

What-Being: Chuang Tzu versus Aristotle

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IN A WAY, the philosophy of Chuang Tzu (b. 369 B.C., China) is radically non-commonsensual. For instance, he says "nothing in the world is bigger than the tip of an autumn hair, and Mount T'ai is small."¹ Nevertheless, behind Chuang Tzu's willingness to depart from ordinary ways of talking, there is a metaphysics of everyday reality. The purpose of this paper is to compare Chuang Tzu's view of what an object is—its "what-being"—to a highly influential Western view that derives from Aristotle. I will show how Chuang Tzu's metaphysics is a plausible alternative to the Aristotelian philosophy.

I

A common view of being goes like this: an object² falls into a certain substance sortal category *S* and is an *s*; there are other things that can be said of the *s*, but those are merely qualities or properties; being *s* is its primary being and it determines the object's identity. For example, the object is an *ox*, which is a substance. Being that individual *ox* determines the object's identity; its being brown, seven feet long, composed of the mass *m*, etc., are its properties. This is a view held, explicitly or implicitly, by many Western philosophers.

The origin of this view may be traced back to Aristotle's doctrine of *ousia*, i.e., primary being or substance,³ as it is usually interpreted. Aristotle discusses the problem of *ousia* in the *Metaphysics*, mainly in the "central books." His discussions are lengthy, meticulous, and sometimes inconsistent. Commentators are often widely divided with regard to what is really Aristotle's position on the issues. Here I present Aristotle as he is usually interpreted, or at least in a way that is not novel to commentators of Aristotle.

¹*Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters*, trans. A. C. Graham (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), p. 56.

²In this paper, I will use "object" to mean an individual. Thus, if there is only one horse and nothing else in a room, we say there is only one object in the room, even though the horse also can be said to be a pack of flesh and bones. According to E. Halper, Aristotle usually reserves the term "individual" for a composite *ousia*, something that is one because it has a single matter (Delta 6, 1016b 31–33). See Edward C. Halper, *One and Many in Aristotle's Metaphysics: The Central Books* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1989), p. 243.

³As has been pointed out by numerous scholars, "substance" is a misleading translation for *ousia*. See Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian 'Metaphysics'* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1963), p. 139. "Primary being" seems to have some advantages over "substance," but because "substance" has become the conventional rendering (and translation) of Aristotle's *ousia*, it is sometimes more convenient to use than "primary being." In any case, I use both interchangeably in this paper. But we have to bear in mind that in Aristotle *ousia* does not mean substratum, which "substance" may imply.

Aristotle maintains that philosophy is the science of Being *qua* Being. He states that:

The term "being" is used in several senses, as we pointed out previously in our account of the various senses of terms. In one sense, it signifies whatness and a *this*; in another, it signifies a quality or a quantity or one of the others which are predicated in this way. Although "being" is used in so many senses, it is evident that of these the primary sense is whatness, and used in this sense it signifies a substance. For when we state that this has some quality, we say it is good or bad but not that it is three cubits long or a man; but when we state what it is, we say that it is a man or a god but not white or hot or three cubits long.⁴

Accordingly, there are many ways in which an individual object's what-being can be spoken of, but only one way refers to primary substance ("a what" or "a something"), the others being merely about predicates (or properties). It is to this primary being the "what-it-is-to-be" or essence (*to ti ēn einai*) belongs.⁵ Thus, Aristotle reduces the question "what is being?" to the question "what is substance?"⁶ The way Aristotle talks about essence and primary being clearly indicates that he believes that for each individual object (or at least a natural object) there is only one essence and one primary being.⁷ For the essence of an object is (determined by) its form; presumably one object only has one form; therefore one object can only have one essence.⁸ An object may have secondary being, but only one primary being.

From this follow several interrelated Aristotelian claims in regard to an object's what-being. First of all, viewing an object as a collection of its constituent parts does not reveal the object's reality. The essence belongs to the object as a whole, not to its constituent parts. Since the primary being of an object is determined by its essence which its constituent parts do not possess, the primary being of an object cannot be revealed by an analysis into its parts. In other words, an object is a particular *this*, but not only a *this*; it is also a definite *such*, i.e., a *this such*. It cannot be a *this* without being also a *such*.⁹ Second, for Aristotle, because there is only one essence in an object, there is only one primary being in it, and therefore there is a single objectively correct answer to the question of what an object is primarily. The correct answer is one that reveals the object's essence and primary substance. Thirdly, Aristotle maintains that the essence of an object is linked to its species, and the species to which an object belongs has a hold on the object's primary being. Hence, a withdrawal of its membership from the species means losing the object's primary being and means its destruction. These

⁴Aristotle, *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1966), 1028a 10-17; p. 108.

⁵Although the phrase is commonly translated as "essence," J. Owens thinks it is best translated as "the What-IS-being." See Owens, pp. 180-89.

⁶*Metaphysics*, 1028b 4; Apostle, p. 109.

⁷Cf. Halper, p. 4.

⁸While many commentators believe that in Aristotle form and essence are the same, M. Loux disagrees. But there should be no question that in Aristotle form and essence are closely linked. For these different views, see Michael Frede and Gunther Patzig, *Aristotle's "Metaphysics Z,"* 2 vols. (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1988), and Michael J. Loux, *Primary Ousia: an Essay on Aristotle's Metaphysics Z and H* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1991).

⁹Cf. Loux, p. 7.

views represent a substantial part of the Aristotelian metaphysics; further philosophical observations are based on them.

The metaphysics of Chuang Tzu, a near contemporary of Aristotle, may be viewed at two levels. At the fundamental level, every thing belongs to the Tao, or the Way. The Way is the ultimate truth of the universe. Every thing in the world has its root in the Way. In this sense, all are One. At the object level, each individual object can be both a "this" and a "that." An object's being a "this" does not exclude its also being a "that." The two levels are linked in that an individual's being a "this" and being a "that" are ways of the Way's presenting itself. We will focus on the second level, on the issue of an object's what-being.

For Aristotle, to be a primary substance is to be a member of its lowest-level substance-kind.¹⁰ For example, being an ox is a primary being.¹¹ Accordingly, ceasing to be an ox means a loss of its primary being; and our recognizing the object as the individual ox is the only correct way for us to recognize its primary being. Chuang Tzu has a different account of what an ox is. In his story about Cook Ting, the cook says:

'When I first began to cut up oxen, I saw nothing but whole oxen. After three years of practicing, I no longer saw the ox as a whole. . . . I follow the natural grain, letting the knife find its way through the many hidden openings, taking advantage of what is there, never touching a ligament or tendon, much less a main joint.

'A good cook changes his knife once a year because he cuts, while a mediocre cook has to change his every month because he hacks. I have had this knife of mine for nineteen years and have cut up thousands of oxen with it, and yet the edge is as if it were fresh from the grindstone. There are spaces between the joints. The blade of the knife has no thickness. That which has no thickness has plenty of room to pass through these spaces. Therefore, after nineteen years, my blade is as sharp as ever.'¹²

The main purpose of Chuang Tzu's story is to tell us how to find our way in the world. He suggests that it can be done by properly recognizing and using things in the world. After three years of fine training, Cook Ting saw an ox no longer as a whole thing but as a pack of flesh and bones. For Chuang Tzu, Cook Ting was not mistaken. What the cook saw was real. But the object was certainly also an ox. What this shows is that an ox can be recognized not only as an individual ox, but also as a pack of flesh and bones. Thus in telling the story Chuang Tzu suggests that, as a being, the object is both an ox and a pack of flesh and bones.

This differs from Aristotle who writes: "Of the composite of statue the bronze is a part, but not a part of that which is called 'the form' of the statue. For what should be stated is the form, or the thing qua having the form, but the material part should never be stated by itself."¹³ In a sense, the bronze is a part of the statue as an object, and flesh and bones are parts of an animal.¹⁴ But these parts

¹⁰Cf. Loux, p. 33.

¹¹I use oxen as an example because both Aristotle and Chuang Tzu talked about oxen. Aristotle used this example in the *Categories*. See *Aristotle's Categories and De Interpretatione*, trans. J. L. Ackrill (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963), 2b 22-28; p. 7.

¹²Chuang Tzu, *Chuang Tzu: Inner Chapters*, trans. Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 55, with my slight revision.

¹³*Metaphysics*, 1030a 22-23; Apostle, p. 122.

¹⁴Cf. *Metaphysics*, 1035a 2-5. Sometimes Aristotle seems to believe that natural objects have an ontology different from artificial objects (e.g., 1043b 19-23). But when he talks about the relation

are not the elements of the object's form. Since Aristotle sometimes seems to believe that an object's primary being is its form, in a sense these parts are not constituent parts of the object's primary being. An ox as a whole has the essence of being an ox, while the parts do not possess this essence. Aristotle treats the relation between a pack of flesh and bones, on the one hand, and an ox, on the other, as the relation between potentiality and actuality. The pack of flesh and bones is matter which exists potentially to be an ox. But it is the form which gives the object actuality and makes it an actual ox.¹⁵ The primary being of the substance is exclusively the ox. Chuang Tzu, however, believes that the analysis into its constituent parts is a legitimate approach to an object's reality. On the one hand, its being an ox does not exhaust its real being. It is an ox, but it is also a pack of flesh and bones. The object's being a pack of flesh and bones is not merely a potentiality. The pack of flesh and bones is as real as the ox. In Cook Ting's eyes, it is not the case that the pack of flesh and bones are actualized in being an ox, nor is the object potentially a pack of flesh and bones which will be actualized after the ox is killed. In his eyes, the object *is* a pack of flesh and bones. On the other hand, Chuang Tzu recognizes no essence or primary being. He does not believe there is such thing as essence which exclusively determines the object's being. Therefore, the object's being an aggregate of parts is no less real than its being an ox.

Thus, conceptually, Chuang Tzu views the object at a level different from its being an ox or a pack of flesh and bones. While being an ox and being a pack of flesh and bones are not the same way of being, they are the same object which has both ways of being. Instead of questioning how an ox can be identical with a pack of flesh and bones or vice versa, Chuang Tzu would question, "How could the object be an ox without at the same time also being a pack of flesh and bones?" Contrary to the Aristotelian view that every particular is a *this such*, Chuang Tzu states:

'Every thing is a "that", every thing is a "this". You cannot see it as a "this" if you are from the viewpoint of "that"; you see it as a "this" when you are from the viewpoint of "this". "That" comes from "this" and "this" comes from "that". . . . Thus, the sage does not bother with these distinctions but sees all things in the light of Heaven. "This" is also "that", and "that" is also "this". . . . When there is no more separation between "this" and "that", it is called the pivot of the Way. At the pivot in the center of the circle one can see the infinite in all things. Therefore, the best way is to seek the true light!'¹⁶

For Chuang Tzu, we always look at things from a certain point of view. If I begin from where I am and see a thing as I see it as a "this," then it may also become possible for me to see it as another sees it as a "that." Therefore, seeing

between an individual, its form, and its matter, he does not keep the distinction so clear. The statue, bronze, and the shape are his favorite examples in investigating *ousia*. Following his suit, I also use similar examples, though my argument does not depend on them.

¹⁵According to Loux's interpretation, Aristotle holds that, in addition to being an ox, a pack of flesh and bones also has an essence; it is also a primary *ousia*. This interpretation brings Aristotle much closer to Chuang Tzu. But it seems that many Aristotle commentators would disagree with Loux in this regard. See Loux, chapter 7, "The Completed Hierarchy of Essences and Two Problems."

¹⁶*Chuang Tzu*, section 3, my translation. Cf. Feng and English, p. 29.

it as a "this" and seeing it as a "that" depend on each other and complement each other. The light of the Way (the "Heaven") shows that, in addition to being a "this" (i.e., an ox), the object is also a "that" (i.e., a pack of flesh and bones). Although the object's being is not confined to being an ox and being a pack of flesh and bones (it is also an aggregate of molecules, etc.), these are ways for it to be a *this* and a *that*.¹⁷ Because being an ox and being a pack of flesh and bones are two ways of the same object's being, an individual ox is a pack of flesh and bones, and a particular aggregate of parts is an ox. Only when we see it not merely as an ox, but also as an object which is both a "this" and a "that" can we get to the pivot of the way.

One may want to object: perhaps instead of one object what we have here are really two objects, one ox and one pack of flesh and bones; although they spatially coincide, they are not the same object. Aristotle does not seem to favor this view. He strives for the unity of an object. When he speaks of the statue and the bronze, he seems to have treated the bronze merely as matter. Instead of suggesting that there are two objects, one statue and one chunk of bronze, he treats it as one object. Aristotle writes: "But, as we have stated, the last matter and the form are one and the same, the one exists potentially, the other as actuality. Thus, it is like asking what the cause of unity is and what causes something to be one; for each thing is a kind of unity, and potentiality and actuality taken together exist somehow as one."¹⁸ He explicitly rejects the suggestion that one individual can be two. He believes that the matter and the form are the same unity; it is not the case that there is a statue *and* a chunk of bronze:

'In some cases, after the thing has been generated, it is called, when referred to the matter out of which it was generated, not "that" but "that-y" (or "that-en"); for example, the statue is called not "stone" but "stony" . . . So, just as we do not say of a healthy man, who became so from being sick, that he is a sick man, so of the statue we say not that it is wood but (by varying the word) that it is wooden, not bronze but brazen, not stone but stony, and of the house not bricks but brick-en; for if we look at the situation very carefully, we would not say without qualification that the wood becomes a statue, or the bricks a house, since that which becomes must change and not remain. It is because of this fact that we speak in this manner.'¹⁹

Thus, after the bricks become a house, the bricks (as bricks) are no more; after the bronze becomes a statue, the bronze (as bronze) is no more. So, when one points to the statue and asks "How many objects are there?" the answer is clearly, "One."

One reason for us to agree with Aristotle in this regard is that the two-objects approach inflates the number of objects in the world. It is not the case that there is an ox *plus* a pack of flesh and bones; there is only *one* thing which is both an ox and an aggregate of parts. Suppose two persons dispute over whether the object is an ox or a pack of flesh and bones. If there were two objects, there would be no dispute at all because they would be talking about two different

¹⁷*This* (*shi*)—see Glossary at end—and *that* (*bi*) stand for two sides of a thing. But it does not exclude the possibility of a third or fourth; just as in English we use "on the one hand . . . on the other" which does not necessarily mean that there are only two aspects and no more.

¹⁸*Metaphysics*, 1045b 17–21; Apostle, p. 145.

¹⁹*Metaphysics*, 1033a 6–23; Apostle, p. 118.

objects, one ox and one aggregate of parts: while one would hold that an ox is an ox, the other would hold that a pack of flesh and bones is a pack of flesh and bones. But we know the dispute is over the same object. We may want to say to the disputants that yes, it is an ox, but it is also a pack of flesh and bones. Here the two "it's" must refer to the same object or the sentence would not make sense. In the story of Cook Ting, the cook sees an aggregate of parts in the same object in which others see an ox. The object can only be that which is both an ox and a pack of flesh and bones. At a certain time, t , the ox o and the pack of flesh and bones p are one and the same object.

Some contemporary philosophers want to update Aristotle by saying that an object is "a four-dimensional spatio-temporal worm." Two objects are identical only if they have the same history. Here again there is only one story to be told about the object. But two observations can be made on Chuang Tzu's behalf. First, it is questionable that an object has to be a spatio-temporal worm. I think our ordinary idea of an object is something that exists at a certain time. If an object is a four-dimensional worm, one that takes a very different route in space and time would not be the same four-dimensional worm and therefore not the same object. But I think that our ordinary notion is that the same object might have been at a spatio-temporal spot different from where it actually is. Moreover, if an object is a four-dimensional whole, a half of it would be a half object. Since it is true that if an object's "life-span" is cut short, the object is still a whole object, not a broken one, then what we mean by "an object" is not a "four-dimensional worm," even though *the object* endures in time. Second, even if we grant that an object is a spatio-temporal worm, that will only change the terminology, not the issue at stake. In that case, what we have been calling an object would be a time stage of an object. Then the question of whether the time stage is substantially and primarily a time stage of an ox or a time stage of a pack of flesh and bones (which presumably lasts longer than an instant in time) still remains for the Aristotelians. In my view it can still be said that the same time stage is both the time stage of the ox and the time stage of the aggregate of parts, without one being primary and the other secondary.²⁰

II

Because Aristotle believes that an object only has one essence and one primary being, it follows that, for Aristotle, there is a single objectively correct answer to the question of what an object primarily is. He holds that the question of what a thing is refers essentially to primary being.²¹ In other words, the "what-it-is" of an object belongs to primary being, and to other categories merely potentially and derivatively, merely as a quality or a quantity. For example, an object o is a member of the kind *ox*, and that it is an ox is the correct answer to the question "what is o ?" Chuang Tzu denies that there is primary being and that there is a single objectively correct answer to the question of what an object is. He believes that saying the object is an ox is not the only correct way to answer the question

²⁰This is no place to launch a full-fledged argument against the "four-dimensional worm" theory. If my objection presented here is considered inadequate, I myself contend in this paper that the theory, after all, is not Aristotle's.

²¹*Metaphysics*, 1030a 23-24; Apostle, p. 112.

of what the object is; that the object is a pack of flesh and bones is also a correct way to answer the question.

Then, how come that the object is an ox and that the object is a pack of flesh and bones are both right? Chuang Tzu believes that "the way comes about as we walk it; as for a thing, call it something and that's so."²² Originally there were no ways in the world. A way emerges only after we walk it. "Call" (*wei*), which may also be translated as "name" (verb) here, can be understood as recognizing.²³ A thing is so because we recognize it this way. The individual object is an ox when we recognize it so; it is a pack of flesh and bones when we recognize it so. This may sound rather idealistic. But it should not be taken as meaning that we can view an object whatever way we like. Chuang Tzu continues the remark by saying: "Why so? By being so. Why not so? By not being so. It is inherent in a thing that from somewhere that's so of it, from somewhere that's allowable of it" (Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English have translated the last sentence as "Everything has its own nature and its own function").²⁴ It is not entirely arbitrary for one to recognize an object as "a something" because an object has its own nature and its own function. From this it may be said that a thing's being a *such* is not a pure invention of ours. The Way has its ways. We have the view that an ox is more an ox than a pack of flesh and bones, or vice versa, because we come to recognize it that way. We can do this because of its "being so." Yet, it is not true that there is only one correct way to recognize things.

Chuang Tzu's view appears even more appealing as we look at artificial objects. In analogy to Aristotle's bronze statue example, I can ask a similar question: Is my ring a primary substance which has a property of being gold, or is this piece of gold a primary substance which has a property of being a ring? On the one hand, this piece of gold is a primary substance if anything is; on the other hand, there is no reason why my ring should not be a primary substance when other individual objects, such as bricks and tables, are primary substances. If there is only one primary substance in one object, which is it? At this point an Aristotelian may want to retreat and hold that only natural objects are substances. If so, at least Chuang Tzu's ontology would have the advantage of covering both natural objects and artificial objects.

Chuang Tzu states:

"The Way has never had borders, saying has never had norms. It is by a "That's it" which deems that a boundary is marked. Let me say something about the marking of boundaries. You can locate as there and enclose by line, sort out and assess, divide up and discriminate between alternatives, compete over and fight over: these I call our Eight Powers. . . . To "divide", then, is to leave something undivided; to "discriminate between alternatives" is to leave something which is neither alternative. "What?" You ask. The sage keeps it in his breast, common men argue over alternatives to show it to each other. Hence I say: To "discriminate between alternatives" is to fail to see something."²⁵

²²Chuang Tzu, Graham, p. 53.

²³See Chen Ku-Ying, *A Contemporary Exposition and Interpretation of Chuang Tzu* (Beijing: China Publishing House, 1983), p. 63.

²⁴Chuang Tzu, Graham, p. 53; Feng and English, p. 30.

²⁵Chuang Tzu, Graham, p. 57.

The Eight Powers are ways to define the boundaries of things in the world. The Confucians use the first four powers to delimit the "That's it" and "That's not" in human relations; the Mohists use the last four powers to delimit the "That's it" and "That's not" in our general knowledge of the world.²⁶ For Chuang Tzu, they are all fundamentally mistaken. Chuang Tzu holds that the Way has no borders and the being of an object has alternatives. When common men ask the "What" question, they use the Eight Powers to draw borders, divide things, and discriminate between alternatives in order to show a definite "That's it" or "That's not" of things. But the same thing is both "That's it" and "That's not." To adhere obstinately to the "That's it" of an object is to discriminate against alternatives. In doing so, one is prevented from seeing the reality of the Way.

What Chuang Tzu here says about the "Eight Powers" reminds us of Aristotle's doctrine of things in the *Metaphysics* and *Categories*. Aristotle makes a distinction between substance and qualities, generation and alteration, doing and being-affected, etc. For instance, he claims that among many things that can be spoken of an object's "what-it-is," there is only one way we speak of it as a substance, the rest being qualities. For Chuang Tzu, getting deeply involved in such disputes as whether an ox or a pack of flesh and bones is a substance is getting away from the Way, because one fails to see another side of reality. For example, in distinguishing between an ox as substance and a pack of flesh and bones as a potentiality of the substance one fails to see that what can be said of an ox as a substance can also be said of the pack of flesh and bones. The aggregate of parts, like the ox, can be treated as a "substance" which has certain properties. To know the Way is not to discriminate against alternatives, but to be open to them. Therefore, obstinately holding that the object is only an ox or a pack of flesh and bones is grossly one-sided. So Chuang Tzu remarks:

"To wear out the daemonic-and-illuminated in you deeming to be one without knowing that they are the same I call "three every morning". What do I mean by "three every morning?" A monkey keeper handing out nuts said, "Three every morning and four every evening." The monkeys were all in a rage. "All right then," said he, "four every morning and three every evening." The monkeys were delighted. Without anything being missed out either in name or in substance, their pleasure and anger were put to use; his too was the "That's it" which goes by circumstance. This is why the sage smooths things out with his "That's it, that's not", and stays at the point of rest on the potter's wheel of Heaven. It is this that is called "letting both alternatives proceed".²⁷

Here Chuang Tzu advocates the view that everything belongs to the Way. He criticizes those who fail to realize this as "three every morning." Chuang Tzu's criticism also applies to Aristotelians who hold that an individual object has only one primary being. Chuang Tzu does not deny that there is a little difference between "three every morning and four every evening" and "four every morning and three every evening." But he believes that the difference is not significant enough for one to hold an obstinate adherence to one instead of the other. From the viewpoint of the Way, the two are rooted in the same one. The monkeys fail to see that "three every morning and four every evening" and "four every

²⁶See Chen Ku-Ying, p. 75.

²⁷*Chuang Tzu*, Graham, p. 54.

morning and three every evening" amount to the same. Aristotelians are also "three every morning" because they fail to see that, from the Way's point of view, "being an ox with the property of having the pack of flesh and bones" and "being an aggregate of parts and having the property of being an ox" amount to the same. They are two different ways of describing the same object. Disputing which has absolute primacy is like the monkeys fighting over whether they have three nuts every morning and four every evening or four every morning and three every evening. The sage, on the pivot of the Way, would see the Oneness of the two sides and remains flexible on this matter.

Recognizing that an object can be both a "this" and a "that," Chuang Tzu is willing to judge as better or worse views of what an object is on the basis of practice. This is what he means by saying that the "that's it" of things "goes by circumstance." In the second chapter of *Chuang Tzu*, we find a conversation between Yeh Chueh and his master Wang Ni.

'Would you know something of which all things agreed "That's it"?'
'How would I know that?'

...
'... When a human sleeps in the damp his back hurts and he gets stiff in the joints; is that so of the loach? When he sits in a tree he shivers and shakes; is that so of the monkey? Which of these three knows the right place to live? Humans eat the flesh of hay-fed and grain-fed beasts, deer eat the grass, centipedes relish snakes, owls and crows crave mice; which of the four has a proper sense of taste? Gibbons are sought by baboons as mates, elaphures like the company of deer, loaches play with fish. Mao-ch'iang and Lady Li were beautiful in the eyes of men; but when the fish saw them they plunged deep, when the birds saw them they flew high, when the deer saw them they broke into a run. Which of these four knows what is truly beautiful in the world? In my judgment the principles of Goodwill and Duty, the paths of "That's it, that's not", are formless; how could I know how to discriminate between them?'²⁸

Here through Wang Ni's mouth Chuang Tzu expresses his own view. He is targeting the issue of a universal "That's it" in a broader sense, extending to the ethical as well as to the aesthetic. It certainly includes the metaphysical. For him, that there is no consensus on a universal "That's it" shows not only that we cannot reach such a state for epistemic reasons, but also that there is no such reality. An object has its being and functions. How we approach and value it really depends on the practice in which we are involved. Saying the object is an ox and saying it is a pack of flesh and bones are two ways of describing the same object. As to which way is right really depends on the context in which the object is recognized. The correct way to recognize an object depends on its purpose. For example, if we use the object as farm animal, it is better to recognize it as an ox; for Cook Ting, seeing no whole ox shows that he has found his Way in the world. It is very important for Cook Ting that an ox is not only a whole animal, but also an aggregate of parts, for only seeing it as a non-whole, as a pack of flesh and bones, is it possible for him to find "plenty of room" in between to ply his

²⁸Ibid., p. 58, with one revision of mine. "*Fan ran yao luan*," which means formless, orderless, or chaotic, Graham has translated as "inextricably confused," which, though literally correct, may convey a negative sense. But Chuang Tzu is by no means bothered by the formless or chaotic character of reality. Since Wang Ni presumably represents Chuang Tzu, I use "formless" instead.

blade. For him, the object as a pack of flesh and bones is by no means merely a potentiality as Aristotle holds. It is a real being to deal with. In this way, Chuang Tzu's relativistic metaphysics and his emphasis on practice are linked.

An Aristotelian perhaps would not straightforwardly deny that sometimes it makes more sense to treat the object as a pack of flesh and bones instead of as a whole ox. He may try in two ways to avoid an obvious contradiction with his metaphysical view that the object is primarily an ox. First, he may maintain that there are two objects, one ox and one aggregate of parts; while the ox is primarily an ox, the pack of flesh and bones is primarily an aggregate of parts. But, as we have pointed out earlier, in this way the Aristotelian not only goes against Aristotle himself but also inflates the number of objects in the world by duplicating objects. Second, he may choose to say that there is only one primary substance; while the primary substance is the ox, sometimes it is useful to focus on its potentialities rather than on primary substance; the case of Cook Ting is such an example. I think, however, this latter view has two disadvantages in comparison with Chuang Tzu's view. First, for Aristotle, matter cannot exist without form and potentiality cannot exist without actuality. If the pack of flesh and bones is merely a potentiality, the pack of flesh and bones cannot exist independently of the ox. This is obviously untrue. It is not the case that the pack of flesh and bones is actualized as flesh and bones only after the ox is killed. It is a pack of flesh and bones even when the ox is still alive. For we would say that after the ox is killed, it is the *same* pack of flesh and bones that remains. For Cook Ting, the aggregate of parts is a real being which does not depend on anything else. Chuang Tzu's account therefore works better here. Second and more important, treating the pack of flesh and bones merely as potentiality by the Aristotelian account, we can only approach the aggregate of parts through the ox. It is an indirect approach. In contrast, Chuang Tzu's account enables us directly to approach the object as the aggregate of parts. Because the object is really a pack of flesh and bones, instead of taking the object *as* a pack of flesh and bones for convenience, we take the object as the object in its real being. In other words, we treat it as a pack of flesh and bones because it itself is an aggregate of parts. Thus, Chuang Tzu's metaphysics provides a suitable foundation for his practical philosophy, and the latter reinforces the plausibility of his metaphysics.

III

The third contrast between Aristotle and Chuang Tzu on the matter of what-being is whether the same object can survive a substance sortal concept change. Aristotle links an object's essence to its species. He writes, "Essence, then, will belong to nothing which is not a species of a genus, but only to a species of a genus."²⁹ For an object, to maintain what it is, to possess its essence, is to belong to its species to which it actually belongs. Therefore, ceasing to belong to its species amounts to ceasing to possess its essence, which amounts to the destruction of the object. This Aristotelian view is very influential in today's debates over the issue of identity. For instance, David Wiggins, a contemporary Aristotelian, holds that the substance sortal or kind concept into which an object falls is

²⁹*Metaphysics*, 1030a 12-13; Apostle, p. 112.

essential for the object's identity. That is, "for an x and any kind f , if f is a substance kind, then if x belongs to f , x always belongs to f ," in other words, "to be, for such a thing just is to comply with this ultimate or near ultimate concept f ."³⁰ That is, when an object no longer falls under the same substance sortal concept as it used to fall, the object is no longer the same object. In this way, the concepts of primary substance, essence, and necessity are linked. The object is primarily an ox, it is essentially an ox, and it is necessarily an ox. As a primary substance, the object cannot be the same object without being an ox.

Chuang Tzu again disagrees. In *Chuang Tzu* we have the famous story of a dream: "Last night Chuang Chou dreamt he was a butterfly, spirits soaring he was a butterfly, and did not know about Chou. When all of a sudden he awoke, he was Chou with all his wits about him. He does not know whether he is Chou who dreams he is a butterfly or a butterfly who dreams he is Chou. Between Chou and the butterfly there must be some difference; just this is meant by the transformations of things."³¹ Here Chuang Tzu suggests that it could be that he is Chuang Tzu (Chou) who dreams he is a butterfly or that he is a butterfly that dreams he is Chuang Tzu. He might never know which, but, in either case, he would be the same individual. Losing his species status as a human does not mean destruction, but a different way of the being of the same individual. That is, it is not necessary that he is a man but not a butterfly. He might be a butterfly and still maintain his identity as the same individual.

If an object can survive a substance sortal category change and remain the same individual as Chuang Tzu believes, one might want to press further by asking "the same what?" To this question neither "the same man" nor "the same butterfly" can be the right answer. Even "the same animal" would not do it, because we normally do not consider a man and a butterfly the same animal. But Chuang Tzu does not follow this way of thinking. He does not deny that there is some difference between being a human and being a butterfly. But he believes that, from the viewpoint of the Way, the difference only shows "the transformations of things." In Chuang Tzu, the transformation of things occurs when the boundary between "this" and "that" is dissolved and the Oneness of the world is revealed.³² In such a state, whether one is a human or a butterfly does not matter much, not only because from the viewpoint of the Way every thing in the world belongs to the Oneness of the Way, but also because these could be two ways of being the same self. The notion of the transformation of things becomes more plausible in the light of Chuang Tzu's view on the unity of the "that" and "this" of the same object. He would deny that there is essence and that the identity of an object is determined by anything like essence. Accordingly, to say an object is essentially or primarily a man or a butterfly is already to be misled. For Chuang Tzu, an object can be both a "this" and a "that"; it may remain the same object while transforming from one category into another.

³⁰David Wiggins, *Sameness and Substance*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980), p. 146.

³¹*Chuang Tzu*, Graham, p. 61, with my revision. The last sentence Graham translated as, "Between Chou and the butterfly there was necessarily a dividing. . . ." The use of the word "necessarily" gives the sentence a strong sense of metaphysical necessity which Chuang Tzu would not accept. The original is "ze bi you fen yi," which Chen Ku-Ying interprets as "bi ding shi you suo fen bie de." I translate it as "there must be some difference."

³²See Chen Ku-Ying, p. 92.

This view is probably the most difficult to accept for those who are used to the Aristotelian way of thinking. It is, however, an extension of what Chuang Tzu has said about the simultaneous coincidence of different ways of an object's being to its temporal or chronological dimension. The view that a thing may survive a substance category change is grounded in traditions of Chinese thought. In Chinese classic mythology, we are told again and again that an individual maintains its identity after going through substance category changes. For example, the Monkey Sun is able to change itself into seventy-two varieties. It can be a fish or a temple. Yet it is the same Monkey Sun. Its identity as that individual object transcends any particular category with which the object is associated. This is hardly a real argument for Chuang Tzu and against Aristotle. But it suggests that it is not inconceivable for an object to maintain its identity through category changes.

Suppose at time t_1 an object is a member of a species S , and at time t_2 it ceases to be an s and becomes an a . After t_2 we can point to the object and say, "It used to be (or was) an s at t_1 but now it is no longer an s but an a ." This sentence makes perfect sense. But in order for the sentence to make sense the two "it's" must refer to the same thing. What is "it"? Chuang Tzu would say that it cannot be an either/or; it has to be both. This intuition was probably what Chuang Tzu had in his mind when he told his story of dream. But he did not go further to give an argument for it.

IV

In Chuang Tzu, the question how "this" (substance) and "that" (substance) are identical does not arise. If it is asked how "this" way of being and "that" way of being are identical, the answer is simply that they are not identical. But the object which has both ways of being is self-identical. It is the same object. This view of being fits well into the picture depicted by contemporary physics. At the micro-level of the world, there is no ultimate substance-brick of the world. What are particles are also energy. To ask about the substance or primary being of the world is futile. It is no more particles than energy-buckets; nor more energy-buckets than particles. It is both. The fact that we are more comfortable with the idea that it is particles is not a legitimate reason for us to take particles as primary substances and energy-buckets as secondary.

From the above discussion, we can see that although Chuang Tzu did not provide a systematic metaphysical theory as Aristotle did, nevertheless he indicated an alternative metaphysics. Perhaps the biggest difference between Chuang Tzu and Aristotle on being is that while Aristotle sees things as primary being or substances, Chuang Tzu does not accept the notion. For Chuang Tzu, things have their ways of being. A thing can be a "this" and a "that." While being a "this" is a way for it to be, being a "that" is another way of its being. Nevertheless, they are different ways for the same object to be. Thus, from his point of view, not only is the world a world of diversity, but also the being of an object is a diversity. One thing we can learn from Chuang Tzu is to open our mind to the diversity of the being of objects, and allow an object to have both "this" and "that," and possibly any number of ways, as its real being. To justify systematically Chuang Tzu's ontology would require a *magnum opus*, which is far beyond

the scope of this paper. But I hope I have made it clear that Chuang Tzu has an ontology which is different from Aristotle's and that this ontology deserves our attention.³³

Glossary

- | | |
|--------|-------------|
| a. 是 | e. 莊子今注今譯 |
| b. 彼 | f. 樊然殽亂 |
| c. 謂 | g. 則必有分矣 |
| d. 陳鼓應 | h. 必定是有所分別的 |

³³I wish to thank Joel J. Kupperman, whose encouragement and suggestions contributed greatly to this paper, and Samuel Wheeler III for his discussion of Aristotle.