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HOW TO SAY WHAT CANNOT BE SAID: METAPHOR IN THE *ZHUANGZI*

ABSTRACT

I argue that it is only on the condition of a preconceptual understanding that Zhuangzi's metaphors can be cognitive. Kim-chong Chong holds that the choice between metaphors as noncognitive and cognitive is a choice between Allinson and Davidson. Chong's view of metaphors possessing multivalence is reducible to Davidson's choice, because there is no built-in parameter between multivalence and limitless valence. If Zhuangzi's metaphors were multivalent, the text would be subject to infinite interpretive viewpoints and the logical consequence of relativism. It is only if metaphors are cognitive that the text of the *Zhuangzi* can convey the message of transcendent freedom.

I. THE CHOICE: ALLINSON OR DAVIDSON

The choice of whether or not metaphors can be cognitive, is between the present author's view of metaphor and the view of Donald Davidson, according to Kim-chong Chong who states that, "...there are at least two different views [concerning whether there is a cognitive content of metaphor that is lost in paraphrase]... One view is that there is special cognitive content that is lost in the attempt at paraphrase. Another is that apart from its literal meaning there is no such special content to a metaphor. Robert Allinson, in his book *Chuang-Tzu for Spiritual Transformation*, holds the first view, while Donald Davidson ... holds the second, opposite view."¹

Chong's own view is difficult to discern. A clue that Chong gives to his own view is his praise of Lakoff and Johnson in which according to him, they endorse a view of metaphor as a preconceptual, deeply

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embodied structure of thought—a view which in this sense accords with that of the present author.² However, in Chong's conclusion he sides with the Davidsonian idea that, "the 'emptying' devices of the mirror and the goblet seem to parallel the idea that metaphors are empty of cognitive content."³

Chong refers to "Donald Davidson's view of metaphor as having no cognitive content beyond its literal meaning ..."⁴ In Chong's exposition of Davidson he states that "... metaphor—since it can intimate any number of things—has no cognitive content."⁵ Differentiating himself from Davidson: "However, metaphors need not be as limitless in scope as Davidson alleges. Thus, we could acknowledge that they could have a certain structure, ruling out certain interpretations."⁶

Chong does not want to totally agree with Davidson or else—as he states—he could not disagree with the present author.⁷ For the most part, Chong does seem to depart from Davidson, but the cost of his disagreement, as he says, is not to be able to disagree with the present author.⁸ If he would simply agree with the present author, Chong could depart from Davidson's view with grace.

Chong presents a view of Zhuangzi that metaphors are multivalent, a view that purposes that there is cognitive content, but that the content is indeterminate. This view possesses two key weaknesses. First, if there were content to be cognized, an explanation of how the cognitive content of metaphors is cognized is not provided. Second, an indeterminate content cannot be cognized.

Chong asserts that "...the non-propositional nature of Zhuangzi's argument lies in semantic paradoxes, infinite regresses, irony, wordplay, and fables (e.g., the butterfly dream, the monkeys, the trees, and the goose that cannot cackle) and so on, without his being forced (logically) to assert to or to adhere to anything."⁹

Chong's assertion does not explain how Zhuangzi's nonpropositional argument is cognizable. The point is not whether Zhuangzi needs to explicitly assert anything. The point is that such paradoxes and fables only work if there is such a thing as a pre-conceptual metaphorical understanding to comprehend them. They work by engaging the preconceptual understanding.

Chong's argument is weak because of its lack of understanding that a nonpropositional (nonconceptually explicit) argument requires a consonant nonpropositional (nonconceptually explicit) mode of understanding in order to understand it. Fables, wordplay, irony, geese, and butterflies are wonderful species of metaphor that cry out for a theory of metaphor. They cannot be understood simply by repeating that they are examples of irony, fables, and wordplay. This is the problem, not the solution.

II. ARE SPATIAL METAPHORS ABSENT IN CHINESE?

Why does Chong disagree with the present author? His objection to the present author is that "... there is a certain structure of metaphorical argument in the *Zhuangzi* that would rule out Allinson's reading ... Allinson is influenced by a certain metaphorical model that belongs to a tradition of thought that could be described as both Greek and Judeo-Christian: this is the doctrine of perfection and of salvation from a lower to a higher transcendental state ... that is not the metaphorical milieu that sustains Zhuangzi, for whom there is no transcendental state ..."¹⁰ And again, Chong states that the present author: "is mistaken in his interpretation of Zhuangzi."¹¹ [which is] "... a result of some nonpropositional metaphorical structure in Allinson's own thought that maps values in spatially embodied items of 'higher' and 'lower.'"¹²

Salvation forms no part of the Greek and the Jewish tradition and for all intents and purposes neither does perfection. The Greek gods are notoriously imperfect and the Jewish Deity allows Abraham to best him in moral negotiation. Salvation plays a role only within Christianity. The present author's use of terms such as "higher" and "lower" were a result of reading Zhuangzi, especially in his opening lines when he both literally and metaphorically presents transformation in terms of a *lower* creature, a fish, transforming itself into a *higher* creature, a bird. Fish exist in a space *below* birds. Birds exist in a space *above* fish. A fish transforms itself from a creature that exists in a lower space to a creature that exists in a higher space. The framework is Zhuangzi's own. It is not imposed by the present author from a foreign milieu. There is no circumventing the fact that the sky is above the ocean. Zhuangzi did not begin his book by accident with the story of such a transformation. If the basis of Chong's disagreement with the present author is his mistaken view that the present author has imposed a Western idea of *ab extra* transcendentalism onto the text, then it would now seem that there is no basis for a disagreement with the present author.

As for there being no transcendental states in Zhuangzi, Chong himself supplies some of the numerous examples from the *Zhuangzi*: Ziqi informing his disciple that he has lost his soul, of his asking his disciple if he has heard the pipes of heaven. Chong also refers to the spirits of those that cross when asleep.¹³

In order to transcend, one must go beyond or go above (spatial language). When referring to the transcendental, it is difficult to use language that avoids the use of elevation or height. The question is, why should we hobble ourselves by disallowing the metaphors of lower and higher, the very metaphors signified by the transformation of the bird

peng, which begins the *Zhuangzi* transformed from a fish, a lower creature, to a higher creature, which can fly, rising from the earth's surface to begin its great journey. In this context it is useful to recall that *peng* does not change back into a fish again: the transformation effected is one-way, from lower to higher. It is not endless: it is unidirectional and permanent. A one-way transformation to transcendent freedom is, therefore, the meaning of this metaphor.

What is important to remember is that the transcendental in *Zhuangzi* is not *ab extra*. There is no salvation that is effected from above. The transcendental—the present author prefers the term “transformation” which is other-worldly neutral—is effected by self-growth. The multiple stories of the interactions between sages and aspirants reflect that it is a matter of right understanding and not being saved from above that is the key to attaining unity with the Dao. It is in this sense that one transforms oneself. It is the conflation of the transcendental with being saved from above that perhaps forms the basis of Chong's disagreement.

Chong's objection is removed by realizing that a change from lower to higher is not a Western import and that therefore the present author's interpretation may be retained. Chong himself uses spatial metaphors repeatedly in his essay. As early as his third sentence he speaks of his own ability to conceive of a “central metaphorical structure.” Centrality is, needless to say, a spatial metaphor. Spatial metaphor is not alien to Chinese thought as the name of the country literally translates as, the central country. When Chong uses the idea of a “central metaphorical structure,” he does not mean it literally since the metaphorical structure is not found in the middle of the text of the *Zhuangzi*. By “central,” he implies the pivotal, main, or most important metaphor, for example, as opposed to a peripheral, minor or least important metaphor. Chong himself relies upon a spatial metaphor for his value structuring of the *Zhuangzi*. The only issue between the spatial metaphorizing of the present author and Chong is that the present author uses “higher” as a preferential spatial term as opposed to “central.” It would seem that both the present author and Chong are relying upon spatial metaphors. The difference is that some spatial metaphors, for Chong, though not for *Zhuangzi*, are more privileged than other spatial metaphors.

Multiple passages in Chong's text explicitly make use of the term “central” in an honorific sense.¹⁴ Notably, near the end of his essay, in his penultimate sentence, Chong writes, “... (what I see as) a central structural argument in the *Zhuangzi*” The difference between the choice of the terms “higher” and “central” would appear moot since both require space for their higher or more central valuations. The important point is that whether one chooses “higher and lower” or

“central and peripheral,” one is committed to spatial metaphor and to valuation.

Zhuangzi makes many implicit evaluations in terms of greater and smaller (spatial metaphors):

Great understanding is broad and unhurried; little understanding is cramped and busy. Great words are clear and limpid; little words are shrill and quarrelsome [the shrill voices remind us of the doubting voices of the cicada and the dove when they gossip about the flight of Peng].¹⁵

Great understanding is described with honorific adjectives; small mindedness is described with pejorative adjectives. It is clear that a value preference is expressed for great or superior understanding as over against narrow-mindedness or petty mindedness. Most important of all is the reference to not only great understanding but to a *great* awakening: “...someday there will be great awakening when we know that this is all a great dream.”¹⁶

If great understanding and great awakening were considered to be on the same plane as narrow-minded thinking, why would one use the term “great” in the first place? Why not refer to this as a small awakening?

III. DOES MULTIVALENCE IMPLY RELATIVISM?

What of Chong’s concept of multivalent meaning? One problem with this interpretation is that one can find many value judgments in the *Zhuangzi* that clearly take the position that one position is correct and its opposite incorrect. This is single valence, not multiple valence. The concept of multivalence does not include a built-in value hierarchy, but suggests that all values exist on the same axiological plane.

There are references to the “true man of old” (rather than the false man of old) in chapter six of the inner chapters.¹⁷ The references to the true man reflect a preference for the true over the false. The references are to the True man of ancient times not to the True man of contemporary times, thus reflecting a preference for the old over the new. If Zhuangzi had no value hierarchies, why speak of a “true man of old”? It is clear that he valued these men of ancient times over hypocrites.

The concept of the beautiful as more valued than the ugly also appears in the authentic chapter two:

We can’t expect a blind man to appreciate beautiful patterns or deaf man to listen to bells and drums. And blindness and deafness are not confined to the body alone—the understanding has them too ...¹⁸

The above passage makes two points. First, there is beauty to be appreciated. Second, blindness and deafness are not limited to

physical blindness and physical deafness. A blind understanding would be an understanding that could not distinguish truth from falsity. Here, incidentally, deformities are treated as impediments demonstrating that one must always watch the context when Zhuangzi is employing his illustrations of what is beautiful and what is ugly. In other contexts, deformities signal special insight.

Uglies and cripples abound in his text, as the present author analyzes in his monster gallery.¹⁹ But, these characters serve different purposes. Their beauty is imprisoned inside just as the stunning image of the pheasant in the cage—the image of beauty imprisoned—an image which formed a deep impression on no less of a judge than Bertrand Russell who extols it in his autobiography. Can this brilliant image, a precursor of the butterfly image, stand for multivalence?

Imprisonment of beauty is clearly implied to be inferior to freedom. And, freedom from a cage, that is, liberation, is surely another image betokening the project of freedom and self-transformation that are the key themes of the *Zhuangzi*. One becomes free by breaking out of the cage of concepts. Once again, Zhuangzi does not choose to put a cricket in the cage; he chooses a pheasant. It is beauty that breaks out, not ugliness. There are clear, preferential value choices in Zhuangzi's choice of metaphorical images. It is a butterfly dreaming, not a bat. If values were multivalent, he could have chosen a bat or a mole.

What if Zhuangzi's point were that nonhierarchical thinking was the type of thinking that ensued from a higher understanding? If nonhierarchically valued thinking were equivalent in value to a higher understanding, then we would have a relativistic Zhuangzi, one who values everything, Hitler and Gandhi, alike. Even Chong's own project, (defined as self-transformation in the present author's interpretation as the fish transforms itself into the bird and the chrysalis into the butterfly or as obtaining/not obtaining clarity/multivalence in Chong's view), would then be equivalent to anyone else's project.

Why speak at all? Zhuangzi does speak and is renowned as a poet. He uses skilled literary conceits rather than clumsy ones. He clearly values the true man of old. From this textual evidence, we know that he would not make Hitler and Gandhi moral equivalents. But, one whose values were multivalent would have no choice, but to value Hitler and Gandhi the same. One whose values were multivalent could not express a value preference for the true man of old.

Zhuangzi does not use handsome men and beautiful women to present what he considers to be the right ideas (that would be the way of Hollywood), but the point is that he *prefers* certain ideas over others. He also favored the image of the butterfly over the use of a horsefly (Socrates' self-image). The essential point is that certain views are held as superior to other views. *peng*, the great bird who has risen

from the fish, is greater than the petty-minded dove and cicada who mock his efforts.

We need to pay careful attention to the context of the passages that Chong analyzes. While it is true that fish do not see Lady Li as beautiful, men do. This does not mean that ugliness and beauty are equivalent in value. It means that fish and men value beauty, but they differ in what objects they regard to be beautiful. Neither values ugliness over beauty nor sees them as equivalent. In more modern terms, one may say that different cultures may prize different signs of beauty: Japanese males: the nape of the neck of a female; American males: the curve of a female hip. In order that different cultures find different images to be images of beauty, there has to be an idea of beauty that is different—and more desirable—than ugliness.

Chong points to the passages where *dao* is in ants, piss, and shit to prove that the butterfly analogy has no suggestion of transcendental awakening. However, the “*dao* is in ants, piss and shit passage” appears in a later, inauthentic chapter. If a chapter is inauthentic, unless it can be clearly shown to be consistent with the message of the authentic, inner chapters, arguments taken from it cannot be said to represent the genuine view of Zhuangzi. In the quotation that Chong cites from chapter twenty-two, the passage begins with “Zhuangzi said...”²⁰ It is not likely that an author will attribute a point to himself in the third person as if he were a different person who had already spoken in the past. This is only one of the reasons why this chapter is considered to be inauthentic.

The issue of authentic and inauthentic chapters is too often neglected. In one of the present author’s many conversations with the late, celebrated Chinese scholar and translator, D. C. Lau, a colleague with him for many years at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Professor Lau agreed strongly with the present author that chapter seventeen, Autumn Floods, was not genuine, based both on its content and on its style. Since this chapter is a fulcrum for relativistic interpretations of the *Zhuangzi*, one can understand how important it is to classify chapters into authentic and inauthentic chapters. If a quotation from a chapter other than from one of the inner chapters contradicts the message of the inner chapters, this is a basis for determining its inauthenticity.

Chong has asserted that the present author’s interpretation of the authentic Zhuangzi is mistaken. But, there is only *one* piece of evidence brought forward to show this.²¹ This evidence is this clearly inauthentic passage cited above.

Chong argues that Zhuangzi does not prize the “higher” or “upper” end of the following dichotomies: ugly/beautiful, inferior/superior, lowly/high, old/new, crawling/flying, less/more developed, etc. The

dichotomies Chong draws are not parallel. For example, old/new is a dichotomy in which Zhuangzi values the old whereas in inferior/superior he values the superior. The context of the use of these dichotomies is critical to one's understanding of Zhuangzi's use of them.

In the last sentence of his last endnote of his article, Chong himself seems to perceive the real Zhuangzi: [the fact that he has stopped sobbing does not] "necessarily indicate that he had managed to stop grieving."²² Zhuangzi, for Chong, still grieves despite his "performance avowals" of nongrief. There is value hierarchy here. Multivalence is not a genuine possibility when one's wife dies.

Chong also cites another author—who argues for a non-Cartesian interpretation of the butterfly story—to support his point of view that the butterfly dream does not signify a state of doubt (In the view of the present author it signifies a state of transitional doubt which is overcome).²³ Chong states that, "Nor does it [the butterfly story] connote a state of doubt?"²⁴ Chong marshals this unexamined argument of another author against the view of the present author. But, the implications of the argument of the other (non-Cartesian) author constitute a *reductio ad absurdum* of the argument of that author. According to Chong, the author of this non-Cartesian interpretation "states that following his interpretation, the point about dreaming and waking is best made as a parallel between life and death."²⁵ "Therefore, it is wrong to worry about death, since it is perfectly certain and without any doubt that it is impossible to prove one of these two realms to be more "authentic" than the other."²⁶

If this is the implication of this interpretation of Zhuangzi that Chong takes as a refutation of the present author, then this does not accord with Zhuangzi's profound existential soliloquy:

Once a man receives this fixed, bodily form, he holds on to it, waiting for the end. ... he runs his course like a galloping steed and nothing can stop him. Is he not pathetic? ... His body decays, his mind follows it—can you deny this is a great sorrow?²⁷

This moving passage occurs in the significant chapter *Qiwulun*. While this chapter is the most influential of all chapters for the interpretation of Zhuangzi, and the most widely cited chapter in the *Zhuangzi*, it is surprising that this memorable passage is overlooked. Perhaps, it is not so surprising since taking it into account would radically alter the commonplace view of Zhuangzi as an untroubled skeptic or relativist for whom all events and all values amount to the same thing.

If one should not concern oneself with death, why would Zhuangzi write the memorable passage above? Either the interpretation that death is nothing to worry about is clearly incorrect or Zhuangzi is

writing the above passage tongue in cheek. This decision is best left to the reader to make up her or his mind. Zhuangzi frequently is a humorist. However, this does not strike one as a humorous passage.

The interpretation that death is of no concern to us is also inconsistent with Zhuangzi's initial mourning of his wife's death. If this is the implication of the non-Cartesian interpretation of the butterfly dream story, then so much the worse for this interpretation. Doubt is back in play. Contemplation about mortality is one of the major sources of philosophizing. If there were no contemplation of the implications of mortality there would be much less philosophy and much less poetry.

Chong cannot have it both ways. If he does desire to subscribe to a theory of metaphorical significance, he can sever his allegiance to Davidson and share a common viewpoint with the present author. If so, he must also provide some arguments why the metaphors he points to possess the significance he attributes to them and what makes them cognizable.

Chong's writing does reveal that he does think that metaphors possess cognitive significance. He states that the butterfly dream, the monkeys and the goose that cannot cackle all "hint at certain things."²⁸ To say that these metaphors hint is to say that the metaphors contain meaning, because one cannot hint unless one has a meaning with which and to which one is alluding. By using the term "hint," Chong is admitting that there is a cognitive state that is both known beforehand and is being pointed to with the cognitive expectation that it can be cognitively grasped. Indeed, the word "hint" is itself a form of metaphor. For, it itself cannot be understood literally. Chong does employ cognitive metaphor. He only needs a well-grounded theory of metaphor.

The metaphor that Chong uses to attempt to explain his interpretive view (the empty goblet) must have cognitive content or else it would not function as an explanation. What is crucial to understand is that the empty goblet does not suggest that metaphors are empty (the Davidsonian view). The metaphor here is that emptiness is cognitive (the Allinsonian view)! *Emptiness stands for the capacity to cognize when one is empty of discursive concepts. The emptiness metaphor stands for preconceptual cognition.*

Chong's rendition of the metaphorical speech of Zhuangzi is not convincing. He refers to monkeys and speechless geese as hinting at clarity. On the contrary, a monkey causes us to laugh. A silent goose makes us ponder. Neither example clarifies. It is not clear to the present author why these metaphors referred to particularly point at clarity. They would seem to point at confusion rather than clarity. A monkey's antics point at chaos. A silent goose leaves us puzzled. If

Chong is to make a case for a metaphor possessing a particular meaning, he needs to show a connection between the metaphor and that to which it points. His examples do not support his conclusions.

IV. DOES METAPHOR REQUIRE PRECONCEPTUAL COGNITION?

Chong seemingly does want to share with the present author (whose term “preconceptual” he actually favors rather than Johnson and Lakoff’s use of such terms as “cognitive unconscious,” “unconscious conceptual systems,” “the hidden hand of the unconscious mind”), the notion of a preconceptual body of thought. Chong states, “... Allinson ... is mistaken in his interpretation of Zhuangzi ... But, ironically, this mistake may illustrate the view that metaphor operates at the preconceptual level.”²⁹ For Chong, it is the present author’s arguments, apparently, that have illustrated for him the preconceptual operation of metaphor. What remains for Chong is to incorporate the present author’s explanation of the condition for the possibility of preconceptual cognition.

It seems that Chong has accepted, as against Davidson, the preconceptual level which would place him on the same footing as the present author. However, consider his statement in a later discussion of metaphor: “But there is no need to bring in the use of unconscious metaphorical schemas here ...”³⁰ On the one hand, Chong is wedded to the idea of the preconscious; on the other hand, he wants to confine his analysis to a “conscious sense of the “nonpropositional,”³¹ where it seems that he confuses the conscious application of a metaphor by an author with the mode in which the metaphor functions cognitively (preconceptually) for the reader.

Perhaps, part of the problem is Chong’s misinterpretation of the present author’s arguments for the existence of the preconscious understanding. Chong accuses the present author of an argument which commits the fallacy of denying the antecedent. He argues that if we cannot paraphrase a poem this implies that there was no meaning to be paraphrased. It does not imply that there was a meaning which we could not paraphrase.

The argument of the present author is that there is a meaning that cannot be rendered into a prose paraphrase without losing cognitive significance. If one examines the passage Chong quotes in his article, one can see that this is not a fallacy of denying the antecedent. Consider the sentence, “If, however, we cannot translate a metaphor into a literal prose paraphrase without a residue that cannot be conceptually understood, and *we still understand something by that metaphor*, then we can say that a metaphor is intelligible on a preconceptual

level.”³² It is not because a metaphor cannot be translated into prose paraphrase that it contains meaning (that *would* be denying the antecedent), but rather that something is understood, even after the attempt is made to translate it, that implies that there was meaning there to be understood.

If we consider Shakespeare’s famous metaphor of “Life’s ... a tale told by an idiot,” something is understood even after it is obvious that the attempt to reduce it to a literal prose paraphrase fails—there exists no idiot telling us a tale—so this can only be understood metaphorically—there is no fallacy here at all. *It does not follow from the fact that the metaphor could not be fully paraphrased that it had meaning. It follows from the fact that the meaning that was present in the metaphorical understanding is lost after the paraphrase.*

If there were an assumption here, it would be that there exists meaning to be lost. This would be the fallacy of begging the question, or assuming what one is attempting to prove. But, there is no *petitio principii* here. The argument is based on *the fact*, not the assumption that one understands something by Shakespeare’s line, “Life’s ... a tale told by an idiot” despite the fact that its meaning is lost in a literal paraphrase. The argument is based on the fact of cognitive understanding *simpliciter*.

Even Shakespeare’s metaphors cannot be multivalent. The problem is, if in the end, what we are left with is multivalence, how can we have, in Chong’s terms, any *central* argument? Centrality implies value preference just as much if not more so than height. If Chong can use a value hierarchy, then so can the present author. The difference is that Chong uses a value hierarchy, and at the same time argues that there is no value hierarchy (he claims that *higher* and *lower* are the same for Zhuangzi). This interpretation, unfortunately, leaves Zhuangzi in the position of being a relativist.

The real difference between Chong and the present author is not the present author’s use of “higher and lower,” but the present author’s understanding of Zhuangzi as having a value hierarchy whereas Chong would see Zhuangzi as advocating multivalence. The problem with the multivalent interpretation is that it leads to a relativism of values.

V. DOES CHONG’S INTERPRETATION IMPLY ZHUANGZI IS A RELATIVIST?

In the second paragraph of Chong’s article, he states that, “Zhuangzi uses the metaphors of the heart-mind as a mirror and “goblet words” to “empty” the heart-mind of any distinctions. The paradoxical nature

of these words teaches one to be open to multivalence.”³³ Zhuangzi, for Chong, is not “forced to admit the propositional espousal of any value.” Zhuangzi shows his value preferences through metaphors, not through propositions.

Chong attempts to extricate himself from this dilemma in a footnote by referring to Lisa Raphals’ distinction between skeptical recommendations and methods and skeptical doctrine, and he states that “While the latter is self-refuting, the former is not ...”³⁴ But, Greek skeptics such as Sextus were open to the possibility of being shown the truth. If Chong considers Zhuangzi a skeptic of this kind (the former kind), then Zhuangzi would be open to the possibility of being shown the truth. (If the latter kind, then Zhuangzi would clearly be self-refuting.)

If we leave Chong’s footnotes and turn to the main text of his essay, we discover that this is not at all what Chong has been saying in his essay. He attempts to avoid classifying Zhuangzi as a skeptic: “... I shall reserve judgment on whether Zhuangzi was a skeptic in any sense.”³⁵ But, one cannot reserve judgment on a point that is pivotal for the credibility of his entire interpretation of Zhuangzi.

In any event, Chong’s statements in the body of his essay supply ample testimony that he perceives Zhuangzi as a skeptic in the sense that, for Chong, he is not tied to any values. If Chong does not prefer the term “skeptic,” then his interpretation of Zhuangzi makes Zhuangzi into a mere relativist. If all values are possibly multivalent, then all values are inherently relativistic.

Despite the logical implications of his position, in a footnote, Chong denies that he views Zhuangzi as a relativist as well: “My view is that Zhuangzi is not a relativist, at least in the sense that he does not propositionally state any thesis of relativism.”³⁶ This statement is not relevant to whether or not Zhuangzi is a relativist. The issue is not whether Zhuangzi overtly claims to be a relativist. The issue is whether Chong’s interpretation logically implies that Zhuangzi is a relativist. If Zhuangzi, according to Chong, is committed to multivalence, then, according to the present author, that is attributing relativism to him under a veil.

“Multivalence” is simply a metaphor (in this case ironically borrowed from science) to stand for multiple values. An author need not explicitly espouse relativism in a proposition to be a relativist. The issue is whether under the framework of a certain interpretation (in this case Chong’s) the text of an author (in this case Zhuangzi’s) implies that no values are more important than other values. “Being open to multivalence” is not the same as Greek skepticism (which is open to proof of truth), but it is the same as relativism (the equivalence of all values).

VI. CAN MULTIVALENCE BE EQUIVALENT TO CLARITY?

Multivalence, implying multiple values, cannot be construed as clarity. However, Chong states, "... the goal being to maintain the clarity of the heart-mind."³⁷ Chong does come closer to the present author's view when he states, "The aim of Zhuangzi's discussion in the 'Qiwulun' is to clear the heart-mind of any 'impurities', namely, the storage of distinctions. ... The project, in other words, is ... 'stilling the heart-mind'.³⁸ This is not different, from the present author's view, which Chong describes as silencing the analytic faculty of the reader's mind.³⁹ Chong states with the present author that the project is to still the mind, but does not provide the present author's techniques to accomplish this.

Chong's view of Zhuangzi is that "there is no transcendental state but a state of 'clarity.'"⁴⁰ Furthermore, this is not logical clarity, but the clarity of the heart-mind ... and an ontological vision of the oneness of all things.⁴¹ How difficult it is to comprehend how an "ontological vision of the oneness of all things" does not require a transcendental understanding.

The first of the two ways Chong deems that the metaphorical structures he attributes to Zhuangzi operate is the reference to the heart-mind as a mirror which reflects, but does not store. This is an insufficient clue since a mirror only reflects external views. To leave Zhuangzi with only a mirror (no transformed self, for example) would leave Zhuangzi reflecting back all other views with equal value and thus leave Zhuangzi open to the charge of relativism.

In his discussion of what he terms the second of Zhuangzi's ways (in which Zhuangzi's words function as metaphorical structures), Chong suggests that Zhuangzi's strategy is "...to take a particular distinction (good/bad, right/wrong, this/that) ... and through an outpouring of paradoxes and infinite regresses, 'empty' the heart-mind of the distinction." But *how* does the 'outpouring of paradoxes and infinite regresses' empty the heart-mind? This is the problem, not the solution. It is exactly here that Chong's exposition is weak. How Zhuangzi's strategies effect his goal is left unexplained and thus Chong has provided inadequate support for his interpretation of Zhuangzi.

Chong's explication of one of Zhuangzi's infinite regresses in which Chong concludes that Zhuangzi has succeeded in producing a liar's paradox is a beginning of an explanation of how metaphor functions.⁴² However, this is only the beginning of the story. From a liar's paradox, we not only do not know which view to uphold; we return to square one. There is no connection here to achieving clarity. Chong provides no hint here at how this passage of Zhuangzi—or others—lead to some form of clarity.

Chong's discussion of clarity is a dark exposition which equates clarity with use. Use and clarity would seem to have no *prima facie* connection.⁴³ Of his discussion of the link between clarity and use, Chong states that, "The implication of this link between "clarity" and "use" (the placement of the double quotation marks are perhaps an ironic reminder that the normal understanding of 'clarity' and 'use' are not to be relied upon - without offering a different understanding for the reader's use) is that we should not be restricted to any specific view. Instead, we should be receptive to the possibility of multivalence. Chong goes even further: "... we should not be stuck on any specific view. Instead, we should be open to the possibility of multivalence. This [multivalence] applies to the conception of *ming* itself, which I have all along translated as 'clarity'."⁴⁴

The implication of the universal application of the idea of multivalence—even extending to the idea of clarity—is staggering. One must carefully attend to what is the meaning of the term "multivalence." While Chong offers no actual definition of this term, it would seem to the present author that it is a term standing for multiple values, even multiple meanings. The problem with the unrestricted and unqualified application of "multiple" is that multiple can include opposite. Encouraged to take multiple viewpoints, I can happily aver Hitler's Holocaust to be good and his victims to be evil. Why not? This would appear to be the unfortunate implication of Chong's interpretation of Zhuangzi. A multivalent view is not the same as having no view at all. Of course, if one wishes to include 'no view' as one of the multiple views, then one is no better off. One remains neutral to the evil of the Holocaust and the fate of its victims. Nevertheless, such a view is implied by the elevation of the concept of multivalence to clarity and use, since openness to multivalence for Chong is the implication of the link between clarity and use.

The meaning of multiple meaning can logically be stretched to include infinite meaning. For, there is no built-in limitation to the concept of multiple. An unqualified multiple meaning can be infinite in its multiplicity and hence meaningless. If a concept can mean anything at all, how can it mean anything in particular? If a concept can mean everything, then it possesses no determinate meaning. As Hegel argued, being in general is nothing in particular.

Chong himself seems to recognize this when, in his discussion of Davidson, he states that, "However, metaphors need not be as limitless in scope as Davidson alleges. Thus, we could acknowledge that they have a certain structure, ruling out certain interpretations."⁴⁵ This shows Chong's inclination to move away from Davidson. Chong needs to make good on this promise. The problem: he offers no account how metaphors can be limited. His endorsement of the idea

of *multivalence*—what appears for him to be leading idea of the *Zhuangzi*—would appear to suggest there is no limitation to the interpretive value positions that one may embrace.

Perhaps, Chong should have, in accordance with his own strictures on Davidson, opted for limited valence. However, he does not and despite his numerous demurrals, seems, by logical implication, to place Zhuangzi firmly inside the relativist camp. Occasionally, he does seem to opt for limited valence—implied by his choice of one interpretation as being more “appropriate”—on the grounds of what, one might ask?—than another, as is seen in his assertion his interpretation is more appropriate than that of the present author. However, these instances are inconsistent with his overall emphasis on multivalence.

Chong’s discussion of both the two ways in which he considers Zhuangzi’s words to possess metaphorical structures, is that “... his words have a certain metaphorical structure that enables him to resist being pinned down to any position.”⁴⁶ This reading of Zhuangzi is surely an interpretation that makes Zhuangzi into a relativist. The function of the metaphorical structure Chong sees in Zhuangzi has the purpose of relativizing all views: he is pinned down to none. Nevertheless, Chong does wish to state that certain views are better than others. The entire issue is whether, on Chong’s interpretation of Zhuangzi, one can assert the claim one view is better than another. Chong states that “...we shall deny the possible objection that any interpretation of metaphors in the *Zhuangzi* is as good as any other. Instead we can still say that one interpretation is more appropriate than another”⁴⁷ But, how is this possible under the doctrine of multivalence? Chong would like to join the present author in the view that Zhuangzi is not a relativist. However, his multivalent interpretation of Zhuangzi does not allow this.

VII. CLARITY REMOVED

It is difficult to pinpoint the precise viewpoint Chong is espousing. After committing himself to an interpretation that so strongly emphasizes that Zhuangzi is attempting to achieve clarity, rid the mind of distinctions and still the mind, Chong states that, “... Zhuangzi is not committed to espousing “clarity” *above* all other values”⁴⁸ (emphasis added). Notice here how even Chong, who apparently is not influenced by the Greek and the Judeo-Christian worldview uses “above” as a term to stand for preferred valuation. What is good for the goose is not good for the gander.

Even the stated goal of clarity is thrown out of the window. Chong seems to think this is justified on the grounds that “Zhuangzi ...

consciously steers clear of the espousal of any value.”⁴⁹ And, “... we should also be careful about espousing, and being attached to, ‘clarity.’”⁵⁰ If we need not be attached to clarity, it follows that it is likely that we would become confused. Under the doctrine of multivalence, we could just as easily be attached to confusion. If confusion is an acceptable state of mind, it is difficult to understand on what justifiable basis we can criticize other points of view.

On the one hand, Chong states Zhuangzi can “hint at certain things (e.g., “clarity”), but at the same time without his being forced (logically) to assert to or adhere to anything.”⁵¹ “Clarity” apparently has a definite meaning according to Chong—it can be hinted at—and yet, on the other hand, at the same time, there is not much point to the hinting, since one should not be tied to it as any goal.

While Chong seemingly commits himself to the view that the concept of clarity is clear enough to offer hints as to how to reach it, in the end, he repositions the goalposts such that one’s goal is to “stop” clarity rather than to reach it. In Chong’s suggestion that *yi ming* means “stopping” clarity, it would seem that under this interpretation, Zhuangzi is not committed to preferring or valuing one thing and is not committed to espousing “clarity above all other values.”⁵²

Furthermore, it is not at all clear why Chong writes that a *jumble* of words, (“semantic paradoxes, infinite regresses, irony, wordplay ...”) “enable Zhuangzi to hint at ... clarity.” If anything, these devices would appear, on the role given to them by Chong, to hint at confusion. Indeed, in a footnote, Chong says that, “Zhuangzi’s words do seem—deliberately—to have this jumbled nature.”⁵³ Why should jumbled words lead to clarity? It is this omission of an explanation that leaves Chong’s account of Zhuangzi’s method inadequately supported.

VIII. SUMMARY OF CHONG’S POSITION

Two essential problems exist with Chong attributing meaning to metaphors. First, the question is, how is it possible that metaphors possess cognitive significance? How do we obtain cognitive meaning from a metaphor? This is the question; it is not the answer. In contrast, the present author has attempted to explain this with the reference to a preconceptual faculty cognitive capacity.⁵⁴ Second, on Chong’s interpretation of the metaphorical structure of the Zhuangzi, metaphors function so as, in the end, to provide multivalence, that is, no specific meaning. If metaphors do not possess a specific meaning, how can they possess cognitive significance? How can Chong rule out certain interpretations when a metaphor, on this account, has no specific, interpretive content? On what possible grounds can Chong prefer one

interpretation to another? But, if he cannot, he is firmly back in Davidson's camp. And, if metaphors have no specific meaning, but rather are doors that open to multivalence, how is this significantly different from Davidson's position? If the meaning that metaphors have is multivalent, then how can metaphors be said to possess cognitive significance? If I grasp a metaphor to simultaneously mean Hitler, Gandhi, the theory of everything and popcorn, what sort of meaning have I grasped?

Perhaps, as referenced to above, part of the problem stems from the fact that Chong seems to focus on what Zhuangzi espouses, and deduces from discovering a lack of espousal that Zhuangzi has no standpoint. However, from Zhuangzi's lack of espousal, nothing particularly follows. That Zhuangzi does not espouse anything only means that he is not a didactic teacher. Plato and Confucius did not wish to state what the good was. It did not follow, however, that they were unattached to goodness. The entire focus on didactic espousal misconstrues the core issue.

IX. CONCLUSION

If one returns to the fish-bird transformation that marks the beginning of the *Zhuangzi*, one remembers that the bird that soars from lower to higher never turns back into a fish again. The transformation, once achieved, is complete forever. The flight of *peng* is a metaphor for the spiritual transformation of the reader. The spiritual transformation is effected by accessing the reader's preconceptual mind through cognitive metaphors. They free the mind from its cage of concepts and illuminate its path to transcendence. The higher view obtained frees one from fixations including the relativistic fixation or the multivalent fixation.⁵⁵ The higher view, as explained in *Chuang-Tzu for Spiritual Transformation*, does not call itself higher, and thus is freed from evaluative language while embodying ethically preferential transformative values.⁵⁶

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ENDNOTES

Acknowledgment of Copyrights and Credentials:

1. Kim-chong Chong, "Zhuangzi and the Nature of Metaphor," *Philosophy East & West* 56, no. 3 (2006): 370.
2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 381.
4. Ibid., 370.
5. Ibid., 373.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 381.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 370.
10. Ibid., 381.
11. Ibid., 372.
12. Ibid., 370.
13. Ibid., 374.
14. Ibid., 380, 383, 384, et passim.
15. Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 37.
16. Ibid., 47.
17. Ibid., 77-79.
18. Ibid., 33.
19. Cf. Robert Elliott Allinson, *Chuang-Tzu for Spiritual Transformation* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989).
20. Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 239-40.
21. Chong does say that there is another argument (not evidentiary) that could be used, that is, “that Zhuangzi does not value any of the ‘higher’ states [thus implying that higher states do exist for Zhuangzi] because he would see no stability to any of these positions” (Chong, “Zhuangzi and the Nature of Metaphor,” 380), but he does not choose to use this argument—it could be used but he does not aver that he is using it. It is possible that he is alluding to the endless transformation interpretation of Zhuangzi’s butterfly dream, an interpretation against which systematic arguments have been adduced in *Chuang-Tzu for Spiritual Transformation* that this inevitably leads to relativism. In any case, not valuing higher states would also not bring stability so that it is not at all clear what logical connection a lack of stability has to any interpretation since it would seemingly apply to all interpretations. Ironically, given Chong’s endorsement of the never-ending possibility of multivalence, it would seem that he would value nonstability. But, on account of Chong’s assertion that valuing higher states does not provide stability, he considers that Zhuangzi would not accept it. Is he here pitting Zhuangzi (who in this instance is said to value stability) against his own interpretation of Zhuangzi (the essence of which is instability, i.e., the constant parade of exchanging different valences)?
22. Ibid., 391.
23. Ibid., 380-81.
24. Ibid., 380.
25. Ibid., 380-81.
26. Ibid., 381.
27. Watson, 38.
28. Ibid., 382.
29. Ibid., 370.
30. Ibid., 382.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 372 (emphasis added).
33. Ibid., 370.
34. Ibid., 387.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., 385.
37. Ibid., 375.
38. Ibid., 375-76.
39. Ibid., 371.

40. Sometimes Chong encloses “clarity” with single quotation marks as above and sometimes with the double quotation marks that indicate that it is not quite “clarity” that is the subject of his discussion. This alteration of usage suggests that it is not clear what Chong means by clarity. For example, following his quotation from another author who argues that “it is impossible to prove one of the two realms [dream or waking] to be more ‘authentic’ than the other,” he states that, “This it should be noted, is compatible with Zhuangzi’s project of clarity.” How not being able to distinguish between dreams and waking life is compatible with a project of clarity, the present author leaves up to the reader to determine. If confusion between knowing what is illusion and what is reality is clarity, then clarity is confusion.
41. Chong, “Zhuangzi and the Nature of Metaphor,” 381.
42. Op. cit., 376–77.
43. Op. cit., 377–78.
44. Ibid., 378.
45. Ibid., 373.
46. Ibid., 375.
47. Ibid., 379.
48. Ibid., 378. Is this a Platonic slip?
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., 379.
51. Ibid., 382.
52. Ibid., 378.
53. Ibid., 388.
54. Ibid., 372.
55. For arguments showing the fallacy of attributing the interpretation of multivalence to Zhuangzi, cf., Robert Elliott Allinson, “On Chuang Tzu as a Deconstructionist with a Difference,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 30, no. 3–4 (2003): 487–500.
56. Cf., Robert Elliott Allinson, “Having Your Cake and Eating It, Too: Evaluation and Trans-Evaluation in Chuang Tzu and Nietzsche.” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 13, no. 4 (1986): 429–43.