the corner of the eye. For when all your actions are what you cannot help doing, outside of your deliberate control, it is called intrinsic virtuosity. Conversely, when all your actions come from yourself alone, we call that being completely in control. These two descriptions are directly opposed, but the facts they describe actually agree.

“Yi was skillful at hitting a target, but not at preventing others from praising him. The sage is skilled at the Heavenly but not at the human. It is only the Whole Man who is skillful at the Heavenly and also good at the human. Only an insect can be an insect, and it is only by being an insect that it can succeed in being the Heavenly. The Whole Man hates the Heavenly, for he hates what humans take as the Heavenly [in contrast to the Human]. How much more would he hate identifying himself as ‘The Heavenly’ or ‘The human’!

“Yi could hit any sparrow that came his way—authoritative shooting indeed! But if he could have viewed all the world as the cage that encompasses them, not a single sparrow could have escaped. Tang caged Yi Yin by making him a cook, and Duke Mu of Tai caged Boli Xi with a five-colored sheepskin.²⁷ Thus we see that it has never been anything but what they delight in that traps people in their cages.

“A one-footed cripple may cast off his fancy clothes, for he already stands beyond honor and disgrace. An escaped prisoner may climb great heights without fear, for he has forgotten all about life and death. If a man gets used to being

24. Cf. *Daodejing* 37 and 48.

25. 知 *Zhi*.

26. 知 *Zhi* again, as in the previous phrase. See Glossary.

27. Yi was a legendary archer of great skill, mentioned also in Chapter 5 and Chapter 24. Yi Yin was fond of showing off his skill as a cook, and the Emperor Tang enticed him to work for him by letting him do so. Boli Xi was a seventh-century BCE statesmen whose fortunes underwent many ups and downs after his state was overthrown, living the life of a cattle herder before being recognized by Duke Mu of Qin for his worthiness in spite of his lowly status. He was fond of sheepskin garments and was bribed into service by the Duke’s gift.

insulted, he becomes impervious to shame and finally forgets all about human viewpoints. Forgetting the human makes you a man of the Heavenly. Only when a man merges into the Heavenly Harmony can he be respected without being delighted, or insulted without being angry. Anger may come forth from him, but without him being angry, so his anger is an expression of non-anger. His doings come forth from him without him doing anything, so his doings are expressions of non-doing.²⁸ Wanting stillness, you have endeavored to pacify your vital energy, and wanting spiritual power, you have endeavored to comply with your own mind. But these are still just deliberate doings. If you want to really hit the mark without fail, just hew to the unavoidable, wherever it goes. For it is something like the unavoidable that constitutes the Course of the sage.”

ENDNOTES

A. As written, this name has no obviously discernible meaning. But Lu Deming reports that the surname is given by Sima Qian as 亢桑, and Yu Yue adds that this is the same figure as the likely homonymous *Kangcangzi* 亢倉子 mentioned as a disciple of Lao Dan's in the *Liezi*. If we were to take the original form as 亢倉楚, it might be translated “Overstorage Pain.”

B. Reading *li* 利 for *zhi* 制.

C. Reading the name as equivalent to 南榮壽, as found in the *Hanshu* “Gujin renbiao,” the meaning might be “Southbloom Longlife.”

D. An extremely obscure sentence. Here I follow Yu Yue's substitution of 繳 *jiao* for 繁 *fan* and follow Guo Xiang's general construal of the grammar, but taking *qian* 撻 in its meaning of “to connect” rather than “to block off” or “shoulder up.” “What entangles from outside” is usually interpreted to mean sensory objects of pleasure as well as profit, fame and power, while “what entangles from within” is taken to mean obsessive thoughts, biased desires, erroneous concepts, and illusory beliefs. Without the substitution, taking *qian* to mean “shoulder up,” the meaning would be something like: “But it's no good trying to control external entanglements by making yourself more complicated—that just bolsters more of the same on the inside. It's no good trying to control internal entanglements by tying yourself up in them—that just bolsters more of the same from the outside.” Taking *qian* to mean “block up” or “seal off,” we might have Guo Xiang's reading, shared and expanded upon by Chen Shouchang: “When external things entangle you, don't try to get control of them one by one in all their complex diversity, for that just blocks one up internally; and when internal factors entangle you, don't try to get control of them one by one in all their tangled threads, for that just blocks one up externally.” Guo Songtao reads this similarly, but understands the last clause not as a description of consequence but as advice: “When external things entangle you, instead of trying to get control of them one by one in all their complex diversity, just close yourself off to them all and don't let them in. When internal factors entangle you, instead of trying to get control of them one by one in all their tangled threads, just contain them all and don't let them out.” In any case,

28. *Wuwei*. See Glossary.

though, the point is clear: the attempt to “do something” about your undesirable qualities, handling them with strategies of control, is futile. Laozi suggests an alternative to this in the following paragraphs.

E. This is usually taken to be the end of Lao Dan’s speech. What follows in this chapter is then taken to be in the anonymous authorial voice. The translation here ignores this very reasonable way of dividing the chapter and instead experiments with reading the remainder of this chapter as a continuation of a long answer from Lao Dan, and thus to be construed specifically in connection with Nanrong Chu’s questions and concerns. It should also be noted that the echoes and tweaks of phrases and ideas otherwise unique to Chapter 2 are more densely packed into the remainder of this chapter than anywhere else, suggesting either the same author or another author very steeped in its characteristic rhetorical style and turns of thought, attempting to redeploy them here in this new context. A. C. Graham and others have speculated that this section could be a compilation of the working notes to that chapter, collected by that author’s literary executors or successors.

F. Following Yu Yue’s reading.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Ghostless Saunter

The hermit Ghostless Saunter,¹ on the strength of an introduction by Ru Shang,² had come to meet with Marquis Wu of Wei. Marquis Wu offered commiseration for his visitor's exertions. "You must be ill, sir!" he said. "Having suffered the hardships of living in the mountain forests, you have still made such an effort to come meet with me!"

Ghostless Saunter said, "I was just about to commiserate with you—how is it that you commiserate with me? For if you inflate your desires and expand the range of your likes and dislikes, the dispositions of your own inborn nature and the allotment of life in you are bound to get diseased. But if instead you try to expel your desires and pluck out your likes and dislikes, your eyes and ears are bound to get diseased. So I was about to commiserate with you—how is it that instead you commiserate with me?" The marquis, with a faraway expression, made no reply.

After a short time, Ghostless Saunter went on, "Let me tell you about how I evaluate hunting dogs. Those of the lowest quality do no more than seize their prey and eat their fill—they have the intrinsic powers of mere foxes. Those of middling quality have a look to them as if they were gazing at the sun. Those of the highest quality have a look to them as if they had lost the one thing that mattered to them, and with it the unity of their own beings.³ But my way of evaluating dogs is not as good as my way of evaluating horses. I find that some run so straight that it matches a measuring line, make turns matching the arc of a hook, turn corners matching the edge of a T-square, and run circles that match those drawn with a compass. These are the horses of national grade. But they are not as good as the horses of the imperial grade. The imperial horses are truly perfect and complete

1. The name "Wugui" 無鬼 means "without ghosts," a term used by Mohists to describe a position they hoped to dispel: that there are no such things as ghosts, i.e., spirits of the deceased who monitor the behavior of the living.

2. Construing 女 as the surname 汝. The given name means Merchant. If we were to take this as another fantasy name, and regard the first character as semantically significant rather than as a surname, it would mean something like either "Lady Merchant" or "Youseller."

3. A double translation. See "Notes on the Translation." Literally, "lost their one(ness)." This could also mean "lost the Oneness," or "lost themselves," or "lost their own unity."

in their natural endowments. They look worried and desolate, as if they were mourning the loss of the one thing that mattered to them, and with it the unity of their own being.⁴ Horses like this pass beyond everything, leaving it all behind them in the dust, never knowing where they are.” Marquis Wu was now grinning with delight.

When Ghostless Saunter departed, Ru Shang followed and asked him, “How did you manage to so delight my lord, sir? Whenever I go to counsel him, I bring in the *Classic of Odes*, the *Classic of Documents*, the *Classic of Ritual*, and the *Classic of Music* from the side, also advising him step by step about the *Golden Tablets* and *Six Metal Scabbards*,⁵ making innumerable policy proposals, which by the way have had enormous success. And yet through all of it my lord has never once cracked a smile. What have you told my lord that was able to delight him so?”

Ghostless Saunter said, “I just told him how I evaluate dogs and horses.”

Ru Shang said, “Is that all?”

The other said, “Have you never heard of the traveler from the distant state of Yue? When he had been away from his homeland for a few days, he was glad whenever he saw an acquaintance. When he had been away for a fortnight or a month, he was delighted to see anyone he had even met with in his home country. After a year, he was delighted to see anyone who even resembled anyone he had met there. Was this not because he missed his countrymen more and more deeply the longer he was away? Now imagine someone who had fled to the empty wastelands, where tangles of goosefeet and woodbine block the paths even of the weasels and polecats who hop from spot to spot through the wastes. How delighted he would be if he were to hear the stomping of human footsteps, and how much more so if he were to catch a sound in the breeze of his brothers and relatives chatting and chuckling somewhere nearby! How long indeed it must have been since my lord has heard even the chatting and chuckling of a Genuine Human anywhere near him!”

Another time, Ghostless Saunter again had a meeting with Marquis Wu, who said to him, “Sir, you have been living in the mountain forests for a long time, willing even to subsist on acorns and fill yourself with onions and chives to keep poor me at a distance. Are you now getting too old for that, or have you started to crave wine and meat? Or might you be here to bring good fortune to my altars of soil and grain?”

Ghostless Saunter said, “I was born poor and lowly, and have never dared to think of partaking of your lordship’s wine and meat. I have come to commiserate with you.”

“What? What is there to commiserate with me about?” said the ruler.

“I commiserate with your lordship’s hardships of spirit and body.”

Marquis Wu said, “What do you mean?”

4. See previous note.

5. Works of military strategy.

Ghostless Saunter said, “The nourishment provided by heaven and earth is one and the same for everyone. Those who climb the highest heights cannot extend it, and those who dwell in the lowest depths cannot diminish it. Now you are special in being the lord of ten thousand chariots, which you use to embitter the lives of an entire nation so as to nourish your own ears, eyes, nose, and mouth. But the imponderable in you, the spiritlike, will not allow this. The spiritlike is something that loves harmony and hates any one-sided self-indulgence⁶. For one-sided self-indulgence is an illness, and it is for this illness that I commiserate with you. If not this, what is it that you, my lord, consider illness?”

Marquis Wu said, “I have long wished to meet with you, sir. I want only to love and care for my people, practice justice and put an end to warfare. Would that be acceptable?”

Ghostless Saunter said, “Not at all! Love and care for the people is the source of harm to the people. Practicing justice and ending bloodshed is the root of war. If you start from this sort of thing, taking deliberate action to pursue your aims, you are most likely to fail. Perfect beauty is a tool that fashions ugliness. Even if you endeavor to practice humankindness and responsible conduct,⁶ it will be not much different from artifice and duplicity. No doubt you can succeed in shaping yourself into the desired shapes of these things, but as soon as they are fully formed they will certainly become aggressively self-aggrandizing, and as they further transform, that will certainly lead to warfare with whatever is outside them. You must refrain from setting up rows of bells and drums in resplendent towers, from walking your thoroughbred steeds through the pavilions of your altars—do not thus store up adversity for yourself in the midst of your gains. Make use of neither skill nor schemes nor outright warfare to triumph over others. If you kill the elites and commoners belonging to another man’s country and annex his land to nourish your private desires and your own spirit, it becomes impossible to say which side is good or where the victory lies. If you cannot completely refrain from this, you can instead cultivate whatever requires no deliberate faking in your own breast, for that will accord with the true dispositions of heaven and earth without disturbing them. Then the people will already have escaped death—what need would you then have to put an end to warfare?”

The Yellow Emperor was going to meet with Big Teeter⁷ in the Thatchtop Mountains. Scopeclear was captain of the chariot, assisted by Brightspace, with Spreadlike and Studybuddy going before the horses while Brogates and Goofball rode behind. When they arrived in the wilds of Xiangcheng, these seven sagely men got lost and could find nowhere to ask directions, until they happened upon a herding boy. They asked him the way, saying, “Do you know the Thatchtop Mountains?”

6. *Renyi*. See Glossary.

7. *Dawei* 大隗. Possibly a deliberate or inadvertent miswriting of *dakuai* 大塊, “the Great Clump,” but in any case unmistakably echoing that term visually. Cf. Chapter 2, p. 11 and Chapter 6, pp. 56 and 59.

“Yes,” the boy said.

“Do you know where Big Teeter lives?”

“Yes, I do.”

The Yellow Emperor exclaimed, “What an extraordinary young man! Not only does he know the Thatchtop Mountains, he even knows where Big Teeter lives! Let me ask you, then: how should the empire be handled?”

The boy replied, “The empire should be handled by doing just what I’m doing now, nothing more. What more is there to do? When I was younger I would wander on my own everywhere within the six conjoined directions.⁸ Then I happened to be afflicted with an illness that damaged my eyesight. That’s when an elder offered me some advice: ‘You must now instead wander only in the wilds of Xiangcheng, as if riding on the sun as your chariot.’⁹ Now that my eyesight has somewhat recovered, I wander even *outside* the six conjoined directions. That’s how the empire should be handled. What more is there to do about it?”

The Yellow Emperor said, “The handling of the empire is indeed not your problem, my son. But nevertheless, I venture to ask you about how to handle the empire.” But the boy declined to answer. The Yellow Emperor asked again.

Then the boy said, “Handling the empire is no different from tending horses, is it? You just get rid of anything that harms the horses, that’s all.”

The Yellow Emperor bowed twice with his head to the ground, praised the boy as his Heavenly Teacher, and departed.

Intellectual people are unhappy when deprived of the constant transmutation of ideas; debaters are unhappy when deprived of the orderly progression of arguments; critics are unhappy when deprived of the task of berating and nitpicking. These are people who pen themselves in with mere things. Men who can solicit the attention of the age become rising stars at court; those who can satisfy the populace are honored with official positions; those with physical strength are proud of difficult feats. Those who are brave and daring are spurred on by calamity. Those skilled in handling weaponry delight in combat; the dried-out and depleted rest on their reputations; the wielders of law and statute make much of expanding governance; the masters of ritual instruction revere proper demeanor; the men of humankindness and responsible conduct cherish the interfaces of human relationships. When farmers have no work to do with their crops and weeds, they fall to pieces,^B as do merchants deprived of their markets; when the common people are given work to do morning and night, they become diligent; when craftsmen are skilled in handling their tools and machines, they become vigorous. Without an accumulation of wealth, the greedy get anxious; without expanding power and influence, the ambitious get depressed.

This is the only way these slaves to circumstances and external things delight in the process of transformation: when they meet with a time that can make use

8. North, south, east, west, up, down.

9. Cheng Xuanying takes this to mean active only during the daylight, resting at night, following the changes of the sun and its daily renewal.

of something about them, they are unable to resist doing their thing, unable to practice non-doing.¹⁰ Thus do they comply and align themselves with whatever is brought by every passing year, instead of letting change be their very thinghood!^C Thus do they drive their bodies and inborn natures about, sinking beneath the ten thousand things, never turning back for their entire lives. How sad!

Zhuangzi said, “If an archer can be called skillful for hitting a target not designated in advance, then everyone in the world is a master archer like Yi. Would you agree?”

Huizi said, “Yes.”

Zhuangzi continued, “If the world has no universally recognized standard of right, so each man affirms his own idea of rightness as right, then everyone in the world is a sage like Yao. Would you agree?”

Huizi said, “Yes.”

Zhuangzi said, “Well, then. There are the Confucians, the Mohists, the Yangists, the Bingists,^D and yourself. Among these five positions, which is ultimately right? Or is it like the case of Halfwit Hasty? His disciple said, ‘I have mastered your Course. I can get the cauldron boiling in the winter and make ice in the summer.’ Halfwit Hasty said, ‘That is just using the yang to evoke the yang, and the yin to evoke the yin. It is not what I call the Course. Let me demonstrate my Course for you!’ Then he tuned two zithers, placing one in the foyer and one in his room. When he struck the *gong* tone on one, the *gong* on the other sounded; when he struck the *jue* tone on one, the *jue* on the other sounded—for they were tuned the same way. But then he changed the tuning of one string, matching none of the five tones. When he plucked this tone, all twenty-five strings of the zither resonated at once. It was just a sound like all the rest, and yet it functioned as the lord of all the tones. Is that how it is?”^E

Huizi said, “But how about if whenever I debate the Confucians, Mohists, Yangists, or Bingists, they are so bowled over by my words and weighed down by my statements that none can refute me?”

Zhuangzi said, “It would be like a man of Qi who sends his son on a journey to Song, but assigns cripples to be his bodyguards. Or like someone who seeks out a euphonious bell, but then muffles its sound by keeping it wrapped in cloth. Or like someone who searches for his lost son, but doesn’t look beyond his own house. This is forgetting the right type of thing [to be used for the job]. A man of Chu was angered by the doorman at his lodgings [and so wished to depart, but was still so angry] in the middle of the night, when no one else was around, that he picked a fight with the ferryman. He didn’t get anywhere, but he did manage to make some enemies for himself!”^F

Zhuangzi was attending a funeral when he happened to pass Huizi’s grave. He looked at his followers and said, “There was a man of Ying who, when a bit of plaster no thicker than a fly’s wing got smeared on his nose, had Carpenter Stoney

10. *Wuwei*. See Glossary.

slice it off. Carpenter Stoney swung his ax with a whoosh, slicing it off exactly as requested, removing every bit of the plaster without harming the nose, leaving the man of Ying standing there completely unperturbed. When Lord Yuan of Song heard about this, he called Carpenter Stoney to court and said, "Try it on me!" Carpenter Shi said, "It is true that I could once slice like that. But my material is now long dead." Since Huizi died, I, too, have had no material to work on. There is no one I can talk to anymore."

Guan Zhong had fallen ill, and Duke Huan¹¹ asked him, "Father Zhong's illness has become severe; how could I be permitted not to say what I must say? If the illness gets worse, to whom would Your Highness like me to hand over the state?"

Guan Zhong said, "To whom would you wish to give it?"

"To Bao Shuya,"¹² said the duke.

"No, not him. He is a good man, incorruptible and pure, so much so that he will not associate with those who are not as good as himself. When he is once told of someone's errors, he never forgets it for the rest of his life. If you have him govern the state, he will tangle with you on the one hand and clash with the people below on the other. It would not be long before he offended you."

"Then who can do it?" asked the duke.

"If you won't give up on the whole idea," said Guan Zhong, "Xi Peng¹³ would be all right. He's the kind of man who forgets those above him and leaves those below him alone. He is ashamed that he is not as good as the Yellow Emperor, and thus is empathetic to those who are not even as good as himself. Those who share their intrinsic virtuosities with others are called sages, while those who share their wealth with others are called worthies. Those who domineer or subordinate others with their worthiness never succeed in winning them over. There is much Xi Peng doesn't hear about in his state, and indeed there is much he doesn't see going on in his own house. So if you won't give up the whole idea, he's the one for the job."

The king of Wu, boating on the Yangtse River, stopped off for a hike on Monkey Mountain. When the monkeys saw him, they scampered away in fright, escaping into the deep thickets. But one monkey among them continued to swivel and pivot his own sweet way, nimbly clutching at the branches, showing off his skill to the king. When the king shot at this monkey, a nimble stab of its hand snagged the arrow in midflight. The king then ordered his attendants to hurry forward and unleash their shots in tandem, straightaway overtaking and killing the monkey dead. The king looked the corpse up and down, and then said to his friend Undoubting Visage, "This monkey showed off its skill, depending on its own agility,

11. On Duke Huan and Guan Zhong, see also Chapter 19, pp. 152–53.

12. Virtuous minister of the state of Qi, and Guan Zhong's own close friend and confidant.

13. Another Qi minister, whom Guan Zhong recommended as his successor but who died in the same year as Guan Zhong.

acting superior to me, and thus arrived at this terrible fate. Take a lesson from it! Ah! Do not show a haughty demeanor and act superior to others!”

Undoubting Visage returned home and took Overseer Lumbertree as his teacher, which assisted him in adjusting his demeanor, getting rid of any show of delight, and saying good-bye to display. After three years everyone in his country was praising him.

Sir Shoestrap the Southside Unk¹⁴ sat sprawled against his armrest on the ground. Gazing up, he emptied a long sigh out into the heavens. Sir Faceformed saw him there and said, “Master, you surpass all beings. Can the body really be made like dried wood, the mind like dead ashes?”

“I used to live in a mountain cave,” replied Sir Shoestrap. “One time Tian He¹⁵ showed up and managed to get a look at me, and because of that the people of Qi held celebrations three times to congratulate him. I must have had something in me for him to be able to see it in me like that. I must have been selling something for him to come shopping for it like that. If I didn’t have it in me, how could he have come to know it? If I were not selling it, how could he have come to buy it? Alas! It saddened me to see someone lose himself like that, and then it saddened me that I was saddened about that person, and then it saddened me that I was saddened that I was saddened about that person. And from there it just keeps going on and on.”^G

Confucius went to Chu, where the king held a feast in his honor. Sun Shu’ao stood holding the pouring vessel while Yiliao of Marketsouth received the wine and made the libation, saying, “Ah, you are an equal to the men of old! And they would certainly have words to say on such an occasion!”

Confucius said, “I have learned something of the wordless words, but I have never spoken them. I will speak them now. You, Yiliao, merely juggled some balls around, and the conflict between Chu and Song was thereby resolved. And you, Sun Shu-ao, merely fell asleep with a feathered fan in your hand, and the people of Ying halted their troops.¹⁶ As for me, I wish I had a beak three feet long!”

The deeds of those two are what may be called a “nonguiding Course,” while the words of this one are what may be called a “wordless argument.” When all

14. Either an alternate name for, or a parody of, “Southwall Ziqi” (Nanguo Ziqi) from the opening vignette of Chapter 2.

15. De facto ruler of the state of Qi from 404 BCE to his death in 384 BCE.

16. Xiong Yiliao of Marketsouth appears in *Zuozhuan*, Duke Ai 16, as a man who refused to get involved in a proposed political uprising, unmoved by threats and authority; the uprising failed and peace was restored. Luo Miandao further relates a tale of Yiliao juggling ninety-nine balls, keeping ninety-eight in the air at all times in the midst of a battle between Song and Chu. Like Sun Shu’ao’s ability to nap in a similar situation, this inner repose, unaffected by external things, ended up having the most powerful effect on external things, as the armies stopped their fighting, transfixed. In other versions of the Yiliao story, however, it was only the enemy Song troops who were transfixed, allowing for an easy Chu victory. Yiliao also appears in Chapter 20, p. 158, note 3.

powers and virtuosities are subsumed in the unification of the Course and all words rest in what the understanding does not understand, the utmost has been reached. But no single virtuosity can include¹⁷ all that is unified in the Course, and no argument can adduce what understanding cannot understand. To become famed [for one's moral virtuosity, understanding and arguments] like the Confucians and Mohists is thus always an inauspicious sign. The ocean refuses none of the rivers flowing into it; its vastness is unsurpassed. Likewise, the sage encompasses heaven and earth, his bounty reaching all in the world, but no one knows who he is. A Great Man is born without titles, dies without posthumous honors, gathers no wealth, and establishes no name for himself. It is not skillful barking that makes a dog good, and it is not skillful talking that makes a man even a worthy, much less a Great Man. Indeed, endeavoring to be great does not make him great, much less any endeavor to be virtuosic! Nothing is more complete than heaven and earth, but do they become so by seeking to be so? One who understands the great completeness seeks nothing, loses nothing, abandons nothing; he never replaces his own self with any definite thing, never alters himself for the sake of anything.¹¹ He returns only to his own self, yet he finds it inexhaustible. He follows the ancients, yet he never becomes their mere copy. This is the unfaked realness¹⁸ of a Great Man.

Sir Shoestrap had eight sons. He had them line up before him and then called over Nineway Blocker, saying to him, "Physiognomize my sons for me. Which one will have good fortune?"

Nineway Blocker said, "Jamb is the one who will have good fortune." Shoestrap, pleasantly surprised, said, "How so?"

"Jamb will share his meals with the ruler of a state to the end of his days."

Shoestrap then began to weep inconsolably, crying, "What did my son do to deserve such an extreme fate!"

Nineway Blocker said, "But when someone shares his meals with the ruler of a state, generous support is given even to the three most distant levels of his relations; how much more his own parents! For you to weep in this way upon hearing of his fate is to reject happiness. What father counts his son's good fortune as a misfortune?"

Shoestrap said, "Blocker! How could you understand it? Would this really make Jamb fortunate? It goes no further than wine and meat, just stuff that goes into the mouth and nose. But that tells us nothing of where it comes from. If, though I have done no shepherding, a ewe is suddenly there giving birth in the southwest corner of my house, and then, though I have had no inclination to go hunting for it, a quail is suddenly there hatching her young in the southeast corner, what should I think it to be if not some ominous anomaly? What I wander in with

17. Following the editions that have *zhou* 周 rather than *tong* 同. If using the latter, the meaning would be, "But no single virtuosity can be the same as all that is unified in the Course. . . ."

18. 誠 Cheng.

my son is heaven and earth. Together with him I welcome the joy, the music, of heaven. Together with him I welcome the sustenance, the nutriment, of earth. I do not do any work with him, I do not hatch any schemes with him—we do not do anything anomalous like that. Together with him I chariot upon the unfaked realness of both heaven and earth,¹⁹ never letting him be disturbed by mere things. Together we see all twists and turns as one, never letting ourselves get caught up in what external events do or don't require. And yet now this conventional reward comes to him! Wherever an ominous anomaly appears, there must have been some ominous anomalous conduct. Danger looms! Since my son and I have not done anything wrong, it must be Heaven that is visiting this upon us! That is why I weep.”

Soon afterward he sent Jamb off to Yan. But he was captured by bandits on the way, and since it would have been difficult to sell him as a slave with his body intact, they cut off his foot to make it easier. They sold him in Qi, where he was made gatekeeper for Duke Ju, in which capacity he was given meat to eat for the rest of his days.

Gnawgap ran into Xu You and said, “Where are you going, sir?”

“I am fleeing from Yao.”

“What do you mean?”

“Yao is so cloyingly kind and humane,²⁰ I am afraid he will become a laughingstock to all the world—and finally will lead people in later times to cannibalize each other! It is not difficult to get people to gather around you: love them and they will feel affection for you, profit them and they will come to you; praise them and they will work hard for you. Give them what they hate, however, and they will scatter. Loving and profiting them do indeed come from humankindness and responsible conduct. But those who freely dispense humankindness and responsible conduct are few, while those who see profit to be gained from practicing humankindness and responsible conduct are many. If there is even the slightest moment of faking²¹ in one's humankindness and responsible conduct, they instantly become weapons in the hands of brutish greed. Thus for any one man to benefit the world with his decisions and institutions²² can be likened to trying to carve out the shapes of all things with a single slash of the knife.²³ Yao understands how worthy people profit the world, but he doesn't understand how they plunder

19. 誠 Cheng. Compare “what is true both to heaven and earth,” Chapter 1, p. 5.

20. *Ren*. See Glossary.

21. 無誠 *wucheng*.

22. *Duan zhi* 斷制. Both words also imply carving and severing; hence the comparison that follows.

23. Following Guo Xiang, as supplemented by the suggestion of Zhang Binglin. In other words, violently imposing a single shape on the multifarious variety of all things, rather than gently shaping each in its own way with whittle after tiny whittle.

the world. For only those who have ousted all worthiness from themselves can understand this!”

There are the subserviently compliant, there are the precariously perched, there are the compromised and put upon.

The subserviently compliant are those who learn the words of one teacher and then, secretly pleased with themselves—so subservient! so compliant!—remain partial to their own theory, regarding it as quite sufficient, without realizing there has never been anything to possess there, or anywhere. Thus they are called the subserviently compliant.

The precariously perched are like lice on a pig. Choosing a place between its wide-set bristles, they think they have found an enormous palace or vast pleasure park for themselves. In the slits of the hooves or creases of the buttocks, or in the cleavage between the teats or the folds behind the knees, they think they have found a secure home in an auspicious site, not realizing that as soon as the butcher claps his hands and spreads forth the kindling, setting it aflame, they will be fried together with the pig. They flourish due to their place, and likewise perish due to their place. Such are the precariously perched.

The compromised and put-upon are people like the emperor Shun. The mutton has no hankering for the ants; it is the ants that hanker after the mutton, for it is rank with musk. Shun’s musky behavior attracted the delight of the people. Thus he changed his residence three times, and in each case a city sprang up around him. After he moved to the wastelands of Deng, it became a metropolis of a hundred thousand families. When Yao learned of Shun’s worthiness, he raised him up from the barren lands, saying, “We are hoping his arrival will bring us prosperity.” When Shun was taken from the barren lands he was already long in years and was losing both his vision and his hearing, but he was never able to return home to rest. This is what I mean by being compromised and put upon.

Hence the Spiritlike Man always hates the arrival of a crowd. For where there is a crowd there is no togetherness, and where there is no togetherness, a crowd is no gain. He keeps no one too close and no one too distant, embracing only his intrinsic virtuosities, warming himself with his own harmony, thereby getting along with the world. Such are what I call Genuine Persons. Even more than those ants they have dropped away all wisdom, even more than the fishes they always find a plan, even more than the mutton they have dropped all deliberate intentions. They view the eye with the eye, listen to the ear with the ear, recover the mind with the mind. Their levelness is like that of a taut cord. Their transformations are a mere following along.

For the Genuine Persons of olden times waited for and depended upon²⁴ it all through the Heavenly in them. They did not intrude into the Heavenly with the human. Such were the Genuine Persons of old! Getting it, they lived; losing it, they died. Getting it, they died; losing it, they lived. It is like medicine. There are crow’s head, balloonflower, cockscomb, and chinaroot. Taken at the right time,

24. *Dai*. See Glossary.

any of them can be sovereign, but the case-by-case vicissitudes are beyond exact verbal description.

When Gou Jian was trapped on Mt. Kuai'ji with his three thousand armored soldiers, it was only Zhong who knew how to save them from destruction, but it was also only Zhong who was unaware of the subsequent danger to his own life [at Gou Jian's hands].²⁵ So I say, the owl's eyes are suited to certain conditions, and the crane's neck has its proper proportion. But to change them would cause these creatures suffering. Hence it is said that although both the wind and the sun diminish the river when they pass over its face, nonetheless, even if both were fixed upon it at once, the river would be undisturbed; it merely relies on its source and continues on its way. For the water holds firmly to the earth, the shadow holds firmly to the body, and all beings hold firmly to one another.

So it is that the eye is endangered by keen vision, the ear by sharp hearing, the mind by its self-sacrificing devotion to external things. Every ability endangers its own reservoir. Once this danger has taken shape, it is too late to change it. Once disaster sprouts, it grows and flourishes. To return them [to their source] requires effort, and the results take time. But people think [these abilities] are their most precious treasures—pathetic, is it not? The ceaseless destruction of nations and the slaughter of the people come from never thinking to question this.

The feet occupy just the span of earth upon which they stand, but it is all the untrod land that allows them to travel well. Man's conscious understanding is puny, but it is all that it does not understand that allows it to understand what is meant by the Heavenly. To understand it as the Great Oneness, as the Great Dark, as the Great Eye, as the Great Equality, as the Great Scope,²⁶ as the Great Dependable, as the Great Stability—that is to arrive at the utmost. As the Great Oneness it runs through and connects all things; as the Great Dark it solves and dissolves them all, as the Great Eye it beholds them all, as the Great Equality it enframes them all, as the Great Scope it incorporates them all, as the Great Dependable it is verified in them all, as the Great Stability it supports them all. Bringing each as far as it can go and using it up, the Heavenly is there. Following them all, illumination is there. Vanishing into them, a pivot is there. Starting anew, something other is always there.²⁷ To solve it seems like leaving it unsolved, to know it seems like leaving it unknown, for it can be known only by not knowing. It cannot be

25. Gou Jian (d. 464 BCE?) was king of the kingdom of Yue. Wen Zhong, originally from the state of Chu, was considered a master strategist and became one of Gou Jian's top military advisors in his campaign to reclaim his throne after Yue was annexed by the state of Wu. After they had successfully destroyed the state of Wu and Gou Jian was once again king of Yue, Wen Zhong stayed on at his court to enjoy the honors earned by his contributions, only to meet his death when Gou Jian later suspected him of plotting a revolt.

26. 大方 *dafang*. In Chapter 17 (p. 134), the same term is translated as “the Great Purview.” In Chapter 20 (p. 158), and Chapter 25 (p. 216), it is translated as “the Vast Ambit.”

27. This line can also be parsed differently, but it is equally obscure either way. The other parsing might be rendered, “In all of them the Heavenly is there to follow, for in all there is a darkness that illuminates, a pivoting to a new beginning, providing always an alternate standard.”

inquired after in terms of either the bounded or the unbounded. But within all the scraping and slippage there is a solidity that is never replaced through all the ages, never lacking. So may we not say that it has manifested itself plainly and put itself greatly forth? Shall we not inquire into this? What else is all our perplexity for? To resolve our perplexity into the ever unperplexed, thus returning it to the unperplexed, this would still be the greatest unperplexity.

ENDNOTES

A. Following Guo Xiang, reading 姦 in its earliest attested sense as given in the *Shouwen*, i.e., 私也.

B. Following Luo Miandao.

C. *Buwuyuyi* 不物於易. Most commentators understandably suggest one of three possible corrections of this difficult phrase: (1) changing the *bu* to an *er* 而, which would mean something like “complying with and aligned by the course of the year, but thereby made into a mere determinate thing by the process of change”; (2) reversing the *wu* and *yi*, which would mean something like “complying with and aligned by the course of the year, but not exchanging itself with other things”; or (3) both, which would mean something like, “complying with and aligned by the course of the year, but letting themselves be changed by external things.” I follow the minority attempt of commentators like Lu Shuzhi and Zhu Dezhi to make sense of the original phrase, which compels us to take it to be making a contrast between two ways of going along with change and two kinds of thinghood, in both cases distinguishing a superficial sense that is critiqued from a profounder sense that is extolled. The superficial form of going along with change means merely taking a limited place within the whole process of change, fulfilling one’s determinate role and locking into that single inert and partial identity, whereas the thoroughgoing form of going along with change is to take change as one’s very thinghood, to be made of change itself, which means to actually also have as one’s deepest inner essence the uncanny and spiritual power of constant self-transformation, always going beyond any one fixed and determinate identity.

D. Traditionally identified as the followers of the logician Gongsun Long (see Chapter 17, p. 140), who however was probably born too late to have been known to the historical Zhuang Zhou. Some scholars have thus suggested that this could be a distorted reference to followers of Song Xing or the proto-Daoist/Legalist Tian Pian (see Chapter 33, p. 269). But it is just as likely that this story is an imaginative fiction about Zhuangzi written after his death, when Gongsun Long had already come to prominence.

E. Huizi had developed a form of argumentation that used the alteration of perspective to undermine hard and fast distinctions, leading to the conclusion that all things are one (see Chapter 33, p. 273). Zhuangzi adopts this method from Huizi but conceives its status and function very differently. For it is this method that develops into Zhuangzi’s “going by the rightness of the present ‘this’” (*yinshi* 因是), the “wild card.” (See Glossary; see also “Zhuangzi as Philosopher” at <https://www.hackettpublishing.com/zhuangziphil>.) This method, shared by Huizi and Zhuangzi, is what is here compared to the one tone that matches none but makes all the other strings resonate. This passage perhaps shows us the difference between Huizi and Zhuangzi. Zhuangzi points out that this wild card is still one more card—“it is just a sound like

all the rest”—and that it still doesn’t resolve anything about what is so, above and beyond all argument, in the way Huizi thinks. It just means he can win every argument. But this is still “laboring your spirit to make all things one” (Chapter 2, p. 15). The wild card view has certain special characteristics, can resonate with every string, can win every argument: but it is not for that reason to be regarded as the establishment of an objective truth.

F. To think that winning a dispute is the way to establish the truth is using the wrong type of thing for the job. All that is actually accomplished is bad blood with the defeated, but the whole point was to establish agreement, a harmonious relation, between the disputants. Similarly, the man of Chu wanted to get away from his lodgings and cross the river because of his anger at something there, but it was his anger that kept him from getting across the river. Zhuangzi’s alternative is the use of “going by the present this” not to show the others that they are wrong and that they ought to regard all things as one but to follow along with whatever their partial viewpoint is, as in the tale of the monkey keeper (Chapter 2, pp. 15–16).

G. Following Luo Miandao’s reading.

H. A double translation. See “Notes on the Translation.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Zeyang

When Zeyang was traveling through Chu, Yi Jie spoke of him to the king of Chu but withdrew from the court before managing to convince the king to meet with him. Some time later Zeyang¹ met with Wang Guo. “How about if *you* commend me to the king?” he asked.

Wang Guo said, “Gong Yuexiu would be a better choice than me.”

“What does this Gong Yuexiu do?”

“In the winter he spears turtles around the Yangtse River and in the summer he lounges around in the depths of the mountains. When someone passes by and asks him what he’s doing there he just says, ‘This is my house.’ As for me, I am no match even for Yi Jie—if he was not able to get the king to meet with you, I would have no chance. Yi Jie is the kind of person who is knowledgeable but lacking in any real virtuosity of his own and thus, not aggrandizing himself, he can work wonders for you in the realm of social connections, but that will also definitely get you all turned upside down and blinded by the trappings of wealth and rank. For to help others with anything other than one’s own intrinsic virtuosity really only helps deplete what they have of it themselves, like a man afflicted with chronic frostbite availing himself of a coat though he’s right in the midst of spring-time, or a man suffering from sunstroke hiking back to wintry climes though he’s right in the midst of a cool breeze.[^] Now this king of Chu is the kind of man who is noble and dignified in bearing but unforgiving as a tiger when offended; one must be either a smooth-talking flatterer or else completely true to one’s own intrinsic virtuosities to make any impression on him. A true sage can make his own clansmen forget their poverty in times of hardship and make kings and dukes forget their rank and wealth, becoming humble and lowly, in times of success. Interacting with non-human things, he just joins in their merry-making. But dealing with fellow humans, though he enjoys communing with them as he does with any beings, he also protects himself and preserves what is most his own. Thus he sometimes says nothing at all but still imbues those around him with harmony, transforming them simply by standing next to them, fitting together perfectly like father and son. He may go back to live in his solitude, but still what he puts forth

1. The text has “Peng Yang” here, but this can only be an alternate name for the same figure.

to others remains unchanged, working in its usual leisurely way. This is how greatly his heart and mind differ from those of ordinary men like me.² So I really suggest you wait for Gong Yuexiu.

“A sage is someone who gets through to the intertwining of things, so that everything forms a single body around him, yet without knowing it to be so, without knowing it to be right: it is just his inborn nature. Whether communing with his allotted fate³ or shaken into activity, he takes the Heavenly as his only teacher. Others follow him, pinning labels on what he does, but soon afterward they get caught up by this understanding⁴ of theirs and thus can never walk his walk for very long—how then can they ever stop?

“One who is born beautiful, even if handed a mirror, will not realize her beauty surpasses others unless someone tells her so. But whether she knows it or not, whether told of it or not, the delight she gives is unceasing and the affection it inspires equally so, for to be that way is just her inborn nature. Other people stick a name on the sage’s love for mankind. But if no one tells him about it, he will not know that he loves mankind. Yet whether he knows it or not, whether told of it or not, his love is unceasing and the comfort it brings to others equally so, for to be that way is just his nature. Even to gaze from afar at our old homeland and capital is to be penetrated through with joy. No matter that the old rolling hills are overgrown with weeds and nine out of ten of your old friends are now lying beneath them; the joy still flows unhampered in you. How much more so if you could still see what you had once seen and hear what you had once heard there—it would be like standing on a platform suspended eighty feet high above the surrounding crowd. Mr. Renxiang⁵ was one who found such a center of the circle.⁶ He brought himself to completion by following along with whatever he encountered, participating in things without ending and without beginning, no matter what their impulse or season. It is only someone who transforms every day together with all things who can remain always one and unchanging—when need he abandon them for even a moment? Indeed, if you deliberately make the Heavenly your teacher, the Heavenly will not teach you, and you will instead end up martyring yourself to each thing you encounter. So what point is there in having any concerns?

“To the sage there have never existed any such things as the Heavenly or the human—to him there have never been any beginnings at all, never any beings of any kind, for he just moves along with the world without replacing anything, going through every kind of activity without getting stuck in any ruts. So how could he have any thought of ‘merging’ with them?

2. Or possibly, “This is how far-reaching their effects are on the heartminds of their fellow human beings.”

3. 命 *Ming*. See Glossary.

4. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

5. According to Guo Xiang, an ancient sage-king.

6. Cf. Chapter 2, p. 15.

“Tang found his charioteer in Gateman Deng Heng and took him as his personal tutor. He ‘followed’ this teacher without being confined by him; he had learned from him how to complete himself by following after others.⁷ If he had similarly put him in charge of handling the names of things, the excess standards that would then belong to each name would have provided him with double-vision.⁸ It was in this way that Confucius treated as his private tutor even his own exhaustive thinking.⁹ As Mr. Rongcheng⁹ said, ‘Remove the days and there are no more years. No inside, no outside.’”

Ying, the ruler of Wei, had a peace treaty with Tian Mou, the Marquis of Qi. When the latter violated the treaty, the ruler of Wei flew into a rage and wanted to send an assassin. The minister of war, Gongsun Yan, considering this a shameful idea, said to him, “You are the ruler of ten thousand chariots, my lord, and yet you seek personal revenge in the manner of a commoner. I beg of you to grant me command of two hundred thousand soldiers to attack Qi for you, to take his people prisoners and to confiscate his horses and cattle. That will make him burn inside with a fever that pierces him from front to back. Then I will take his capital, and when he flees in terror I will strike him down from behind, hitting him so hard it will shatter his spine.”

Jizi heard about this advice and, thinking it a shameful idea, said to the king, “If you are building a defensive wall ten cubits high and then, when you already have it seven^c cubits finished, it all gets torn down again, that would be a bitter disappointment to the workers who had been conscripted to build it. Now we have already achieved seven years without warfare, and this is a solid foundation for building true kingship. Your minister of war Yan is just a troublemaker. Don’t listen to him.”

Huazi heard about this advice and, thinking it very unsavory, said to the ruler, “The one who so artfully tries to convince you to attack Qi is just a troublemaker. The one who so artfully tells you not to attack is also just a troublemaker. And I, who tell you that both the proponent of attack and the proponent of non-attack are men who can only bring disorder, I am also just a troublemaker.”

The ruler said, “Then what is to be done?”

“Just seek your own course, nothing more,” said Huazi.

Huizi heard about all this and thus introduced Dai Jinren to the ruler. Dai Jinren said to him, “I am sure that my lord knows what a snail is?”

7. The charioteer “follows” the horses, and the passenger “follows” the charioteer. But the charioteer is not thereby confined or ruled by the horses, nor the passenger by the charioteer—quite the contrary, this following empowers the free travel and activity of the charioteer and the passenger.

8. The implication would then be that Confucius learned from his thinking to see the doubleness of every name, its ability to generate multiple models—a direct rebuke to the interpretation of “the rectification of names,” *zheng ming* 正名, as implying single definite standards for each name.

9. According to the Gao You commentary to the *Huainanzi*, Rongcheng was the creator of the calendar in the time of the Yellow Emperor.

“Yes,” said the ruler.

“Suppose there is a country on the tip of the snail’s left horn called Provocation and a country on the tip of the snail’s right horn called Savagery. They sometimes go to war over territory, and after scattering tens of thousands of corpses across the battlefields, each army goes into retreat for fifteen days and then counterattacks.”

“Eh? This is some kind of nonsense talk, isn’t it?” said the ruler.

“Yes, but please permit your servant here to fill it out with the reality,” said the other. “What do you think, my lord? Is there a limit to the space in the four directions and above and below?”

“It is limitless,” said the ruler.

“So you do know how to let your mind roam into the limitless! But then, when you do that and then look back at all the lands we can travel and know, are they not so indistinct that it is unclear whether they exist or not?”

“Yes, quite so.”

“Among those lands we can travel and know, there is your state of Wei, in which there is the city of Liang, in which there is a king. Is there any difference between this king and the country of Savagery?”

“No, no difference,” said the ruler.

Then the visitor departed, leaving the ruler astonished, as if he had lost himself.

Afterward, Huizi went in to meet with the ruler, who said, “That visitor was a Great Man; ‘sage’ is not sufficient to describe him.”

Huizi said, “When you blow through a flute, you hear a tone. But if you blow into a sword’s scabbard, you just have to swallow your breath coming back at you. [Sages like] Yao and Shun are praised by everyone. But if you tried to speak of Yao and Shun in front of a man like Dai Jinren, you would just have to swallow your breath coming back at you, nothing more.”

When Confucius was traveling in Chu, he took lodging in a shack^D on Ant Hill. In the neighboring house, a man had climbed up into the rafters, along with his wife and servants and concubines. Zilu asked, “Why have they all crowded together up there?”

Confucius said, “Such are the servants of sages. They^E bury themselves among the common people, finding a way to hide themselves in the space of the boundary regions.^F When they remain silent, their intents nevertheless remain boundless, and when they speak with their mouths, their hearts and minds still never say a word. They seem to be in some kind of conflict with the world, but really their hearts and minds don’t deign to interact with it at all. Thus do they sink underwater even on dry land, which is their way of pulling a Shinan Yiliao,¹⁰ no?”

Zilu asked if he could go call them over. “Don’t even try,” said Confucius. “They know that I would expose them. Knowing I have come to Chu, they think that I will certainly convince the king of Chu to summon them to court. They

10. Shinan Yiliao also appears in Chapter 20, p. 158, and Chapter 24, p. 201.

think of me as a kind of smooth-talking flatterer. People like this would be ashamed even to hear the words of such a smooth-talking flatterer as me, much less see him in the flesh. And what makes you think they're even still there?"

Zilu went over to have a look, and indeed found that the house was now empty.

Border-warden Changwu once questioned Zilao, saying, "A ruler in his handling of government must not leave the clumps unsmoothed, but in governing the people must not completely tear them up either. In the past when I was a farmer, I plowed my field without smoothing the clumps, and I was repaid with a harvest of unsmooth clumps. When weeding, I completely tore up the fields, and I was repaid with a torn-up harvest. The next year I changed the alignment, deepening my plowing and covering up the seeds until they ripened, and the harvest came in dense and rich, providing me with more than I could consume for the entire rest of the year."

Zhuangzi heard about this and remarked, "The way most people nowadays go about governing their bodies and ordering their hearts and minds is like what the Border-guard described: they hide from what is Heavenly in them, separate themselves from their inborn natures, destroy their true dispositions, kill their own imponderable spirits. Because it is what everybody else does, they leave the clumps of their inborn natures unsmoothed, so that their desires and hatreds, those bastard children of the inborn nature, become its overgrowth of reeds and bushes. At their first sproutings these do provide support for our bodies, but eventually they tug at and finally uproot the inborn nature itself, until it leaks and oozes and spurts, its juices flowing indiscriminately out, erupting with scabs and sores and tumors, burning with fever and pissing out grease."

Bo Ju was studying with Lao Dan and asked, "May I go wandering out in the world?"

Lao Dan said, "No need. The world is the same as here."

But he persisted, again making the same request. Lao Dan then said, "Where will you begin?"

"I will begin with the state of Qi," said the student. When he reached Qi, he saw the body of an executed criminal. Sitting the corpse upright, he took off his court robes and covered him, tearfully wailing to the heavens, "My child! My child! Great calamity is coming to everyone in the world; you have just been the first to encounter it. People say, 'Don't rob, don't kill!' But then they set up ideas of glory and disgrace, and right away people start seeing certain things as defective. They accumulate wealth and property, and right away people start seeing certain things as worth fighting over. Now if you set up something for people to shun as defective and accumulate something for people to fight over, trapping and impoverishing people so that they have not a moment's respite, and yet you don't want to arrive at this kind of a result, is that possible? The rulers of olden times credited success to the people and blamed failure on themselves, attributed the right to the

people and the wrong to themselves, so that if even a single body lost any of its own shape,⁶ they would resign and blame themselves. These days it is totally different: they mask the way things are and then call whoever cannot see it a fool, they enlarge difficulties and then condemn whoever dare not take them on, they load up duties and then punish whoever cannot fulfill them, they lengthen the roads to be traveled and then execute whoever cannot complete the journey. In response, knowing their powers will be insufficient, the people can only have recourse to fraud. With these new frauds coming at them every day, how could the people of either high or low rank do without some fraudulence of their own? Those with insufficient power fake it, those with insufficient knowledge cheat, those with insufficient wealth steal. If they take up banditry and thievery, where should we put the blame?”

Qu Boyu¹¹ went along for sixty years and transformed sixty times. There was nothing he didn't initially affirm as right that he didn't later repudiate as wrong. So he could never be sure if what he presently called right was not fifty-nine times wrong. All beings have that from which they are born, but no one can see their root; they have that from which they emerge, but none can see through what door they enter. Everyone esteems what his knowing knows, but no one knows how to know only by relying on what his knowing does not know.¹² Is this not the greatest doubt of all? Enough! Enough! There is nowhere to escape it! This is called saying both “It is right!” and “Is it right?”

Confucius questioned the Great Historiographer-semioticians Da Tao and Bo Changqian,¹³ along with Hoghide,¹⁴ saying, “Duke Ling of Wei¹⁵ drank so much and indulged so unrestrainedly in his pleasures that he no longer attended to the affairs of state. He was so preoccupied with his hunting and his weaponry that he neglected all relations with the feudal lords. Why then is he known as Duke Ling?”¹¹

Da Tao said, “For precisely these reasons.”¹

Bo Changqian said, “Duke Wei had three wives with whom he would frolic in his bathing pool. But when Shi Qiu entered his palace bearing tribute, the duke himself intercepted the gift and supported the visitor under the arm.¹ Though in

11. Minister of the state of Wei and contemporary of Confucius, who praised him as an exemplar of self-correction and adaptability appropriate to circumstance. See *Analects* 14:25 and 15:7.

12. *Zhi* appears six times in this sentence. See Glossary.

13. A historiographer-semiotician of the Spring and Autumn period, originally serving the imperial house of Zhou.

14. Listed first among the divine figures who obtained the Course in Chapter 6, p. 57, and also appearing in Chapter 22, p. 181; Chapter 25, p. 214; and Chapter 26, p. 223.

15. From whom Chapter 15 of the *Analects* gets its name.

his disregard [for moral standards] he was extreme, his treatment of a worthy man was still profoundly reverent. That is why he was given the name Duke Ling.”

Hoghide said, “When Duke Ling died, we conducted a divination to ask whether he should be buried in the ancestral tomb, but the result was unfavorable. Then we again divined to ask if he should be buried on Sandy Hill, and the result was favorable. When we were digging a grave for him there, we found several fathoms deep an old stone coffin. We cleaned it up and inspected it. The inscription on it read, ‘If this man’s descendants cannot be counted on,¹⁶ a Duke Ling will usurp his place and be buried here.’ So you see, Duke Ling has been ‘Ling’^K already for a long, long time. How could these two know anything about it?”^L

Know Little asked Vast Unbiased Adjustment, “What is meant by ‘Community Words?’”¹⁷

Vast Unbiased Adjustment replied, “A ‘Community’ joins dozens of family surnames and hundreds of personal names, taking them as forming an identifiable set of customs. The different are joined into the same, the same are dispersed into the different. Now you can point to the hundred parts of a horse’s body and never come up with a horse, and yet the horse is right there, tethered in front of you; it is precisely through establishing the hundred parts that we call it ‘horse.’ Hence hills and mountains pile up the low to make the high. The Yangtse and the Yellow River join the small to make the large. And a Great Man joins and brings all things together to make the unbiased. For this reason, that which comes in to him from outside has a host to receive it without being exclusively clung to, and what comes from within him is able to rectify other things without being rejected.

“Each of the four seasons has its own type of weather,¹⁸ but the sky grants favor to none, and thus does the year come into being. The five bureaus of government have their different duties, but the ruler is not partial to any of them, and thus is the state well governed. Cultural works and military deeds require different skills, but the Great Man grants favor to neither, and that is why his intrinsic virtuosities are complete and comprehensive. All things have their distinctive structures, fitting together in various ways,¹⁹ but the Course is not partial to any of them. Thus it has no name. Since it has no name, it is non-doing,²⁰ engaging in no particular activity. Engaging in no particular doings, there is nothing it does not do:²¹ the seasons have their ends and beginnings, generations have their alternations and transformations; disaster and prosperity overflow into one another, so that whenever something is thwarted, something is also suited; each particular thing spontaneously follows a different direction, so whenever something is set aright, something is also set awry. It can be likened to a great swamp, where all

16. To defend and maintain the tomb.

17. A strange term, unattested elsewhere.

18. *Qi*. See Glossary.

19. *Li*. See Glossary.

20. *Wuwei*. See Glossary.

21. Cf. *Daodejing* 37 and 48.

the different trees are alike accommodated. This can be seen also in contemplating a great mountain, taken as a foundation for trees and rocks alike. These are what we call Community Words.”

Know Little said, “This being the case, is it sufficient to call it the Course?”

Vast Unbiased Harmony said, “No. If we calculate the number of things, it does not stop at ten thousand, and yet we set a limit by calling them ‘The Ten Thousand Things’—this is just to use one of the larger numbers as a nickname by which to pronounce a provisional designation for them due to their great quantity. So ‘Heaven and Earth’ just means the vastest among forms, ‘yin and yang’ just means the vastest among energies,²² and ‘the Course’ just means what is most unbiased among all doings.²³ To use [the word “Course”] as a nickname for the vastness involved, as a way to bespeak it, is permissible; but once we have this word there is a tendency to take the Course as being comparable and contrastable to something. To dispute and distinguish on this basis is to compare the Course to a class outside itself, like we do with the species of dogs as opposed to horses. This misses it by a wide margin.”

Know Little said, “In that case, within the four directions and the six realms, how does the arising of the ten thousand things come about?”

Vast Unbiased Harmony said, “Yin and yang shine on one another, injure^M one another, heal one another. The four seasons replace one another, give birth to one another, slaughter one another. Bridged between them there arise all sorts of desires and aversions, rejections and attractions. The joining of male and female like paired fragments becomes a regular presence in their midst. Safety and danger replace one another, disaster and prosperity give birth to one another, leisure and hurry grind against one another, aggregation and dispersal complete one another. This is the realm of which names and objects can be recorded, of which even the finest subtlety can be registered. The mutual ordering of beings as they follow in succession, the bridgelike circulation of beings as they move each other around, reverting when they reach exhaustion, beginning again when they come to an end—this is what belongs to the realm of beings, what words can exhaust, what understanding²⁴ can reach. It remains within the limit of the realm of beings and goes no further. He who sees the Course doesn’t follow after them when they perish nor trace them back to whence they arise. This is where speculation comes to an end.”

Know Little said, “Between Jizhen’s theory that ‘no one does it’ and Jiezi’s²⁵ theory that ‘something causes it,’ which is true to the facts and which is a merely partial apprehension of the structure of it all?”²⁶

22. *Qi*. See Glossary.

23. Alternately, “The Course just means what is unbiased to any of them.”

24. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

25. Jizhen and Jiezi are both thinkers said to have been active at the Jixia academy in the state of *Qi*.

26. *Li*. See Glossary.

Vast Unbiased Harmony said, “Chickens squawk, dogs bark—this is something people know. But even someone with the greatest understanding cannot describe in words whence they come to be this way, nor can he plumb by thought what they will do next. We can go on splitting and analyzing things further, until ‘the subtlety reaches the point where there are no more divisions possible, the vastness reaches the point where it cannot be encompassed.’²⁷ But even so, the theories that ‘something causes it’ or ‘nothing does it’ don’t yet get out of the realm of beings, and thus in the end they fall into error. ‘Something causes it’ implies something substantial; ‘Nothing does it’ implies total void. The named and the substantial refer to the presence of beings, but ‘namelessness’ and ‘void’ merely point us to the spaces between these beings. One can speak and think about these, but the more one talks the farther off one gets.

“What has not yet been born cannot be kept from coming, what has already died cannot be stopped from going. Life and death are not distant, and yet the structure fitting them together²⁸ cannot be discerned. These theories that ‘something causes it’ or ‘nothing does it’ are merely crutches for doubt to lean on. I gaze at its root, and its antecedents go back without end; I seek its furthest developments, and their coming stretches on without stop. Having no end and no stop—these are negations within the scope of language and thus share only in the structures whereby things fit together,²⁹ the sense made within the realm of mere beings. ‘Something causes it’ and ‘nothing does it’—these are attempted descriptions of the root, but actually they end and begin where things do. The Course cannot be considered existent, nor can it be considered nonexistent. The name ‘Course’ is what we avail ourselves of so as to walk it, a fiction we invent in order to proceed. ‘Something causes it’ and ‘nothing does it’ each occupy only one corner of the realm of things. What do they have to do with the Vast Ambit?³⁰

“If words were completely adequate, one could speak all day and all of it would be the Course. If words were completely inadequate, one could speak all day and all of it would concern only particular beings. The ultimate reaches both of the Course and of beings cannot be conveyed by either speech or silence. Only where there is neither speech nor silence does discussion really come to its ultimate end.”

27. According to Chapter 17, these were stock propositions among the debaters of the time. See p. 136.

28. *Li*. See Glossary.

29. *Li*.

30. 大方 *dafang*. In Chapter 17 (p. 134), the same term is translated “the Great Purview.” In Chapter 20 (p. 158), as here, it is translated “the Vast Ambit.” It also appears in Chapter 24 (p. 205), translated as “the Great Scope.”

ENDNOTES

a. I.e., a seeming solution to the problem that actually blocks out the solution that doing nothing to solve the problem would provide. Alternate translations: “For a man afflicted with frostbite will try to make a springtime for himself by piling on some clothes, and a man suffering from sunstroke will try to return to winter in the slightest cool breeze,” or, “When a man is freezing, it is a warm coat that is springtime to him, and when a man is sweltering, it is a cool breeze that transports him back to the winter.” This is likely an alternate form of a proverb found, in a somewhat less idiosyncratic and more easily intelligible form, in Chapter 2 of *Huainanzi*: “A man afflicted with frostbite avails himself of a full-length coat even in springtime, and a man suffering from sunstroke longs for a cold wind even in autumn.” 凍者假兼衣於春而暍者望冷風於秋。

b. The sentence is very obscure to say the least, and this is merely a stab at making sense of it. Deng Heng followed his horses, and Tang followed Deng Heng his charioteer, learning from him the art of being unconfined by what you follow. The idea might be that it is possible to treat ideal-bearing names like those discussed above (e.g., “beautiful” and “love of mankind,” regarded here also as ostensibly unambiguous norms embodying values to be emulated) as Deng Heng treated his horses: following them closely however they turned, but without being confined by them. This is what taught Tang, who followed behind Deng Heng in the same way, the art of self-completion-through-following. This way of treating names and ideals would reveal that there are always excess and additional ways their meanings twist and turn, providing more than a single stable model or norm, so that each is seen as always double. Names, which seem to impose a controlling ideal, could then be, like the horses, not confining controllers, but rather things that through their inherent multiplicity allow one to travel far and complete oneself. This “double-vision,” 兩見 *liang jian*, would be an analogue for the “walking double,” 兩行 *liang xing*, “Walking Two Roads at Once,” of Chapter 2, p. 16, which also signifies embracing more than one norm at the same time. Alternately, parsing and interpreting differently, the same sentence could also mean “Having put him in charge of the reputation that came with his own social role, he mastered the art of appearing in two ways at once, making superfluous all definite models of behavior.”

c. Following Yu Yue’s suggested emendation, bolstered by the use of “seven” in Cheng Xuanying’s commentary, as argued by Wang Shumin.

d. Reading *jiang* 蔣 for 漿 *jiang*, as suggested by Sima Biao.

e. I translate Confucius’s words here with a plural referent, taking literally the description of “servants of sages,” which has puzzled commentators, since what follows seems to be about hidden sages themselves. It would be highly unusual if not actually unprecedented to have a group of males and females all designated as hidden sages, who would be in any conceivable danger of being summoned to an official post at the king’s court. Most interpreters take Confucius to be referring to one among them, presumably the master of the house (though the text never signals this shift of reference), and to be suggesting that he might be Shinan Yiliao himself, in hiding. The plural translation preserves the ambiguity: it could refer in general to all men like the master of the house here, himself a “servant” of sages, or to all of the members of the household as sage-servants. The Shinan Yiliao reference is ambiguous at best—literally saying “this is their/his/its Shinan Yiliao,” which could mean either that it *might* be Yiliao himself or that this is the respect in which he or they resemble that well-known worthy. On Yiliao, see Chapter 20, p. 158, and Chapter 24, p. 201.

f. Following Cheng Xuanying.

g. *Sic*. 一形有失其形. If this text is uncorrupted, it must intend a pun on the two meanings of *xing*: a physical body and a shape. But as Wang Shumin points out, both Guo Xiang’s

commentary and Cheng Xuanying's subcommentary seem to be working with a text that has *wu* in place of the first *xing*, thus: "If there is even a single creature that loses its body. . . ."

H. This story depends on a pun: *ling* 靈, when used as a posthumous name given by court historiographers, can mean either "numinous, spiritlike, spiritually efficacious, reverent, holy" or "lacking the Course, immoral." Confucius understands these two as contraries. The *Shifajie* 諡法解, a manual for assigning posthumous names, actually gives six meanings for 靈 in this context: "To die but still have one's ambition come to fruition; to be unruly but without loss, to have supreme knowledge of ghosts and spirits; to become eminent but without effort; to manifest spiritual power after death; to have a liking for making ritual sacrifices to ghosts and spirits" 死而志成曰靈, 亂而不損曰靈, 極知鬼神曰靈, 不勤成名曰靈, 死見神能曰靈, 好祭鬼神曰靈. Cheng Xuanying cites another quite relevant meaning of the term when used as a posthumous name, from a similar though now lost source: "The pure kernel of innate potency's perspicacity is called Ling" 德之精明曰靈.

I. Taking *ling* in its sense of "lacking the Course, immoral."

J. Shi Qiu was an upright man whose advice had been ignored by other rulers, none of whom apparently could recognize his worth. This anecdote shows Duke Ling dotting on the elderly worthy as soon as he laid eyes on him, interrupting the visitor's ritually self-subordinating presentation of the gifts, himself instead taking the role of subservience, showing both reverence and an uncanny, almost magical telepathic sensitivity to the old man's genuine worth, somehow immediately perceiving what others could not see. Sima Biao reads these obscure lines as depicting a rather different scenario, wherein Shi Qiu came into the bathing area bearing ritual gifts for the duke, who was just then frolicking naked with his three wives, but then the duke and his wives swiftly snatched up their clothes and covered themselves. In any case, the point is the same: Duke Ling's reverence and uncanny spiritual connectivity.

K. In both of the previous senses at once: (1) spooky with uncanny supernatural perception and power, and (2) immoral.

L. The other two thought the ambiguous term *ling* must be meant in one of its two opposite senses and not the other. Hoghide reveals that it means both of the opposite things at once, the convergence point of the opposites—which provides a nice segue into the next section.

M. Following Yu Yue, reading *hai* 害 for *gai* 蓋, which would mean instead "cover one another."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

External Things

External things cannot be counted on. Thus Guan Longfeng was executed, Bi Gan was ripped open, Jizi feigned madness, Wu Lai was killed, and both Jie and Zhou perished with their states.¹ Rulers always want their ministers to be loyal but might not trust them even if they are. That is why Wu Yun's corpse was set adrift on the Yangtse and Chang Hong had to kill himself in Shu, his blood ending up stored there and transforming after three years into green jade.² Parents always want their children to be filial but might not love them even if they are. That is why Filial Ji died of grief and Zeng Shen languished in sorrow.³

When two pieces of wood are rubbed together, the flame that emerges burns them both away. When fire and metal are held against each other, the metal melts and both the fire and the metal dissipate. When yin and yang scrape and clash, they massively entangle all of heaven and earth, bringing forth the crashes of thunder and lightning, a kind of fire flashing out from amid the water that can strike and incinerate huge trees. But there is something even more distressing than any of this: to be caught between the two pitfalls of *benefit* and *harm* as they grind away at each other, and to have no third way out to avoid them, scuttling unsteadily between them and accomplishing nothing, the heart and mind straining as if stretched between sky and earth, pressed^A and glum and engulfed and imperiled.⁴ For this is what produces the most extensive conflagrations, the kind that in most people burn away the harmony in them, like the light of the moon

1. Jie and Zhou were the legendarily evil last emperors of the Xia and Shang dynasties, respectively. The other figures listed here were all killed one way or another due to either assisting or opposing these two tyrants.

2. Wu Yun (Wu Zixu) was a minister of the state of Wu who, though loyal, was forced by the ruler to commit suicide, his body then disposed of as described. Chang Hong was a virtuous scholar and statesman of the Zhou dynasty forced to commit suicide due to a factional struggle. The legend of his blood turning to jade is taken to suggest a vindication of his virtue; our author seems to cite it as cold comfort indeed.

3. Filial Ji failed to win over his obstreperous stepmother and Zeng Shen, disciple of Confucius and exemplar of filial piety, was disliked by his father.

4. Alternately, possibly something like "now enraged, now forlorn, now sinking, now trapped."

overpowered by the glare of a flame. It is due to this that they finally collapse entirely, the Course in them completely depleted.

Zhuang Zhou's family was poor, and so he went to borrow rice from the marquis in charge of the Yellow River region. The marquis said, "Sure. I will collect some tax money from the village, and then I will lend you three hundred pieces of silver. How would that be?"

Zhuangzi reddened with anger and said, "When I was on the road coming here yesterday I heard someone calling to me. I turned to look and saw a carp in the puddle of a wheel-rut. I said to it, 'A carp come to this? What brought you here, carp?' It answered, 'I am an officer in the Ministry of Waves in the Eastern Sea. Can you give me a cup or a quart of water to keep me alive?' I said, 'Sure. I will go south and get the kings of Wu and Yue to drive the western Yangtze into a channel that will flow through here, which will take you up into it when it comes. How would that be?' The carp reddened with anger and said, 'I have lost something I need contact with at all times; I have nowhere else to go. What I need is just a cup or a pint of water to keep me alive. Rather than talk like this you might as well just wrap me up for the dried fish stall!'"

The Prince of Letbe once upon a time fashioned a huge hook and a thick fishing line of black silk and then, squatting on top of Mount Kuai'ji with fifty steers as bait, cast his line into the Eastern Sea. He fished there morning after morning for an entire year without catching anything, but finally an enormous fish finally took the bait, dragging the giant hook down as it dove into the depths. Then it came charging up, furiously flapping its fins, raising white waves like mountains, shaking and shifting the waters of the ocean with noises like a chorus of ghosts and spirits, spreading terror for a thousand miles around. Having caught such a fish, the Prince of Letbe sliced it and hung it up to dry. All the people east of the Zhi River and north of Cangwu were thereafter sated by the flesh of this fish for a long, long while.

Now in later ages lightweight satirists are all astonished when they retell such stories. And indeed, using a bamboo pole with a string tied to it, waiting for carps and minnows in puddles and ditches, it's going to be hard to catch any such big fish. On the other hand, those who embellish their small tales to please local magistrates are likewise far from those of great understanding. And thus those who reject the ways of the Prince of Letbe, regarding them as unheard-of absurdities, can never be one's companions in weaving through the world—far from it.

The Confucians break into graves with their *Book of Odes* and *Book of Ritual*. The elder Confucians solemnly intone, "Already the east begins its glow; how goeth the work to which we go?" The younger Confucians then say, "The robe and coat not yet unfurled; within his mouth there lies a pearl."⁵ Indeed it is said

5. Part of the ritual for burial was to place a pearl or other gem in the mouth of the deceased.

unmistakably in the *Book of Odes*: ‘Upon his bulging grave / there grows the green of greening sprouts / in life he gave no alms / in death what need hold pearl in mouth?’” Then the young ones grab him by the whiskers and pull at the beard, allowing the elder Confucius to slowly pry open the jaws by pulling down the chin with the back of a metal hammer—but ever so careful not to damage the pearl inside the mouth.

A disciple of Lao Laizi’s was out gathering firewood when he ran into Confucius. When he returned, he reported it to his teacher, saying, “There is a man out there, long on top and short below, with a hump at the top of the head and pushed-back ears, looking around as if he were in charge of all within the four seas. I don’t know whose child he can be!”

Lao Laizi said, “That’s Qiu! Call him over.”

When Confucius arrived, the master said, “Qiu, get rid of this posture of dignity and this appearance of wisdom! Then you might really become a ‘noble man’!”

Confucius bowed and was on his way out when suddenly his expression changed with a jolt, and he asked, “Can some progress then be made in my work?”

Lao Laizi said, “Because you are unable to endure the suffering of this single present era, you drive ten thousand eras into disaster.^B Are you deliberately trying to put them in such straits, or have you just failed to think it through?^C That you take such pride in pleasing others with your kindnesses is in fact your lifelong disgrace. For what you thus promote is no more than the typical activity of mediocrities, leading each other along with promises of fame and tying each other down with threats of obscurity. But praising Yao and condemning Jie is not as good as forgetting both and shutting off entirely all that praises or is praised.⁶ For praise is something that never fails both to harm the praiser and to corrupt the praised.^D When sages take up any endeavor they dawdle and hesitate, and that is why they always succeed. What can be done with someone who carries himself like you do? In the end you are just showing off.”

Lord Yuan of Song dreamt one midnight of a man with disheveled hair peeping at him through the side door, who then said, “I had been sent from the abyss of Zai’lu as an emissary from the limpid Yangtse River to the residence of the Yellow River god, but I have been caught by the fisherman Mefornow.”

Lord Yuan awoke and had the dream interpreted. “It was a divine tortoise,” he was told.

The ruler asked, “Is there really a fisherman named Mefornow?” When his attendants told him that there was, he said, “Have Mefornow summoned to court.”

The following day, Mefornow appeared at court. The ruler asked, “What have you caught recently?”

6. The reference could be to both the praised and the praising: the evaluative controlling mind that praises and behavior that displays itself in hope of praise or can be known in such a way as to be subjected to praise.

He answered, “My net has caught a white tortoise five feet around.”

“You must bring this tortoise of yours to me!” said the ruler.

When the tortoise arrived, the ruler couldn’t decide whether to kill it or let it live, and to resolve his doubt, he had a divination done. The result said, “To kill the tortoise and use it for divination will bring good fortune.” So they cut the tortoise open, piercing its shell for seventy-two divining perforations, not one of which made a wrong prediction.

Of this Confucius said, “The divine tortoise had the ability to appear in a dream to Lord Yuan, but not the ability to escape the net of Mefornow. It had wisdom capable of making correct predictions with all seventy-two of its perforations, but not wisdom capable of escaping the calamity of having its bowels slit open. Thus we see that wisdom has its limits and even divine intelligence⁷ does not reach everywhere. Even a person of perfect wisdom will have ten thousand others plotting against him. Fish have no fear of the nets but they do fear the pelicans. When you divest yourself of small wisdom, the great wisdom dawns; when you get rid of the idea of goodness, goodness spontaneously emerges. Infants are born and, without apprenticing themselves to any teacher,⁸ they become speakers of their native language, just by remaining there in the company of those who can speak it.”

Huizi said to Zhuangzi, “Your words are useless.”

Zhuangzi said, “It is only when you know uselessness that you can know anything about the useful. The earth is certainly vast and wide, but a man at any time uses only as much of it as his two feet can cover. But if you were to dig away all the earth around his feet, down to the Yellow Springs, would that little patch he stands on be of any use to him?”

Huizi said, “It would be useless.”

Zhuangzi said, “Then the usefulness of the useless should be quite obvious.”

Zhuangzi said, “If a person has the capacity to wander, can anything keep him from wandering? And if he has no capacity to wander, can anything set him to wandering? But aspirations to exile oneself into hiding and practices designed to cut oneself off from everything, alas, these are certainly not the doings of utmost wisdom⁸ and abundant intrinsic virtuosity. And yet those who engage in them are unable to turn back even if an avalanche descends; they pay no heed even if engulfed by fire. But even if one person is lord and another is servant, this is only a matter of the times; in another age, neither would be lower than the other. Hence it is said that an Utmost Person does not remain walking on any one road, does not stick to any one practice. The scholarly types esteem antiquity and disparage the present—and to be sure—when you look at people of today against the

7. *Shen*. Elsewhere usually “the imponderable spirit,” or “the spiritlike.” See Glossary.

8. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

likes of old Mr. Hoghide,⁹ who could fail to be swept away in the flow of such waves? But it is only the Utmost Person who can wander through this world without going awry, following along with others without losing himself, not imitating the teachings of others, receiving ideas from them without becoming one of them.

“For the eye to penetrate through, unblocked by its objects, is clear vision. For the ear to penetrate through, unblocked by its objects, is keen hearing. For the nose to penetrate through, unblocked by its objects, is acute smelling. For the tongue to penetrate through, unblocked by its objects, is the sweetness of tasting. Likewise, for the mind to penetrate through, unblocked by its objects, is real knowing,¹⁰ and for knowing to penetrate through, unblocked by its objects, is its realization of its intrinsic virtuosity. Blockage is undesirable on any Course, for where there is blockage there is backup, and if the backup continues people end up trampling all over each other, which is where all the trouble starts. The knowing consciousness¹¹ of living beings relies upon the breath, and it is not Heaven’s fault if it becomes depleted. Heaven blows through them day and night without cease, but human beings for some reason make a point of seeing to it that all their openings are blocked off. As the sac of the heart has chamber after chamber of open space, the mind has its places of Heavenly wandering. When there is insufficient space in a house, the womenfolk will surely fall to quarreling. If the mind does no Heavenly wandering, the six apertures of perception will interfere with one another. This is why being in a vast mountain forest benefits a man more than anything granted by the spirits.¹²

“Intrinsic virtuosity, when it overgrows, turns into good reputation, but when good reputation overgrows, it turns into violent display. Schemes consolidate due to the resulting emergencies and it is from these conflicts that knowingness¹³ arises. Each one builds a barricade^F around himself for self-protection, but their official tasks can only be accomplished through the convergence of diverse demands. In the springtime, when the seasonable sunlight and rain come, the grasses and trees rage forth into life, and that is just when the spade and hoe begin to prune and trim away at them [thereby making more space]. And it is thus that most of these plants and trees manage to find a way to firmly plant themselves—without ever knowing how they are doing it.

“Stillness and silence can fortify one against disease, rubbing the eyes can ease the ailments of age, tranquility can halt anxiety—but these are the works of the already beleaguered. Those who are truly at ease have no place for them, and never bother to find out about such things. A Spiritlike Man, a man of the imponderable, does not bother to find out about a mere sage’s methods for shaking up

9. Hoghide has also appeared in Chapter 6, p. 57; Chapter 22, p. 181; and Chapter 25, p. 214.

10. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

11. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

12. *Shen*. See Glossary.

13. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

the world. A sage doesn't bother about a mere worthy man's methods of doing so, nor does a worthy man find out about a mere noble man's. And likewise, a noble man doesn't bother to find out about a petty man's methods for conforming with the times.

"In Yanmen there was a man who harmed himself with such great skill while mourning for his deceased parent that he was rewarded with a post as Official Tutor. Thereafter over half of his townsmen died from the harm they inflicted on themselves during mourning.

"Yao gave the empire to Xu You, and Xu You fled. Tang gave it to Wu Guang, and Wu Guang burst out in a rage. When Ji Tuo heard of this, he led his disciples to kneel and pray to the Kuan River, and all the feudal lords sent their condolences for his suffering. After three years, Shen Tu'ai threw himself into the Yellow River [to earn even greater fame for suffering].

"A fish trap is there for the fish. When you get the fish, you forget the trap. A snare is there for the rabbits. When you get the rabbit, you forget the snare. Words are there for the intent. When you get the intent, you forget the words. Where can I find a man who has forgotten words, so I can have a word with him?"

ENDNOTES

- A. Reading 熨 for 慰, following Wang Fuzhi's son Wang Yu.
- B. Following Cheng Xuanying's second reading, replacing 驚 with 驚, as supported by Wang Yu's gloss.
- C. Following the interpretation of Lin Yunming.
- D. Literally, "directed back to the self it always harms, put into motion it always perverts." Following Lin Yunming's interpretation.
- E. Reading *suo* 所 for *shi* 石, as suggested by Lu Xixing.
- F. Reading *chai* 柴 as in Chapter 12's usage of *chaizha* 柴柵, a barricade made of wood chips, as proposed by Luo Miandao.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Words Lodged Elsewhere

Almost all of my words are presented as coming from the mouths of other people, and of those the better part are further presented as citations from weighty ancient authorities.¹ But all such words are actually spillover-goblet² words, giving forth [new meanings] constantly, harmonizing them all through their Heavenly Transitions.³

The nine-tenths or so attributed to others discuss a topic by borrowing an outside viewpoint. A father does not serve as matchmaker for his own son, for praises from the father are not as effective as those from the mouth of another—and the blame, too, then goes not to me, but to someone else! In any case, those who agree will be responsive, while those who do not will object. For people call right whatever agrees with themselves and call wrong whatever differs from themselves.

The seven-tenths or so that are presented as citations from weighty ancient authorities are meant to defuse garrulous fault-finding, eliciting agreement with the words of these “venerable elders” instead. But in fact some of those who come before us in years, if they have not gone through the warp and the woof of things in a way befitting their age, from the root to the tip, do not have any real priority over us. A man [of advanced years] with nothing to give him priority over others has not fulfilled the course of a human being, and a human being devoid of the course of human being should really just be called a stale, obsolete oldster.

These spillover-goblet words give forth [new meanings] constantly, so that all are harmonized through their Heavenly Transitions. They extend on and on without break and thus can remain in force to the end of one’s years. When nothing is said, everything is equal. But the saying and this original equality are then not equal to one another. Thus it is that I speak only nonspeech. When you speak nonspeech, you can talk all your life without ever having said a word, or never

1. Literally, “nine-tenths are words-lodged-elsewhere,” and [of those] “seven-tenths are repeated/weighted words.”

2. A hinged vessel that tips and empties when it gets too full.

3. 天倪 *tian ni*. See Chapter 2, p. 21. *Ni* means literally “beginnings” or “child” on the one hand and “divisions” on the other, put together here to form the meaning “transitions”—a beginning that crosses a division.

utter a word without ever failing to say something. There is some place from which each saying is acceptable, and some place from which it is unacceptable. There is some place from which it is so, and some place from which it is not so. Whence so? From being affirmed as so. Whence not so? From being denied to be so. Whence acceptable? From someone's accepting of it. Whence unacceptable? From someone's nonacceptance of it. There is necessarily some perspective from which each thing is right and acceptable. Thus all things are right, all things are acceptable.⁴ So what words other than spillover-goblet words, harmonizing through their Heavenly Transitions, could remain in force for very long? All beings are seeds of one another, yielding back and forth their different forms, beginning and ending like a circle, so that no fixed groupings apply. This is called the Heavenly Equality, the turning of the Heavenly Potter's Wheel.⁵ It is this equality of the turning of the Heavenly Potter's Wheel that we see in their Heavenly Transitions.

Zhuangzi said to Huizi, "Confucius went along for sixty years and transformed sixty times. What he first considered right he later considered wrong. He could never know if what he presently considered right were not fifty-nine times wrong."

Huizi said, "Confucius certainly devoted himself to the service of knowledge."⁶

Zhuangzi said, "No, Confucius had let go of such things! Did he not say so himself? Confucius said, 'We receive our innate stuff from the Great Root, and we stay alive by returning always to its mysterious efficacy.' But each of his crowings was taken as a measure, each of his words became a model. This was only because, when the choice between profit and responsibility was set before him, he would make a show of some likes, dislikes, rights, and wrongs to subdue the mouths of others. If they had yielded in their hearts as well, they would not have dared to stand against him, and he could have settled what the world needed to be settled. Enough! Enough! I certainly can't compete with that!"

Zengzi⁷ was twice employed, and his heart transformed each time. He said, "In my first post, though my salary was only three pecks of rice, it brought benefit to my parents as well, so my heart was glad. In my second post, though my salary was raised to three thousand bushels of rice, it was too late [to be of use to my parents], so my heart was sad." His disciples asked Confucius about it, saying, "Someone like Zengzi must be unentangled in any fault!" Confucius said, "No, he is already entangled. If he were unentangled, what sorrow would he have had?"

4. Cf. Chapter 2, p. 15.

5. Here literally Heavenly Equality (*tianjun* 天均), but read in mutuality with Chapter 2's "Heavenly Potter's Wheel" (*tianjun* 天鈞), assuming that the two characters are interchangeable but that this passage presupposes and makes reference to the other, and not the other way around, hence a creative gloss on the meaning of "Potter's Wheel."

6. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

7. Zeng Shen, disciple of Confucius and exemplar of filial piety.

Both three pecks and three thousand bushels would have meant no more to him than a mosquito or a sparrow flying past!”

Sir Swimmy Faceformed said to Sir Shoestrap of Eastwall, “After a year of your teachings, I was a wild man. After two years, I became tame. After three years, I opened up. After four years, I saw myself as a thing among things. After five years, something came forth to meet me. After six years, its ghostly presence entered into me. After seven years, the Heavenly took shape in me. After eight years, I didn’t know either death or life. After nine years came the Vast Wonder:

“When life is subordinated to definite purposes, death can be used to exhort the people to be public-spirited, saying that death comes to them from a particular source.⁸ And yet their birth into the visible world has no such source. But is even that really so? Where does life go? Where does it not go? Heaven has its calendrical proportions, earth has its bearings for man, but where among them can I seek out [this source]? ‘One never knows where one will end up, so how can there not be such a thing as fate?’ But no one knows where he comes from either, so how can there be such a thing as fate? ‘There is a response to my actions, so how can there not be such things as ghosts?’ But nothing is found there doing the responding, so how can there be any such thing as ghosts?”

The Penumbras asked the Shadow, “Previously you looked down and now you look up. Previously you tied back your hair but now it is loose. Previously you sat and now you stand. Previously you walked and now you stop. Why?”

The Shadow said, “Quibble, quibble! What a petty question! I exist without knowing how or why! To say I’m like a cicada shell or a snakeskin may seem to be right, but ultimately that’s not how it is. In sunshine or by firelight I materialize, but in the shade or the nighttime I vanish. Is it that there is an *other* there on whom I depend?⁹ Then all of you are all the more dependent on something! When he arrives, I arrive with him. When he goes, I go too. And when he is bright and powerful, I am bright and powerful with him! Since I am so bright and powerful, what questions could I have?”¹⁰

Sir Brightside Homebody¹¹ had gone south to Pei and invited Lao Dan, who was traveling in Qin to the west, to meet him in the borderland between them. He went to Liang, where he joined up with Laozi. In the middle of their journey, Laozi looked up to the heavens and sighed, saying, “I used to think you were teachable, but now I know it will never work.”

8. Either fate, as the Confucians claimed, or the punishment of ghosts, as the Mohists claimed.

9. 待 *Dai*. See Glossary.

10. Cf. Chapter 2, p. 21.

11. 陽子居, often identified by commentators in spite of the morphed surname as another name for Yang Zhu 楊朱, commonly cited as the philosopher of self-interest as opposed to the Mohist philosophy of altruism. See for example *Mencius* 7A26.

Sir Brightside Homebody made no reply. But when they arrived at their lodgings, he brought the master a towel and comb and a pan of water to wash his hands and mouth, removed his shoes outside the door, and came forward on his knees, saying, "Earlier I wanted to ask you about this, but since you were busy with the journey, I dared not do so. Now that you have some leisure, please tell me where my fault lies."

Laozi said, "Gazing all lofty and wide-eyed into the distance the way you do, who could bear to be with you? The purest appear defiled; those with the greatest intrinsic powers appear defective."

Sir Brightside Homebody's face changed with a jolt. "I will respectfully do as commanded," he said.

On the road to this meeting, the innkeepers had welcomed him to their homes and seen him off, the husbands bringing his mat, the wives bringing his towel and comb, all the other lodgers yielding their seats to him and making way for him around the hearth. On the road back, he had to fight the other lodgers for his seat.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Yielding Sovereignty

Yao had tried to yield the empire to Xu You, who refused to accept it. Then he went off to try giving it to Zizhou Zhifu instead. The latter said, “You want to make me the emperor, hmm, yes, that seems like it would probably be all right. But right now I happen to be afflicted with an obscure but worrisome illness, and I have to deal with managing that, so I have no time to manage the empire.”

The empire is supremely important, and yet this man would not harm his own life with it, not to mention the lives of other beings. Indeed, the empire should only be entrusted to the kind of person who would have no use for it.

Emperor Shun in his day also tried to yield the empire to this man, Zizhou Zhibo,¹ and again he said, “I happen to be afflicted with an obscure but worrisome illness, so I have no time to manage the world.” The empire is the vastest of vessels, but this man would not exchange his life for it. This shows how much a person who has found the Course differs from ordinary conventional people.

Shun later offered to yield the empire to Shan Juan. Shan Juan said, “I stand in the midst of the continuum of all spaces and times, wrapped in hides and furs in the winter and in hemp and straw in the summer. In the spring I plow and plant, as long as my body is able to work, and in the autumn I gather in the harvest, which gives me enough to rest and feed my body. When the sun comes out I work, when the sun goes down I rest. Thus far-flung and unfettered do I live between heaven and earth, my heart and mind content with themselves. What use would I have for an empire? Pathetic! You really do not understand me at all!”

Thus did he reject the offer. And then he departed and went to live somewhere deep in the mountains, no one knows where.

Shun went to yield the empire to his friend, a farmer of Youhu. The farmer said, “You’re all coiled up, your majesty!² Here is a distinguished man who really conserves his strength!”—showing that he regarded Shun’s intrinsic virtuosity as not

1. Commentators seem to agree that this is an alternate designation of the same man, Zizhou Zhifu.

2. It is worth noting that the form of address for the sovereign used here is a deliberate archaism, applied to emperors in very early texts but in later times, including the probable date

yet fully realized. The farmer then took his whole family off to sea, with just what the husband could carry on his back and the wife could carry on her head, holding the hands of their children, never to return.

When King Danfu the Great³ was dwelling in Bin, the wild Di tribes of the north attacked him. He offered them skins and silks, but they would not accept. He then offered them dogs and horses, and then pearls and jades, but they would not accept any of those either. What the Di tribes wanted was territory. King Danfu then said, "After dwelling together with a person, how could I bear to then slaughter his younger brothers and sons? My children, work hard to remain here! What difference is there between being ruled by me and being ruled by the Di? For I have somewhere been told that those whom one should nourish should not be harmed on account of that which should nourish them." Then he picked up his staff and riding crop and departed. But the people stuck close to him and followed, establishing a new state around him at the foot of Mount Qi.

King Danfu the Great may be called someone who was really able to honor life. People who are really able to honor life will not use its sustenance to harm their bodies, however rich or high-ranking they may be, and will not put their bodies into bondage for the sake of profit, however poor or low-ranking they may be. But nowadays those who occupy high offices and honored rank think renouncing these things would be a very heavy loss. Their eyes fixed on profit, they carelessly destroy themselves. Are they not confused?

The people of Yue killed three of their rulers in succession. Fearing they would do the same to him, Prince Sou fled to Cinnabar Cave, leaving them without a ruler. They went looking for him everywhere, finally tracking him down there. When he refused their efforts to lure him out, they smoked him out with moxa and then forced him to mount the royal chariot. As he took hold of the strap to climb aboard, the prince looked up to the sky and called out, "Ruler! Ruler! Could I not have been spared such a thing?" Prince Sou did not hate ruling as such, but he hated the troubles that are inseparable from ruling. Prince Sou can be considered someone who would not harm the life in himself for the sake of a state. And this was exactly why the people of Yue wanted so badly to have him as their ruler.

The state of Han and the state of Wei were in a conflict over some contested territory. Zihuazi went to see the Marquis Zhaoxi of Han and found him looking quite distraught. Zihuazi said, "What if all the states in the world were to come before you with a signed edict saying, 'If anyone grabs hold of this with his left hand, his right hand will be removed, and if anyone grabs hold of it with his right hand, his left hand will be removed. But whoever does grab hold of it will be given possession of the empire.' Could you then bring yourself to grab hold of it?"

of composition but not the setting of this story, used only to refer to imperial personages of female gender.

3. The grandfather of King Wen, progenitor of the imperial family of the Zhou dynasty.

Marquis Zhaoxi said, "I could not."

Zihuazi said, "Excellent! From this it is obvious that your two hands are worth more to you than the empire. But your entire body is surely worth more than your two hands, and the state of Han is worth less than the whole empire. And the small piece of territory you are now contending over is certainly worth less than even the state of Han. You, my lord, certainly care about your body; so it can't be right for you to harm the life in you with this worry and sorrow!"

Marquis Zhaoxi said, "Excellent! Many have instructed me before, but I have never before heard such words!" Indeed, Zihuazi may be considered someone who knew what does and what doesn't matter.

The ruler of Lu heard that Yan He was someone who had attained the Course, and so he sent a messenger with a gift of silks as an overture to arrange a meeting. Yan He was puttering around outside the door of his shabby residence, wearing a coarse hempen garment and feeding his cows by hand. The messenger from Lu arrived at the gate and asked him, "Is this the home of Yan He?"

Yan He said, "Yes, this is his home."

The messenger presented the silks. Yan He said, "I am afraid you have misunderstood your orders, and will be blamed by him who sent you. You had better look into the matter and confirm it." The messenger then went back and confirmed his orders, but when he returned looking for Yan He, Yan He could no longer be found. For men like Yan He truly abhor riches and honors.

Thus it is said, "The genuineness of the Course applies only to the management of the person himself, to taking care of one's own body. Only whatever is left over after that may be used for the local community and the family, while whatever dust and chaff are further left after that may be used to govern the empire." From this it can be seen that the accomplishments of emperors and kings are just the leftover deeds of the sages, not that by which they keep their bodies undamaged and nourish the life in them. But most of the conventional "noble men" of the present day just endanger their bodies and abandon the life in them, martyring themselves to external things. Is it not sad? Whenever a sage is to make a move toward something, he always scrutinizes what must be used to get there as contrasted to what he's going there for. Now imagine someone who would use a precious pearl like that which belonged to the Marquis of Sui to shoot at a sparrow a thousand yards away. Surely everyone would laugh at him. And why is that? Because what he is using up to try to get something is worth more than what he is trying to get. And is not the life within us worth more than the pearl of Marquis Sui?

Master Liezi⁴ had fallen into extreme poverty, to the point where his hunger showed itself on his face. A visitor mentioned it to Ziyang of Zheng, saying, "Lie Yukou is what you might call a distinguished man who has the Course. Now what

4. For Liezi, see Chapter 1, p. 5; Chapter 7, p. 70; Chapter 18, p. 147; Chapter 19, p. 150; Chapter 21, p. 171; and the eponymous Chapter 32.

is the reason that a distinguished man who has the Course dwells in your land, my lord, and yet has been allowed to fall into such extreme poverty? Can it be that my lord has no liking for distinguished men?"

Ziyang then immediately ordered an officer to send a gift of grain to Liezi. Liezi welcomed the messenger, but then bowed twice and declined the gift. The messenger departed and Liezi went back into his house. His wife glared at him and pounded her breast with her fist, saying, "I was told that to be the wife of a man of the Course would be a life of ease and joy. But here we are, the starvation showing on our faces. The ruler was in error, but now he has sent food to you to correct it, and yet you refuse it. Alas, that such must be my fate!"

Liezi laughed and said, "The ruler does not know me personally. He has sent this grain to me on the basis of what someone else has told him about me. So if someone else were to speak ill of me, he would perhaps also go by that person's words. That's why I didn't accept the gift."

As it happens, the people later rebelled against Ziyang of Zheng and put him to death.

King Zhao of Chu lost his kingdom and Yue the sheep butcher was among those who fled with him into exile. When King Zhao returned to his kingdom in triumph, he wanted to reward those who had been loyal to him in his exile. When they came to Yue, the butcher said, "When his majesty lost his kingdom, I lost my butcher stall. Now that his majesty has recovered his kingdom, I have recovered my butcher stall. My income and rank have already been recovered; what is this talk of further reward?"

When this response was reported to the king, he said, "Make him take it."

But when they tried to do that, Yue said, "When his majesty lost his kingdom, it was not my fault, and therefore I did not dare to accept any punishment for it. Now that his majesty has recovered his kingdom, it is likewise not due to any merit of mine, so I dare not present myself as worthy of reward for it."

The king, when told of this, said, "Bring him here to see me."

But when they tried to do that, Yue said, "The law of the state of Chu states that to see the king is a privilege only given to someone as a reward for great service. But my knowledge was not sufficient to preserve the kingdom, and my courage was not sufficient to martyr me in fighting off the invaders. When the armies of Wu invaded I was frightened of the danger they brought, and thus tried to get away from them. I was not deliberately following the great king. Now his majesty wants to discard the law and destroy the statutes just to see me; I've never heard of such a thing anywhere in the world."

The king, when told of this, said to Sima Ziqi, "Butcher Yue dwells in a very lowly position but his display of responsible conduct is most lofty. On my behalf you are to offer him a position as one of the Three Nobles."

When Ziqi did so, Butcher Yue said, "The position of the Three Nobles is, I well know, much loftier than a sheep butcher's stall, and the attendant emolument of ten thousand *zhong* would make me far richer than I could ever be on a sheep butcher's profits. But how could I cause my lord to have the reputation of reckless

expenditure just so I can feed off high rank and salary? I dare not take it. I ask to please be permitted to return to my butcher's stall." And thus in the end he managed to escape all reward.

Yuan Xian⁵ was living in a round hut in Lu, with weeds growing out of its thatching, an unclosable door made of underbrush and hinged with mulberry branches, windows in both of its small rooms made of broke-bottomed earthenware jugs held in place by coarse cloth. The roof was leaky and the floor was damp, but there he sat squarely framed within it, strumming away at his strings.

Zigong⁶ went on a journey to see him, wearing a white robe with a purple girdle inside it and drawn by a team of massive horses, but the luxuriant carriage was too big to get into the alleyway where Yuan Xian lived. The latter came to his door in a cap made of flower stems, his sandals tied onto his feet with old hairbands, supporting himself on a cane made of pigweed stalks. Zigong said, "Yeesh! What malady afflicts you, sir?"

Yuan Xian said, "I have heard that to be without money is called poverty, but to be unable to put into practice what one has learned is called a malady. I am poor, but I have no malady."

Zigong stepped back, looking quite ashamed. Yuan Xian smiled and said, "What I really could not bear would be things like trying to please the present generation in all my actions, forming cliques by making friends on all sides, learning for the sake of others and teaching for the sake of myself, hiding in humankindness and responsible conduct, showing off with chariots and horses, that kind of thing!"

When Zengzi⁷ was living in Wei, he wore a robe of tangled hemp with no outer coat and went about with a swollen, hungry look on his face, his hands and feet covered with calluses and corns. He would go three days without lighting a fire and for ten years he wore no newly made clothing; he couldn't put his cap on straight without snapping the chinstrap; he couldn't sash his robe shut around him without his elbow sticking out; he couldn't get his feet into his shoes without busting the heels. But dragging his broken shoes along he would sing "The Paeans of Shang," and his voice would fill heaven and earth like it was ringing forth from metals and stones. The Son of Heaven could not get him to serve as his minister; the feudal lords could not get him to be their friend. So it is that those who nourish an aspiration forget their own bodies; those who nourish their own bodies forget profit; and those who manifest the Course forget even their own minds.

Confucius said to Yan Hui, "Come, Hui! You come from a poor family of low rank; why do you not take a position as an officer of government?"

5. Disciple of Confucius known for his poverty.

6. Disciple of Confucius known for his affluence.

7. Zeng Shen, disciple of Confucius known for his filial piety.

Yan Hui said, "I have no wish to be an officer. Outside the wall I have a field of fifty acres, which is sufficient to provide me with gruel and congee. Inside the wall I have a field of ten acres, which is sufficient for the making of silk and hemp. My drum and zither are sufficient for me to entertain myself, and my study of your Course, master, is sufficient for me to enjoy myself. I have no wish to be an officer."

Confucius blushed, his expression changing entirely. "What a wonderful way of thinking, Hui! I have heard that those who know contentment in what is sufficient do not entangle themselves in profit, that those who understand what they have attained in themselves have no fear of loss, and that those who cultivate themselves within feel no shame in having no official position. I have long been preaching this, but only now, in you, have I seen it with my own eyes. And that is for me a real success."

Prince Mou of Middle Mountain said to Zhanzi, "My body is here taking in the sights of the rivers and seas, but my mind remains back at the court of Wei. What can I do?"

Zhanzi said, "Value the life in you. If you value the life in you, profit ceases to seem so important."

Prince Mou said, "I understand that, but I can't help myself."

Zhanzi said, "Well, if you can't help it, then just go with it; do not hate the imponderable spirit in you! If you cannot control your longings, but then you force yourself not to obey them, this is called a double injury. Those who are thus doubly injured are never among the long-lived."

Mou of Wei was a prince of ten thousand chariots, so he would have had a harder time living on cliffs or in caves than would a scholar who had known no official rank. Although he had not yet arrived at the Course, he can be said to have had some propensity toward it.

Confucius had reached a dead end between Chen and Cai and for seven days had had no cooked food, eating only pigweed soup with nary a scattering of rice. He looked extremely exhausted, and yet he was strumming and singing in his chamber. Yan Hui was sorting vegetables, and Zilu and Zigong came over to talk to him. "The master was twice driven from Lu," they said, "had his footprints erased from Wei, had a tree cut down on him in Song, was starved out in Shang and Zhou, and now is surrounded by Chen and Cai. Anyone who kills him would be charged with no crime, and anyone who abducts him would be violating no prohibition. And yet he strums and sings, plucking at his zither, with never a break in the onrush of tones. Does the shamelessness of a noble man really have to go quite this far?"

Yan Hui had no answer, so he went inside and reported the conversation to Confucius. Confucius pushed his zither aside and said with a sigh, "Those two are really stunted, tiny men. Call them in here, I will talk to them."

Zilu and Zigong entered, and Zilu spoke: "Look at you: this can truly be called a total dead end, utter failure."

Confucius said, “What are you saying? What the noble man calls clear passage, success, is only success and clear passage in the Course; and what he calls a dead end, failure, is only failure and dead end in the Course. I hold fast to the Course of humankindness and responsible conduct. How does the fact that I happen to have encountered the calamity of living in a time of disorder mean that I have reached a dead end? I look within myself and find no dead end in the Course. I encounter difficulties but do not lose my intrinsic virtuosities. When the cold of winter has come, when the frost and dew descend, that is when we can see the flourishing vitality of the pine and the cypress trees.⁸ These dire straits between Chen and Cai are my good fortune!”

Confucius then pulled his zither back to him again and began to strum and sing with cutting intensity. Zilu exuberantly picked up a spear and began to dance along. Zigong remarked, “I had known neither the height of the heavens nor the depth of the earth.”

The ancients who had found the Course were happy whether they succeeded or failed, for what brought them happiness was not success or failure. As long as the Course and its intrinsic powers are there, failure and success are nothing more than a passing sequence of cold and heat and wind and rain. Thus did Xu You enjoy himself alone on the sunny bank of the Ying River, and thus did the Earl of Gong find contentment on the peaks of Mount Gong.⁹

Shun wanted to yield the empire to his friend Choiceless of the North. Choiceless of the North said, “What an outrageous person you are, your majesty!¹⁰ Living in the midst of the channeled fields, you nevertheless went wandering through the gates of Emperor Yao. But that’s not all: you even want to splatter your disgraceful conduct onto me. I am ashamed to even look at you.” Then he went off and threw himself into the abyss of Qingling.

Tang was getting ready to start his attack on Jie¹¹ and thus went to get tactical advice from Bian Sui. Bian Sui said, “It’s got nothing to do with me.” Tang said, “Who then?” The other said, “I have no idea.”

Tang then went to get tactical advice from Wu Guang, who said, “It’s got nothing to do with me.” Tang said, “Who then?” The other said, “I have no idea.”

Tang said, “How about Yi Yin?”

“Well, he *can* force himself to tolerate disgrace, but I don’t know anything else about him.”

Tang then went to Yi Yin, and with his tactical advice he attacked Jie and defeated him. He then wanted to yield the empire to Bian Sui, who declined the

8. Cf. *Analects* 9:27.

9. Said to have abdicated the throne in 828 BCE and retired to Mount Gong.

10. See note 2 above.

11. Tang’s overthrow of Jie, the last emperor of the Xia Dynasty, was the founding event of the Shang Dynasty.

offer, saying, “When your majesty¹² came to me for tactical advice to attack Jie, you must have taken me for a bandit. Now that you have defeated him you want to yield the empire to me, so you must also take me to be avaricious. I was born in this time of disorder; again and again men without the Course show up trying to splatter me with their disgraceful conduct. I cannot bear to hear this sort of talk over and over.” Then he went and drowned himself in the waters of the Zhou.

Tang then wanted to yield the empire to Wu Guang, saying, “A clever man has planned it, and a military man has accomplished it. Now a man of humankindness must take ownership of it. That is the ancient Course. Why would my master not take the position?”

But Wu Guang declined, saying, “Just as deposing one’s ruler is a breach of duty,¹³ and causing the death of the people is a breach of humankindness, to enjoy the benefits earned by difficulties taken on by someone other than oneself would be a breach of scrupulousness. I have been taught that one must accept no pay for jobs done in breach of duty, and one must not set foot on territories when they have strayed from the Course—how much less could I accept the honors accrued by such deeds! I cannot bear to see this sort of thing any longer.” And with that he went off and, fastening a boulder to his back, drowned himself in the waters of the Lu.

Once upon a time, at the rise of the Zhou dynasty, there were two distinguished men who lived in Guzhu named Bo Yi and Shu Qi. On a certain occasion they conferred with one another, saying, “We have heard that there is a man in the west who seems to have the Course.¹⁴ Let us go and see.” When they arrived at the sunny side of Mount Qi, King Wu heard about them and sent his younger brother Dan¹⁵ to go meet with them, offering to make a covenant with them stipulating that after the revolution he was planning they would be second in wealth only to the king and would be given official posts of the very highest rank. The covenant was to be sealed in the blood of a sacrificial animal and buried.

The two looked at each and laughed. “Wow! Outrageous! This is not what we call the Course! Long ago when Shennong¹⁶ possessed the empire, he did the sacrifices at the proper times and with the utmost reverence, but he prayed for no blessings in return. With respect to human beings, he was loyal and trustworthy, making sure all their affairs were put into good order, but sought nothing from them in return. Those who enjoyed partaking in governance did the governing with him, those who enjoyed partaking in orderliness did the ordering with him.¹⁷”

12. See note 2 above.

13. Yi. Elsewhere “responsible conduct.” See Glossary.

14. Taken to be a reference to King Wen, father of King Wu and Dan, the Duke of Zhou.

15. The Duke of Zhou, Confucius’s hero.

16. “The Divine Farmer,” mythical inventor of agriculture.

17. Possibly, “He delighting in governing with those who governed, and in bringing order with those who brought order,” or “For those who enjoyed participating in governance he governed, for those who enjoyed participation in order he brought order.”

He did not build his own success on the ruin of others nor elevate himself by lowering others. He did not take advantage of the times he happened to have found himself in to reap personal gain. But now the house of Zhou sees the disorder of the Shang and suddenly decides to manage the governance of the world, strategizing with those above and bribing those below, relying on an army to guard their authority, using the blood of sacrificial victims for covenants as a proof of good faith, advertising their lofty conduct to appease the masses, engaging in murderous ‘punitive’ military expeditions for their own profit—all this is just over-throwing disorder and replacing it with violence. I have heard that when the distinguished men of olden times found themselves in an age of good order they did not shirk their duties, but when they found themselves in an age of disorder they did not endeavor to survive through shifty compromises. Presently the world is in darkness and the virtuosity of Zhou has already declined. Rather than stand side by side with the Zhou and sully our bodies with its grime, it would be better to stay far away from them and purify our own conduct.”

Then the two of them went north to Mt. Shouyang and starved themselves to death.

Men like Bo Yi and Shu Qi, even if they can attain rank and wealth in a permissible way, will nevertheless certainly not make themselves dependent on such things. Their lofty self-control and fiercely contrarian conduct,¹⁸ their unshared enjoyment of their own commitments, their refusal to serve the present age—these alone were what regulated these two distinguished men.

18. Following Wang Shumin, taking 戾 as interchangeable with 厲, glossed as a synonym of 抗.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Robber Zhi

Confucius had a friend named Liuxia Ji,¹ who had a younger brother known as Robber Zhi. This Robber Zhi had been rampaging through the known world with a private militia of nine thousand men, invading and pillaging the territories of the feudal lords, absconding with other men's livestock as well as their wives and daughters, making empty shells of their homes with only the doors left swinging on their hinges, greedy for gain to the point of forgetting all claims of kinship, completely neglecting his parents and brothers and offering no sacrifices to his ancestors. Wherever he went, the people in the large states guarded their city walls and those in the smaller states took cover in their strongholds. This Robber Zhi had become a plague to each and all.

Confucius said to Liuxia Ji, "A father must be able to lay down the law to his son, and an elder brother must be able to instruct and educate his younger brother. If a father is unable to lay down the law for his son or an elder brother to instruct and educate a younger brother, they have failed to take sufficiently seriously the intimacy of the father-son or brother-brother relationship. Now you, sir, are one of the most talented men of the age, but your brother is Robber Zhi, who has become an affliction to all the world, and yet you cannot instruct and educate him. To be honest, I am ashamed for you. I beg to go to him on your behalf and try to persuade him to change his ways."

Liuxia Ji said, "You say, sir, that a father must be able to lay down the law for his son, and an elder brother must be able to instruct and educate his younger brother. But if the son doesn't obey the father's law, or the younger brother doesn't accept the elder brother's instruction, what then? Zhi is the kind of man whose mind gushes like a fountain, whose thoughts are like gusts of wind, whose disputational dexterity is more than sufficient to cover up his wrongdoing, just as his strength is more than sufficient to resist his enemies. If you go along with his ideas he is pleased, but if you oppose his ideas he becomes furious, and then he

1. Generally identified with the figure more commonly known as Liuxia Hui 柳下惠 (720–621), whom Mencius (5B1) describes as "the most easy-going among the sages," a sage of live and let live, since "you are you and I am I." The historical Liuxia Hui was dead long before the historical Confucius was born.

finds it quite easy to humiliate people with verbal abuse. You really must not go see him.”

But Confucius did not listen. With Yan Hui as his charioteer and Zigong as his right-hand man, he went to see Robber Zhi.

He found Robber Zhi halted with his troops on the southern slope of Mount Tai, enjoying an afternoon snack of minced human livers. Confucius descended from his carriage and came forward to introduce himself to Zhi’s gatekeeper, saying, “I am Kong Qiu of Lu. I have heard tell of the generalissimo’s lofty rectitude.”² He then respectfully bowed twice.

The gatekeeper went inside and announced the visitor. But when Robber Zhi heard who it was, he immediately erupted into a ferocious rage, his eyes blazing like stars, his hair bristling against his cap. “This cannot be that crafty hypocrite Kong Qiu from Lu, can it? Say to him for me: ‘You make up phrases and invent terms, absurdly singing your panegyrics to King Wu and King Wen, your silly insignia draping from your cap like branches from a tree, the wrapper around you stolen off the ribs of a dead ox, with your abundance of pretty phrases and ridiculous theories, eating food though you plow no field, decked in garments though you weave no cloth, flapping your lips and clicking your tongue, monopolizing the production of judgments of right and wrong so as to confuse the world’s rulers and to prevent the world’s scholars from ever returning to their root, baselessly inventing filiality and brotherliness so as to try your luck with the feudal lords and anyone else who is rich or highly placed. Your crimes are the heaviest of anyone’s! Get out of here, fast! Otherwise I will add your liver to today’s snack.’”

Confucius sent back a message saying, “In the name of my good relation with your brother Ji, I hope to be able to gaze from afar at your shoes under the fringe of the curtain.” The officer delivered the message, and then Robber Zhi said, “Bring him in!”

Confucius came hurriedly toward him but declined to sit when a mat was offered, instead rearing back and bowing twice to Robber Zhi. This further infuriated Zhi; he splayed his legs and put his hand on his sword with glaring eyes, and with a voice like a tigress protecting her nurslings, he bellowed, “Come forward, Qiu! If what you say pleases me you shall live. If not, you die.”

Confucius said, “I have heard that in this world there are but three kinds of human excellence.³ The highest type of excellence is to be born large and grow tall, to have unparalleled physical beauty, delightful to the eyes of young and old, a joy to the noble as well as the lowly. The middling type of excellence is to have an understanding that encompasses heaven and earth and an ability to distinguish all things from one another and win arguments about them all. The lowest type of excellence is to be brave and fierce, resolute and daring, gathering together a band of soldiers. Any human being who possesses even one of these excellences is worthy to be an emperor, facing south and calling himself The Lone One. And

2. Yi. See Glossary.

3. *De* 德. Elsewhere translated as “intrinsic powers,” “intrinsic virtuosities,” or “virtue, kindness.” See Glossary.

here you are, generalissimo, possessing all three of these excellences at once. You are eight feet two inches tall, radiant in countenance, lips like gleaming vermilion and teeth like rows of evenly aligned seashells, with a voice of dulcet timbre matching the tones of the Yellow Bell. And yet you are known as 'Robber' Zhi! To be honest, I would be too embarrassed for you to call a man such as you by such a name.

"If you, generalissimo, are inclined to listen to your humble servant here, I beg to be allowed to go south as your ambassador to Wu and Yue, north to Qi and Lu, east to Song and Wei, west to Jin and Chu, and to convince them to build a great walled territory for you of several hundred square miles, establishing in it cities of several tens of thousands of households, to officially honor you there as a legitimate feudal lord. You will then be able to begin your relation with this age anew, relieved of constant warfare so you can disband your troops, free to gather in and support all your brothers and to worship your ancestors together with them. This is the proper conduct for a man such as you, with the innate talent of a sage, and it is also what all the world is yearning for."

"Get over here, Qiu!" said Robber Zhi, utterly enraged. "Anyone who can be regulated with promises of profit and admonished with slick words is what I would call a stupid, ignorant, ordinary sort of person. That I am tall and handsome such that I am a delight to everyone who sees me—that is nothing more than a kind of excellence I inherited from my parents. Do you think I didn't already know it before you decided to flatter me about it? And I've heard it said that the people who like to flatter you to your face are exactly the same people who like to slander you behind your back. When you tell me all about the great territory and multitude of subjects I will have, you are trying to regulate me with promises of profit and make me tame like an ordinary person. How could any of that last? There is no territory larger than the entire empire; but although Yao and Shun possessed the entire empire, their descendants didn't have even as much land as you'd need to stick an awl into. Tang and Wu were made emperors, but all their descendants were later wiped out. Was this not because there was so much to be gained by doing so, because of their massive holdings?"

"I've also heard that in ancient times animals were many but humans were few, so the people had to stay clear of them by living in nests up in the trees. In the daytime they gathered chestnuts and at night they roosted up in their nests. That's what got them the name 'Nesters.' In ancient times the people knew nothing about clothing; in the summer they gathered much firewood, which was used in the winter to keep them warm. That's what got them the name 'Survival-savants.'" In the time of Shennong, people fell asleep on the spot without ceremony and woke to where they were all wide-eyed.^A They knew who their mothers were but not who their fathers were. They commingled with the bucks and does, plowing for their food, weaving for their clothes, with no thought of harming or being harmed. This is the full flourishing of utmost human excellence, of our utmost intrinsic virtuosity. But then the Yellow Emperor, unable to realize this virtuosity to the utmost, instead went to war with Chi You in the wilds of Zhuolu, until blood was flowing for a hundred miles around. Then Yao and Shun arose, setting

up their throng of ministers. Thereafter Tang banished his own lord, and King Wu murdered Zhou. From that point onward, the strong have oppressed the weak and the many have violently imposed themselves on the few. Everyone from Tang and Wu onward has been just another disrupter of the people.

“And now you come along practicing the Course of King Wen and King Wu, taking hold of all the disputations in the world in order to instruct future generations, using your sewed garment and your narrow belt, your scolding words and your hypocritical deeds to confuse the rulers of the world and eke out some wealth and rank for yourself. No one could be more of a robber than you! Why doesn’t the world call you Robber Qiu instead of calling me Robber Zhi? After you used your pretty words on Zilu, urging him to follow you, he got rid of his tall hat and took off his long sword and obeyed your teaching, and all the world declared, “Kong Qiu is able to stop the violent and inhibit wrongdoing!” But the result was that Zilu tried and failed to murder the ruler of Wei, and ended up pickled and hung out to dry over the eastern gate of Wei.⁴ This shows how little your teaching reached him. You call yourself a talented man, a sage? But twice you were banished from Lu, your footprints were wiped away in Wei, you were starved in Qi and trapped between Chen and Cai. The world has no place for you, and you taught Zilu only how to get himself pickled in his own calamity. Above you do no good for yourself and below you do no good for others. How could there be anything at all of value in this Course of yours?

“No one is more admired in this world than the Yellow Emperor, and yet even he was unable to keep his intrinsic virtuosity complete: instead he went to war in the wilds of Zhuolu, spilling blood for hundreds of miles around. Yao was not an affectionate father, Shun was not a filial son, Yu was paralyzed on one side, Tang banished his ruler, King Wu attacked Zhou, King Wen was imprisoned at Youli.^B These are the six men most esteemed by this age. But how shall we assess them? All of them confused what is genuine in them for the sake of some sort of advantage or profit, and forced themselves into opposition with their own innate dispositions and inborn natures. *That* is the kind of conduct that is truly worthy of shame.

“How about the ones this age calls worthy men of distinction? Bo Yi and Shu Qi are among them, and these were men who declined rulership of their native Guzhu⁵ and instead went to starve to death on the hills of Shouyang, leaving their bones and flesh unburied there. Bao Jiao, showing off his fine conduct, condemning the age, held on to a tree until he died.⁶ Shentu Di, when his remonstrations

4. Zilu’s lord Kong Kui had been pressured by his uncle Kuai’kui to support the latter’s illegitimate usurpation of the throne of Wei from his own son. Zilu, always known for his courage and impetuousness, was killed upon returning to Wei to confront Kuai’kui.

5. Because they thought it unethical to do so under the auspices of the Zhou dynasty, which they regarded as illegitimate for violently overthrowing the Shang.

6. Bao Jiao refused to ingest any product of what he regarded as a corrupt society and is said to have given up eating even any wild plants that grew in an empire he disapproved of, instead choosing to cling to a pillar and starve to death. In another version, he even vomits forth

were not heeded, took a heavy stone onto his back and threw himself into the Yellow River to be eaten by fish and turtles. Jie Zitui was consummately loyal: he cut a piece of flesh from his own thigh to feed Duke Wen, and when the Duke later ignored him, he left angrily and allowed himself to be burnt to death with his arms around a tree.⁷ Wei Sheng arranged an assignation with a girl under a bridge; when she didn't show up, he refused to leave the designated spot even when the tide rose around him, holding onto a pillar of the bridge and drowning to death. These six men are no different from dismembered dogs, pigs swept away in the current, a dead beggar still clutching his halved gourd as an alms bowl: all of them were trapped in the net of reputation and names, looking lightly on death, with no thought for what originally nourishes and preserves the life in them.

“How about the ones this age calls loyal ministers? None can match Prince Bi Gan or Wu Zixu.⁸ Well, Wu Zixu's corpse was sunk in the Yangtse River and Bi Gan's heart was cut out of his chest. These two men are what this age calls loyal ministers, but in the end they became laughingstocks of the whole world. Looking at all of the above cases all the way down to Wu Zixu and Bi Gan, I find nothing there worthy of my esteem.

“Qiu, if you were trying to lecture me with some tales of ghosts and demons, that would be something beyond what I can know. But if you are trying to persuade me using the history of human affairs, that is something I do know something about, and it amounts to nothing more than what I have just described. Now let me tell you the truth about the innate dispositions of human beings. Our eyes want to see colors, our ears want to hear sounds, our mouths want to discern flavors, the energies of our aspirations want to wax to their fullness. The greatest longevity humans can hope for is a hundred years; medium longevity is eighty years; lesser longevity is sixty years. If you subtract all the time lost on sickness, pain, bereavement, mourning, worry, and trouble, the time left when a man can open his mouth and laugh is no more than four or five days out of a month. Heaven and earth are inexhaustible, but death ends each human life at a definite time. If you take all of this limited time and prop it up in the midst of the inexhaustible time of heaven and earth, it's just a brief sudden flash, no different from a *qilin*-unicorn galloping past a crack in the wall. Anyone who is unable to gratify their ambitions and desires and consume what serves their physical survival has failed to comprehend the Course. I reject *everything* you say! Get out of here, you! Scram! Don't say any more about it! Your Course is an insane fixation, a mass of

some mountain jujubes when it is pointed out to him that these, too, were not planted by himself, and thus dies of dehydration.

7. When the duke, regretting his neglect, later went after him to try to rectify the mistake and attempted to smoke Jie Zitui out of the forest.

8. After Bi Gan loyally remonstrated with the evil emperor Zhou, the latter said, “I've heard that a sage's heart has nine apertures in it” and then cut it out of his chest to see. Wu Zixu loyally remonstrated with King Fuchai of the state of Wu, who had him executed. Zixu asked that after his death, his eyes be gouged out and hung over the gate of the Wu capital, so they could see its enemy Yue come and destroy it.

deceitful, crafty, vain, hypocritical hooey! It cannot be used to keep the Genuine in us complete! Even talking about it is not worth my time!”

Confucius bowed twice and quickly retreated out the door and into his carriage, fumblingly grabbing at the reins three times before he managed to get hold of them, his eyes glazed and unseeing, his complexion like dead ashes. He steadied himself against the crossbar with his head down, unable to breathe. When he had gotten back as far as the eastern gate of Lu, he ran into Liuxia Ji, who asked, “You have been missing for several days, impossible to find. Your horse and carriage appear to have been traveling. Were you able to go see Robber Zhi?”

Confucius looked up to the heavens and sighed. “Yes, yes, I was,” he said.

Liuxia Ji said, “And I bet he still opposes your ideas, just like before, yes?”

Confucius said, “He sure does. I am what they call someone who gets himself cauterized when he has no wound. I ran rashly over to pat the tiger’s head and braid the tiger’s whiskers—and narrowly escaped falling prey to that tiger mouth of his!”⁹

Zizhang asked Man Gou’de,¹⁰ “Why not try engaging in some moral conduct? No one trusts a man devoid of moral conduct, and without trust you will never find employment, and if you are not employed, you will gain no profit. Thus whether considering reputation or calculating in terms of gain, responsible conduct is actually always the right policy. But even regardless of reputation and gain, when a man of distinction hearkens to the demands of his own heart and mind, he finds that he cannot neglect the practice of moral conduct for even a single day!”

Man Gou’de replied, “It is actually the shameless who become rich, while the trusted become merely prominent. So the greatest reputation and gain would come from combining the two, being totally shameless and yet somehow also trusted. Thus whether considering reputation or calculating in terms of gain, getting people to trust you is actually what is always the right policy. Forgetting about reputation and gain, on the other hand, when a man of distinction looks into the demands of his own heart and mind, the sole conduct he engages in is to embrace the Heavenly in him—doing what comes naturally!”^c

Zizhang said, “In the past, Jie and Zhou were of the highest social rank—emperors—and of the greatest wealth, possessing the entire empire. But nowadays if you say to even a common servant or stable-boy^d ‘Your behavior is like that of Jie or Zhou!’ he will blush with shame and resist the accusation, for these sovereigns are now despised even by petty persons. Confucius and Mozi, on the other hand, lived impoverished lives as common folk, yet nowadays if you say to a prime minister, ‘Your behavior is like that of Confucius or Mozi,’ his countenance will take on new color as he protests that he is not worthy of such an honor, for these two are now sincerely esteemed by all distinguished men. Thus a person who has

9. Perhaps alluding to Robber Zhi’s rather persuasive eloquence (tip of the hat to Jason Chen).

10. The name means something like “Filled with/Satisfied Even with Unscrupulous Gain.”

happened to become emperor by force of circumstance is not necessarily noble, and a person living the impoverished life of a common fellow is not necessarily ignoble. The criterion of noble versus ignoble lies in the beauty or ugliness of their conduct.”

Man Gou'de said, “A small thief gets arrested; a great thief gets to be a feudal lord. And you will find many righteous men of distinction lingering around the gates of a feudal lord. In past times Xibo the Duke of Huan murdered his elder brother and took for himself his brother's wife, and yet Guan Zhong willingly served as his minister. Tian Cheng, known as Zichang, murdered his ruler and stole the state from him, but Confucius accepted a gift of silks from him. In their discourse Guan Zhong and Confucius despised such people, but in their conduct they submitted to them. Such is the conflict between the reality of the words and the reality of the deeds, warring in a single man's breast. Do they not clash and scrape? Thus the *Writings* say, “Who is odious? Who is lovely? Those who succeed become the head and those who do not succeed become the backside.”

Zizhang said, “But if you do not engage in moral conduct, there will be no proper relations between close and distant, the noble and lowly will be unable to fulfill the responsibilities of their respective roles, the younger and older will not be in the proper sequence. How then can the Five Bonds and Six Positions¹¹ be properly distinguished?”

Man Gou'de said, “Yao murdered his eldest son, Shun exiled his mother's younger brother—were they maintaining a proper relation between close and distant? Tang exiled Emperor Jie and King Wu attacked Emperor Zhou—were they fulfilling their respective responsibilities as noble and lowly? Prince Ji¹² assumed the succession in place of his elder brother, and the Duke of Zhou had his elder brothers executed¹³—did they keep the younger and older in proper sequence? Do you think either the Confucians' fraudulent rhetoric or the Mohists' doctrine of all-inclusive care make any difference to the actual enactment of the Five Social Relations and Six Roles?

“It is pretty clear that to you the ultimate aim is reputation, and to me the ultimate aim material benefit. But it now seems that when seen for what they really are, neither reputation nor material benefit fully accords with the structure of things¹⁴ and neither fully reflects the Course. On the morrow let us put the case before Unbound.”

11. According to Yu Yue, the Five Bonds are the same as the Five Relationships (五倫 *wulun*), i.e., father-son, ruler-minister, husband-wife, elder-and-younger, and friend-to-friend, while the Six Positions (elsewhere known, confusingly, as the Six Bonds) are male paternal ancestors, brothers, clansmen, uncles, teachers and elders, and friends.

12. Father of King Wen, selected by his own father for the throne in preference to his elder brother the crown prince allegedly on the basis of his superior virtue.

13. Executed by the Duke for allegedly plotting rebellion (while the Duke wept, according to Cheng Xuanying).

14. *Li*. See Glossary.

The latter said, “The petty person martyrs himself for wealth, while the noble person martyrs himself for reputation. The reason they alter their innate dispositions and change their inborn natures is different in each case, but insofar as each alike abandons what is really his ultimate aim to martyr himself to what isn’t,^E there is no difference between them. Thus I now say,

Be neither a petty person
 Who, turning within, martyrs himself to the Heavenly in him,¹⁵
 Nor a noble person,
 Who follows instead the coherent guidelines¹⁶ of Heaven.¹⁷
 Whether being crooked or being upright, whether bent or straight,
 Let each be the Heavenly pivot of the other,^F
 Scanning at once all four directions, ebbing and flowing with the times.^G
 Whether affirming or negating, whether right or wrong,
 Hold also to your all-around omnidirectional impulse.
 Fulfilling in your aloneness your own solitary aspiration,
 Meander back and forth with the Course.
 Don’t control your conduct,
 Or perfectly fulfill your responsibilities,¹⁸
 Or you will lose what you’re really aiming for.¹⁹
 Don’t dash after your precious riches,
 Or martyr yourself to your successes,
 Or you will have abandoned the real Heaven in you.²⁰
 Bi Gan’s heart was cut out of his chest.
 Wu Zixu’s eyes were gouged from their sockets.²¹
 These are the disasters that come from too much loyalty.
 Upright Gong informed on his own father,
 Wei Sheng drowned to death.²²
 These are the troubles that come from being too trustworthy.
 Bao Jiao dehydrated to death where he stood;²³

15. Like Man Gou’de. See note C.

16. *Li*. See Glossary.

17. Like Zizhang.

18. *Yi*. See Glossary.

19. The case of Zizhang.

20. The case of Man Gou’de. A more radical reading of these last six lines would be: “Don’t control your conduct or perfectly fulfill your responsibilities; then you can get rid of aiming for anything. Don’t dash after your precious riches or martyr yourself to your successes; then you can abandon your ‘Heaven.’”

21. On Bi Gan and Wu Zixu, see note 8 above.

22. For Upright Gong, see *Analects* 13:18. Wei Sheng had a date with a woman who didn’t show, and remained on the designated spot, grasping a pillar as the tide came in and overtook him.

23. On Bao Jiao, see note 6 above.

Shentu Jia buried himself in the river.¹⁴

These are the harms that come from being too incorruptible.

Confucius would not see his own mother,²⁴

Kuangzi would not see his own father.²⁵

These are the losses that come from too much rectitude.²⁶

All of these instances were passed down from former ages

And are still talked about by later ages.

From all this you can see how noble men, precisely because they are so correct in speech and so resolute in their behavior, submit themselves to disasters and get themselves entangled in calamities.”

Insatiable asked Harmony Savant, “In the end there is no one who does not strive to establish reputation and to gain riches. When a man is rich, others seek him out and submit themselves to him, esteeming him above themselves. To see other people submitting themselves to him and esteeming him above themselves is the Course that prolongs his life, eases his body, and satisfies his heart and mind! But you alone, sir, have no will to pursue it. Is it that you’re just not smart enough to understand this? Or do you understand it but just lack the power to do it, so you go around advertising your own correctness so no one will forget it?”

Harmony Savant said, “The kind of person you were describing believes that those born in the same age and living in the same village as himself regard him as a distinguished man who has soared above convention and transcended his age. But that just means that he is devoid of a controlling standard of his own, for his way of evaluating past and present ages and the divisions between right and wrong is transformed as convention transforms. Meanwhile the people of the age dismiss what is most worthy and throw away what is most noble in the hopes of doing as he does. Is it not misguided to call this the Course that allows one to prolong life, ease the body, and satisfy the heart and mind? Such people detect neither the wretched grief nor the pleasant ease that course through their own bodies; they notice neither the horrified fears nor the delighted joys that course through their own hearts and minds. They know to act in service of their purposes, but not the reasons for these purposes. This is why even someone with the highest title—Emperor—and the greatest wealth—possessing the entire empire—is never able to free himself of worries.”

Insatiable said, “But wealth benefits a man in every way, bringing all there is of every form of beauty and plumbing the depths of every sort of art, catching what even the Utmost Man cannot catch, reaching what even the worthiest man

24. According to Cheng Xuanying, because he was busy with his work, traveling around trying to get the world to adopt his Course, Confucius did not return to see his mother on her deathbed.

25. Kuang Zhang, who was driven out by his father after remonstrating with him for his immoral behavior, never saw him again.

26. Yi. See Glossary.

cannot reach. It is more powerful and awe-inspiring than even the force and courage of the bravest knight. It allows one to be taken as intelligent and discerning simply by controlling the cleverness and foresight of others, to be taken as worthy and good simply by taking advantage of the excellences of others, to be as honored as a ruler or father even though one possesses no state. And beautiful sounds and sights, delicious flavors, social power—these are things that the heart of man does not need to be trained to take pleasure in and that the body of man does not need to be given an example to find comfort in. Desire and aversion, avoidance and pursuit are definitely there in us without being taught. This is the inborn nature of human beings. Although the whole world may condemn me for it, who can deny it?”

Harmony Savant said, “In all his doings a wise man always acts in line with the ways of ordinary people, not exceeding their measure, and thus he is content and does not contend. Not trying to achieve anything in particular with his actions, he seeks nothing. It is the unsatisfied who seek, contending on all sides and yet not thinking themselves greedy. Conversely, those who have more than enough refuse to take any more, even to the point of giving away the empire itself, yet without deeming themselves incorruptible. Greed and incorruptibility are really not forced on one by external circumstances; the standards ruling these behaviors come from examining what’s really happening within oneself. If someone becomes emperor and yet is not supercilious toward others because of his high rank, or if someone is so wealthy as to possess the empire and yet does not make sport of others on the strength of his wealth, that is just because he has calculated the harms and considered the repercussions back on himself and sees that to do such things would harm his own inborn nature. That is why he declines and will not accept them; it is not for the sake of reputation and honor. When Yao and Shun were emperors, the world was in harmony, but not because they were trying to be kind to the world. It was rather because they would not let beautiful things harm the life in them. Shanjuan and Xu You were offered the position of emperor but didn’t accept it, not as empty displays of abstention and yielding but because they wouldn’t let external obligations harm their own selves. In all cases they were just going after what was advantageous and declining what was harmful, and the world happened to call them worthy men because of it. Thus these men did not do what they did to establish reputation and honor for themselves, even if they may have accepted such things when they came.”

Insatiable said, “But to torture their bodies and deny themselves all pleasures like that, restricting their sustenance just to what would maintain their lives, they must have been trying to maintain their reputations. For they must have been always sick and uncomfortable, even if they still didn’t outright drop dead.”

Harmony Savant said, “Moderation is a blessing and excess is harm. So it is with all things, but especially with wealth. The ears of the wealthy are occupied with bells and drums and fifes and flutes and their mouths are stuffed with grass-fed meats and rich wines to stimulate their attention and forget their cares—this can indeed be considered a kind of disorder. Choked and submerged in their own swollen energy, like a hiker ascending a slope with a heavy burden on his

back—this can indeed be considered a kind of suffering. Greedily pursuing wealth, what they end up getting is fear;¹ greedily pursuing power, what they end up getting is exhaustion. They drown in it when at leisure and inactive, are driven by it when physically healthy. This can indeed be considered a kind of sickness. Because they want to be wealthy they press toward profit, becoming overfull with it as if it stuffs their ears to such deafness they no longer understand how to desist, becoming more and more excited and never letting go. This can indeed be considered a kind of disgrace. The wealth accumulates beyond any use and yet they clutch it to their breasts and will not relinquish it, their hearts filled with agitation, ceaselessly seeking further increase. This can indeed be considered a kind of grief. In their homes they are apprehensive of theft and requests for favors, and out in the world they fear bandits and robbers, so in their estates they set up surrounding towers and moats and outside their own door they dare not travel alone. This can indeed be considered a kind of terror. These six are the most harmful things in the world, but they manage to forget every one of them, not knowing how to stop and think about what is happening. When disaster finally strikes them, though they may expend all their inner resources and exhaust all their wealth trying to return to untroubled times, it is no longer possible. Then they look for their reputation but cannot find it anywhere; they seek their gain but cannot find it anywhere. How confused they must be, to tangle up their minds and bodies struggling after such things!”

ENDNOTES

A. Comparing to *Huainanzi*, Chapter 6: *wojuju, xing xuxu* 臥踞踞, 興盱盱, as proposed by Wang Shumin. The same phrase appears in Chapter 7, p. 68.

B. According to Cheng Xuanying, the first two claims are in reference to Yao’s refusal to pass the throne on to his son (choosing the more virtuous Shun instead) and to Shun’s banishment of his father (in order to contain the potential harm of his evil proclivities). Yu damaged his body by overexerting himself in taming the flood; Tang and Wu both overthrew their own rulers and founded new dynasties; King Wen was imprisoned for his commitment to virtue. Since all these events are regarded by Confucians as expressions of supreme moral commitment, the conclusion below that these harms were all due to the lure of “advantage or profit” (*li* 利) must be understood either as debunking the Confucian claim, seeing a baser immoral motivation as what was really behind these renowned deeds, or else critiquing the moral commitment itself as a pursuit of a kind of unnatural “advantage.”

C. Literally, “embrace his Heavenly.” I follow Lu Shuzhi in reading this to mean that Man Gou’de takes “embracing the Heavenly” to be a value-free position that would imply either no guidance at all or the indulgence of one’s own desires, in contrast to Zizhang’s belief that the Heavenly as found within one’s own heart would provide moral guidance.

D. Following the emendation of Sun Yirang.

E. 所為 Literally, “what it’s all for.” 棄其所為而殉其所不為. The terminology here is echoed in *Lushichunqiu*, Chapter 128, “Examination of What Matters,” 審為: 身者所為也, 天下者所以為也: “What it’s all for is one’s own body. That which is to be used for it is the world, the empire.” That text goes on, helpfully: “When you know what is to be used for what, then your priorities of important and unimportant will be clear. Now imagine a man who cuts off his head in exchange for a hat, or kills his body in exchange for some clothes. This would baffle everyone in the world, because a hat is to be used to ornament a head, clothes to ornament a body.”

F. Following Fang Yizhi’s text, 相為天極, rather than the 相而天極 found in most other editions. The latter would instead mean, “serve . . .” or “scan . . .” or “make manifest the utmost reaches of your own heaven.”

G. Following Fang Yizhi’s text, which has 而 instead of 面.

H. Following Wang Xianqian, adopting the textual variant cited by Lu Deming with 埋 instead of 理, and without the negative, thus preserving the parallelism, thus taking this to be a reference to Shentu Di, who drowned himself rather than accept sovereignty over the empire, not Shen Sheng, who killed himself rather than defend himself against a false slander, as Cheng Xuanying thinks. The pairing of Shentu Di and Bao Jiao as exemplars of this point has already appeared earlier in the chapter as well.

I. Following Lu Deming’s suggestion, reading 慰 as cognate with 畏.

CHAPTER THIRTY

*The Joys of Swordplay*¹

King Wen of Zhao, in his day, had a great liking for swordplay. Throngs of swordsmen came crowding to his gate, with over three thousand of them taken on as retainers at any given time. Day and night they were made to fight before him, killing or wounding over a hundred of them each year, yet still he was so delighted that he couldn't get enough of it. After this had been going on for three years, the state was going to ruin and competing feudal lords were starting to plot invasions. The worried crown prince Kui enlisted his attendants to find a solution, saying, "Whoever can persuade the king to put an end to this swordplay business will be rewarded with a thousand pieces of gold."

An attendant said, "Zhuangzi should be able to do it!"

The prince then sent a messenger to Zhuangzi, presenting him with a thousand pieces of gold. Zhuangzi refused the gift, but personally accompanied the messenger back to meet with the prince. "What does your majesty want of me that he presents me with a thousand pieces of gold?" he asked him.

The prince said, "I have heard tell of your brilliant sagacity, Master, and thus with great care I had sent you first a thousand pieces of gold, to be followed by silks and other gifts. But since you decline to accept them, I dare speak no further."

Zhuangzi said, "I have heard that you are hoping to employ me to put an end to the king's predilections. But if I go up there and try to persuade the king in any way that displeases him, failing to fulfill your charge, I shall be punished with death. What good would the gold do me then? On the other hand, if I go up there and persuade the king in a way that suits your purposes here below, I assume I would be given anything I ask for in the whole state of Zhao."

The prince said, "Yes, that is true. But look, my father will only give an audience to swordsmen."

Zhuangzi said, "Right. But I am good with the sword myself."

The prince said, "But the swordsmen my king receives are all men with tangled hair and protruding whiskers, decked up in dangling caps and wild tassels

1. The first word of the title 說 *shuo* can be read to mean either "enjoyment," "explanation," or "persuasion." Hence the title could alternately be rendered, "Explaining Swords," "Persuading Swords," or "Delighting (in) Swords."

and short-bottomed coats. Their eyes are full of rage and their words are full of threats. This is what the king likes. But you, sir, are the type who will present himself to the king dressed in the garb of a Confucian scholar. I'm afraid things will then go very badly indeed."

Zhuangzi said, "Then let me go put together a swordsman's getup for myself."

It took three days to make the outfit, after which Zhuangzi again went to see the prince, who accompanied him to request an audience with the king. The king drew his gleaming blade from its scabbard to await him.

Zhuangzi sauntered at a leisurely pace through the doorway of the royal hall, and when he saw the king he did not bow. The king said, "What is it that you wish to teach me, sir, that you have had the prince prepare the way for you?"

Zhuangzi said, "I have heard that your majesty has a liking for the play of the sword, so I have come to meet with you on the strength of my swordplay."

The king said, "Tell me about how your swordplay lays down the law."

Zhuangzi said, "Even if man after man were positioned before me, spaced one every ten paces, my swordplay would not pause its activity for a thousand miles."

The king was delighted. "Then no one in the world can match it!"

Zhuangzi said, "This is a swordplay that displays false appearances to the opponent, leading him on with the lure of gain, thrusting forth only after he does, but preceding him in landing the blow.² I would like to show you."

The king said, "Go get some rest back in your quarters and wait for my summons. I will arrange a match for you."

The king then tested his swordsmen for seven days, and after sixty-plus were disqualified by heavy injury or death, five or six remained, whom he ordered to bring their swords to the palace. Then he summoned Zhuangzi.

The king said, "Today we will test the swords of you gentlemen against one another."

Zhuangzi said, "I have long been awaiting this chance."

The king said, "How long is the 'cane' you would like to wield today?"

Zhuangzi said, "Anything is fine with me. But I have three different swords, all of which I put at the king's disposal. Let me first describe them, if I may, and then we can put them to the test."

The king said, "Yes, I would like to hear about your three swords."

Zhuangzi said, "I have the sword of a Son of Heaven, the sword of a feudal lord, and the sword of a commoner."

The king said, "What is the sword of a Son of Heaven?"

2. Zhuangzi seems here to be describing what he's doing to the king with his own crafty "swordplay," hiding his own tricky method in plain sight. Alternately, these cryptic lines could mean, "What wields this sword unsheathes empty and open, but grinds keen and sharp; follows in starting out but precedes in arriving," in which case we might take the referent to be, as Cheng Xiangying does, the Course itself, wielding the sword of the world as described below.

“The Son of Heaven’s sword has a point formed of the Gorge of Yan and Rockwall up north, the eastern peninsula of Qi out to Mount Dai forming its blade-edge, the states of Jin and Wei to the west forming its spine, the states of Song and the former holdings of Zhou forming its hilt, and the states of Han and Wei in the west forming its handle. It is wrapped by the surrounding wild tribes, enfolded within the four seasons, entwined by the Bo Sea, strapped in place by the enduring hills, shaped by the Five Processes,³ assessed with punishments and kindnesses, sharpened by yin and yang, held aloft by the spring and summer, pressed into action by the autumn and winter. When this sword is thrust straight forward there is nothing in front of it. When it is raised, there is nothing above it. When it is put down, there is nothing below it. When it is spun around, there is nothing on any side of it. Above it cuts through the drifting clouds and below it splits through the contours of the earth. If this sword is used even once it puts all the feudal lords in their places and all the world yields. Such is the sword of a Son of Heaven.”

King Wen, lost in astonishment, asked, “What about the sword of a feudal lord?”

Zhuangzi said, “The sword of a feudal lord has a point made of wise and brave men of distinction, an edge made of pure and incorruptible gentlemen, a spine made of officers worthy and good, a hilt made of officers loyal and sagacious, a scabbard made of officers heroic and valiant. When this sword is directly thrust forward, it too has nothing before it, when raised it too has nothing above it, when put down it too has nothing below it, when spun around it too has nothing on any side of it. Above it is modeled on the roundness of Heaven and can thereby accord with the Three Luminaries.⁴ Below it is modeled on the squareness of earth and can thereby accord with the four seasons. In between it harmonizes the interests of all the people and can thereby bring peace and security to all regions. If this sword is used even once, it is like thunder from a flash of lightning, and all within the four borders submit as retainers, willingly obeying the ruler’s command. Such is the sword of a feudal lord.”

“And how about the commoner’s sword?”

“The commoner’s sword is wielded by men with tangled hair and protruding whiskers, decked up in hanging caps and wild tassels and short-bottomed coats. Their eyes are full of rage and their words are full of threats. They attack one another before you, slashing through head and neck above, slicing out liver and lung below. Such is the swordplay of commoners, no different from fighting roosters. In the flash of an instant their lives are cut down. This makes no contribution to the affairs of state. Now your majesty has the position of the Son of Heaven and yet he is fond of the sword of a commoner. To be honest, I think it is a little beneath you.”

The king then took Zhuangzi with him to the upper hall where the royal cook set forth a banquet on the table. But the king just kept walking around it,

3. Vegetable, Fire, Soil, Mineral, Water. The easy inclusion of this category probably dates this writing to the late Warring States period or after.

4. Sun, moon, stars.

three times around and around. Zhuangzi said, “Your majesty can now sit down and settle himself. The business of the swords is over and finished.”

After that King Wen did not leave his palace for three months. As for the swordsmen, however, they all ended up killing themselves anyway—but now in the privacy of their own quarters.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

The Old Fisherman

When Confucius was traveling through the forests of Ziwei, he paused for a rest at the Apricot Altar. As the disciples went off to pore over their texts, Confucius himself took up his zither and started singing, strumming and drumming it in time. But before his song was even half finished, an old fisherman stepped off a boat nearby and approached. The man's beard and eyebrows were a tangle of white, his untied hair was streaming down his back, and his sleeves were flapping as he walked up from the shoreline, stopping when he reached dry land to listen, crouching with his left hand resting on his knee and his right hand against his cheek. When the song was finished, he called out to Zigong and Zilu, both of whom responded at once. The stranger pointed to Confucius and said, "Who is that man?"

Zilu responded, "That is the noble man of Lu."

The stranger asked what family he belonged to, and Zilu told him, "He is of the Kong clan." The stranger asked, "And what is this Mr. Kong's occupation?" Before Zilu could answer, Zigong said, "This 'Mr. Kong' is by nature devoted to loyalty and trustworthiness, and he personally exemplifies humankindness and responsible conduct in the flesh. He brings out the beauty of ritual and music and codifies the proper human relationships. Above he is loyal to the rulers of the age, and below he transforms and educates all people equally, so as to benefit the whole known world. This is Mr. Kong's occupation."

"Is he a ruler who possesses territory?"

Zigong said, "No."

"An aid to a king or prince?"

Zigong said, "No."

The stranger then laughed and started walking back, saying, "Humankindness is all well and good, but I'm afraid he will not get through unscathed—embittering his mind and laboring his body like that, and thus endangering whatever is genuine in him. Alas! How distantly he has divided himself off from the Course!"

Zigong went back and recounted the incident to Confucius, who pushed his zither away and stood up, exclaiming, "That man is a sage!" and immediately hurried off to look for him. When he reached the edge of the marsh, he found the

fellow just then pushing his boat from the shore with his pole. But upon seeing Confucius, he turned back and stopped to stand and face him. Confucius at first stepped back, but then he bowed twice and advanced toward him.

The stranger asked, "What are you looking for?"

Confucius said, "Earlier you spoke some provocative words and then departed. I am unworthy and have not been able to understand them. I am secretly hoping that I will have the good fortune to at least stand downwind from you and catch the sound of your cough or spittle, which might finally provide a way for me to divine who I am!"

The stranger said, "Hoo! Your love of learning really runs deep!"¹

Confucius bowed twice and straightened up. "I have been engaged in learning since I was young and have been going at it for sixty-nine years already. But I have still not learned the utmost teaching—how dare I fail to humbly seek it?"

The stranger said, "Similar things follow one another, similar tones respond to one another—that is certainly the way things naturally fit together.² But please allow me to set aside what belongs to someone like me and instead try to go through the things that would motivate and preoccupy someone like *you*. What motivates and preoccupies you is human affairs. When the Son of Heaven, the feudal lords, the great officers, and the common people all align themselves spontaneously, this is the most beautiful form of order. But when any of these four departs from his own position, great disorder ensues. When the officials handle their own duties and the common people concern themselves with their own business, the two do not encroach upon each other. What concerns the common people are things like barren fields and leaky roofs, insufficient food and clothing, disproportionate taxes, disharmony among wives and concubines, elders and youngsters in disarray. What worries the great officers are things like not being equal to their tasks, failure to handle their official business, corrupt conduct, lazy and careless subordinates, lack of merit and virtues, and insecurity of rank and salary. What worries the feudal lords are things like lack of loyal ministers at court, confusion and rebellion in the great clans of the state, artisans and engineers without skill, tribute gifts of low quality, inferior ranking in the spring and autumn audiences at court, and the displeasure of the Son of Heaven. And what worries the Son of Heaven and his officers are things like the disharmony of yin and yang bringing unseasonable heat and cold and thus harming all things; the oppressive behavior and rebellions of the feudal lords who recklessly attack and plunder one another and thereby injure the common people; overspending on ritual and music that depletes the wealth of the state; and interpersonal relationships so unattended that the people become promiscuous and disorderly. Now you, sir, are not in the position of a ruler or feudal lord with the power to be in charge of such things, nor even the official post of a great minister, and yet you capriciously take it on yourself to beautify ritual and music and codify the proper human relationships,

1. Cf. *Analects* 5:27.

2. *Tian zhi li* 天之理, literally "The coherences of Heaven." For Li and for Tian, see Glossary.

to transform and educate all people equally—aren't you being way too much of a busybody?

“Instead you should be looking into the eight typical flaws people are prone to and the four troublemakers in the handling of affairs. The first of the eight flaws is *meddling*: concerning yourself with what is none of your concern. The second is *smooth-talking*: advancing your own agenda when no one has shown any interest in it. The third is *sycophancy*: scanning the listener's intentions and shaping your words accordingly. The fourth is *flattery*: not caring whether what you say is true or false. The fifth is *tale-bearing*: a liking for speaking of the faults of others. The sixth is *maliciousness*: to break up friendships and cause divisions among kinfolk. The seventh is *scheming*: to use deceitful praise in order to bring about the downfall of your enemies.³ The eighth is *slipperiness*: facing in two directions to suit everyone, the good as well as the bad, sneakily excavating what would please them. These eight flaws externally wreak chaos among others and internally harm one's own self. Noble people avoid friends who have these traits and wise rulers avoid such ministers.

“The four troublemakers are, first, *pushiness*: to have a taste for managing big projects and replacing accepted practices in order to win credit and fame for oneself. The second is *greed*: to insist that yours is the only way to understand things and your projects the only things to be done, raiding what others have for your own use.⁴ The third is *obstinacy*: not correcting one's errors even when clearly seeing them, doubling down when called out. The fourth is *conceit*: approving whoever is the same as oneself and disapproving whoever is different from oneself, disallowing any good in them. These are the four troublemakers. You are not even really teachable until after you get rid of these eight flaws and abandon these four troublemakers.”

Confucius, blushing, sighed and again bowed twice. When he straightened he said, “I was twice banished from Lu, my footprints were erased in Wei, a tree was cut down on me in Song, and I was trapped between Chen and Cai. I don't know what I did wrong. How could I have escaped these four slanders?”

The stranger, with a grieved expression coming over his face, said, “Your obtuseness really runs deep, sir! There once was a man who feared his own shadow and hated his own footprints, and thus tried to run away from them. But the more he lifted his feet the more footprints he left, and however fast he ran he could not outrun his shadow. Thinking he must still be moving too slowly, he just kept on increasing his speed—until finally he died of exhaustion. He didn't realize that if he had just lounged in the shade his shadow would have vanished, and if he had

3. “Your enemies” renders 惡人, normally read *e'ren*, “the wicked,” but here construed as *wu'ren*, which amounts to nearly the same thing: those one hates. Wang Shumin suggests that 惡 (wicked) may be a loan for 誣 (slander), which would make the phrase mean, “to use deceitful praise to bring down and slander other people.” Some editions have 德 here, which would render “to use deceitful praise to bring the downfall of virtuous people.”

4. Alternate possibility, “*invasiveness*: to regard only one's own understanding and do things one's own way, encroaching upon others to achieve one's own purposes.”

just stood still he'd have made no more footprints. How stupid of him! And now you, sir! You carefully make judgments distinguishing what is humankindness and what is responsible conduct, you investigate the distinction between same and different, you contemplate the transformations between motion and stillness, you make precise measures for giving and receiving, you try to order⁵ the feelings of like and dislike, you try to harmonize the proportions of human joy and anger.⁶ That is why you have only narrowly escaped the same fate as that foolish man. But if you would only attentively cultivate your own person, holding carefully to what is genuine in you, giving all other things back to others, then you would not be bound up in such entanglements. But now you seek in others what is not cultivated in yourself—no wonder it all remains merely external, no?”

Confucius anxiously asked, “Please sir, what do you mean by ‘genuine’?”

The stranger said, “The genuine is whatever is most unmixed and unfaked. For nothing that is done when one is faking it or of two minds about it can be persuasively moving to others. Thus someone who forces himself to cry, however sad it may sound, inspires no sorrow; someone who forces himself to be angry, however severe he may seem, inspires no awe; someone who forces affection, however he may smile, fails to get along with others. But genuine sadness, even when silent, evokes sorrow in others; genuine anger, even if unexpressed, inspires awe; genuine affection, even without a smile, fosters harmony. Whatever is genuine within has an imponderable spiritlike power to move external things. That is why we value the genuine. When applied to the structures⁷ of human relationships, it makes service to one's parents affectionate and filial, service to one's ruler loyal and faithful, drinking festivals pleasant and merry, mourning for the dead somber and sorrowful. The point of loyalty and faithfulness is to accomplish something, the point of drinking festivals is to make merry, the point of mourning is to be sorrowful, the point of serving parents is to please them. In achieving these aims, the visible external methods are not always the same. Since pleasing them is what matters in serving parents, it doesn't matter what means are used to do so. Since merriment is what matters in drinking festivals, it makes no difference exactly what supplies are used. Since sorrow is what matters in mourning the dead, one need not inquire about the specific rituals observed. For ritual is simply what is conventionally done, whereas the genuine is what one receives from Heaven, which is so of itself and cannot be deliberately altered. Thus the sage models himself on Heaven, values the genuine in himself, and does not conform to the conventions of the age. The fool does just the reverse: he is unable to model himself on Heaven but instead worries about what other people think. He doesn't understand the value of the genuine in himself but instead thinks the payment he receives from others is what really pays, letting himself be changed to conform to convention. That is why he never feels he has enough. What a pity, sir, that you

5. The verb is *Li*, literally to order, to organize into a coherent structure. See Glossary.

6. Cf. the famous opening passage of “*Zhongyong*,” “The Doctrine of the Mean.”

7. *Li*. See Glossary.

have been so quick to immerse yourself in human artifice, but so slow to hear the Great Course!”

Confucius again bowed twice, and said after straightening, “I am very fortunate to have met you, sir; such good fortune is like a gift from Heaven. If you are not ashamed to receive me, may I beg to accompany you as a servant so that I can accept your personal instruction? May I ask where you stay, so that I may receive your teachings and complete my study of the Great Course?”

The stranger said, “I have heard that if you meet someone you can really set off with, you can together reach all the way to the Wondrous Course; but as for those you cannot really set off with, not knowing their course, the only way to avoid serious error is by not joining up with them at all. Make your own efforts, sir! I must leave you, I must go!” He then pushed his boat from the shore and departed, threading his way into the green thickets of the marsh.

Yan Hui brought the carriage around and Zilu held out the strap to board, but Confucius paid them no heed, waiting at the water’s edge until the ripples ceased, not daring to get into the carriage until he could no longer hear the sound of the pole in the water.

Zilu, sitting beside him in the carriage, asked, “I have been serving you for a long time, Master, but I have never seen you so awed by any person you have met as you are today. Even when you met with rulers of states of a thousand or ten thousand chariots, even when they shared the hall with you and treated you as an equal, still you always looked confident and at ease. But now this fisherman stood across from you with his pole in hand and you bent at the waist like a finger-cymbal, bowing each time before answering—isn’t that going a little too far? All of us disciples find your behavior very strange, Master. How can some fisherman deserve such treatment from you?”

Confucius leaned against the crossbar and sighed. “How difficult it is to educate you! You have been immersed in the study of ritual duties, but still your unrefined lowbrow way of thinking has not been entirely left behind. So come, I will tell you! To meet an elder without showing respect is a breach of ritual propriety. To see a worthy man without honoring him is a breach of humankindness. If that man was not an Utmost Person, he wouldn’t have been able to make others, like myself, feel such humility, and if we who humble ourselves to him are not undistracted and thoroughgoing in our response to him, it is only because we have failed to find the genuine in ourselves, and thus do we constantly harm ourselves. Alas! There is no greater disaster for a person than to lack humankindness, and yet somehow you want to take that disaster upon yourself! The Course is that from which all things emerge. When things lose it they die, and when they have it they live. When we act in opposition to it we fail, when we act in accord with it we succeed. Thus a sage will honor the Course wherever it is. That fisherman must be said to have really made the Course his own. How dare I not revere him?”

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

*Lie Yukou*¹

Lie Yukou had set out on a journey to Qi, but halfway there he turned back and started heading home. Uncle Dim Nearblind² ran into him on the road back. “You headed off in one direction and now you turn around,” he said. “Why?”

“Something really spooked me,” said Lie Yukou.

“What spooked you so much?”

“I stopped to eat at ten different soup stalls, and at five of them I was served first!”³

Uncle Dim Nearblind asked, “And why would that spook you so?”

Lie Yukou said, “Whenever the unfaked in a person fails to thoroughly dissolve, it starts to seep out^A of his physical appearance to form a kind of radiance. This is sure to make a strong impression on the hearts and minds of everyone around him, so that without a second thought they treat him with the respect due a man of high status or an elder. Then they serve him up a hash of all their troubles.

Now these stalls have only the serving of soup as their sole commodity, and they don’t operate with much of a surplus. Their profit is small and their margin for making case-by-case adjustments is narrow, and yet they treat me this way. So how much worse would surely happen if I were to meet the ruler of a state of ten thousand chariots! With his body labored in the handling of his state and his mind exhausted by all its tasks, he would surely entrust me with some work to do and test me for my effectiveness in handling it. That’s what got me so spooked!”

Uncle Dim Nearblind said, “Well observed indeed. But even if you stay at home, people will still come to you for refuge.”

Not long afterward Uncle Dim Nearblind went to visit Lie Yukou at his home; the doorway was cluttered with shoes. Uncle Dim halted there, gazing northward for a while with his cheek resting against the handle of his staff. Then without a

1. Also referred to as Liezi, who also appears in Chapters 1, 7, 18, 19, 21, 28. If translated, “Lineup Banditfend.”

2. Generally identified as another name for the figure otherwise known as Uncle Dim Nobody. See Chapter 5, p. 47, and Chapter 21, p. 171.

3. This could mean either “before paying,” or “before other people”—in either case, the complaint about being too highly trusted and esteemed would make sense here.

word he turned and started walking away. The doorkeeper reported this to Liezi, who at once grabbed his shoes and went running barefoot after Uncle Dim, catching up to him at the outer gate. “Since you have come all this way,” he pleaded, “will you not give me some prescription to cure all this?”

“It’s already too late! I told you before that people would come to you for refuge, and now it has happened. Don’t think this means you have some power to cause people to take refuge in you; it’s that you *lack* the power to cause them *not* to take refuge in you! What use is it to you, stirring up their delight just to show how different you are from them? You will also be stirred by it, and this will agitate and distort everything you were originally made of. There’s nothing more I can say—and those who now travel along with you will certainly never tell you anything. Their little words are on the contrary exactly the kind of poison that finishes a man. None of you wakes up, none of you opens his eyes—how can any of you get to questioning identities with each other?^B Labors beset the skillful and worries beset the wise, but those without any abilities are free of all seeking: they eat until they’re full and then they wander around aimlessly, drifting like an unmoored skiff. Empty and aimless, they wander.”

There once was a man named Slowpoke, from the state of Zheng, who studied and recited the classics at the Qiu clan compound. After three years there, Slowpoke had become a Confucian. As the river irrigates all around it for nine miles, his fecundating influence reached all three sets of his relatives—causing his younger brother to become a Mohist. The two of them, now a Confucian and a Mohist, thenceforth were often locked in the usual debates, and their father always took the side of the Mohist. After ten years of this, Slowpoke killed himself. Then he appeared to his father in a dream, saying, “It was I who caused your son to become a Mohist! Why, why have you failed to see my good deed?^C Why do you not visit my grave, where I have already become an autumn fruit hanging from a cypress tree?”

Whenever the Creator of Things rewards a person, it is not the person but the Heavenly in the person that is rewarded. It was definitely *that* which caused his brother to become as he was. Whenever people believe that on the contrary it is they themselves who possess some power to change others, it becomes a pretext to disrespect the people closest to them. It is like the story of the well of Qi: whenever either of them tried to drink from it, the other pulled him away by the hair.^D Thus we may say that nowadays everyone is just like Slowpoke, always considering themselves to be right,^E while the real efficacy of the intrinsic virtues is possessed only by those who are unaware that they possess it. This applies all the more to possessing the Course. The ancients called the condition of such people “the punishment of hiding from Heaven.” Sages settle themselves in what gives them rest, never settling in what gives them no rest. The multitude settle in what gives them no rest, never settling in what gives them rest.⁴ As Zhuangzi said,

4. Literally, “find rest in what they find rest in, find rest in what they find no rest in.” 安其所安, 安其所不安. Both “settle” and “give rest” here translate the same word, *an*.

“To know the Course is easy, but to refrain from speaking of it is difficult.” To know it without speaking of it is how one arrives at the Heavenly. To know it and speak of it is how one arrives at the human. The people of ancient times were of the Heavenly and not of the human. Gushroar the Red studied the art of slaughtering dragons from Discombobulated Plus, using up all the resources of his rather wealthy household. After three years he had mastered the art, but there was nowhere for him to apply his new skill. Because sages regard even what seems unnecessary as what must be, they have no need to arm themselves. The mass of men, regarding something as unnecessary, try to force it to conform to how they think things must be, and thus they always need many weapons. Because they follow the demands of their weaponry, their actions always find some goal to pursue. But thus to rely on weaponry and war is to destroy oneself.

The knowledge of petty persons never amounts to more than gift wrapping and greeting cards, shredding the pure kernel of spirit in them by limping through the shallows. And yet they aspire to benefit all equally and guide all beings, to make a grand unity of form and void! But this is just getting lost and confused in the limitless continuum of spaces and times, becoming so bound to forms that they know nothing of the Great Beginning. Those others, the Utmost Persons, revert the pure kernel of spirit in them to the beginninglessness, vanishingly napping their way to the homeland of not-even-anything—fluidly flowing into the formlessness, expansively releasing into the vast clarity. How sad it is indeed to busy yourself with knowledge of trivialities, the tiny hairs at the end of things, knowing nothing of this Great Tranquility!

Among the men of Song there was a certain Trader Cao who was sent on a mission to Qin by the king of Song. He was granted several chariots for his journey, but the king of Qin was so pleased with him that he gave him a hundred more. When he returned to Song he went to see Zhuangzi and said, “You know, I admit I’m not so good at living in a narrow alleyway in the poor part of town, so hard-up for cash that I have to weave my own sandals out of grass, all dry-necked and jaundice-eared [like you]. But what I’m really good at is getting a hundred chariots to follow me home just by once enlightening a lord of ten thousand chariots!”

Zhuangzi replied, “When the king of Qin gets ill and calls his doctors, the one who pops a zit or squeezes a boil is awarded one chariot, while the one who licks the king’s hemorrhoids is awarded five. The lower the thing they treat, the more chariots they receive. Might you have been licking the king’s hemorrhoids for him? How else could you have received so many chariots? Ride along now!”

Duke Ai of Lu asked Yan He, “If I take Confucius here as my mighty pillar of support, will the state be healed?”

“Danger lies that way, great peril!” said Yan He. “Confucius is the kind of person who would try to add color to a feather by painting over it. He just busies himself with flowery phrases, taking the secondary branches as the main point, suppressing his own nature so as to look after the people, never realizing how untrustworthy this makes him to them. He makes use of directives received from

his mind to exert control over the imponderable spirit in him. How could someone like that be worthy of setting up as something for the people to look up to? Does he please you? Will you give him sustenance? Fine, let's just write that off as a mistake. But to go and make the people detach from the real and instead learn the fake is not a good way to look after them. If you care about future generations, it's better to dismiss this fellow. He is hard to govern indeed!

"Giving to others but not forgetting about it afterward is not the way Heaven gives. Mercantile ideas of buying and selling just don't mesh with it. Even if for some specific purpose you try to fit such ideas in, imponderable spirit will not mesh with them. External punishments are forged from metal and wood, but the internal ones are comprised of agitation and regret. Benighted people either meet with external punishment, in which case they are interrogated with metal and wood, or with internal punishment, in which case the yin and yang consume them. It is only Genuine Humans who can succeed in avoiding both the internal and the eternal punishments."

Confucius responded: "The hearts and minds of human beings are more dangerous even than mountains and rivers, and harder to know even than Heaven itself. For Heaven at least has its regularities of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, of day and night. But human beings hide their emotions deeply behind a thick wall of external appearances. Thus some appear sincere but are really set on advantage; some are actually superior but appear incompetent. Some seem circumspect^f and anxious but are really quite accomplished; some seem firm but are actually lax; some seem easy-going but are actually vicious.^g Hence those whom we see thirstily pursuing right conduct are just the ones who run away from right conduct⁵ as if it were burning fire. Hence the noble man must send people on distant missions to test their fidelity, employ them in nearby tasks to test their reverence, give them difficult work to test their abilities, question them without warning to test their knowledge. He must hurry them with deadlines to test their reliability, entrust them with funds to test their humankindness, warn them of dangers to test their self-control, intoxicate them with liquor to test what really rules them,^h put them in a variety of compromising situations to test them for lasciviousness. Through these nine tests, unworthy persons are found out. In contrast to such people, my esteemed ancestor Zheng Kaofu walked with bowed head when he received his first official appointment; when he received his second, he walked with bent back; when he received his third, he was doubled over facing the ground and had to walk along the path hugging the wall."⁶

[Said the other,] "Who would dare neglect such a model! But a fellow like you starts to strut arrogantly as soon as he gets his first official appointment, starts dancing in his chariot when he gets his second, and by his third appointment is

5. Yi. Elsewhere translated as "responsible conduct," "responsibility," "duty," or "conscientiousness." See Glossary.

6. Zheng Kaofu was Confucius's tenth-generation ancestor. The last sentence quotes an inscription posthumously describing him, reported in the *Zuozhuan*, Zhao Year 7. Each new appointment was a promotion; the higher he rose, the more humble he became.

invoking the names of his ancestors! Which of these is in harmony with the ways of Yao and Xu You? Truly, there are no greater thieves than an awareness of one's own intrinsic virtuosities and a mind that has adoring eyes^l for itself. For as soon as the mind has adoring eyes for itself, it starts gazing adoringly within, and by always gazing adoringly within it is ruined. There are five ways in which the intrinsic virtuosities become a curse, and to take those intrinsic virtuosities to actually reside within oneself is the worst of them. What does it mean to take the intrinsic virtuosities to reside within oneself? It means adoring oneself to the point of disparaging everything one cannot oneself do.

"There are eight extremes that constrain one to fail, three necessities that allow one to succeed, and six repositories of punishment.^l Exceeding others in beauty, coiffure, height, stature, strength, attractiveness, courage, and daring—these will be what constrain one to failure. Being steered by and following along with things, shrinking and lying low, constrained by fears of being lesser than others—these three are all unobstructed paths to success. Conscious understanding and wisdom connecting only to what is external, courage and activity inciting much resentment, humankindness and responsible conduct making many demands—these six are what bring on punishment.^k

"One who comprehends the true dispositions of the life in him dances along puppetlike, while one whose comprehension comes only from conscious understanding imitates and feigns. One who comprehends the great meaning of fate is always following along after it, while one who comprehends merely the small meaning of fate is always having to confront it face-to-face."

There was a man who had an audience with the king of Song, who then bestowed upon the man ten chariots. With condescending arrogance the man showed off these ten chariots to Zhuangzi. Zhuangzi said to him, "By the banks of the Yellow River there once lived a poor family who supported themselves by weaving baskets from straw. One day the son went diving into the depths and found a pearl worth a thousand pieces of gold. The father said to the son, 'Get a stone and smash that thing to pieces! A pearl worth a thousand pieces of gold can only have been under the chin of the black dragon who lives nine fathoms deep—you were able to get hold of this pearl only because you must have happened upon it when the dragon was sleeping. If the black dragon had been awake, would there be even a shred of you left?' Now the state of Song is an abyss that is more than merely nine fathoms deep, and the ferocity of the king of Song far exceeds that of a black dragon. To get these chariots from him, you must have come across him when he was sleeping. If he had been awake, you would certainly have been ground to powder!"

A messenger came to Zhuangzi bearing offer of an official position. Zhuangzi said to him, "Have you ever seen an ox being prepared for sacrifice? It is clothed in ornate embroidery and fed with fresh hay and beansprouts. But when the day comes for it to be led by the nose into the Great Temple, it might fervently wish to be a neglected baby calf again—will it be able to?"

When Zhuangzi was dying, his disciples wanted to prepare a lavish funeral for him. Zhuangzi said to them, “I will have Heaven and Earth for my coffin and crypt, the sun and moon for my paired jades, the stars and constellations for my round and oblong gems, all creatures for my tomb gifts and pallbearers. My funeral accoutrements are already fully prepared! What could possibly be added?”

“But we fear the crows and vultures will eat you, Master,” said they.

Zhuangzi said, “Above ground I’ll be eaten by crows and vultures, below ground by ants and crickets. Now you want to rob the one to feed the other. What brazen favoritism!”

And yet if instead you try to impose such evenness⁷ by means of something that is itself uneven,⁸ the resulting evenness will still be an unevenness. And if you try to demonstrate [that evenness] by means of something that is itself undemonstrable,⁹ the resulting demonstration demonstrates nothing. Clear understanding of it is only a way to try to control it, but the imponderable, the spiritlike, is its very demonstration.¹ Thus clear understanding has never been able to win out over the imponderable and spiritlike. Yet fools depend only on what they see, and try to get others to accept it as well. The effect is merely external. Pathetic, isn’t it?

ENDNOTES

A. Reading *xie* 洩 for *die* 諜, as suggested by Sun Yirang. Keeping the original *die* 諜, the meaning plays instead on “leak” in the figurative espionage sense: “. . . his physical appearance leaks it by forming a kind of radiance. . . .”

B. 何相孰也. Most interpreters try to make sense of this obscure phrase by substituting 孰 for 孰, rendering “How could you ever grow familiar with one another?” This is reasonable and connects tolerably to the previous line. Here, however, the line is venturesomely translated without the substitution, reading 孰 as a transitive verb that would mean literally “to ‘who?’ each other.” This would link the idea to the “I lost me” and subsequent questions about the identity of the rouser of the tones in the windstorm (compared to the “genuine ruler” or self behind human states and activities) and the linkage of waking up to perplexity about identity in the Butterfly Dream, the tropes that bookend Chapter 2 (pp. 11 and 21). To open the eyes and awaken is what enables the question “Who is the doer?” We may also think here of the “Who can . . . ?” questions of the friends in the two death stories in Chapter 6, pp. 59 and 61.

C. The word here, *liang* 良, literally means “good,” implying “this good deed of mine” or “this good man, me.” But in light of the following line, many commentators take this as a loan

7. I.e., the equality between getting no funeral and being eaten above ground, and getting a lavish funeral and being eaten below ground.

8. The understanding consciousness.

9. The understanding consciousness.

word, perhaps a pun, for the word *yin* 垠, literally an embankment, taken to be an indirect way of saying “grave, tomb.” In other words, I, this good man, have now become the foliage on a grave, and my good deed of turning your son into a Mohist (“good” to you, Father, since you apparently so approve of Mohism) has reached fruition in your other son the Mohist, like a tree that flowers the better in the harsh cold of autumn, i.e., my Confucian opposition to Mohism. Why then do you not visit my grave?

D. Most commentators take this as an allusion to the story of a man of Qi who *drilled* a well, but then, whenever anyone tried to drink from it, pulled them away by the hair. Sun Yirang, however, suggests that two men were *inside* the well, which implies a scenario perhaps more directly relevant to the Confucian-Mohist debates: two men fell into a well, and though both were standing waist-deep in water and both were thirsty, whenever either tried to drink from it, the other prevented it by pulling his head up by the hair. As Sun says, “This means that both the Confucian and the Mohist are dwelling within the process of creation-transformation, and yet they contend with each other over it.”

E. Following the interpretation of Yu Yue.

F. Following those editions that have *shen* 慎 instead of *shun* 順.

G. Taking 慢 for 縵 and 悍 for 鈇. Without the substitutions, perhaps: “Appear firm but are really just blank; appear relaxed but are really just stuck.”

H. Reading *ze* 則 for *ce* 側.

I. Some editions have *jie* (eyelashes) here instead of *yan* (eyes). I follow Wang Shumin’s argument for preferring *yan*.

J. Reading 刑 for 形, to accord with the conclusion. See note K below.

K. Following those manuscripts that add the seven characters *liuzhe suoyi xiangxingye* 六者所以相刑也 here.

L. Understanding can grasp the proposition that the vultures above and the ants below, proper ritual burial and abandonment to the harsh natural elements, are ultimately equal and even, but this understanding of non-bias is itself biased and one-sided, because the understanding is always bound to a single point of view. Since the basis of its judgments, its point of reference, is “peculiarly unfixated” (Chapter 2, p. 12, Chapter 6, p. 53) and thus never justified or demonstrable, its conclusions, too, remain ultimately unjustified and undemonstrated. But the imponderable spirit, being open to all things and fixed to no place and no identity, able to transform into anything without obstruction, is the very demonstration of this equality, this unbiasedness.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

The Whole World

In the world there are many who apply themselves to some method or technique, and each believes that whichever one he has taken up as his own is the best one possible. But in the end, where among them is what the ancients called “the art of the Course”? I say: there is nowhere it is not.

But then, you may ask, from whence does the imponderable spirit [of a sage] descend? From whence do the clear illuminations [of a king] emerge?

I answer: That which produces a sage, that which completes a king—both have one and the same origin.

Those who are never separated from their source are called Heavenly Persons.

Those who are never separated from their pure kernel of vitality are called Spiritlike Persons.

Those who are never separated from their genuineness are called Utmost Persons.

Those who regard Heaven as their source, its intrinsic powers as their root and the Course as their gate, alive to the portents of every transformation, are called Sages.

Those for whom humankindness is the stuff of beneficence, responsible conduct the guiding structure,¹ ritual the normal practice, and music the source of harmony, everywhere exuding compassion and humaneness, are called noble men.

But to use laws to define proper roles, to regard stated duties as the standard of evaluation, comparisons as the test of performance, and verification as the only decisive factor, viewing these as four hard and fast categories—one, two, three, four!—this is no more than a way for the government officials to keep order among themselves. Still, if they are unvaryingly committed to their duties and prioritize the feeding and clothing of the people, regulating the periods of plowing and leaving fallow, storing up the surpluses, always keeping in mind the weak, the orphaned, the widowed, then even here there is some guideline² for nourishing the people.

1. *Li*. See Glossary.

2. *Li*. See Glossary.

In contrast, however, how complete the ancients were! They combined the imponderable spirit with the clear illuminations,³ coupled heaven with earth, nourished the ten thousand things and brought the world into harmony, their bounty extending even to the ordinary folk. They understood the fundamental codes and could also link them to the derivative regulations. Unobstructed above, below, and all around, they connected up all that surrounded them, operating everywhere, in both the large and the small, in both the subtler matters and the coarser ones.

Much of their wisdom, as embodied in codes and regulations, can still be found among the scribes handling the old laws and inherited traditions, and many of the gentlemen of Zou and Lu still have some understanding of that part of it preserved in the classics of *Odes*, *Documents*, *Ritual*, and *Music*. The *Odes* guides their wills, the *Documents* guides their handling of affairs, the *Ritual* guides their behavior, the *Music* guides their harmonies, the *Changes* guides them through yin and yang, and the *Spring and Autumn* guides their apportioning of roles and duties.⁴ Their traditional codes are scattered throughout the world, but firmly established in these central states, so that now and then the scholars of the various schools will commend them and take them as their guide.

But the world is presently in great disorder. People no longer understand real sagehood and worthiness. The Course and its intrinsic powers are no longer unified. Many in the world congratulate themselves complacently for their insight into some single aspect of it. It is as if the ears, eyes, nose, and mouth each had their own understanding, without being able to interconnect. Thus do the skills of the various schools each excel in some part of it, each of which is useful at a certain time. But they are partial and incomplete, nook and corner scholars only. They may try to judge the beauties of heaven and earth, analyze the coherence⁵ of all things and investigate the comprehensiveness of the ancients. But how rarely can any of them fully encompass the beauty of heaven and earth or take the measure of the richness both of imponderable spirit and of clear illumination. For this reason the Course enabling one to be inwardly a sage and outwardly a king is obscured and unclear, blocked and unexpressed. Each man in the world now fashions his own technique out of whatever part of it happens to suit his own desires. How sad! The various schools go off without returning, making it impossible for them ever to come together. If these latter-day scholars are unable to perceive the purity of heaven and earth, or the vast system of the ancients, the art of the

3. I.e., the holiness (“imponderable spirit,” *shen*) of the sage and the wisdom (“clear illumination,” *ming*) of a true king. Cf. *supra*.

4. These are the traditional “Six Classics” associated with the Confucian tradition, which was centered in Zou (home of Mencius) and Lu (home of Confucius). It is noteworthy that the author of this chapter conspicuously omits an entry on the Confucians as one of the present-day schools that understands only one side of the Course. Instead, they are presented as the direct inheritors of what is left of its completeness.

5. *Li*. See Glossary.

Course will be torn to pieces by the world—and this will be what ends up tearing the world to pieces.^A

Not to instill extravagance in later generations, not to be wasteful in the use of any of the ten thousand things, never imprecise^B about codes and regulations,^C rigorously disciplining oneself as if with rope and cable, taking upon oneself all the troubles of the world: these were some aspects of the ancient art of the Course. Mo Di and Qin Guli got wind of them and were delighted. But they went too far in what they did, and complied too closely in what they kept themselves from doing. They began an “anti-music” campaign, classifying this as a form of “frugality in expenditure.” In life there was to be no singing and in death no ceremonial attire. Mozi wanted to extend loving care to all, bringing advantage to everyone, disapproving of all fighting. His course was to eschew all anger. He was also very fond of study and quite learned, not deliberately trying to innovate, but he ended up differing from the former kings in his slander of the ancient rituals and music. Now, the Yellow Emperor had his Xianchi Symphony, Yao his Dazhang, Shun his Dashao, Yu his Daxia, Tang his Dahuo, King Wen his Biyong, and King Wu and [his brother] the Duke of Zhou together created their martial music. In the ancient mourning rites, noble and base each had their respective procedures, superiors and inferiors divided by rank. The Son of Heaven was buried in seven nested coffins, the feudal lords five, the great officers three, the general class of distinguished men two. But now Mozi alone would have no singing in life and no ceremonial attire in death, making a three-inch-thick coffin of paulownia wood with nothing enclosing it the enforced standard for everyone. I’m afraid that to instruct people thus shows no real love for them. And to put it into practice personally certainly shows no real love for oneself. This does not mean Mozi’s course was a complete failure. But people sing, and he condemns their singing; they cry, and he condemns their crying; they make merry with music, and he condemns their music—does he really have any fellow-feeling for them at all? Is he really one of us, us human beings?^D To be labored in life, and then neglected in death—this course is too mean, and being so difficult to put into practice, it just brings sorrow and worry to the people. I fear this can never be used as the Course of the Sage. The people of the world cannot endure such a thorough negation of what is in their own hearts. Although Mozi himself may have been up to the task, what use is that for the rest of the world? Thus isolating himself from the world, he was far from true kingship.

But Mozi praised his course, saying, “In olden times when Yu diverted the great flood, he channeled the rivers to reach the four barbarian tribes and all the nine provinces, creating three hundred major waterways, along with three thousand large streams and numberless small ones. Yu took up the shovel and basket with his own two hands, joining and interconnecting the waterways of the world until the down was scraped off his hams and the hair off his shins, drenched in extreme rains, hair raked through by violent winds. Thus did he bring security to all the nations. Yu was a great sage, and yet he was willing to labor his body for the world like this!” Such words caused many among the later Mohists to clothe

themselves in hides or coarse fabrics and to shoe their feet in grass or hemp sandals, never resting day or night. They thought self-torture was the ultimate achievement, saying, “Anyone who can’t do the same is not following Yu’s Course, and is not qualified to be called a Mohist.” Xiangli Qin’s students, Wu Hou’s disciples, and the southern Mohists like Ku Huo, Yi Chi, and Deng Lingzi all recited the same Mohist canons, but disagreed and argued to the point of calling each other heretics who had abandoned Mozi. They criticized one another with disputations about “hardness” and “whiteness,” “sameness” and “difference,” answering back to each other with words as incompatible as the odd and the even. They considered their Great Pontiff a sage, willingly making him their lord and master, each hoping to succeed him—it still goes on down to the present day.

Mo Di and Qin Huali had good intentions, but they went about it in the wrong way, causing the later Mohists to insist on doing nothing but torture themselves, goading each other on with their bare hams and bald shins. This is indeed the best kind of disorder, but the worst kind of order. Nonetheless, Mozi was truly one of the most outstanding persons this world has seen, the likes of which cannot be found today. Even when worn out and completely depleted, he never gave up—truly a gifted and extraordinary man!

Unbound by conventions, unadorned by possessions, not exacting^E of others, not hostile to the masses, purifying the mind with the aspiration that all in the world enjoy peace and security, not stopping until both oneself and others have enough to nourish themselves with: these were some aspects of the ancient art of the Course. Song Xing⁶ and Yi Wen got wind of them and were delighted. They wore caps in the shape of Mt. Hua as their emblem and based their interactions with all creatures on a policy of making clear boundaries and tolerantly giving space to each one. They spoke of the mind’s ability to accept all things, calling this a form of conduct to be practiced by the mind itself, which would enable people to get along with each other happily and bring concord to all within the four seas. They would politely suggest that everyone establish this as their guiding principle. They said there was no disgrace in being insulted, wanting thereby to liberate the people from contention. They prohibited military aggression and called for universal disarmament, hoping thereby to save the world from warfare. They took this teaching all around the empire, counseling rulers and instructing commoners. Although the world did not accept them, they insistently clamored on without giving up. Hence it was said that although everyone, above or below, was tired of seeing them, they still managed to force their way into view.

But they did too much for others and too little for themselves. They would say things like, “It would be enough if you were so kind as to give me even five measures of rice. For I am afraid that you, my master, will not have enough to eat your fill. As for your humble servant here, although I may go hungry, I will in any case never forget about the welfare of the world, and day or night I will not rest in my efforts.” Or: “Is it really so necessary that I survive? Would I try to put on such

6. Referred to as Song Rongzi in Chapter 1, p. 5.

airs, as if I alone were the man who could save the world?" They would also say, "A noble man does not exactly scrutinize others or impose his personal will on things." They held that anything not beneficial to all the world was not worth knowing. Their external practice was to ban military aggression and encourage disarmament, and their internal practice was to thin out their own passions and desires. In all they did, large and small, coarse and fine, their practices reached just this far and no farther.

All-embracing and nonpartisan, unstrained and unbiased, unhesitating but without any fixed direction, going forth to things without secondary considerations, ignoring all calculations, uninvolved in any schemes of knowledge,⁷ choicelessly moving along with things: these were aspects of the ancient art of the Course. Peng Meng, Tian Pian, and Shen Dao got wind of them and were delighted. They gave primacy to equalizing all things,⁸ saying, "Heaven can cover things but cannot support them; earth can support things but cannot cover them; the Great Course can encompass things but cannot distinguish them." They knew that each thing had something acceptable about it and something unacceptable about it, and so they declared, "To make a choice is to lose the all-pervading. When any one thing is taught something else is blocked out. But the Course excludes nothing."

Thus Shen Dao abandoned knowledge and wisdom, rid himself of any personal position, and instead followed along with whatever was unavoidable. Letting all things flow on was for him the guideline⁹ of the Course. He said, "Know how not to know, for it is unwise to be wise."¹⁰ As soon as one approaches even the slightest knowledge or wisdom,¹¹ one is on the verge of harm." Unashamed and self-reliant,^f accepting no responsibilities, he laughed at the world's esteem for the worthy. Unconstrained and unattached, uncommitted to any program of conduct, he critiqued the world's high regard for sages. By pounding and hammering off all his sharp protuberances, rounding himself off, he was able to roll and swirl along with anything that came his way. Abandoning both right and wrong, both approval and disapproval, he managed to avoid involvement. Unguided by wisdom or calculation, ignoring the before and after, he simply towered alone wherever he was. Moving only when pushed, proceeding only when pulled, he was like a twirl in the breeze, like a spinning feather, like a grindstone rolling on—complete, rejecting nothing, making no mistakes whether moving or at rest, free from blame. Why so? An inanimate¹² object has no worries about establishing itself and does

7. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

8. 齊物 *qiwu*. These are the first two of the three characters that compose the title of Chapter 2.

9. *Li*. Elsewhere translated "structure," "coherence," "pattern," "principle." See Glossary.

10. *Zhi*. See Glossary. A double translation of the two alternative parsings. See "Notes on the Translation."

11. *Zhi*. Another double translation.

12. A being without *zhi*. See Glossary.

not get entrapped by the application of its knowledge and wisdom.¹³ Neither its movement nor its stillness can ever stray from some guideline,¹⁴ and thus it remains forever free from praise [and blame]. Hence he said, “Just become like an inanimate object. There is no need for worthies or sages. Indeed, a clump of earth never strays from the Course.” The ambitious achievers would laugh at him, saying, “Shen Dao’s course is no practice for the living, but it is a perfect guideline¹⁵ for the dead!” In the end he was regarded as merely an eccentric.

Tian Pian was the same way. He studied under Peng Meng and learned from him the eschewal of all definite teachings. It was Peng Meng’s teacher who said, “The ancient men of the Course simply reached the point of considering nothing either right or wrong. Their ways were like a passing gust of wind—how can they be described?” These men insisted on doing the opposite of what others do, presenting to men’s eyes no achievements worth beholding, but still they had to “round themselves off.” What they called the Course was not really a Course, so even what was right in their words could not but turn out wrong. Peng Meng, Tian Pian, and Shen Dao did not really know the Course. But they had all vaguely heard something about it.

Regarding the hidden root as the purest kernel and its manifest reifications as the cruder part, regarding accumulation as an insufficiency, dwelling tranquilly alone in the company only of whatever forms of imponderable spirit and clear illumination may come: these were some aspects of the ancient art of the Course. Guan Yin¹⁶ and Lao Dan got wind of them and were delighted. They founded their way on the constancy of Nonbeing, and centered it in the supreme Oneness. Externally, they had the appearance of pliant weakness and self-deprecating humility. Internally, it was the empty void that leaves all things unharmed that was their firmest reality.

Guan Yin said, “When nothing dwells within you, the forms of all things manifest in you naturally. In motion you are then like water, in stillness like a mirror, in responding like an echo. This is something vague and ambiguous, as if not really there! Still and quiet, like something transparent and clear! To merge with it is to be in harmony, but to try to gain something from it is to lose it. So never precede others; follow behind them instead.”

Lao Dan said, “Know the male but hold to the female; be the ravine of the world. Know the unstained, but hold to the disgraced; be the valley of the world.¹⁷ Everyone else chooses to be the first, but I choose to be last. This is called accepting the filth of the world. Everyone else chooses to be full, but I choose to be

13. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

14. *Li*. Elsewhere translated “structure, coherence, pattern, principle.” See Glossary.

15. *Li*.

16. “Yin, the Keeper of the Pass.” In what became the standard Laozi legend, the immigration official who insisted that the fleeing Laozi write the *Daodejing* before permitting him to leave the known world and disappear to the West.

17. Cf. *Daodejing* 28.

empty, for it is because I store up nothing that I have more than enough—like a range of rolling hills stretching on before me, more than enough!” In the movement of his body he was slow and unhurried, letting nothing go to waste. Non-doing,¹⁸ he laughed at the skillful. Everyone else sought to get what they wanted, but he found his completeness in the indirect twists and turns, saying, “Somehow or other it will work out all right.” The depths were his foundation, contraction to the minimum was his regulating thread, for, as he put it, “The hard will be smashed, the sharp will be dulled.” He was broad-minded and tolerant with all creatures, never slicing his way into the domain of others. This can be called reaching the zenith. Indeed! Guan Yin and Lao Dan, these were truly the vast and broad Genuine Humans of olden times!

Blank and barren, without form! Changing and transforming, never constant! Dead? Alive? Standing side by side with Heaven and Earth? Moving along with the spiritlike imponderables as well as the clear illuminations? So confused—where is it all going? So oblivious—where has it all gone? Since all the ten thousand things are inextricably netted together around us, none is worthy of exclusive allegiance. These were some aspects of the ancient art of the Course. Zhuang Zhou got wind of them and was delighted. He used ridiculous and far-flung descriptions, absurd and preposterous sayings, senseless and shapeless phrases, indulging himself unrestrainedly as the moment demanded, uncommitted to any one position, never looking at things exclusively from any one corner. He considered the world so sunken in the mire that it was pointless to say anything in earnest, so he used spillover-goblet words for unbroken extension of his meanings, citations of weighty authorities for verification, words put into the mouths of others for broad acceptance.¹⁹ In his aloneness he came and went, joined only by heaven and earth and the purest kernels of imponderable spirit, but still never arrogantly separated himself off from the creatures of the world, for he reprimanded none of their views of right and wrong and thus was able to get along with worldly conventions. Although his writings are a string of jades and baubles, their intertwining twistings will do one no harm. And even though his words are uneven, their very strangeness and monstrosity are worthy of contemplation. For their overabundance is truly an unstoppable force. Above they take us wandering with the Creator of Things, below befriending whoever can put life and death outside themselves, free of any end or beginning. They open us broadly to the vastness at the root of things, releasing us into its depths. They can truly be said to attune to every encounter and thereby reach up to their source. Even so, because they respond to every transformation and are free of all bondage to specific things, even the guidelines²⁰ within them are undepletable, giving forth new meanings without shedding the old ones. Vague! Ambiguous! We have not got to the end of them yet.

18. *Wuwei*. See Glossary.

19. See Chapter 27.

20. *Li*. See Glossary.

Hui Shi had many theories: his writings filled five carts. But his course was uneven and mottled, and his words wide of the mark. His thinking ranged through all sorts of things. He said:

“The largest unit has nothing outside it. This is called the Great Oneness. The smallest unit has nothing within it. This is called the Small Oneness.”

“What has no thickness cannot be piled up, and yet it extends for a thousand miles.”

“Heaven is as low as earth, and the mountain as level as the lake.”

“Just as the sun slants as soon as it reaches high noon, things start dying as soon as they are born.”²¹

“When a great sameness is considered different from smaller samenesses, these can be called only small samenesses and small differences. But all things being at once ultimately the same and also ultimately different can be called the truly great sameness and the truly great difference.”

“The south is both bounded and boundless, so one can go to Yue today and arrive yesterday.”²²

“Linked hoops can be unhooked.”

“I know the center of the world: it is north of the state of Yan [in the north] and south of the state of Yue [in the south].”

“Love all things without exception; heaven and earth are one body.”

Hui Shi used these statements to make a great display in the world, showing them off in debate, and all the debaters in the world shared his delight in them, [adding]:

“Eggs have feathers. A hen has three feet. The state of Ying possesses the whole empire. A dog can be deemed a sheep. Horses have eggs. Frogs have tails. Fire is not hot. ‘The mountain’ comes out of the mouth. The wheel does not touch the ground. The eye does not see. Indication never reaches.³ Reaching can never end. A turtle is longer than a snake. The T-square is not square, the compass cannot make a circle. The chiseled hole never surrounds the chisel handle. A flying bird’s shadow never moves. A speeding arrow in flight is sometimes neither moving nor at rest. A puppy is not a dog. A yellow horse and a black cow make a total of three. White dogs are black. An orphaned colt has never had a mother. If you remove half of a footlong stick each day, it will not be depleted even after ten thousand generations.”

The debaters responded to Hui Shi with these propositions, which kept them busy to the end of their days. Huan Tuan and Gongsun Long²³ were debaters of this type. Covering over what is in men’s hearts with their embellishments, altering their ideas, able to defeat their mouths but not to convince their hearts—this is the trap in which all such debaters get stuck. Hui Shi day after day used his

21. *Fangsheng fangsi* 方生方死. See Chapter 2, p. 14, for a Zhuangzian reinterpretation and repurposing of this proposition, taken to mean “as soon as there is life there is death,” and more generally, “as soon as something is generated, it is deceased, i.e., negated, gone.”

22. Cf. Chapter 2, note 9.

23. Gongsun Long also appears in Chapter 17, p. 140. See also Chapter 2, notes L and M.

cleverness²⁴ to debate with others, accomplishing nothing more than the creation of a spectacle along with the other debaters. This is all it amounted to. But Hui Shi thought his eloquence was the most valuable thing in the world, saying, “Are heaven and earth any more magnificent? I have this heroic power in me without even relying on a past tradition!”

In the south there was an odd man named Huang Liao who wanted to know why the heavens above did not crash down and why the earth below did not collapse underfoot, and the reasons for the wind, rain, thunder, and lightning. Hui Shi did not hesitate to answer, responding without even thinking, giving a comprehensive explanation of all things. He talked without rest, loquacious, unstoppable, and still he thought it was not enough, so he supplemented it with even stranger ideas. Since it was really all about opposing the views of others in order to earn fame for defeating them, he was unable to get along with the mass of men. He was weak in intrinsic virtuosity but strong in forcing his way heavy-handedly on things, so his path was in the end a dark one. Viewing Hui Shi’s skills against the Course of heaven and earth, they look like the busy labors of a mosquito or a fly. What use are they to other creatures? That [uselessness] would still have been perfectly acceptable, if only he pushed all the way to its conclusion his idea of Oneness, which is to say, if he had valued the Course a bit more. He was so close! Instead, Hui Shi found no peace in it even for himself, scattering himself unceasingly into all things, ultimately gaining nothing more than fame as a skilled debater. A pity! Hui Shi’s talents were fruitlessly dissipated running after things and never returning to himself. He was like a man trying to silence an echo with shouts, a man trying to outrun his own shadow. How sad!

ENDNOTES

- A. A double translation. See “Notes on the Translation.”
- B. Reading 渾 for 暉, as in the Cui manuscript.
- C. Following the manuscripts that have *hun* 渾 rather than *hui* 暉.
- D. A double translation of *lei* as both “regarding as of the same type” and “being of the same type.” See “Notes on the Translation.”
- E. Reading *ke* 苛 for *gou* 苟, as proposed by Zhang Taiyan. Reading *gou*, the meaning would be, “Not taking advantage of others.”
- F. Following Luo Miandao’s interpretation, as bolstered by the valiant philological explanation of Ruan Yusong.
- G. “Indication” here is *zhi* 指, literally “finger,” or “pointing,” also meaning what is pointed to or the indicated. Cf. Chapter 2, note M.

24. *Zhi*. See Glossary.

GLOSSARY OF ESSENTIAL TERMS

BIAN 辯. Debate, Distinguish, Demonstrate, “Back-and-Forth.” The term literally means “debate” or “disputation,” as engaged in by logicians of the day, including Zhuangzi’s friend and foil Huizi (Hui Shi), whose presence looms large in the text. It can mean “demonstration” in the sense of “demonstrating by means of debate which of two alternatives is correct.” It is sometimes used in the *Zhuangzi* as a cognate for the homonyms *bian* 辨 (meaning “to distinguish, to differentiate” and by extension, “to clarify by means of debate”) and *bian* 變 (meaning “transformation”). Zhuangzi exploits this ambiguity, not least in the crucial line in Chapter 1, “riding atop the back-and-forth of the six atmospheric breaths” (p. 6) where “back-and-forth” is meant to capture the sense of “debate” and “transformation,” along with the implication of a differentiation between the contending positions.

CHANG 常. Constancy, Stability, Sustainability, Staying Power, Reliability, Regularity, Normal, Common, Ordinary, Everyday. The more common translation—“constant” or even “eternal”—can be misleading, for the term also means “common, everyday, ordinary” and at the same time has a distinctive value implication, that is, “normal.” Bringing these senses together, it can be rendered as “sustainable” in the sense of what has the value of staying power, of what can be maintained over a long period of time without exhausting or destroying itself, particularly what can be maintained without special effort—hence a reliable and sustainable course of action. The term (or its cognate, in some versions, *heng* 恆) is very central in the *Daodejing*, appearing in the first two lines of the standard post-Han editions of the text: *daokedao feichangdao, mingkeming feichangming* 道可道非常道, 名可名非常名. These two lines are often translated to mean something like, “The Way that can be spoken is not the Eternal Way; the name that can be named is not the Eternal Name.” But in context, the meaning is arguably something more like, “Guiding courses can be taken as explicit guides, but then their guidance ceases to be sustainable. Named values can be explicitly named as values, but then what they name ceases to be sustainably valuable.” Or more succinctly, “Specifying a way to do things destabilizes that way of doing things. Specifying what is valuable about things destabilizes their value.”

CHENG 成. Completion, Completeness, Coming to Be, Taking Shape, Accomplishment, Fullness, Maturity, Success, Formation, Fully Formed, Perfection, opposed to *kui* 虧, lacking, waning (of the moon), incomplete, or to *hui* 毀, to destroy. The term means “to form,” “to become fully formed,” “to come into existence,” “to succeed,” “to reach maturity,” “to accomplish or be accomplished,” “to be perfect,” “to be complete,” “to take shape.” The argument in Chapter 2 plays heavily on the various implications of this term.

DAI 待. To Depend On, To Wait, To Wait For, To Wait On, To Attend To, To Treat. The word means both diachronic “waiting for” and synchronic “dependence on,” as well as “to attend to” someone, as one does a guest. The theme of dependence and independence centered on this term has deep resonances through at least the first few chapters of the text. We are told that the rightness or wrongness of knowledge “depends” on something “peculiarly unfixed” (Chapter 6, p. 53), making it impossible to know whether we are correct when we call something “Heaven” or “human”—a claim that replicates verbatim claims made about the instability of the referent of any words, also called “peculiarly unfixed” (Chapter 2, p. 13), and questions about whether we can know if we are correctly calling something “knowledge,” illustrated by noting that what is named the knowing of right dwelling, right cuisine, or right sexual allure differs depending on who is doing the naming (Chapter 2, pp. 18–19). Bringing these together we have the suggestion that all judgments about what is right and what is so are “dependent” upon the perspective from which they are spoken. The value of one’s identity and the function of one’s distinctive virtuosity analogously “depend” on the environments that affirm and enable them, as Liezi “depends on” the wind (Chapter 1, p. 5)—and the same could be said of the great bird Peng, who depends on the wind just as Kun qua Kun depends on the water. The unresolvable questions about the “identity of the rouser” that calls forth all the varied sounds of the windstorm, or the genuine ruler governing all events, or the true self ruling one’s own body and mind (Chapter 2, pp. 12–13), are similarly understood as questions about dependence: the rouser or ruler or self is the basis upon which the varied sounds, the phenomena of nature, or our moods and actions are supposed to depend, and yet the identity of this basis can never be specified. But the same word is used in the crucial line of Chapter 4, stating that “the vital energy becomes a vacuity that *waits* for the presence of whatever thing may come” (p. 37). Similarly, the shadow “depends on” the physical form, and the penumbra on the shadow, so thoroughly that they have no way of knowing how or why they are what they are and do as they do, or what the thing they depend on might itself depend upon—but not knowing what to make of who or what either the dependent or the depended upon are, finding no specific identity anywhere that doesn’t depend on something else, appears to make the initial problem of dependence evaporate (Chapter 2, p. 21). Similarly, we are told that the sounds of the windstorm depending on something, or on each other, is no different from their not depending on anything or each other (Chapter 2, p. 21); the non-resolution of the question of what they depend upon, and their inability to ever be freed of

this thoroughgoing condition of dependence—but dependence on something that can be neither known to exist nor not to exist, something without any definite identity at all—is presented as resolving their problem of dependence. See “Zhuangzi as Philosopher” at <https://www.hackettpublishing.com/zhuangziphil> for a fuller discussion of this point.

DAO 道. Course, Coursing, Courses, A Course, Some Course, Some Courses, The Course. To Guide, Guidance. Often translated as “Way,” the term originally designates a roadway. From this literal meaning it takes on the early ethical meaning of a course of study or activities that lead to some desired result, that is, a program of emulation and practice by means of which a particular set of skills could be cultivated (“the course of the sage kings, the course of humankindness, the course of archery”), or a process by which a particular type of valued result was produced (“the course of Heaven/Sky,” which produces the seasons and thus the growth of all things). Used as a verb, it means “to put someone on or to lead someone along such a course of study and practice,” that is, “to guide.” In this usage it is cognate with the character 導. This sense of spoken indication as directive is implicit also in the word’s extended meaning of “to speak.” In pre-Daoist thought it thus has a highly normative and ethical flavor: deliberate activity directed toward a preconceived goal. Putting these implications together, it can be translated, following Chad Hansen, as “Guiding Dis/course.” Daoist use of the term, beginning with the *Daodejing*, ironically plays on this original meaning, *reversing* it to signify precisely the opposite of a normative course, but one that has the expected effect of a normative course (that is, to produce something deemed valuable). In this ironic sense, Dao means not the deliberate pursuit of a consciously valued goal but the non-deliberate and indiscernible process, a non-doing both unvaluing and unavailable as an object to be valued, that is claimed to be the real source of value and being. Expanding on a growing naturalization of Heaven’s Course, pushed to the total denial of any consciousness or intention in the formerly deified Heaven, Dao comes to mean the nameless unhewn raw material from which are carved out all particular named and culturally valued objects, conceived as entailing their emergence and return in the manner of a shapeless fluid whose very instability produces specific shapes in its ripples and waves, and into which these shapes again submerge. In this translation, the term “course” is used in preference to the more prevalent English translation for this word, “way.” There are two main reasons for this: (1) to highlight the originally highly normative sense of the term *and* its reversal into a critique of normativity: “course” in English can be used in both an explicitly and emphatically normative sense (“course” as in syllabus or prescribed program) and also in a neutral sense, for example, in “a course of events,” or “the course of time”; and (2) to emphasize the new meaning of not only “road” but “the process of traveling a road,” and even “that which travels,” in keeping with the dimension of radical immanence and the watery imagery associated with the term in Daoist texts. In English “the course of the water” means not just the channel through which the water flows but also the traveling of the water, and thus this word, unlike “way,” can function also as

a verb, as in “the blood of kings courses through my veins.” We can say “when in the course of human events,” referring to the actual events, as opposed to “the way of human events,” which is only the manner or style of their going, not their going itself. “Course” seems to be broad enough to imply *dao* all at once as normative, anti-normative, roadway, or empty channel through which something goes, what goes through that channel, process of going through, immanence of channel and process and what undergoes process to each other, and manner or style of doing all at once, and for this reason is to be preferred to “way.” This dynamic implication seems to be forefronted in the *locus classicus* of the explicit repurposing of the word *dao* for its new “metaphysical” meaning, that is, *Daodejing* 25: “There is something undifferentiated and complete, prior to the generation of heaven and earth, standing alone but unchanged, *circulating everywhere but unendangered*, which can be considered the mother of the world. I don’t know what its name is; I nickname it *Dao*.” That it itself circulates everywhere, going all around (*zhouxing* 周行), seems to be a key consideration in choosing the strange name “*Dao*” for this vague something, for although this line is not found in the Guodian or Mawangdui versions of this chapter, the rest of the chapter singles out precisely this dynamic dimension as what is most notable about *Dao*: not its priority to heaven and earth, not its standing alone, not its changelessness, not its motherhood of the world, but its motion: its “vastness, which means going away, which means distancing, which means returning” (*da* 大, *shi* 逝, *yuan* 遠, *fan* 反). *Dao* is something that *goes and returns*, like a course, not *merely* the channel upon which or through which something else goes and returns, like a road (though “course” is able to cover that meaning as well: the peculiarity of *Dao* is that it is both the formless openness through which all goings pass and also the definite goings themselves, both the named and the unnamed, both immanent and transcendent). This persistent semantic nuance informs the much later adoption of this character as a measure-word when referring to rays of light or jets of water through empty space, to “courses” of food at a restaurant, or even to instances of going through processes and procedures like washing or applying paint: one “*dao*” can mean one ray of light, one bolt of lightning, one jet of water, one course of food in a meal, one time through a process of washing or painting something—and even one of the resulting coats of paint itself. In all cases, these refer not merely to the paths traversed by certain items but also to the very processes of traversing and the items that traverse: one can be struck and killed by a “*dao*” of lightning, one can be swept away by a “*dao*” of water. “Way” comes a little closer to including this dynamic implication than “road,” but still falls short of fully marking it. Unlike “way,” “course” can be used as synonymous with words like “process,” evoking richer implications of motion than “way” does—something that moves or even is itself the process of moving. Hence “course” is used as the translation for *Dao*. In the Inner Chapters *dao* is used both in its older normative sense (as an object of critique) as well as in its new ironic sense, and it is here that we see the intricate dialectic of these two senses of the term played out most forcefully. What is really distinctive to the *Zhuangzi*, especially the Inner Chapters, is the further elaboration of the ironic sense of *Dao* to mean the process of

producing not only valued things but also value perspectives, and hence all the diverse valuations themselves. See the Preface and “Zhuangzi as Philosopher” at <https://www.hackettpublishing.com/zhuangziphil> for a fuller discussion. The Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters present a wide variety of new and innovative repurposing and syntheses of the various senses found in the Inner Chapters and in the *Daodejing*.

DE 德. “Virtuosity/Virtuosities,” “Intrinsic Virtuosities” (when speaking of human beings), “Intrinsic Powers” (when speaking of nonhuman entities), modified according to context. Virtue, Kindness, Moral Force. Often translated as “virtue,” “power,” “potency,” or the like, the original sense of this term is an efficacious power, “virtue” in the nonmoral sense (“by virtue of . . .” meaning “by the power of . . .”), which is closely linked with the idea of *dao* in the generic sense. If a *dao* is a course of study, *de* is what is attained by successfully completing that course: the perfected skill thereby acquired, the value gained by doing things that way. The term is thus often glossed in early texts with the homophone *de* 得, meaning “to attain,” or “to succeed.” Virtuosity is what one gets from following a course. Virtuosity in archery is what one gets from practicing a course in archery. Virtuosity in general living, in interacting with the world with maximum effect and minimum harm, is what one gets from the Course in general. This is the primary sense in the Inner Chapters, but a shift is already beginning to occur there, concomitant to the new Daoist ironic sense of “Dao.” It is the virtuosity of the non-deliberate Course of the world, and thus something like the innate skill, inborn virtuosity, which we might call one’s ownmost powers, what one can do without deliberate effort, just as a virtuoso can perform his art effortlessly (after finishing the efforts of learning and training). In the Daoist sense, it is the intrinsic powers constituting a thing’s distinctive being, where a characteristic is regarded not as a property inhering in a substance but as a virtuosity, an effortless skill in a particular kind of efficacious nondoing, the style of activity that any being consistently engages in without effort, which identifies it as that being and no other. From an early period the term is also used to mean “moral charisma” or “non-coercive persuasiveness,” and by extension leniency and kindness on the part of a ruler, as opposed to strict enforcement of penal law; here again this is looked at as a manifestation of the ruler’s mastery and virtuosity in his practice of the “Course” of true noncoercive rulership through moral influence, the course of humankindness and responsible conduct that he personally trains himself in. When the Inner Chapters’ usage of Dao comes together with the more explicitly “metaphysical” Dao of *Daodejing* and related texts, in the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters, the term takes on a key role in an emerging family of broader ontological and cosmological accounts. Here the term comes to imply the individual endowment or attainment of Dao in a particular being, the individuated form of Dao that constitutes one’s own nature and that allows one to live, the effortless operation of Dao in and as one’s specific ownmost character. This ownmost inborn individual character is still a kind of virtuosity, denoting the most distinctive powers of nondeliberate activity and effectiveness in the world, what

one can do without having to try: beat one's heart, pump one's blood, see and hear, but also exactly be who one is and none other, and have whatever mysterious unintended effects on others that one does. As before, this is thought to have power not only in the sense of ability to act but also to influence other beings non-coercively, through its fascinating charisma—much as virtuosity in the narrower artistic sense does.

JING 精. Purest Kernel, Purest Kernel of Vitality, Quintessential Energy, Seminal Energy, Semen. Pure kernel of energy within things, especially living beings. The word initially denotes refined or purified rice, that is, the innermost kernel of a grain of rice after the inert outer husk has been removed, the kernel being where the life-sustaining nutrition and also the germ of growth are located.

JINGSHEN 精神. Purest Kernel of Imponderable Spirit, Quintessence of the Imponderable Spiritlike Within Us. See *jing* and *shen*.

LI 理. Structural Coherence, Coherent Structure, Guideline, Coherence, Structural Configuration, Pattern, Perforations, the Way Things Fit Together, the Sense Made by Things, the How and Why of Things. “Principle” is the most common translation of this term, but that word has misleading metaphysical connotations in English that are best avoided. “Pattern” comes closer to the sense of the term, but this word in English usually implies a strictly and exactly repeating motif, and this sense of exact replication of some form or shape that is literally the same in each instance, however abstract, is lacking in this Chinese word, which is better understood as a not necessarily repeating way in which things fit together and together with which further things can then be fit. In its earliest usages, the term functioned as a verb meaning to divide something up in a way that made it valuable or useful, such as carving a raw piece of jade into a ritual pendant or dividing a field for agricultural purposes. (The word still functions as a verb in this sense in modern Chinese, for example when a haircut is called a “Li”-ing of the hair: cutting and dividing and recombining it to make it all cohere in such a way that it will further cohere with social expectations and fashions.) By extension, it came to mean the inherent lines or patterns in the raw material that might guide such cutting most easily and effectively, the places it was easiest to cut and that would also give it the greatest value by allowing its parts to fit together in such a way as to allow it to meet the needs of (that is, fit together with) the various domains of the wider world where it was expected to be put to use. The single occurrence of the term in the Inner Chapters, in Chapter 3, p. 30, where it is translated “unwrought perforations,” marks the first appearance anywhere in the tradition of the binome “Heavenly Li” (*tianli*), which would later name a central metaphysical category in Neo-Confucianism. But in Chapter 3 its meaning is more concretely related to the actual lines and configurations running through the flesh of the ox, the channels and gaps that serve as guides for the knife to effectively and easily cut through it. In later parts of the *Zhuangzi*, the word becomes a more general philosophical term, referring to the underlying structure of a thing conceived as

the way its parts cohere with each other and with the wider world, discernible as the natural guidelines that allow one to take worthwhile action with respect to it, such that acting in accordance with them (or dividing along those particular lines) will lead to a valued arrangement of things. Li is a “coherence” in the sense of something valued, something readable, or the lines according to which one may divide things up so as to make them cohere into a desired structure. As coherence, it can thus be equivalent to the sense made by things, the how and why of them, their structure, the conditions of their possibility inasmuch as they must coexist with other things, the way they fit together, what allows them to be discerned and identified, and a tracing of what configurations of action are workable with respect to them. It is translated differently in each case according to context.

MING 明. Illumination (of the Obvious). Clarity. Light. Understanding. The character is composed of a graph juxtaposing the sun and the moon; its most basic meaning is simply “light, brightness.” It also means to make manifest, or to understand, or what *is* manifest, the obvious. The distinctive phrase *yiming* 以明 “using *ming*, because of *ming*,” is repeated several times in Chapter 2 and is a crucial point of controversy for interpreters. The same term is contrasted to *zhi* 知 (see entry below) several times in the *Daodejing* (Chapters 10, 33; see also Chapters 16, 24, 27, 36, 47, 52, 55), and there, too, *ming* is some form of cognition approved of by the text while *zhi* is disparaged. In the *Daodejing*, it seems to refer to the type of awareness that does not cut names and identities entirely out of their unnamed contexts, thereby retaining a sense of their connection to the processes of the whole and their rootedness in the nameless. This is a type of non-knowing that is identified with the knowing of the sustainable (*chang*; see above). Chapter 2 does seem to share something of this contrast with *zhi* in its use of the term, but gives it a twist more in keeping with its own way of thinking. Some take the term, as used at crucial junctures in that chapter, to indicate a higher type of understanding, which transcends the relativism of perspectival rights and wrongs, a “Great Knowledge” that is intuitive rather than cognitive or logical. But this seems to be inconsistent with the relativist critiques that dominate the local context of this usage, a tension that some interpreters try to resolve by regarding the critiques as merely therapeutic and provisional, critiques of rational knowledge to make room for another, intuitive kind of knowledge. Understanding this term in its more basic sense of “obvious” provides an alternate way to resolve this tension, one that is in my view more satisfying on several levels—a usage closer to the so-called “Genuine Understanding” of Chapter 6, p. 53, which is clearly presented as no understanding at all, intuitive or otherwise. It then refers not to a deeper apprehension of the real transcendental truth lying beneath the surface of appearances but rather to attentiveness to the surface itself, the most obvious and undeniable feature of which is the disagreement between varying perspectives, but also their intrinsic inseparability and unavoidable mutual transformations, inhabiting and then forgetting the intrinsic rightness/thisness of each as it passes. As such it is related to other distinctive and seemingly paradoxical phrases in Chapter 2, notably “The Shadowy Splendor” (p. 18) and “The Radiance of Drift and

Doubt” (p. 16). Drift and Doubt are precisely what is obvious, and the radiance and illumination provided by this resolves the problems they seem to present, the uncertainty of multi-perspectivism. This is still positively contrasted to ordinary *zhi* and does all the work attributed to *ming* in the earlier Daoist sense of the *Daodejing*. (See “Zhuangzi as Philosopher” at <https://www.hackettpublishing.com/zhuangziphil>.)

MING 命. Fate, Destiny. Literally “a command,” originally linked to Heaven in the term *tianming* 天命, the “mandate of Heaven,” which was used as a moral justification for the Zhou overthrow of the Shang dynasty in the eleventh century BCE. This term undergoes many of the same modifications that affect the term “Heaven” in subsequent Chinese thought. In the Inner Chapters it is not a pre-existing plan inscribed in advance in some other, transcendental site, determining what will happen, but rather a word for the unknowability of the agent who makes things happen. That fate is not to be thought of as an agent that does something or a positive law with determinate contents somewhere, an actual grounding principle that accounts for anything, is already implied in the much more conservative usage of the term by Zhuangzi’s contemporary Mencius, whose conception of Heaven retained a much more normative tinge than Zhuangzi’s, but who nonetheless states, “What comes upon us although no particular agent brings it about is what we call *ming*, Fate” (*Mencius*, 5A7). Mencius perhaps meant only to disavow a human agent here, not literally to disavow all agents and identifiable determinants, human or divine, seen or unseen; but the *Zhuangzi* of the Inner Chapters can be understood to be literally dismissing all of the above. In the *Zhuangzi*, the term is sometimes explicitly disassociated even from “Heaven” (see the final story in Chapter 6, p. 63), underscoring the sense of “what happens although I can find no one who makes it so,” or more simply, a synonym for “what cannot be stopped,” that is, what no conscious purpose or activity, of any one particular agent divine or human, can change.

QI 氣. Vital Energy, Atmospheric Conditions, Breath, Air, Energy, Life Force. A key term in Chinese cosmology, sometimes speculatively traced to a root meaning of the mist that forms into clouds, or (on the basis of the rice radical in the character) even the steam rising from rice, in either case suggesting a vapor that takes various shapes and provides life (as rain or as food). It refers to air in general, but more specifically to the breath, and by extension the life force, the absence of which constitutes a living creature’s death (referred to as “cutting off the *qi*”). It has no one fixed form and is composed of no fundamental building blocks such as atoms or particles; rather, it is constantly in a process of transformation, congealing and dispersing. It also refers to weather conditions and to the general feeling of a particular atmosphere either physically or stylistically. These implications are to be kept in mind when considering the various uses of wind imagery in Chapters 1 and 2. In Chapter 4 it is presented in an “empty” condition, contrasted to the ear and the mind, with which one hears when practicing the “fasting of the mind,” and that is “a waiting for the presence of whatever thing may come.”

Having no fixed form or identity of its own (“empty”), it is able to adapt itself to any condition. Cosmologically it eventually comes to be regarded as the substance of which all things are composed, which is by nature biphasic, tending to expand into impalpable vapor and condense into palpable objects, spanning both the material and the spiritual, which is one moment undetectable and the next felt by the hand or face as wind, or by the lungs as nourishing breath, seemingly producing something from nothing, life from empty space. This expanded cosmic meaning is often encountered in the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*. In slightly later Chinese texts, particularly those concerned with meditation and religious practices, or with constructing a universal theory of the origin and constitution of the world, its relation to Dao becomes so close that the two terms often verge on synonymity.

REN 仁. Humankindness; Kindness; Humaneness; Kind; Humane, Being Good. *See Renyi*.

RENYI 仁義. Humankindness and Responsible Conduct. Being Good and Doing Right. Kindness, Responsibility. Kind and Responsible. Humane and Dutiful. Goodness and Rightness. The cardinal virtues of Confucianism, sometimes translated as “Benevolence and Righteousness” (Waley, Watson) or “Goodwill and Duty” (Graham). Functionally often a synecdoche for “morality” or “ethics” in general. *Ren* is originally the adjectival form of “human” (人), initially used especially of the noble class as opposed to the common masses (referred to as *min* 民). Hence the term means the demeanor of a true member of the nobility, someone who displays the character proper to a noble, or adjectivally, “to be noble.” Confucius expands on this implication, using the term to mean something like “truly human” (note that David Hall and Roger Ames translate the term as “authoritative humanity”), applicable to a virtuous member of any social class. The term comes to have the implication especially of kindness and humanitarian love, and the sense of “kindness” in our translation “humankindness” should be taken here in its original English etymological sense (encoded also in the “two” component of the character 仁), as a feeling of “kindredness” or “kinship”—either the feeling of kindness as kinship among humans (or as in Chapter 14, the kindredness between tigers and their young, p. 119) or in some later Confucian thought even the (human) feeling of kindredness with all things in the universe. *Yi* has a range of meanings that no single English word exactly covers: “responsible conduct” is deployed here as a blanket term meant to cover on one side “Justice” and on the other “Duty,” and in the middle a sense of Decency or a particular sense of what is right and wrong in general, and what is right and fitting in any situation. It is focused more on conduct than on feeling, without excluding the latter—which is why a Confucian thinker like Mencius felt the necessity to refute the seemingly commonsensical idea that it was “external” as opposed to the innerness of humankindness, allowing its ordinarily deemphasized dimension of a felt *sense* of responsibility to be brought into focus. “Appropriateness 宜 [to one’s official position or temporary situation],” is its standard gloss in early texts, which gives us perhaps

its central connotation, but it carries a bit more normative gravitas than “appropriateness” bears in English (though the scolding use of “not appropriate” is gaining ground in English). The term can mean “justice” both in its sense of a readjustment of an existing situation to make it fit together in a way that is fair to all its participants, and in its severe sense of meting out deserved punishment or imposing a restriction, saying no to something, refusing to do something because it is just not done (Mencius sees its source in the feeling of “shame and dislike” of certain states or acts, the need to negate or eliminate them); it can mean “duty” in the sense of fulfilling the obligations that come with being in a certain role or situation. It can thus mean doing right, rightness, justice, or duty, the doing of what one’s particular role or rank requires. Mencius says he likes both life and *yi*, but likes *yi* more than life, and thus it is something he might be willing to die for. The *Shuowen* defines it in terms of “one’s personal dignified demeanor,” *ji zhi weiyi* 己之威儀, relating it to honor and self-respect, which also connects to the meaning of “decency.” “Appropriate” is also the root meaning of the English word “decent,” rendering a core meaning of “doing the decent thing, acting appropriately in each context,” but in English this perhaps does not convey the life-or-death dignity of the term. The extended meaning of “meaning” itself is also not irrelevant here, denoting also the role a word properly plays in its context, like the conduct that duty requires of a person in his social position and temporary situation. The “meaning” of a word is also an instance of the word doing its duty by appropriately playing its semantic role, and understanding a meaning is “doing what one should in response” to the word, the “appropriate response” to the use of that word, or perhaps the proper function of a word in response to its context, the role to be played by a word in a sentence. The word basically means “responding appropriately,” whether to one’s position and role (duty), to the needs of the moment (appropriateness), or to the need for the tempering or elimination of some unfitting factor in the adjudication of alternatives (justice). Here it is translated “responsible conduct” (with the full sense of “responding” in the forefront) when part of the set pair “humankindness and responsible conduct,” taken as a binome indicating the whole of moral virtue in general. But when used alone it is translated variously according to context, covering the range from Justice to Duty.

SHEN 神. Spirit, the Spiritlike, Spiritlike, the Imponderable, Imponderable Spirit. The word originally means the spirit of a deceased person, an ancestor, or the invisible entity presiding over some part or process of nature like a river, a mountain, or the growth of crops. In the period during which much of the *Zhuangzi* text was probably written, the term was undergoing a partial expansion and demythologization, without losing its original animistic application. It comes to be used as an adjective describing anything mysterious, incomprehensible, incalculable, miraculous, as well as sometimes indicating a faculty within the living human being, associated with the higher aspects of conscious life, including but not limited to thought and imagination. But the implication of full transparency and lucidity, of maximal intelligibility, which might be associated with

“consciousness” or “spirit” in English, should be avoided, since the term connotes just the opposite: the mysterious, the incomprehensible. Moreover, as the universal application of cosmological theories of *Qi* (vital energy; see above) begin to take more definite shape during this same period, *shen* comes to be understood as a highly refined form of *Qi*, made of the same stuff as, and functioning on a continuum with, all other phenomena, including physical objects. Prior to this time, while no theory is explicitly put forth, *shen* may well have been assumed to be an ontologically distinct category of existence, surviving the death of the physical body because it was of an entirely different nature, as is commonly believed in many pre- and even postliterate societies. This situation sometimes makes it difficult to pinpoint which of these senses is intended in some of the usages in this text; the judgment calls in the translation are determined by local context, but whenever the term is used, all the possible meanings should be kept in mind.

SHENG 生. Becoming, Birth, Life, the Life Process, the Process of Life, the Flow of Life, the Life in Us. The term means both “birth, becoming, coming into existence,” whether of a state or condition or of a living entity, and “life” in the sense of being alive. Hence “life process” is sometimes used as a translation, sometimes “generation,” “production,” and the like. In the opening lines of Chapter 3, in accordance with the “shoreline” imagery used, it is translated as “flow of life.” In most places when it is something to be preserved or nourished, the vitality that animates a living body, it is rendered “the life in us.” “Nourishing life” should not be understood as, say, feeding living creatures but as supplying the life in us with what it needs for optimal flourishing and sustainability.

SHI / FEI 是非. Right/Wrong. Literally “that’s it/that’s not” (A. C. Graham), implying, “right/wrong.” *Shi* by itself, or coupled with *bi* 彼 (“that, other”) can mean simply “this.” The double meaning of “this” and “right” are key to Zhuangzi’s argument in Chapter 2. For a full discussion, see “Zhuangzi as Philosopher” at <https://www.hackettpublishing.com/zhuangziphil>.

TIAN 天. Heaven, Heavenly, the Heavens, Sky, Skylike, Celestial. The first thing any non-Chinese reader should understand about *tian* is that no one in the history of Chinese thought ever doubts its existence. Even the most skeptical thinker would not deny the existence of *tian*; rather, he would say that *tian* exists and that it is simply that blue sky above us. This makes the term very unlike “God” and its equivalents in Western traditions, and perhaps closer to “Nature,” which similarly is something the existence of which is never contested. In both cases the only issue is not whether it exists but what its character is: personal, impersonal, deliberate, nondeliberate, spiritual, material, moral, amoral, conscious, unconscious. This primary meaning of “sky” is never absent in the word, in its most rudimentary and undeniable sense: what is *up there* above the reach of human beings, where weather comes from, which changes through the seasons and thus sets the conditions for all human activity but is *beyond human manipulation*. That contrast to purposive human activity remains the core element in the idea

of *tian* no matter what further content is added: *tian* is what is not accomplished by any deliberate human actions, but which conditions human actions. But “sky” also functioned as a metonym for whatever deity or deities may be living in the sky, much as the “White House” is sometimes used to refer to the president of the United States, or “Hollywood” is used to designate a complex collective conglomerate entity like “the movie industry.” It was so used to designate the ancestral deity or deities of the Zhou imperial house, whose moral “mandate” underwrote the Zhou overthrow of the Shang dynasty in the eleventh century BCE. *Tian* in this usage tended to function as a patriarchal sky-god of the kind typical of many ancient cultures. With the rationalizing tendencies of the Spring and Autumn Period (770–475 BCE), however, including the early Confucian movement, the naturalistic association with “sky” began to grow more pronounced as the anthropomorphic and morally retributive aspects of the term were dampened. In the *Analects*, Confucius sometimes uses the term with clear but possibly rhetorical anthropomorphic implications, but elsewhere in the same work he states that Heaven “does not speak [that is, issues no explicit commands], and yet the four seasons proceed through it, the hundred creatures are born through it” (*Analects* 17:19). The naturalistic sense of Heaven as the plain process of the sky seems to be present in this pronouncement. Interpretive hedgings continued in the work of Zhuangzi’s contemporary Mencius, representing what would later be deemed the mainstream Confucian tradition. Mencius sometimes reduced the meaning of Heaven explicitly to simply “what happens although nothing makes it happen” (*Mencius*, 5A6). This is the sense of the term that emerges front and center in Zhuangzi’s usage: the spontaneous and agentless process that brings forth all beings, or a collective name for whatever happens without a specific identifiable agent that makes it happen and without a pre-existing purpose or will or observable procedure. This is “skylike” in the sense that the sky is conceived as the ever-present but unspicifiable open space that “rotates” tirelessly and spontaneously, bringing the changes of the seasons and the bounty of the earth forth without having to issue explicit orders, make or enforce “laws” or directly interfere: the turning of the sky makes the harvest without coming down and planning and planting, its action is effortless and purposeless. The Heavenly in all things is this “skylike” aspect of all things. The term “Nature” has been used by some early translators, but the implication of Nature as an ordered and knowable system, running according to “Natural Laws,” which are rooted in the wisdom of a divine lawgiver, is profoundly alien to the early Chinese conception of spontaneity, which excludes the notion of positive law as an externally constraining force. Since the term no longer refers to a particular agent but to a quality or aspect of purposeless and agentless process present in all existents, it is here often translated as “the Heavenly” rather than the substantive “Heaven.” But the English “Heavenly” should not be taken in its loose colloquial sense as an exclamation of praise meaning something like “simply marvelous!” Similarly, the English term “Heaven” should be stripped of any implications of a pearly-gated place of reward to which people go when they die.

WUWEI 無為. Non-doing. Often translated into English as “nonaction,” “effortless action,” “non-striving,” “non-contending,” “non-purposive action,” and the like. The term first appears in *Analects* 15:5, where Confucius uses it to describe the effortless ritual efficacy of the sage-ruler Shun; the Daoist use can be seen as expanding upon that sense of effortlessness to the point of stripping it of its ritual substratum, taking the literal implication of the term more seriously. *Wei*, which is what *wuwei* negates, can mean “to do,” “to be,” “to become,” “to make,” “to endeavor,” “to deem or regard [something] as [having some particular identity],” and “for [the purpose of],” and all these senses should be kept in mind when considering this term. What is denied here is not motion or action per se, but the doing of deeds in the sense of consciously taking action “for” (*wei*) some specific purpose, deliberate and intentional teleological action, such that one would deem oneself and other things as having, or make oneself and others have, specific definite identities relative to that purpose.

XIN 心. Heart, Mind, Heart-mind, Heartmind, Heart and Mind. The term is famously inclusive of both cognitive and affective aspects of human experience, as well as the physical organ of the heart. Thus the connotations of the English “heart” are sometimes too gung-ho and sentimental, and the connotations of “mind” are sometimes too cerebral and abstract. Instead of the neologism “heart-mind” to address this problem, I prefer to use “heart,” “mind,” or “heart and mind,” depending on the relevant aspect stressed in each context.

XING 性. Inborn Nature, Inborn Propensity, Human Nature, Innate Nature of a Thing. This term does not appear anywhere in the Inner Chapters (1–7) or in the *Daodejing*. It is very common in the rest of the *Zhuangzi* (Chapters 8–33) and in the vast majority of other Warring States texts dating from the time of Mencius (who made it central to his presentation of Confucianism) and thereafter, and indeed remains a topic of intense speculation and controversy in most Chinese philosophical speculation up to and including modern times.

YI 義. For usage in the stock pair *renyi*, see *supra*. When used alone, Right Conduct, Righteousness, Rightness, Doing Right, Justice, Duty, Decency, Responsibility, Role-appropriate Response, Appropriate Conduct, Conscientiousness, as required by conduct. See detailed explanation in the entry on *renyi*.

YINSHI 因是. Going by the Rightness of the Present “This.” A special term found repeated several times in Chapter 2 (pp. 14, 15, 16, 17) but rarely anywhere else, it sums up the “Wild Card” way of handling the perspectival nature of value judgments (see “Zhuangzi as Philosopher” at <https://www.hackettpublishing.com/zhuangziphil> for a full account). *Yin* normally means simply “to follow,” or “to go along with,” but, as A. C. Graham has shown, it was also part of the technical vocabulary of the logicians of Zhuangzi’s day, used to mean “to take as a criterion for a judgment, to go by.” (See *Shi / fei*.)

ZHENG 正. True, Right, Real, Correct, Straight, Aligned, Untilting, Unskewed. Normally translated simply as “true” or “correct,” sometimes as “real” in the sense of “a true specimen of a given type,” the term has special importance in Chapters 1 and 2 of *Zhuangzi*, where it is sometimes the object of interrogation but sometimes used in a positive sense. In the latter case, given the critique of normativity there, the term is translated in accord with its more basic etymological meaning of “straight, aligned.” Hence “true to” in the key line in Chapter 1, “to chariot upon what is true both to Heaven and to earth,” the term is translated as “true” but this is to be understood in the sense of “aligned with” (as a rifleman’s aim may be said to be “true”) rather than in the epistemological or moral sense. This means fitting in, well-aligned, not only with Heaven but also with earth, sky-fitting in the sky as well as soil-fitting in the soil, right for the depths of the sea as Kun and then right for the heights of the heavens as Peng.

ZHI 知. The Understanding, Conscious Knowing, Conscious Understanding, the Understanding Consciousness, the Mind Bent on Knowledge, Consciousness, Intelligence, the Intellect, Wisdom, Cleverness, Discernment, Knowledge, Know-how, Understanding, Comprehension. This is a crucial term in the *Zhuangzi*. The character can be pronounced in two ways, one being cognate with 智, usually translated as “wisdom.” It denotes not a store of information but rather a *skill* in making “correct” distinctions concerning the character, behavior, and value of things encountered and the successful know-how issuing from this recognition. Mencius, Zhuang Zhou’s contemporary, defines it as the fullest development of the innate capacity to distinguish *shi* from *fei*, the key terms in the *Zhuangzi*’s second chapter, meaning both the ability to approve and disapprove (and thereby to distinguish “right” from “wrong”) and also the faculty of judgment that identifies what *is* or *is not* a certain thing or a member of a certain class. Sometimes the *Zhuangzi* uses this positively charged term ironically, critiquing wisdom or “cleverness” in this sense. In its other pronunciation, the word means the faculty of cognition in general: what recognizes and understands on the basis of its knowledge, regards things as one way or another, and has opinions, views, and plans about things—the thinking mind. But the term also means *consciousness* in the sense of sentience or awareness as such. A few decades after Zhuang Zhou’s death, the Confucian philosopher Xunzi will say, for example: “Fire and water have vital energy but not life; plants have life but no consciousness (*zhi*); animals have consciousness but no sense of responsibility related to division into roles and duties (*yi*). Human beings have vital energy, life, consciousness, and also a sense of responsibility and duty to specific roles.” The same word was used in this period in posing the question about whether the ghosts of the dead had consciousness or not. So the term should in all cases denote consciousness and its thinking, conceived as intrinsically a skill in making judgments and discerning objects by dividing down from a larger whole, and the capacity for successful action derived therefrom. The whole, undivided, would be impossible to discern; one could not be conscious of it. *Zhi* is the capacity to make “correct” divisions and select particular parts from a larger whole. “The understanding” or “the intellect”

considered as a faculty of judgment, the capacity of the mind to identify and categorize things, is useful as a blanket translation for many of these senses. “Discernment,” “wisdom,” or “intelligence” is used as a translation when the sense of a skill in making correct distinctions is stressed. “Cleverness” is used when the sense of practical skill, or even cunning, is at the forefront. “Understanding,” “conscious knowing,” or simply “knowing” are used when the context implies a stress on the explicit holding of views about what is so and what is right. “The understanding consciousness” or simply “consciousness” is used when this process of knowing is viewed more substantively as the awareness that apprehends objects of experience about which judgments might be made.

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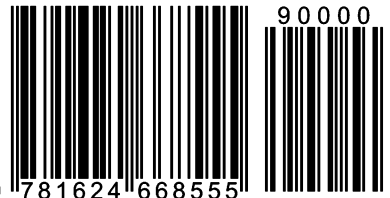
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