

CHAPTER FOUR

A DAOIST CRITIQUE OF SEARLE ON MIND AND ACTION

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1. *Introduction*

In this paper, I argue that the Daoist formulation of the relationship between *wu-wei* and ‘naturalness’, as found in the *Dao-De-Jing*, offers a holistic, world-engaged model of bodily intentionality that challenges John Searle’s mentalistic theory of intentionality. More precisely, I contend that Searle’s overly-cognitivist model of intentionality—and particularly his claim that all intentionality invokes representational mentality—lacks the ability to account for the predominantly noncognitive (but nonetheless directed or intentional) bodily activities that constitute the bulk of our embodied life and situated action. Moreover, I argue that the Daoist formulation of *wu-wei*, or ‘effortless action’, in fact *can* explicate this noncognitive bodily dimension and thus is superior in this regard to Searle’s account. Next, I consider how Searle might respond to this charge. I then conclude by developing the ethical significance of *wu-wei*. I suggest that Searle’s insightful analysis of mind and action might be enriched by following Daoism’s lead on this point.

2. *Searle on Intentionality and Action*

I begin with Searle’s account of intentionality and action. Searle’s discussion of these matters is rich, and I can only provide a summary of the features of his analysis most salient to our present discussion. To begin with some definitions: Searle defines intentionality fairly conventionally as

that property of many mental states and events by which they are directed at or about or of objects and states of affairs in the world...I follow

a long philosophical tradition in calling this feature of directedness or aboutness “Intentionality”...¹

Intentionality is thus the intrinsic directedness of mental states. Importantly, intentionality is a mental feature. However, not all mental states are intentional, according to Searle. Both moods (such as a general anxiety or elation) and pains are not intentional, in that they are not strictly speaking, directed at or about or of objects and states affairs in the world. But they are nonetheless mental states. Again, intentionality as Searle construes it is a mental feature. Moreover, intentionality *must* be a mental feature, Searle claims. This is because intentionality is a *logical* feature of mentality. Only mental states can take objects intentionally. They do so precisely by intending a particular intentional content (objects or states of affairs in the world) via different psychological modes (believing, desiring, remembering, etc.).

To continue: Searle furthermore claims that all *action* is intentional. That is, all action must be caused and sustained by a form of intentionality that he terms “intention-in-action”. Searle believes that there is an important distinction between “intentions-in-action” and “prior intentions.” Once states, this distinction is fairly easy to grasp. Searle writes that “An action... is any composite event or state that contains the occurrence of an intention in action”² He continues: “Actions... necessarily contain intentions in actions, but are not necessarily caused by prior intentions”.³ A *prior intention*, according the Searle, is an intention-to-act the agent forms *prior* to the performance of the act itself. The agent knows what she is going to do because she has already formed a prior intention to do that thing. For example, Jane turns on her stereo after having decided a few moments beforehand that she wanted to listen to some music. Her prior intention (given her belief that turning on the stereo would enable her to listen to music) governed her subsequent action (turning on the stereo).

Not all actions are motivated by prior intentions, however. Intentions-in-action are the intentions an agent has when actually performing the action. Spontaneous actions performed without formulating a prior intention to do them—such as suddenly striking someone in

¹ Searle, John. (1983), *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 1.

² Searle, 1983, p. 108.

³ Searle, 1983, p. 107.

the face, gesturing while talking, or jumping up and pacing while thinking deeply about a philosophical problem—*necessarily* contain an *intention-in-action*, according to Searle. But they neither contain nor are necessarily motivated by *prior* intentions. Thus “the intention-in-action just is the Intentional content of the action”.⁴ The intention-in-action causally shapes the action and sustains it *as* performed by continually representing the goal of the action.

Searle thus claims that even spontaneous bodily actions, such as gesturing while talking, exhibit a goal-directedness that marks them as intentional. Surely this is correct. The intention-in-action is therefore the intentional component of the action that causes the directedness of a bodily movement without the necessary existence of a prior intention. And it is the intention-in-action that differentiates a spontaneous directed *action* (like gesturing while talking or slapping someone in the face) from mere *reflex* or *movement* (one’s leg extending when hit with a doctor’s hammer). Furthermore, intentions-in-action secure both the self-referential nature of an action (the “experience of action”,⁵ as Searle terms it, that I have when engaging in any intentional action; the property of what it feels like to actually “try” to do the action) as well as the bodily movement’s directedness. The composite structure of a successful intentional action for Searle thus consists of both (1) the intention-in-action (or mental component) as well as (2) the concurrent bodily movement (the physical component). Again, Searle insists that all action must contain intentions-in-action as one of its constitutive components. Under his rendering, then, intentions-in-action are both *part of* actions as performed as well as the *cause* of bodily movements constitutive of the actions as performed. But not all actions are preceded by an explicit (or even implicit) deliberative process or prior intention.

An important corollary of this discussion is the next definition I want to look at, which is Searle’s notion of *conditions of satisfaction*. Intentional states according to Searle possess conditions of satisfaction. A condition of satisfaction is a condition that must obtain for a mental state to be true, veridical, or satisfied. Bodily movements thus qualify as actions when they are *caused* by an intention-in-action—a mental state that is a representation of the action’s conditions of satisfaction. The

⁴ Searle, 1983, p. 84.

⁵ Searle, 1983, p. 88.

conditions of satisfaction are therefore propositional representations of what would count as a successful action (e.g. pointing towards an object while describing it; turning on the stereo when I've decided to listen to music, emphatically shaking my fists when arguing for a specific point). And most importantly for our present concerns, according to Searle *all* actions are governed by conditions of satisfaction, or the representation of the action's conditions of satisfaction.

Searle therefore claims that all intentionality involves representation. He says that "Intentional states represent objects and states of affairs in the same sense of "represent" that speech acts represent objects and states of affairs..."⁶ Searle furthermore insists that "there is nothing ontological" about his use of the term 'representation', since according to him, it is part of his purely *logical* analysis of intentionality.⁷ However, recall that Searle's definition of 'intentions-in-action', discussed above, purportedly captures the *feel* of trying to do something—"the experience of acting"—so it's not clear that Searle's logical analysis of intentionality is as phenomenologically neutral as he seems to think that it is. (Of course, if we start talking about phenomenology, we presumably have entered the realm of ontology, too).

Searle rightly notes that any talk of the experience of acting will have to involve some sort of phenomenology-talk.⁸ Moreover, he says that the "phenomenal difference" between "the experience of acting", on the one hand, and bodily movement lacking intentional components (such as Penfield's moving a patient's hand by stimulating their motor cortex),⁹ on the other, "carries with it a logical difference in the sense that the experience of moving one's hand has certain conditions of satisfaction".¹⁰ Therefore, the "experience of acting" has both phenomenal *as well as* logical properties.¹¹ Despite Searle's insistence that his is a purely *logical* analysis of intentionality, he finds that he does in fact have to deal with the *phenomenology* of acting if his account of intentional action is to be sufficiently robust. And since according to Searle the phenomenology of action ("the experience of acting") *also* has (or rather, *is*) the action's conditions of satisfaction—in that "trying", succeeding", and

⁶ Searle, 1983, p. 4.

⁷ Searle, 1983, p. 4.

⁸ Searle, 1983, p. 90.

⁹ Penfield, Wilard (1975), *The Mystery of the Mind*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

¹⁰ Searle, 1983, p. 90.

¹¹ Searle, 1983, p. 90.

“failing”¹² are relevant concepts here—and furthermore, since conditions of satisfaction are always propositional representations of an action’s success-conditions, it seems that we are talking about something very close to representational mentality. More simply, when we perform an action according to Searle—even an unplanned gesture—part of the action’s phenomenology is a representation of what counts as a successful (or unsuccessful) action. In the Penfield case, the phenomenology is different than in instances where a subject consciously performs an intentional action. Thus the “logical difference” that Searle references above is in fact a *phenomenological* difference. Therefore, given the structure of Searle’s account of intentional action, all action, phenomenologically speaking, involves representational mentality of some sort.

It is this representational feature of Searle’s theory of action that is most salient to our present discussion. For as I will discuss momentarily, the Daoist sage—by the practice of *wu-wei*, or effortless action—acts *purposively* without explicitly thinking about her *purpose* for action. Put differently, the sage engages in intentional or directed *bodily* action *without* entertaining a representation of her action’s conditions of satisfaction. In fact, hers is an intentional and holistic mode of action lacking representational mentality. It is precisely this lack of representational mentality that enables the sage to act as spontaneously, effortlessly, and as situationally-appropriate as she does. Moreover, this lack of representational mentality is the phenomenological feature of her experience of action that marks the sage as an ethical-existential expert. This graceful efficiency of action is thus the “profound efficacy”-in-action of the sage who, as we read in chapter 47 of the *Dao-De-Jing*:

Knows without budging
Identifies without looking
Does without trying.¹³

Intentional bodily action lacking a mental component (prior intentions, intentions-in-actions, or both) is incoherent under Searle’s model of action. The Daoist formulation of *wu-wei* and naturalness thus challenges Searle in two regards: first, it offers an alternative model of action that describes a form of bodily intentionality lacking representational mentality. Secondly, it points towards the ethical significance of this form

¹² Searle, 1983, p. 90.

¹³ Addiss, Stanley, and Lombardo, Stanley, trans. (1993), *Tao te Ching*. Hackett Publishing Company, Inc: Indianapolis.

of bodily action, an ethical dimension absent from Searle's discussion of representational intentionality.

3. *The Pragmatic Structure of Wu-wei*

Setting aside Searle's discussion of intentionality and action for a moment, I will now discuss the pragmatic structure of the Daoist formulation of *wu-wei*. I will discuss two essential components of *wu-wei* as developed in the *Dao-De-Jing*: first, its phenomenological structure and secondly, its ethical significance.

Classical Chinese thought was predominantly practical in its orientation. Early Chinese thinkers were not concerned so much with a theoretical consideration of the nature of human value and conduct as they were the question of how human value and proper conduct becomes embodied in particular forms of activity. The term 'conduct', with its definitional nuance of 'comportment' or 'specific forms of behavior', encompasses the moral significance of various forms of intersubjective relations that the early Chinese thinkers were most concerned with addressing. Thus 'conduct' is perhaps more appropriate here than is its more morally-neutral counterpart 'action'. Of this preoccupation with ethical conduct, Edward Slingerland writes that "the primary focus of early Chinese thinkers remained the problem of how to *become* good. . . . [a consideration of] concrete knowledge concerning *how* to act in a way that was good".¹⁴ At the center of these discussions was the notion of *wu-wei*.

So what *is wu-wei*, exactly? *Wu-wei* translates literally as 'in the absence of/without doing'. It is variously rendered 'doing nothing', 'no action', 'non-action' or (less happily) 'acting without acting'. While all of these renderings are perhaps individually inadequate, they collectively serve to provide a multi-dimensional model of what proves to be a deceptively complex phenomenon. To begin on a practical level, *wu-wei* refers to a spontaneous, situationally-appropriate skilled action that radiates effortlessly from the acting agent. It can be thought of as a 'skill-knowledge': an embodied and engaged form of activity consist-

¹⁴ Slingerland, Edward. (2000), "Effortless Action: The Chinese spiritual ideal of *wu-wei*". *Journal of the Academy of Religion*, 68(2), p. 294.

ing of the “mastery of a set of practices that restructure both one’s perceptions and values”.¹⁵

Beyond this emphasis on skill-knowledge, however, *wu-wei* as an *ethical* or *religious* ideal refers to the state of existence or mode of activity of the Daoist sage: one who has realized perfect experiential unity with the world and universe as a dynamic expression of the Dao, and who can therefore relate effortlessly to the people and things of the world. The ethical significance of *wu-wei* is its most important component. For it is only through this reorientation from a microcosmic (or self-centered) perspective to the macrocosmic awareness of a normative cosmic order that one can truly embody the Way in all action-contexts. This practical sagacity or ‘skill-knowledge’ enables the sage to engage with the world ‘naturally’ by exhibiting a kind of perpetually graceful efficacy, continually acting in selfless ways appropriate to changing situations. In chapter 30 of the *Dao-De-Jing*, we find that this graceful efficacy, or effortless action, “is called getting the right results without forcing them”.¹⁶ However, the first reference to the means by which *wu-wei* is actually *embodied* in the practical sagacity of the sage in a truly ‘natural’ form of life is already found in chapter 2 of the *Dao-De-Jing*:

...sages keep to service that does not entail coercion (*wu-wei*)
and disseminate teachings that go beyond what can be said.

In all that happens, the sage develops things but does not initiate them,
They act on behalf of things but do not lay claim to any of them,
They see things through to fruition but do not take credit for them.¹⁷

Wu-wei is thus activity that is neither conditioned by ingrained habits nor preceded by principled reasoning or axiomatic “teachings” that “can be said”, or formalized and subsequently passed on. Importantly, *wu-wei* cannot be adequately articulated in propositional or representational form. Nor is *wu-wei* a deliberately coercive activity. It is an intuitive wisdom—embodied in a practical skill-set—that expresses an ability to effortlessly negotiate the changing aspects of human existence.

As one might expect, Searle is not silent on the important role that skills play in the practical economy of our embodied life. Searle labels the skills that enable us to smoothly navigate our world and function

¹⁵ Slingerland, 2000, p. 295.

¹⁶ Ames, Roger and Hall, David, trans. (2003). *Daodejing: A Philosophical Translation*. Ballantine Books.

¹⁷ Ames and Hall, 2003.

within it ‘capacities’ or ‘practices’.¹⁸ These capacities or practices, Searle insists, are “phenomena [that] are explicitly mental”.¹⁹ But he also insists that such capacities need not be representational or propositional in nature. They are rather “the set of nonrepresentational mental capacities that enable all representing to take place”.²⁰ Collectively, these nonrepresentational mental capacities are famously termed by Searle ‘the Background’. The Background does not itself consist of representational or intentional states but is rather constituted by nonrepresentational, preintentional states that make representing and intending possible in the first place. The Background provides the enabling conditions that make it possible for different forms of intentionality to function, according to Searle.²¹

One of Searle’s attempts to elucidate the relation between skill and the Background involves a description of skiing. A beginning skier is given a wealth of verbal instructions representing possible skiing-related actions: “lean forward”, “bend the ankles”, “keep your center of gravity low”, “don’t hit other skiers”, etc. Yet as the skier becomes more proficient, these verbal representations or rules according to Searle “recede into the Background”.²² They are not internalized and then summoned when relevant. Rather, “the body takes over”, Searle insists, and the skier is able to respond to different environmental conditions (changes in terrain, snow, presence of other skiers, etc.) without explicitly invoking rules and representational states.²³ The various capacities, skills, abilities and preintentional assumptions constitutive of the Background—such as recognizing the function of skis, chairlifts, goggles, etc.; the belief that the mountain will not suddenly vanish while one is skiing atop it, and that gravity will enable one to make it down the mountain; the recognition that icy conditions require heightened attentiveness; the understanding that skiing naked is probably a bad idea for any number of reasons—are what enable the skier to respond flexibly and fluidly to changing conditions.

At first glance, Searle’s characterization of the relation between skilled action and the Background sounds much like the Daoist rendering of

¹⁸ Searle, 1983, p. 156.

¹⁹ Searle, 1983, p. 156.

²⁰ Searle, 1983, p. 143.

²¹ Searle, 1983, p. 157.

²² Searle, 1983, p. 150.

²³ Searle, 1983, p. 150.

wu-wei. A closer examination reveals some important differences, however. To understand these differences, we must look more closely at what I will term the both the ‘external’ and ‘internal’ form of *wu-wei* as offered in the *Dao-De-Jing*.

Chapter 29 offers a characterization of the proper place of non-coercive action (*wu-wei*) within the world, a characterization that is progressively more refined as the text progresses. In this chapter we find the following sketch of the *external* form of *wu-wei* and how it is expressed in different contexts:

One who desires to take the world and act upon it,
 I see that it cannot be done
 The world is a spirit vessel
 Which cannot be acted upon
 One who acts on it fails
 One who holds on to it loses..
 ...therefore the sage gets rid of over-doing.²⁴

Later, in chapter 63, we find the following imperative:

Do things noncoercively (*wu-wei*),
 Be non-interfering in going about your business (*wushi*),
 And savor the flavor of the unadulterated in what you eat.

 Treat the small as great
 And the few as many

 ... it is because the sages never try to do great things
 That they are indeed able to be great.²⁵

Both of these characterizations of *wu-wei* portray the effortless manner through which the sage skillfully navigates the world by yielding to situational givens and responding accordingly. Acting in a “non-interfering” manner is contrasted with a continually imposing of one’s self-directed concerns upon the world in an attempt to refashion it into a more ego-centrally satisfying form. As the self of Daoism is not an internally self-sufficient atom but rather a function of its various relations with the world, the sage thus simply *is* the individual who recognizes this fact and acts in a way that ensures that these various relations constitutive of the self remain smooth and unperturbed. Observed externally, the activities of the sage appear to others as spontaneously dynamic

²⁴ Ames and Hall, 2003.

²⁵ Ames and Hall, 2003.

and natural, wholly devoid of agitation and artificiality while perfectly coordinated with the situation to which they are responding. Here we might think of the world-class swimmer gliding seamlessly through the water, their every gesture an expression of precision and economy. Or we might imagine how the seasoned teacher appears to her students, as she develops her material through the deft use of concrete images and illuminative anecdotes, responding directly to difficult questions while effortlessly exhibiting utter comfort in the classroom and command of the material.

However, by focusing solely on the external form of *wu-wei* (as many interpreters do), we fail to account for the more subtle dimension of *wu-wei* that is perhaps its most important component. Slingerland points to this crucial phenomenological feature of *wu-wei*, a feature often overlooked in the discussions within the secondary literature.²⁶ *Wu-wei*, Slingerland writes, refers *not* primarily to the extrinsic form of the action itself but rather to the inner phenomenology of the agent *as she performs the action*. According to Slingerland, *wu-wei* “describes a state of personal harmony in which actions flow freely and instantly . . . [and] perfectly accord with the dictates of the situation at hand”.²⁷ *Wu-wei* is thus a phenomenological descriptive. It designates the agent’s inner inclinations and motives, their inner states (or as we shall see, conspicuous lack thereof) in the moment of spontaneous action *as performed*. And it is this dimension of *wu-wei* that is directly at odds with Searle’s account of intentionality and action, as it refers to a mode of bodily motor-intentional action lacking representational mentality.

Of course, the *Dao-De-Jing* does not offer a detailed phenomenological analysis of *wu-wei*. But this emphasis is made apparent through a close reading of a number of key chapters. To look at one of them, I quote the whole of chapter 48:

In studying, there is daily increase,
While in learning of way-making, there is a daily decrease:
One loses and again loses
To the point that one does everything noncoercively.
One does things noncoercively
And yet nothing goes undone.

²⁶ Slingerland, 1999.

²⁷ Slingerland, 1999, 300.

In wanting to rule the world
 Be always non-interfering in going about its business
 For in being interfering
 You make yourself worthy of ruling the world.²⁸

Against the Confucian ideal of “studying” and “daily [ritualistic] increase”, the Daoist sage realizes the creative possibilities of each new situation by “losing, and again losing” pre-established patterns of behavior and deliberate, principled knowing. The skilled swimmer ‘rules’ the pool by coordinating her strokes with the flow of the water via a deep ecological sensitivity—a felt of union body and environment. She does not continually appeal to memorized coaching principles prior to each stroke but rather ‘loses’ these principles in her spontaneous bodily performance in response to ever-changing pool conditions. Similarly, the skilled instructor develops a lesson plan but, ever flexible, quickly abandons it when responding to unanticipated questions from students that suddenly open up new avenues of instruction and illumination. She does not refuse to answer questions that deviate from the day’s plan but rather adapts to the needs of her students. Again, the important point is that these skilled actions are not anticipated before the performance (or perhaps even *during* the performance). Rather, they reflect the sage’s deep somatic attunement: a perpetual openness or ‘readiness-to-respond’ that enables the sage to react in a way that does not appeal to represented ‘conditions of satisfaction’ (such as we find in Searle’s account) governing subsequent action. Such actions are spontaneous but situationally-appropriate.

Moreover, this phenomenological aspect of *wu-wei* houses its *ethical* significance. The ethical significance of the concept of *wu-wei* is, again, its most important component. For *wu-wei* is not merely an integral part of a more elaborate Daoist theory of mind and action. Rather, it is first and foremost a mode of relating that enables us to live ethically *and* effortlessly with one another by harmonizing with the natural rhythms of the Way. *Wu-wei* is thus the mode of action by which we embody the virtue of naturalness. Naturalness is not equivalent to *wu-wei* but rather emerges from it. And naturalness, then, is a noncoercive relating to the people and things of the world: the ethical ‘fruit’, so to speak, of *wu-wei*. Chapter 64 tells us that

²⁸ Ames and Hall, 2003.

...because the sages do things noncoercively
They do not ruin them.
And because they do not try to control things
They do not lose them.²⁹

By relating to the people and things of the world naturally, we encourage the free expression of their uniqueness and particularity. We allow them to meet us in their double-aspect of (1) human individuality, as well as (2) their respective place in the Heavenly order. To return to a point made earlier, the natural conduct of the sage expresses an ability to act with a fine-grained microscopic skill that simultaneously maintains a macroscopic sensitivity.

To return to Searle: this ‘microscopic skill’ differs from Searle’s earlier discussion of skills in an important way. The point will be developed in more detail below, specifically during my discussion of Merleau-Ponty’s notion of realizing a ‘maximal grip’. However, the salient aspect of this difference can be succinctly expressed as follows. The situationally-specific, fine-grained microscopic skill marking the conduct of the Sage emerges from a more general macroscopic sensitivity that Searle’s discussion of skills and capacities cannot accommodate. This ‘macroscopic sensitivity’ is *itself* a second-order skill or capacity—the Skill of skills or Capacity of capacities, we might say. (I’ll follow Searle’s convention with ‘the Background’ and capitalize these terms). More precisely, it is a *general* bodily Skill or second-order motor Capacity that enables the sage to continually perform *particular* first-order skills or capacities in a truly effortless and yielding manner. Thus the Sage can exercise ordinary skills (mowing the lawn, skiing, washing dishes, chatting with co-workers) naturally and effortlessly. The sage does not suddenly become an expert lawn-mower, skier, dish washer or conversationalist, of course. Rather, whatever capacities they already possess with respect to these activities are simply allowed to manifest in a spontaneous and yielding manner. This second-order Capacity or Skill *is*, then, the ‘empty’ phenomenology of the Sage acting in an intuitive manner that lacks representational mentality.

²⁹ Ames and Hall, 2003.

4. *Sharpening the Critique: Daoism on Action without Representation*

I will now clarify some of the points introduced above, and highlight more carefully how the Daoist formulations of *wu-wei* and naturalness can be summoned in criticism of Searle's account of intentionality and action. I will then consider how Searle might respond to this criticism, before concluding by briefly developing the ethical significance of this criticism.

John Dewey's distinction between 'know-how' and 'knowing-that' will assist our initial discussion. According to Dewey, 'knowing-that' is a kind of knowledge that "involves reflection and conscious appreciation".³⁰ Put differently, knowing-that is a form of propositional or representational knowledge. However, Dewey argues that the bulk of everyday human activity exhibits knowledge of a different sort:

We may, indeed, be said to *know how* by means of our habits... We walk and read aloud, we get off and on street cars, we dress and undress, and do a thousand useful acts without thinking about them. We know something, namely, how to do them.³¹

Thus know-how, for Dewey, is a practical familiarity with certain environments or situations that progressively emerges from our various embodied interactions with the salient features of these environments. Practical know-how refers to the absorbed coping or bodily comportment—the conduct—characteristic of our familiar routines and patterns of action in particular lived environments. More simply, know-how is a generalized feeling of 'at home-ness' that enables this absorbed coping. Dewey writes that

The sailor is intellectually at home on the sea, the hunter in the forest, the painter in his studio, the man of science in his laboratory. These commonplaces are universally recognized in their concrete; but their significance is obscured and their truth denied in the current general theory of mind.³²

Dewey furthermore claims that know-how is a kind of knowledge that "lives in the muscles, not in consciousness".³³ As he describes it, then,

³⁰ Dewey, John. (1988), *Human nature and conduct* (Vol. 14), Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, p. 125.

³¹ Dewey, 1988. p. 124.

³² Dewey, 1988, p. 123.

³³ Dewey, 1988, p. 124.

bodily know-how exhibits a form of intentionality or goal-directedness that (1) marks it as genuine knowledge, but which (2) differentiates it from propositional or representational knowledge. In other words, it is operative without explicit representation of ‘conditions of satisfaction’. Embodied know-how is a bodily skill (or skill-set) that achieves its practical goals without representing them.

The ‘at home-ness’ of Dewey’s conception of know-how can be used to further explicate the practical skill-knowledge dimension of *wu-wei*. For the true Daoist sage embodies the Way in all action-contexts via the perpetual practice of *wu-wei*. She expresses the ultimate form of skill-knowledge: namely, manifesting an expertise of living that allows her to develop and express her humanity to the fullest degree, and to encourage the same capacities in others by serving as an example for them. Therefore the sage’s ‘ethos of expertise’, as we might refer to it, is *generalized* from particular environments (the sailor on the sea, the painter in her studio, the swimmer in the pool, the teacher in her classroom) to encompass the entire world. This is the generalized ‘macroscopic skill’ of which we spoke earlier. The sage is naturally at home in all situations she encounters, and thus can respond to situational demands in a spontaneous and appropriate manner. In doing so, she serves as a moral exemplar for all those who meet her. Her microscopic expertise resonates with a simultaneous social (or macrocosmic) efficacy.

To return to the critique of Searle: Dewey’s analysis and the Daoist insistence on the pragmatic significance of *wu-wei* point to a phenomenon that we might refer to as the body’s ‘intentional project’, or a form of noncognitive motor intentionality. Put bluntly, Searle’s overly-cognitive discussion of intentionality (with its emphasis on representational mentality) lacks a sensitivity to this bodily dimension and thus artificially carves off an essential aspect of human action. A more natural approach to human action is an embodied approach that recognizes the central role of the body’s intentional project. So what is the body’s intentional project? Put simply, the body’s intentional project is the nonconceptual field of experience *through which* our body is *knowingly* integrated into its lived environment, and *by which* it *intuitively responds* to the practical saliences of its lived environment by knowingly inhabiting it.

In other words, the body’s intentional project is the mechanism that maintains the ‘equilibrium’, in Dewey’s terminology, between the agent’s body and the practical saliences of its environment. The practical saliences are what solicit various forms of skilled action. Dewey writes that know-how consists of “securing prompt and exact adjustment to

the [organism's] environment" since "the truth is that in every waking moment, the complete balance of the organism and its environment is constantly interfered with and is constantly restored".³⁴ Thus life just is, then, a perpetual series of "interruptions and recoveries" according to Dewey. This continual organic exchange between the organism and the environment constitutes the 'equilibrium' we are continually establishing and re-establishing. Like the Daoist conception of 'naturalness', equilibrium, for Dewey, just is the "degree of fit" between the body's intentional projects and the environment (including the practical saliences constitutive thereof) within which the body's intentional projects are enacted.

Merleau-Ponty's notion of the 'maximal grip' further elaborates this phenomenon of nonrepresentational bodily intentionality. Moreover, it perhaps illuminates most effectively the practical import of *wu-wei* and its precise point of divergence from Searle's conception of intentional action. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty writes that realizing a 'maximal grip' consists of achieving "a certain possession of the world by my body, a certain gearing of my body to the world...my body is geared onto the world when my perception presents me with a spectacle as varied and as clearly articulated as possible, and when my motor intentions, as they unfold, receive the responses they expect from the world."³⁵ But the mechanism enabling the body's 'maximal grip' with the world—the body's intentional project—does *not* exhibit a propositional or representational structure characteristic of knowing-that. According to Merleau-Ponty: "Our body is not an object for an 'I think', it is a grouping of lived through meanings which moves towards its equilibrium."³⁶ Like Dewey, Merleau-Ponty's 'equilibrium' or 'maximal grip' (which is the body's tendency to *establish* equilibrium) refers to the way that our body responds to the practical solicitations unique to each situation in such a way that the situation is brought closer to our sense of an optimal gestalt.³⁷ Importantly, this optimal gestalt or situational harmony is achieved without entertaining conditions of satisfaction. According to Merleau-Ponty: "The polarization of

³⁴ Dewey, 1988, pp. 124–125.

³⁵ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1962), *Phenomenology of Perception*. (C. Smith trans.), New York: Routledge, p. 162.

³⁶ Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 153.

³⁷ Dreyfus, Hubert (2002), "Intelligence Without Representation: Merleau-Ponty's critique of mental representation", *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 1(4), p. 367.

life towards a goal is entirely unrepresented. Objective thought bypasses true intentionality, which is *at* its object rather than positing it.”³⁸ This “true intentionality” is a more basic motor intentionality *beneath* the representational mentality of “objective thought”, or Searle’s conditions of satisfaction that Searle thinks must be a phenomenal (in addition to logical) component of intentional action. It is the bodily capacity that enables an immediate and effortless response. In the flow of skilled activity, Merleau-Ponty and Daoism both insist that I am simply responding to the specific solicitations of each encountered situation. In other words, *I allow the situation to draw the proper response out of me*. Against Searle’s conception of intentional action, I experience neither prior intentions nor intentions in action as guiding my action. And I am not aware of an explicit ‘experience of acting’ or ‘feeling of trying’, as Searle puts it. In the process of realizing an optimal situational gestalt, I allow my body to respond in a way that expresses an overarching ‘macroscopic sensitivity’: a felt sense of my relationship to the gestalt established by my agential body and the larger situation in which I am acting. The actions are thus not initiated by *me*, strictly speaking, but by the larger situation of which I am a part. I experience my environment very literally drawing the appropriate response out of me. In this way I am ‘empty’ of purposive or self-directed striving. This, I contend, is the very definition of acting in a ‘yielding’ or ‘natural’ manner. I am truly “acting without effort.” I am acting intentionality but without invoking representational mentality or purposive striving.

Some concrete examples will help here. Hubert Dreyfus has famously directed a similar criticism of Searle’s account of intentionality and action as the one offered above.³⁹ One of Dreyfus’ favored examples of the phenomenon described involves playing tennis. The expert tennis player, Dreyfus argues, need not appeal to rules and representations when absorbed in the flow of a tennis match. Rather, Dreyfus contends that

what one experiences is more like one’s arm going up and its being drawn to the appropriate position, the racket forming the optimal angle with the court—an angle one need not even be aware of—all this so as to complete the gestalt made up of the court, one’s running opponent, and the on-coming ball. . . . But that final gestalt. . . is not something one

³⁸ Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 446.

³⁹ Dreyfus, 2002.

could represent. One only senses when one is getting closer or further away from the optimum.⁴⁰

The continual establishing of gestalt equilibrium—a practical ‘gestalt maintenance’, we might say—is enacted too rapidly and spontaneously to involve representing conditions of satisfaction. Rather, the better I am at tennis the more immediate and refined my sensing becomes, with respect to how close or far away from an optimal gestalt I currently am. However, my performance is too refined and subtle—in other words, situationally specific—to simply be the product of vague Background skills fortuitously coming into play. Rather, the situationally-specific discriminations conform too precisely to the situation at hand to be anything *but* intentional. However, while acting, I may not know in what way I am going to realize an optimal gestalt until *after* I’ve done it. Many athletes speak of not remembering what they’ve done during the moments comprising an especially spectacular athletic performance (such as a football player’s zig-zagging run for a touchdown during which he eludes multiple would-be tacklers) until they later view a video replay of it. In other words, they don’t know what they’ve done, exactly, until *after* they do it. In this sense, they are intentionally performing an action but, phenomenologically speaking, are ‘empty’ in the sense described above. Once more, the phenomenology of such actions lacks Searle’s requirement for individuating actions: his represented ‘conditions of satisfaction’ that determine either before or during the action what the best response is. Therefore, the reports of athletes (and artists, individuals acting in a time of crisis, etc.) describing cases of acting without thinking points to the fact that one can indeed *experience* intentional bodily action that is empty of representational mentality.

Dreyfus’ examples generally involve practical action-contexts. In the next section, I will extend this characterization of motor intentionality to include the ethical, intersubjective realm. However, prior to doing this, it is important to note that, while most of us realize this sort of effortless, nonrepresentational action within specific skill domains, the Daoist sage is poised to affect this effortless action in *all* contexts. The sage naturally and spontaneously brings every situation she encounters to an optimal gestalt in the manner described above. *Wu-wei*, as a second-order bodily Skill, enables her to do just this. Bodily skills can be realized in an indefinite number of ways—certainly more ways than can

⁴⁰ Dreyfus, 2002, p. 379.

be antecedently represented. Moreover, the very definition of genuine skill involves realizing responses that cannot always be antecedently represented. Very often, therefore, the situation draws forth a response from the skilled agent that, only *retrospectively*, is seen to have been the most appropriate one. Again, genuine spontaneity—action without representation—is the key feature here.

To sum up this section: with their respective formulations of what I have referred to as “motor intentionality”, Dewey, Merleau-Ponty and Daoism each in their own way insist that, phenomenologically speaking, we do not represent antecedent conditions of satisfaction to determine whether or not an action has been performed correctly (and thus ‘equilibrium’ or ‘naturalness’ achieved between the body, its lived environment, and the situational salencies of the environment to which the body is responding). For the body’s intentional project is not a form of cognitive or representational intentionality whatsoever. It is a purely practical or skillful poise. Put differently, it is a deep bodily-perceptual *attunement*. This poise or attunement is an expression of the sage’s generalized second-order Skill or Capacity, discussed in the previous section. And poise, as a perpetual readiness-to-respond, is what enables the body’s intentional projects to be enacted via a nonrepresentational mode of activity, without the need to articulate antecedent conditions of satisfaction to determine whether or not an action is successful. Therefore, Dewey describes this poise as a *feeling* of at home-ness, an affective interface between self and world that enables expert nonrepresentational (but nonetheless intentional) skilled action. Similarly, the Daoist sage exhibits an intuitive wisdom that, in its spontaneity and flexibility, is operative without the invocation of representational mentality. This is the mode of noncognitive motor-intentionality activated by the one who “knows without budging” and who “does without trying”, in the words of the *Dao the Ching*. I therefore suggest that the practical dimension of *wu-wei*—as a noncognitive or bodily intentionality, a generalized ethos of expertise that allows the sage to move effortlessly through the flow of everyday situations—discloses an aspect of embodied human action that Searle’s cognitivist theory of intentionality cannot accommodate, and which he overlooks. The skillful navigation of life’s “interruptions and recoveries” is accomplished more successfully and naturally the less one thinks and the more one simply *acts*. Searle’s emphasis on representational mentality therefore offers a less robust picture of the skillful bodily actions that constitute the bulk of our everyday lived experience and, as I will explore in the

final section, our intersubjective relations. However, I first want to look at how Searle might respond to the above criticisms levied against his model of intentionality.

5. *The Primacy of Logical Analysis: A Searlian Response*

So how would Searle respond to the above criticisms? Very likely, he would reiterate a point that has already been mentioned. Put simply, the point is this: Searle would contend that he is not concerned with a *phenomenological* analysis of intentionality but rather a *logical* analysis of its basic features. The criticisms above presuppose that Searle's analysis is somehow phenomenologically deficient. But as his concern, one again, is with logical analysis, the criticisms miss the mark.

There are a number of points to be offered in response. First, I've already noted how, at several junctures, Searle's model of intentionality seems to bring the phenomenological as well as the logical features (as he defines them) of intentionality into something of a mysterious union. He wants to do purely logical analysis but has to contend with the irreducible phenomenology of intentional action—including the phenomenology of *bodily* intentionality. Searle's model of intentionality is as clear as one would like on this point. (See the end of section two for this criticism). More simply, it's not clear that Searle's logical analysis remains entirely phenomenologically neutral when discussing "the experience of acting", as he terms it. Since I've already mentioned this criticism, however, and for the sake of moving to more interesting responses, I won't discuss it further.

Next, I question Searle's more general contention that a purely logical analysis is in itself up to the task of offering an explanatorily adequate model of intentionality and intentional action. Searle has recently summed up this approach when he writes that: "The method of logical analysis is to state conditions—truth conditions, performance conditions, conditions of constitution, etc."⁴¹ So Searle's method is logical analysis, a stating of conditions. Why then logical analysis over phenomenological analysis? Again, Searle's basic contention is

⁴¹ Searle, John (2004), "The Phenomenological Illusion", in *Experience and Analysis: Contributions to the Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society* (Vol. XII), edited by J.C. Marek and M.E. Reicher, pp. 317–336.

concisely stated: “some of the most important logical features of intentionality are beyond the reach of phenomenology because they have no immediate phenomenological reality.”⁴² According to Searle, the “phenomenological illusion” is essentially the belief, which he attributes to those who utilize phenomenological analysis, that unless something is “phenomenologically real”, it has no “mental, intentionalistic or logical reality”.⁴³ Put differently, the phenomenologist contends that the world is only known insofar as it is experienced from human perspectives. Thus whatever reality the world and the things in it *have* is constituted by the human perspectives (attitudes, stances, cultural and linguistic practices, etc.) that *confer* reality upon it. This perspectivalism founds phenomenological methods, according to Searle. Searle therefore says that phenomenology can, with a straight face, speak of “incompatible realities” and “incompatible lexicons” that are used to structure and describe competing realities.⁴⁴ For different human perspectives very literally create different realities. Of course, Searle’s criticism of the “phenomenological illusion” is more nuanced than this mere sketch suggests. However, this gloss captures the core of Searle’s argument.

As usual, Searle’s criticisms are pointed and well-argued. Moreover, I’m inclined to think that there is much of worth in a number of his criticisms. However, there are also a number of problems with several aspects of Searle’s basic argument here, and I’m going to focus on those. First, Searle speaks as though there is one way to do phenomenology, in the same sense that analytic philosophy, according to Searle, has modeled its form of analysis on Russell’s theory of descriptions, and specifically Russell’s analysis of conditions under which sentences are true.⁴⁵ This of course is simply not the case. Searle’s major target is Husserlian phenomenology. But one can indeed levy criticisms at Husserlian phenomenology that find little if any traction in other phenomenological methods—often radically divergent from Husserlian methodology—such as those employed by Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Schutz, Kitarō Nishida or even Daoism, as I am here presenting it. (Even to speak of a single entity that is “Husserlian phenomenology” is to remain insensitive to the many revisions and often profound changes that characterized Husserl’s continually-evolving approach

⁴² Searle, 2004, pp. 322–323.

⁴³ Searle, 2004, p. 323.

⁴⁴ Searle, 2004, p. 332.

⁴⁵ Searle, 2004, p. 321.

to phenomenological analysis). These are more exegetical concerns, however, so I leave them aside.

To return to the more general question at hand. Can logical analysis render a sufficiently robust account of intentionality? It's not entirely clear that it can. Here's why. Despite his insistence on the centrality of the body and what he terms the '1st person ontology' of consciousness in our everyday human experience, Searle's logical analysis of intentionality fails to capture what intentionality *really is*: namely, the lived activity of an embodied agent engaged in an enactive relation with its environment. Intentionality is a feature of this enactive, open-ended *relation*—and not simply a logical feature of mentality. Searle finds “breathtaking” the suggestion, evidently put forth by Hubert Dreyfus, that he is a Cartesian.⁴⁶ Surely we should give Searle the benefit of the doubt when he insists that this is simply false. But given his cognitivist rendering of intentionality, however, it's relatively easy to see why a critic might accuse him of falling prey to a naturalistic variation of Cartesian *internalism*. Put crudely, internalism is the view that mentality (the events, states, and processes that constitute our mental life) resides squarely in the head. As we've already seen, Searle claims that intentionality is a mental feature. Consistent with his “biological naturalism”, he furthermore claims that intentionality is “a biological feature of the world, on all fours with digestion and photosynthesis. It is caused by and realized in the brain.”⁴⁷ Hence, intentionality is a feature of mentality internal to the intracranial structures of the intentional subject.

In contrast to Searle's internalist model of intentionality, the reading of *wu-wei* I have here offered, with its emphasis on the open-ended, world-directedness of bodily intentionality, can be thought of as providing an *externalist* model of mentality and intentionality. In other words, the mind is not localized solely in the events, states, and processes realized in the brain. Rather, mental events, states, and processes extend beyond the limits of the skull and skin, out into the living world. The mind, in a very literal sense, is distributed into the world, intermingled with it. And intentionality is a feature of the relation that is enacted between the 'extended' agent and the world in which she acts. The internalism/externalism debate is indeed a thorny one, very much at the center of contemporary debates in epistemology and philosophy of

⁴⁶ Searle, 2004, p. 319.

⁴⁷ Searle, 2004, p. 322.

mind, and I can't here offer a full defense of Daoist externalism. Thus I'll simply confine myself to a few remarks relevant to the immediate critique of Searle.

When I speak of *wu-wei* and bodily intentionality as an open-ended, world-directed enactive relation realized *externally*, I mean something like the following. In some sense, mentality is, of course, realized in the brain. It seems quite silly to deny this "basic fact", as Searle would call it. For, if my brain were suddenly to vaporize, it's clear that I would cease to be an intentional subject in any meaningful sense. But it does not follow from this that *intentionality*, too, must be realized solely in the brain. Our discussion of *wu-wei* has offered us a rich way of conceiving of the reciprocal relationship between an acting agent and the agent's environment. Moreover, we have seen that the notion of "acting without thinking", far from being an abstract, mystical, or incoherent notion, instead disclose an essential aspect of our embodied human experience, and our basic human way of living and acting in the world. Much of our everyday life is spent embodying this form of "empty" acting, as described above. And the reason that we are able to act without thinking on so many occasions, I contend, is due to the fact that the *world itself*—including the people and things that make up my lived environments—serves as the *vehicle* of many of my mental tasks (such as thinking, perceiving, remembering, believing, etc.). 'Vehicles' of mental tasks are simply the events, states, and processes that carry mental content, where the latter are understood to be the *objects* of events, states, and processes.

The cases of *wu-wei* we have described above enable us to understand how the world itself can serve as the vehicle of thought. Let's return to the tennis example. Using the model of *wu-wei* developed in the second portion of the paper, I have argued that, in this example, the *environment itself* draws the appropriate response out of the tennis player unthinkingly absorbed in the flow of a tennis match. The tennis expert does not consciously think about each and every shot before, during, or after she enacts them. Again, *she simply does them*. This is possible because the structures comprising her environment—her racket, the court, her opponent, the weather conditions, etc.—individually and collectively serve (or at least, *potentially* serve) as vehicles of cognition. But they only do so when our tennis player probes and manipulates them through her embodied engagement with them. Intentionality emerges within this enactive relation.

Thus, when the wind suddenly picks up and the tennis expert slips on a wet spot while about to unleash a thunderous forehand, we can speak of the environment as carrying salient *information*. The environment becomes an information-bearing structure: information about the direction of the gust of wind and how it will effect the tennis expert's return forehand, relative to her position on the court; information about how the wet spot will very suddenly change the angle the tennis player will assume respective to her opponent; the range of available forehand returns given the sudden gust of wind and the player slipping on the wet spot, etc. The expert player, while absorbed in the flow of playing, does not have to *think* about all of this information because the environment *itself* contains this information, waiting for her to access, act upon and respond to it. These environmental saliences thus serve as vehicle of thought, bearing information which the player spontaneously accesses through her embodied engagement with the environment. This embodied engagement is what enacts an *intentional* relation. Intentionality here emerges through the sensorimotor patterns of action by which the tennis player accesses the information contained in various environmental structures. By manipulating these information-bearing structures (countering the gust of wind by putting more topspin on her forehand), the tennis player acts intentionally. But once more, she can do so *without thinking*. The information-bearing structures of her environment do the "thinking" for her. In this sense, then, the environment literally draws the appropriate responses out of her. Therefore, the characterization of *wu-wei* explored above—and specifically its embodied and pragmatic aspects—allows us to see how intentionality emerges *not* simply through internal mental processes but rather through the active probing and manipulation of an external environment by an acting agent. Intentionality is not a logical feature of mentality but rather a lived relation that is enacted through our embodied engagement with the world.

6. *The Ethical Significance of Wu-wei*

There is one final point to be made. In overlooking the foundational bodily dimension of human action discussed at length above, Searle has neglected an essential component of our ethical interrelations: our affective or *felt* connection with other individuals and their respective needs.

Again, according to Daoism, affectivity (and not reflective cognition) is the basic interface between self and world. The “ethos of expertise”, as I’ve termed it, is precisely the felt familiarity that enables us to respond optimally to concrete situations (or experiential gestalts) without invoking representational thought. This ethos of expertise can be realized within ethical encounters, too. Indeed, Daoism would insist that *all* of our intersubjective relations exhibit an irreducible ethical structure. Moreover, ethical interrelatedness is a matter of embodied, affective action that unfolds spontaneously, prior to cognitive or reflective critical-rational judgments. Kantian paradigms of moral life as consisting of the detached formulation of moral judgments and universalizeable principles are thus replaced by an emphasis on the situated micro-encounters with particular individuals in specific moral contexts that comprise the very “marrow” of our real-world ethical relations.

To put the matter more precisely, we might utilize Daoist insights and suggest the following. Moral maturity (as it is embodied in the practice of *wu-wei* and, concomitantly, the expression of naturalness) involves a heightened attunement to situational saliences that allows the sage to intuitively perceive the relevant moral features of concrete situations and to spontaneously react to these features in a selfless manner. Like an artist at home in her studio or a sailor on the sea, the moral expert is deeply attuned to the moral saliences of changing situations that others may not notice: a nearly imperceptible change in a co-worker’s tone during a casual conversation; the slight blush of someone whom I’ve abruptly made uncomfortable by uttering an ill-considered comment; a twenty dollar bill that slips out of the pocket of a person in front of me as they continue down the street unaware; a sudden cry for help just around the corner; the expectant glance of a lone child waiting to be acknowledged in a room full of adults. Searle would surely recognize the moral importance of situations such as those mentioned above. But it’s not clear that Searle’s discussion of intentionality and action can offer a skillful capacity for responding to these situations that that captures the moral character of these kinds of actions.

However, the Daoist notion of *wu-wei* can. By being deeply attuned to these features of concrete moral contexts, the sage affects a radical gestalt shift. (This shift, I suggest, is an expression of the sage’s sense of how to bring about an optimal *moral* gestalt). She immediately *foregrounds* the needs of the others she encounters while allowing her own self-directed concerns to recede into the *background*. Moral expertise thus entails a radical perspectival reconfiguration. By being perpetually

poised to affect such a gestalt shift, the sage thus generates a spontaneous, selfless form of moral action that does not entail reflective deliberation or represented conditions of satisfaction. For the moral requirements of individual situations are generally too rich and fine-grained to be laid bare by prior planning or falling back onto universal rules. Cultivating an ethos of expertise in nearly any practical domain is precisely the ability to avoid “over-thinking” a proper course of activity—again, recall the earlier discussion of the tennis player who simply performs without being conscious of the coaching principles governing expert performance—by simply responding to situational saliences in the proper manner. And this holds for ethical action as well. For by affecting the gestalt shift described above, the moral expert is prepared to react spontaneously and appropriately without being hindered by egocentric self-interest. The needs of the other are foregrounded and the sage intuitively responds to those needs. Genuinely selfless compassion and yielding to the needs of the other thus becomes possible.

7. *Conclusions*

To conclude: I have argued that the notion of *wu-wei*, as developed in the *Dao-De-jing*, is a generalized bodily Skill or Capacity that can be expressed through the various ways that the sage relates to the people and things of the world. Moreover, I have argued that it is an *intentional* bodily Skill (in that it is directed towards, as well as open and responsive to, the world and the things in it) that nonetheless doesn't have the representational character required by Searle's discussion of intentionality and action. Even Searle's discussion of the Background, I have argued, cannot accommodate *wu-wei* understood as a second-order, generalized bodily Skill or Capacity that enables the sage to perform local first-order skill or capacities (like walking, playing tennis, or serving others) in a truly effortless manner. For Searle, the Background is not intentional but is rather composed of preintentional assumptions, skills, and capacities that enable the subsequent formulation of intentional states. However, I have argued that *wu-wei*, as a second-order Skill, is *itself* intentional (again, in that it is directed towards the cosmic order *as a whole*, including the world and the things in it), but that it is operative without representational mentality. The sage intuitively responds to changing situations in ways that *feel* appropriate (via an “ethos of expertise”) *without* invoking representations of success conditions. In

this way, the sage can act spontaneously and fluidly, in accord with the natural rhythms of the Dao. *Wu-wei* thus discloses a crucial fact of our embodied agency—this second-order Capacity—that Searle’s account overlooks. Moreover, it also suggests a number of intriguing reasons to rethink the internalist bias informing not only Searle’s discussion of intentionality but more generally, the Cartesian prejudices informing our sense of self and our conception of our own agency. Finally, and most importantly for Daoism, *wu-wei* furthermore discloses a fact about our embodied *moral* agency—and particularly, our capacity to cultivate a heightened moral attunement—that Searle’s discussion cannot account for. Yet Daoism would surely insist that moral significance of *wu-wei* is its most important element. Our capacity for selfless moral action is the core of our uniquely human agency. The sage would thus encourage Searle to enlarge his discussion to encompass this crucial aspect of human experience.

In this way, then, I have endeavored to show that Daoism offers an important challenge to a theorist who has exerted a deservedly profound influence over the shape and concerns of contemporary western philosophy. Contemporary Chinese thought, too, can assuredly benefit from an engagement with John Searle’s work. However, the relatively humble aims of the essay will have been realized if I have been successful in demonstrating a way in which Searle’s philosophy can itself be enriched by listening to voices from within another philosophical tradition. Given his admirable history of engaging differing western philosophical traditions, it is likely that Searle will be open to such an international dialogue. World philosophy will surely be richer for it.

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