

Wittgenstein, Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu: The Art of Circumlocution

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Where Western philosophy ends, with the limits of language, marks the beginning of Eastern philosophy. The Tao de jing of Laozi begins with the limitations of language and then proceeds from that as a starting point. On the other hand, the limitation of language marks the end of Wittgenstein's cogitations. In contrast to Wittgenstein, who thought that one should remain silent about that which cannot be put into words, the message of the Zhuangzi is that one can speak about that which cannot be put into words but the speech will be strange and indirect. Through the focus on the monstrous character, No-Lips in the Zhuangzi, this paper argues that a key message of the Zhuangzi is that the art of transcending language in the Zhuangzi is through the use of crippled speech. The metaphor of crippled speech, speech which is actually unheard, illustrates that philosophical truths cannot be put into words but can be indirectly signified through the art of stretching language beyond its normal contours. This allows Eastern philosophy, through the philosophy of the Zhuangzi to transcend the limits of language.

The ending of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is well known. *Wovon man kann nicht sprechen, darauf er muss schweigen*. That of which man cannot speak, of that he should be silent. This marks the end of 20th century Western philosophy. Western philosophy can only go as far as the limits of language, not beyond. How circumscribed is contemporary Western philosophy. Where Western philosophy ends marks the beginning of Eastern philosophy. The famous sentence that begins the *Tao de ching* is, 'The Tao that can be spoken about, that is not the enduring Tao'. The difference is that Lao Tzu spends the rest of the *Tao de ching* speaking about it. Where Western philosophy ends, that is where Eastern philosophy commences.

Both Eastern and Western philosophy agree that language places limits on our thinking. They differ in that Western philosophy thinks that these limits mark out

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what we can say and what we cannot say. Eastern philosophy claims, seemingly paradoxically, that even though there are limits, we can and indeed, we must, transgress those limits. For all that is most worthwhile lies beyond the limits of language.

What lies beyond? For Russell it was mysticism. Why was it when we contemplated the stars we were filled with a sense of awe? That they were so far away? That the universe was so vast? No, it was because we, as human beings were aware of the vastness and the unknown. There was so much that remains unknown and there is a cosmos out there of which we are a part. That kinship with the wider universe that lies beyond our grasp is what fills us with the sense of awe.

If philosophy does not give us a taste of that which lies beyond our grasp, it fails to satisfy our deepest cravings. What I want to do in this little paper is to show that we can and must know beyond the limits of language.¹ Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu are contributors from Chinese philosophy that both discuss the transcendence of the limits of language and offer illustrations in their philosophy of doing just that.

Let us start with some simple examples. We know we cannot capture the present moment with the word, 'now'. The 'now' is always changing. This is the message of Lao Tzu. Even if we say that we mean the changing now, that, too, is not the same.

Yet, and this is the point that is sometimes forgotten, when we say 'now', we can understand what is meant even though the 'now' cannot be denoted by language. This message differs from Hegel's. For Hegel, language is limited. We can never say what we mean and we cannot mean what we say. In contrast, in Chinese philosophy, we can understand beyond language. Language has its limits and yet we can understand beyond those limits.

When we say that $1 + 1 = 2$, a seemingly simple truth though Russell and Whitehead did not get to this truth until half way through the second volume of *Principia Mathematica*, we know the truth of this relationship even though it is not limited to the particular set of symbols that we have used. It is not limited by language. Indeed, all that I have said thus far, though it is all written in language, speaks of that which cannot be circumscribed by the language into which it is put. This being the case, the question is, how is it possible that we can understand that which transcends the limits of language? To put the question even more forcefully, how is it possible that we *must* transcend the limits of language?

The only answer that makes sense is that our understanding must take place non-linguistically. Wittgenstein knew this and Lao Tzu knew this. When Wittgenstein said that we must not speak about that which we cannot speak, he was *already* speaking about that which we cannot speak. When he said that we must be silent, all of us understand what he meant. To know that we must be silent about that which we cannot speak means that we understand why we must be silent about that which we cannot speak. To understand why we must be silent about that which we cannot speak means that we possess an understanding about that which we cannot put into words.

Words symbolize a relationship that is closer to us than we think. Each word is a sensible thing and a meaning combined, but this very relationship is mysterious. It is

impossible. The very existence of language proves that the sensible is intelligible and what is sensible is intelligible. 'Now' stands for that which is beyond 'now' and what is beyond 'now' can be understood by the symbol 'now'.

In what is some of the greatest philosophy ever written, Chuang-Tzu writes that philosophy can be conducted in a dream. This is not Descartes. For Descartes and Bertrand Russell, we may be dreaming now, but that is an end to their story. For Chuang-Tzu, we can carry out the work of philosophy in a dream. We can also wake up afterwards and discover that we were dreaming, but I want to stop half-way for I think it is at the half-way mark that Chuang-Tzu is so interesting.

Chuang-Tzu says, 'When Confucius says that you are dreaming, he is dreaming too'.² Chuang-Tzu suggests that philosophy can be conducted in a dreaming state. Whether he means real dreams or metaphorical dreams here, or both, does not matter. What he is saying is that in either case, philosophy can take place even when its boundaries are unknown. Indeed, philosophy *must* take place when its boundaries are unknown because we do not know the boundaries of philosophy.

We do not know what we can know during a dream and this proves that we must have knowledge beyond the dream to know that we cannot know the meaning of what takes place in a dream or even if we are dreaming. If we know that we cannot know if we are dreaming, then we possess knowledge beyond the dream. How can we know that we cannot know something?

For Descartes, we stop here. G-d the rescuer comes in. He would not leave us in such a state. Chuang-Tzu has greater courage. He proceeds to philosophize inside the dream. What does this mean that the entire philosophy of Chuang-Tzu takes place inside a dream? Even that he wakes up can take place inside a dream. There may be an ultimate awakening but that has not happened yet, he says. He is not philosophizing from the standpoint of an ultimate awakening. He is philosophizing all the while inside the dream. What philosopher has had such boldness? Inside the dream, Wittgenstein would say, we can say nothing, but Chuang-Tzu has a great deal to say.

Chuang-Tzu uses language freely even though he possesses no idea of where the limits of language begin and where they end. That our knowledge transcends language is also true of what we know inside the dream. That we might be dreaming now does not affect the truth of what we know now. If later we wake up to find that we were dreaming, that is later.

It is also inside the dream that we can contemplate that one day there will be an awakening that is outside the dream. Inside the dream, inside language, we can contemplate what it means to know outside of language. We do not know what it means to know outside of language, but we have the idea that we can know outside of language. Where does the idea come from that we can know outside of language? Even during the dream, we must be able to know that we are dreaming. We are never completely inside the dream and we are never completely inside of language. The language of the dream is a good analogy because we are aware that we can be dreaming even in the dream.

We are not trapped by the limits of language. All that we need to know is that we can know beyond language. Once we know *that*, we can use language to talk about that which transcends language. We are always knowing that which goes beyond language. It is an everyday event. Why should we be so chary of using language to transcend itself when we do it all the time? Every time we use the word 'now', we transcend language for language cannot refer itself. Language is non self-referential. The word 'now' is general. It has no means of referral to the present. The word 'present' is general as well. The fact that we can apply it properly proves that we can and indeed must transcend the limitations of language.

This is the greatness of the message of Chuang-Tzu. He frees us to do philosophy inside the dream. We are all always transcending language all of the time. Whether what we think is ultimately real or not, we must transcend the limits of language to discuss whether what we think is ultimately real or not. It is all rather like the wondrous discovery of Monsieur Jourdain in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* that all of his life he had been speaking prose.

Let us switch back to Lao Tzu for a moment. Lao Tzu tells us that whatever we say about the Tao is not about the Tao. The Tao, he tells us, is nameless, but 'nameless' is also a name. So, it is not really nameless. However, whatever it is; it is not captured by the name by which we call it. Its name is only its calling card. Whenever we use its calling card, however, we can understand it. What we understand always goes beyond its calling card.

We understand directly that of which we cannot speak. We cannot put this direct understanding into words. Indeed, when we do, we lose this direct understanding. Whenever we philosophize, we perforce must be in a dream. Philosophy always surrounds its objects with the miasma of language. But inside the dream, inside the miasma of language, we know that we are dreaming. We know beyond the language that we use.

What is the value of using language to speak about that which we cannot put into language? The value of using language to talk about the wordless is that we must be reminded that we can know that which lies beyond language. If we do not use language to indicate that there is a sphere beyond language, we run the risk of forgetting that we possess access to that sphere.

In the case of Plato, we can experience truth directly. We once had access to the Ideas face to face without the intervening medium of language. Now, we are aware that images are the lowest form of knowledge. We must ascend, step by step, until we once more can behold that which lies beyond the threshold of language.

Is this mysticism? It is if we recognize that every word we use is mystical language. *Every time we say 'now' we mean what we say but we cannot say what we mean. Or to put this another way, we can say what we mean, but we cannot say this in words.* This is the meaning of being able to philosophize within the dream. Indeed, we cannot help but philosophize within the dream. The dream is, if you like, the net of language. We are always inside language's net, but we always see outside of language's net.

‘Words, words, words’, Hamlet says, but all that we have are words. Chuang-Tzu says, ‘where can I meet a man who has forgotten language so that I can have a good conversation with him?’³ We must learn to use our words to discuss what is truly valuable, which lies beyond the words that we use.

The meaning of words spills beyond the cup of language. Using words in the right way, the use of goblet words in the language of Chuang-Tzu, is another of Chuang-Tzu’s great contributions to philosophy.⁴ Unlike the Ch’an or Zen masters of Buddhism, Chuang-Tzu does not only use language to bring us to a state of inner enlightenment. *Chuang-Tzu uses language to teach us how to philosophize beyond language.* That is why Chuang-Tzu is the Plato of Chinese philosophy.

In Plato’s *Seventh Letter* he explains for the first and only time in his own words that knowledge is something that transcends the descriptions of language, of images, of definitions, of names, and even of the thing itself, the Form. It is only in Plato’s letters that we get what Plato says for himself. In this letter, this mature piece of writing that dates from the time that Plato wrote his *Theatetus*, one of his latest and most mature works, Plato reveals that he himself is breaking away from his theory of Forms. The ultimate quest of knowledge is not of the Forms, but of that which transcends the Forms, for to speak of *Forms* is to speak of that which is linguistically bound. Knowledge for Plato is that which cannot be captured even in Forms, for the Form language was only an attempt to explain how knowledge is possible even inside the trap of language. It is only in the descriptions of love in the *Symposium* and of the dialectic in the *Republic* that Plato rises to the heights that he reaches in his *Seventh Letter*. When Plato speaks of going from Idea to Idea to Idea in that marvelous passage in *Republic VI*, he does not mean Ideas in their linguistic representations. He uses the *language* of Forms or Ideas but he does not mean linguistic forms. Plato uses language to transcend language. Plato is the Chuang-Tzu of Western philosophy.

Knowledge bursts forth for Plato *despite* language. It comes forth in the midst of language. In Plato’s ladder, one is raised higher and higher through the rungs of language. In the end, what everyone complains about the most is that the Form is the most abstract and contains nothing of what is found in the empirical world. What Plato means is that it is not the most abstract but that it is the most concrete. It is only when you strip away all of the abstractions of language that it is possible to experience that which cannot be put into words, but it is not only the experience that Plato is about. For, like Chuang-Tzu and unlike Socrates, Plato loves to write, and like Chuang-Tzu, what he likes to write about the most is that which cannot be put into words.

Apart from Chuang-Tzu, Plato is the only writer who holds that one cannot ever be sure if one is not dreaming. For Plato, that is a final position. Descartes, despite his own arguments of *Meditations I* and *II*, falls prey to the argument from coherence in *Meditation VI* as does Russell in the 20th century. Despite this awareness of Plato’s, he continues to philosophize. For Plato knows that philosophy is not limited by a dream. Plato and Chuang-Tzu alone have the courage to philosophize inside a dream.

Philosophy has suffered since. Ever since the time of Plato and Chuang-Tzu, philosophy has taken a reductionistic turn. Hobbled by language, philosophy has sought to reduce the mysterious to what can be put into words. Because nothing of significance can be put into words, philosophy has become a barren art.

Let us continue this brief sortie with an image from Chuang-Tzu, the image of the man with No-lips. This is a stunning image that transcends the imagery of Plato, the imagery of midwives, cobblers, stone masons and blacksmiths. It transcends the imagery of Nietzsche, the imagery of fools, of tightrope walkers, of madmen and Zarathustra himself. For all of these, Plato and Nietzsche combined, are cardboard cutouts when compared with the richness and meaning of the No-lips character of Chuang-Tzu. There are others as well, the characters of the cripple, the one-legged, the club-foot and the ugly man but I want to dwell on No-lips.⁵ What makes No-lips great is that he can talk, but only a lisp or rasping noises could come forth from the mouth of someone without lips. The language of No-lips would be a language but a language that was indecipherable. What is the meaning of an indecipherable language? We do not know what No-lips is saying because while he speaks, his words are not translated, by Chuang-Tzu, into ordinary language. This is a trick you might say, because we do not really have the language of No-lips, but the entire point is that we do and we only have the language of No-lips. We think that language is clear in its meaning and that we can demarcate what we mean through its enunciation, but the reality is that nothing can be known through language and that language therefore cannot signify at all. Language is, in the end, meaningless babble. It is the series of noises that would be made if we were to speak without lips. It is, as in the great speech of Macbeth, 'A tale told by an Idiot, full of sound and fury and signifying nothing'.

How is it that language cannot signify? All the while we have been talking and surely there has been some intelligible message that has been transmitted. Is not all that we have said up until now a proof that language is a vehicle for the transmission of meaning?

However, all that has been said unto now has not been communicated through language. We have all along been listening to the cripple with no lips and we did not know it. There has been intelligible speech, so we think, but this intelligible speech has really been nothing but dream language. It has not signified, but signification has taken place. The signification that has taken place has taken place not through the language of No-lips but through the fact that the speech of No-lips is garbled.

Garbled speech, dream-speech is our real language. It does not speak what we think it to speak, but it speaks beyond itself. If we can keep in mind that all of our locutions are made without lips, we will be able to understand far and wide. All of that which we are able to understand takes place beyond the medium of language. How does language function? This is indeed a mystery, but the problem is, we tend to forget the mystery. We tend to forget that anything mysterious is taking place at all. By thinking that language is *intelligible*, we forget that language is limited. We think that language communicates. What we think language communicates, it does not

communicate. What we think language means, it does not and cannot mean. What we think that language cannot mean is all that it can mean.

All of this must sound somewhat paradoxical and dizzying because we are stretching language beyond what are taken to be its normal limits though in fact we are putting language to its proper, indeed its only use. In this sense, Lao Tzu and Chuang-Tzu were the only philosophers to abide by the strict use of language. Chuang-Tzu emerges as the more versatile philosopher because Lao Tzu, in the end, would prefer to lead us to proper ways of living whereas Chuang-Tzu not only admires the way of the butcher who cuts between the joints, he also admires the speech of the man with no lips.

Think of the butcher who cuts between the joints because this is a marvelous dual image. On the one hand, every reader of Chuang-Tzu knows this story as signifying that one should act naturally and not cut against the grain. It is a perfect story for this reason for it shows that the admirable person is not someone who literally does nothing, but whose action takes place where there is no resistance. On the other hand, there is another level of meaning to this story as well. Chuang-Tzu, an image user who is not confined to the comparatively refined images of cobblers and clowns, does not mind using the gory image of a butcher. Of course, one can translate this as Cook Ting instead of Butcher Ting, but it comes to the same thing. The cook in Chinese cooking must also cut the meat in a proper way. So, whether it is a cook or a butcher about whom we are speaking, it makes no relevant difference.

The point of the butchery or cookery is that Ting's knife goes between the joints and at the same time never becomes dull. Not to mince words, not to speak of meat, the knife goes where there is no bone. This gives the lie to most Chinese cooks today, but for Butcher Ting, where he cut, there was nothing hard.

Butcher Ting's language, the cleaver with which he made distinctions, cut where there were no distinctions to make. Butcher Ting used language to make distinctions where there was only emptiness. One did not need to make distinctions there. One could, as Wittgenstein, put up the knife, but Butcher Ting or Philosopher Ting, wielded his cleaver in the thin air where language no longer dwelled. The distinctions that he made were non-linguistic. He used language, his cleaver, to be sure, but that which he cut with his cleaver had no parts.

We are using language to make distinctions where no distinctions are to be made. In this sense, as Wittgenstein, we leave everything as it is. We hide the world in the world, but not quite. We now understand that understanding takes place between the words. What we understand has no distinctions. Language makes distinctions where none are to be made. That which we understand has no dual nature, but when we put it into language, we have made subject and object of it. Its reality is not subject and object; but our mode of description is subject and object. We do not understand anything with subject-object language, but it is the only language that we know. What is reality is not divided up into subject and object, but we are forced to use the subject-object language to describe it.

When we experience that which is dear to the heart of all philosophers, the experience of knowledge, of understanding, the love of which is the entire *motus* of all

philosophy, it is a whole that we experience. Or, to put it in the language of Chuang-Tzu in what is one of the most memorable and accurate phrases in all philosophy Eastern or Western, 'the Tao is that which is the absence of all contrariety'.⁶ For the knowledge experience itself is that in which there is no subject and no object. In the simplest possible example, in our sense of touch of a cold stone, where does our hand end and the stone begin?

All language is subject-object language. This is where we need Butcher Ting's cleaver. For his language cuts where there is no subject and no object. His language is precisely the language of the Tao where there is an absence of contraeity. He cuts where there is an absence.

We do know what it is to experience a cold stone and in that experience we know neither hand nor stone. Or, to put it another way, we know not the distinction between hand and stone. The experience is what we have. Later we can describe it as hand touching stone, but the moment of knowledge of awareness is one in which there is neither hand nor stone. It is here that Butcher Ting cuts. He cuts between hand and stone.

What of his knife? His knife, Chuang-Tzu reports, never gets dull. How can it get dull when it meets with no resistance? The language of philosophy never dulls when it speaks about that which cannot be spoken about. The language of philosophy is most sharp when its distinctions that it makes are not real. The language of philosophy is most sharp when it philosophizes in the dream.

There is no part that Butcher Ting cuts and it is there that he does his cutting. For Butcher Ting makes distinctions where there are none. In his making of those distinctions, he teaches us that the distinctions that he makes possess no distinction in reality. He cuts where there is an opening. *He cuts so that we can see the opening.*

Chuang-Tzu loves to talk about the Butcher Ting. So we can use language, the most ordinary language, the language that is beneath us, the language of the Butcher, to talk about that which lies beyond us, the truths of philosophy. What better proof can he offer us that language is to be used to describe that which cannot be described than to use a master Butcher who makes no cuts? We ordinary butchers, we cut and cut and our knives grow dull. For all of our time we cut where we should not cut. We use language to describe the describable.

Where does all of this lead? What of all the wheelwrights, cripples, men with no lips, butchers and dreamers? In the end as with Socrates, we know nothing. That is, we know that our ordinary knowledge comes to nothing. We know that what we ordinarily think of as knowledge is not knowledge, but we know something else as well. In our knowledge that we do not know, we realize that we do know. Our knowledge that we do not know *is* a knowledge. It is a knowledge that cannot be put into words. Even the word 'knowledge' is after all, a word. When we know that we do not know, that knowledge is a knowledge of the Tao. It is a knowledge that does not belong to us for there is no 'us' to whom it may belong and there is no 'it' for it to be. When we know that we do not know, that is knowledge nonetheless. Indeed, it may be the only knowledge that we have, but it is still knowledge for all that. *That* understanding, *that* knowledge, cannot be put into words, but that does not

take away its existence. It is where there are no distinctions. Its cut is where there is nothing to cut.

All knowledge is that way. The most ordinary knowledge as well as the most esoteric does not exist within the confines of language. Language speaks of what it cannot know and what is known cannot be spoken. The limits of language are transgressed all of the time. We must be reminded of this. That is why we need the dreamers, the butchers, the cripples and the men of no-lips of Chuang-Tzu. Let us listen to garbled speech forever, for it is truly the only speech that we ever hear.

It is important to return again and again to the man with no-lips. For this man combines the cripple, the hunch back and adds the no lips. It is a triune image, but it is the no lips that is the most significant image. For no lips signifies that it is only through garbled speech that we can communicate. No lips signifies that it is not an issue of language or no language. It is an issue of garbled language. Chuang-Tzu could have used the image of no tongue in which case we would have a mute. He chose a man with no lips and no lips did not remain silent. No-lips is reported as having 'talked to Duke Ling'.⁷ We are given no idea of what he said. Thus, it is not the content of what he said that is important. *It is that he spoke that is important.* For Chuang-Tzu, even more explicitly than Lao-Tzu, that of which we cannot speak, we must speak. Lao-Tzu simply does this. After telling us that of the Tao we cannot be told, he proceeds to tell us about it in 84 different ways. Chuang-Tzu goes further. Of whatever it is that is beyond descriptive language, that is, language that can be clearly understood, we must practice garbled speech. We are not told what this speech is about. What was the content of No-lips' speech? Could it have been the paradoxical lines, 'But when men do not forget what can be forgotten, but forget what cannot be forgotten—that may be called true forgetting'.⁸ It is not unlikely that it is No-lips who spoke this both from the standpoint of proximity of the lines that he had just spoken with Duke Ling and from the standpoint of the fact that what is said is surely garbled. What do men forget which cannot be forgotten? They forget, in the context of No-lips, that what is to be learned is that which cannot be captured in language. This is forgotten all the time. (It cannot really be forgotten as we have recalled it post-linguistically, but this post-linguistic remembrance is true forgetting for its forgetting is within language and its remembrance cognition is beyond language.) When they remember what should be forgotten, when they remember (wrongly) that what they know can be specified in language, they are not forgetting what actually could be forgotten.

This is a book, after all, that is written for philosophers. It is not a popular book written for laymen. It is a vexing, multi-leveled book that can be appreciated only by *literati*. It is a cure for the dull scholar. It is an attempt to wake up the pedant. The pedant is the scholar who is always writing. He is the one who is most apt to make the mistake of thinking that he can capture his subject in words. The scholar/pedant is the one most likely to forget that the Tao cannot be captured in words. The Tao as the Hunchback Woman later says, cannot be learned. This is what is most easily forgotten. What is it then that men do not forget that they should forget? Men do not forget that Tao cannot be talked about and so they become silent.

They should forget that the Tao cannot be talked about. They should talk about it. This is paradox, but it is resolved because the way in which the Tao should be talked about is in the crippled speech of No-lips. It is Chuang-Tzu who is the goose that cackles. It is the silent goose who is killed, but the speech of a goose is not intelligible. It is the speech of a man who has no lips, but this man and this goose both speak!

Chuang-Tzu babbles and cackles and his babbles are baubles and his cackles are gems. He is the philosopher who speaks in a dream. He not only dreams but he does philosophy in a dream. Chuang-Tzu even more than Lao Tzu is interested in discussing the dream. He is philosopher as much as he is sage.

When he gives us the illustration of the man with no lips he is telling us that what the man with no lips teaches is the art of teaching for all of his figures are teachers. What nolips teaches is the art of teaching how to teach without language. For this art we need the speech of crippled lips and this is the speech of the *Chuang-Tzu*. The *Chuang-Tzu* is the text of crippled speech and the entire purport of crippled speech is to tell us how to talk about that which cannot be described. The *Chuang-Tzu* tries to teach us how to talk about that which cannot be said. It gives us the art of crippled speech. The art of crippled speech is not to make ideas more clear; the art of crippled speech is to show us *how to understand metaphor and analogy*. Ordinary philosophical speech aims at being exact. Crippled speech aims at showing us likenesses.

I will end by making a suggestion regarding the order of the monsters. When one notes the order of the monstrous interlocutors, one notices that first we have the unnamed Commander of the army with one foot; next, we have the deformed cripple, Shu; next we have the madman of Chu, Chieh Yu; next we have Wang Tai who has had his foot cut off; next we have Shen-tu chia, who has lost a foot; next we have another man who has had one foot cut off, who also has no toes, Shu-shan No-Toes; next we have the ugly man of Wei, Ai Tai To; next we have Clubfoot–Hunchback–No-lips; next we have Jug–Jar–Big-Goiter, next we have the unnamed Hunchback Woman; last we have Master Yu who has been transformed into a hunchback.

What I derive from the order of the monsters is this. The first, the Commander, is the easiest to accept. Our minds become accustomed to the idea of monstrosity as an honorific feature. This allows us to accept the hunchback and the escalation to the madman. Then, as in music, there is a decrescendo. We have three men in a row with one foot. We are getting used all over again to the idea of cripples. The third in line also turns into a scherzo because he also has no toes. It is an interesting diversion. Monstrosity can show up in all sorts of shapes and sizes. We are fully accustomed now to the monstrous. We have been treated to special cases of it. There is a diversion to a Simple Ugly. This appears to be a step backwards, but it is only the lull before the storm. We are taken off guard. We are used to more horrific examples. We can easily take the ugly in stride. It is a perfect propadeutic to the most amazing and most important illustration of them all, the man with no lips. After we have been thoroughly warmed up and prepared with a host of cripples, and our guard let down

with the Simple Ugly, we are hit in the face with the most amazing case of all; for it is a lip cripple who speaks, but he speaks, as he must, in distorted speech. One of his famous lines—which we attribute to him—is a line that is deformed. Its deformity: paradoxicality, crippled speech. Its deformity is its irrationality. His speech cannot be easily divined: it must be interpreted. It is not his body only but his very speech that is distorted. It is the illustration that language itself is inherently flawed. Language itself, devoid of lips, has no clear boundaries. Language is not only limited; it is boundary-less. It is not only incapable of exact precision; it is not to be forced into too confined a space. Language is not only not capable of limits; *it is that no limits can be placed on language*. This is the most important philosophical idea of the whole *Chuang-Tzu*, or, if you like, the most unique philosophical idea of the *Chuang-Tzu*. For while it is already in Lao Tzu that we have the notion that nothing important can be captured in language; in *Chuang-Tzu* what is developed is that we must put language to a higher use: we must use language to go beyond the limits of language and to discuss this transgression. We must learn to use language in a higher sense, and it is in the teaching of this higher sense of language that the *Chuang-Tzu* is so rich in its teaching.

This is why No-lips is the climax of the message of the Inner Chapters. For this is its unique teaching: the dual nature of forgetfulness. After No-lips there is a denouement. There is Jug-Jar-Big Goiter. He is pure comic relief. No Lips carried the message that we must speak and we must speak in a distorted fashion. After this we have an obvious physical deformity. It is a relief to the mind. It is easy to take in Jug-Jar-Big-Goiter. He is like the drunken Alcibiades entering after Socrates' speech. We shudder but in relief. No-lips was the apogee of the message. No-lips fits perfectly after the Simple Ugly. His timing is perfect. Then we have Jug-Jar-Big-Goiter in case we have taken No-lips too seriously. After this, after our comic relief, we are again in an unguarded moment. Now we are given the main message again, only in a simpler form. We learn that what we must learn cannot be learned. It is a reminder. If we have not been able to grasp the high point of the message of No-lips, we will be able to learn from the Hunchback Woman who is also a more palatable image. From Jug-Jar-Big-Goiter we can readily accept Hunchback Woman with a youthful face. We are greedy for her message. We accept it wholeheartedly. That is all. There is only one monster to come. It is a coda. It is back to the beginning again. Not to the Military Commander for that would be too simple, but back to the first genuine monster, the contorted hunchback. An image that by now is acceptable. It is only to finish. We cannot finish on the note of the Hunchback Woman. That would be too preachy. We might think that it is her message that is the message. We must cancel her delicacy with a graphic image. We must finish with a crashing sound that blots out the libretto. It is with the same hunchback with which we started our gallery of monsters that we end and thus the ending is not an ending at all. The unspoken message is to start all over again until we see the method in the madness. The message is to repeat. The message is that the message is to be found in the structure. The message is that the message is to be found in the medium. The message is that we must find how language communicates that which is not said by looking to language

forms that do not seem to be communicating. The language that does not seem to communicate is the language that is communicating. It is No-lips who communicates. His message is not heard, but it is spoken. No-lips who cannot speak clearly, speaks the language that is to be understood. Can you understand the language that is unclear? It is spoken in a garbled form, but we receive no prose paraphrase of the message unless we want to take the paradoxical saying about forgetfulness to be the message of No-lips.

If you do not speak at all, there is no chance that you can understand distorted speech. If you aim for clarity, you also cannot understand distorted speech. In *Chuang-Tzu* there is much distorted speech. It is the speech of No-lips that is the most important speech of all.

What he said is not reported, but it is reported that he did speak. What is important, then, is not the content of his utterance since that is not reported. *That he spoke and that he had to speak in a garbled fashion*, that is what is there for us to interpret. If he represents the climactic point of the monster gallery, then the meaning of No-lips is the climactic meaning of the *Chuang-Tzu*. Great indeed is the meaning of No-lips. No-lips teaches us the art of teaching no-teaching. No-lips teaches us what the Hunchback Woman cannot. The lesson of the Hunchback Woman, the lesson of Butcher Ting are lessons for the spiritual aspirant. The lessons of No-lips are lessons for the philosopher. The garbled message of No-lips is the message that must be interpreted. This is the work that is left for the philosopher. The unheard message of No-lips is the message that must be invented. This is the work that is left for the sage.

Notes

- [1] For an extended discussion of knowledge that transcends language, cf. Allinson (2001, 2002).
- [2] See Watson (1968), p. 48.
- [3] Adapted from Watson's translation, *ibid.*, p. 302.
- [4] *Ibid.*, p. 303 (*chih-yen*)
- [5] *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- [6] This inspired translation is that of Wing-tsit Chan.
- [7] Cf. Allinson (1996) for an extended discussion of No-lips.
- [8] Watson (1968), p. 75. It could also have been the speech of Pitcher Sized Big Goiter, but this impediment might also have created a garbled speech.

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