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DAOISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

NOURISHING LIFE

Eric S. Nelson

Daoism and Environmental Philosophy

Daoism and Environmental Philosophy explores ethics and the philosophy of nature in the *Daodejing*, the *Zhuangzi*, and related texts to elucidate their potential significance in our contemporary environmental crisis.

This book traces early Daoist depictions of practices of embodied emptying and forgetting and communicative strategies of undoing the fixations of words, things, and the embodied self. These are aspects of an ethics of embracing plainness and simplicity, nourishing the asymmetrically differentiated yet shared elemental body of life of the myriad things, and being responsively attuned in encountering and responding to things. These critical and transformative dimensions of early Daoism provide exemplary models and insights for cultivating a more expansive ecological *ethos*, environmental culture of nature, and progressive political ecology.

This work will be of interest to students and scholars interested in philosophy, environmental ethics and philosophy, religious studies, and intellectual history.

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To
The Wu 吳 Family

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In this ongoing ecological crisis, and at this moment a world-wide pandemic as I write these words, one can only hope that more nurturing relations with life and our environment can be fostered. In these ecologically and social-politically troubled times, I am also thankful to my friends and family for their nurturing of life, particularly Lydia Nelson, Rick Nelson, Sheng Pingping, Wu Guangsong, and Wu Shengqing.

1 Introduction

Early Daoist ethics and the philosophy of nature

What is Daoism? An Initial Overview

"Dao" and "Daoism"

According to chapter 16 of the *Daodejing* 道德經, attributed to the mysterious quasi-mythical "old master" (Laozi 老子), all things arise from and return to the *dao* 道 (*fuwu yunyun, ge fugui qigen* 夫物芸芸, 各復歸其根).[1] What is this *dao*? Most ancient and classical Chinese forms of discourse employed this word. It is an ordinary Chinese expression still in use today signifying path, road, and way. Already in antiquity, the word had a variety of specialized meanings: it could name a specific teaching or method (such as the *dao* of Confucius 孔子 or Mozi 墨子) or could designate the ultimate reality and truth of things and the cosmos: the whole or the one beyond human discourse and understanding. The *dao*, according to the cosmological account in the "Originating in Dao" (*yuandao* 原道) chapter of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 that heavily relies on the *Daodejing*, is the generative that shelters and opens, envelops and bestows, empties and fills.[2]

According to deep ecologist Arne Næss, Daoism is a motivational ecosophy of environmental wisdom for our times.[3] But what is "Daoism"?[4] Of course, every "-ism" is a formulaic conventional expression inadequate to what it would designate. There is again no single univocal answer to this question, and the expression is at risk of being excessively inclusive or overly exclusive. On the one hand, the expression "Daoism" is a contested multivocal term that incorporates a diverse array of ideas, practices, and texts, and reducing them to a common "-ism" inadequately reflects the historical record. On the other hand, modern scholarly and popular conceptions of Daoism have been formed through complex relations with indigenous sources and voices, and recourse to historical and existing Daoist sources, transmissions, and practices is necessary both to contest and develop alternatives to anachronistic and ideological interpretations that impose their own constructions onto Chinese materials. The present work will repeatedly face difficulties of what a new or reimagined teaching of *dao* would look like under current crisis conditions, generated by human economic and social organization, and how to indirectly translate and revise early Daoist perspectives and strategies

in the context of contemporary environmentalism, in particular given its investment in prescriptive, normative, and activist ways of thinking and speaking that the teaching of *dao* in the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 appears to subvert for the sake of fatalistic quietude.

Early Chinese sources are characterized by intertextual and interdiscursive references to competing teachings (such as those of Confucius and Mozi) and record arguments between their proponents. These early accounts form the basis of the subsequent classification of various schools or families of teachings (*jia* 家) during the rule of Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 (who reigned from 141–87 BCE) in the early Han dynasty by Sima Tan 司馬談 (*c.*165–110 BCE) and his son the historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (*c.*145–*c.*86 BCE).[5] In the *Historical Record* (*Shiji* 史記), also called the *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Taishigong shu* 太史公書), Sima Qian retrospectively recast (further developing his father's classification of six schools) the diverse discursive forms of the Spring and Autumn (*Chunqiu shidai* 春秋時代) and Warring States (*Zhanguo shidai* 戰國時代) periods (sixth century to 221 BCE) as the "hundred schools of thought" (*zhuzi baijia* 諸子百家).[6]

The expression *daojia* 道家 (the lineage or family of the *dao*) addressed by the elder and younger Sima is not found in the *Laozi*, the *Zhuangzi*, or extant pre-Han sources.[7] It was used to designate the politically-oriented form of Daoism called (combining the names of the Yellow Emperor [Huangdi 黃帝] and Laozi) Huanglao 黃老, a prevailing discourse in the early Han dynasty, and, in particular, the teaching of Laozi that remained one of its primary reference points that encompassed apparently related figures such as Zhuangzi. The enigmatic figure of Laozi, who appears to be an amalgamation of personages, was already associated with visions of the functioning of the cosmos, personal self-cultivation, and the art of political rule in the *Daodejing* that would be taken up in Huanglao documents.

Daoism, as transmissions of the way bearing overlapping yet distinctive family resemblances, does not only designate early texts linked with the names of early great masters such as Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Liezi 列子 (Lie Yukou 列禦寇, *c.* fifth century BCE), who are unlikely to be the "authors" of the works traditionally attributed to them and may not have existed. Sima Qian included Laozi in the same chapter (*Laozi Hanfei liezhuan* 老子韓非列傳) as the "Legalist" (*fajia* 法家) Hanfeizi 韓非子 (third-century BCE).[8] This association is not coincidental, as the text attributed to Hanfei includes the earliest surviving commentaries on the *Daodejing*.[9] There are close connections (as well as crucial differences as discussed later) between the text ascribed to Laozi, Huanglao Daoism, and the Legalist (the teaching that identifies *dao* with law) discourses that focused on means of power and administrative methods.[10] Significant sources for interpreting "early" (or what some would rather classify as "proto-") Daoism include eclectic excavated texts unearthed in Mawangdui 馬王堆 and anthologies that fused Daoist, Legalist, and also Confucian strategies of argumentation and interpretation such as the *Huainanzi* and the *Guanzi* 管子.[11]

Transmissions of the* dao *between Religion and Philosophy

In addition to these early works composed and revised through the early Han period, lineages and transmissions of the *dao* can also encompass subsequent cultural, literary, philosophical, and religious movements linked to varying degrees with these sources, such as the eclectic literati of "mysterious learning" (*xuanxue* 玄學) active in the third and fourth centuries CE, which is controversially called "Neo-Daoism," and so-called "religious Daoism" that combined these early sources with new revelations in the formation of its canon.[12]

The *Daodejing* commentary of the "mysterious learning" thinker Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249) elucidated an eclectic hybrid yet still in key respects (as his Ruist critics recurrently noted) fundamentally Laozian philosophy of "nature" and "nothingness" (in their early Chinese senses of *ziran* and *wu*) with a practical ethical-political intent.[13] The Warring State text "Inward Training" (*Neiye* 內業) chapter of the *Guanzi* anthology and the *Daodejing* commentary ascribed to the "riverside elder" Heshang Gong 河上公 in the first century CE stressed the *dao* as informing a biospiritual model for practices of meditation and self-cultivation as well as a biopolitical model for governing and transforming society.[14] To give preliminary definitions: "biospiritual" means in this context techniques, practices, and models of cultivating the embodied heart-mind and the mindful body; "biopolitics" signifies deploying bodily, biological, and medical language and models for governing and ordering society. Another indication of this tendency in the later Han dynasty can be found in the *Laozi Inscription* (*Laozi ming* 老子銘), ascribed to Bian Shao 邊韶 and dated 24 September, CE 165, in which Laozi appears as a scholar and sagely teacher, a spiritualized person who has become a numinous "immortal" or (in a non-Western onto-theological sense) "transcendent" (*xian* 仙, a character meaning person in the mountain) to the mundane world through biospiritual (practices of the experiential body), self-cultivation techniques, and as a cosmic deity embodying *dao*.[15] *The Scripture on Great Peace* (*Taiping Jing* 太平經), a late Han period text linked with peasant rebellions and the beginnings of organized religious Daoism, and the *Xiang'er Commentary* (*Laozi Xiang'er zhu* 老子想爾注), a product of the late and post-Han organized theopolitical movement called the "Way of the Celestial Masters" (*tianshi dao* 天師道), identified Laozi as an incarnation of the most supreme Lord Lao (*Taishang Laojun* 太上老君).[16] The vocabulary of "immortality" or "transcendence," of becoming a spirit (*shen* 神) that is sometimes described as becoming a god or "divinization" (granting the differences between *shen* and Western conceptions of god/divinity), and the embodiment and personification of the *dao* in late and post-Han Daoist religious movements need to be interpreted in their early Chinese senses and contexts instead of according to how they might be conceived in Western metaphysics and onto-theology. In this context, the *dao* is personified in the god-like figure of Lord Lao who manifests the way and reveals the path to becoming a spiritually realized being (*xian*), popularly attributed with supernatural capacities, through

techniques of biospiritual transformation and arts of inward alchemy (*neidan shu* 內丹術).[17]

These late and post-Han period developments saw the establishment of religious Daoist societies and institutions that continue to exist to this day. It would be overly narrow and misleading to regard Daoist masters and adepts (*daoshi* 道士) practicing *dao* (*weidao* 為道) as degenerate inheritors of a higher classical Daoism. Various critiques of "religious Daoism" reflect the concerns of the critics. Some aspects already emerged in Han dynasty and mysterious learning disputes over the possibility of immortality (e.g., Ji Kang 嵇康 and Xiang Xiu 向秀) and in Buddhist and Confucian discourses during the medieval period.[18] The Buddhist monk Daoan 道安 (312–385) in his "Essay on the Two Teachings" (*Erjiao lun* 二教論) and the Daoist convert to Buddhism Zhen Luan 甄鸞 (535–566) in his "Laughing at Daoism" (*Xiaodao Lun* 笑道論) polemically distinguished lineages of the "way of immortals" (*xiandao* 仙道) and "way of spirits" (*shendao* 神道) from the higher wisdom of Laozi and Zhuangzi, which was still deemed inferior to the Buddhist dharma.[19] More recently, their emphasis on "external" devotional rituals and inward alchemical and biospiritual meditative techniques led generations of Western scholars, particularly those with philosophical, Protestant, and secular disenchanting sensibilities, to drastically separate an earlier purer "contemplative" "philosophical" Daoism in Laozi and Zhuangzi from subsequent impure forms of "purposive" "religious" Daoism.[20]

Is the division between religious and philosophical directions tenable? No, inasmuch as both concern *dao* even as they express it in different ways. The trick is to be able to make distinctions without fixating them into binary contraries. There are continuities, differences, and at times conflicting interpretations between the various discourses and practices called Daoist. First, the so-called philosophical and religious teachings have historical continuities and can be complementary rather than opposed. For instance, the *Scripture of the Inner Explanations of the Three Heavens* (*santian neijie jing* 三天內解經), a later fifth-century Liu-Song (劉宋) era Celestial Master text, continues to depict how the *dao* corresponds to nothingness (*wu* 無) and generatively self-actualizes itself in nothingness while portraying the "divinized" Laozi as the form of that actualization.[21] Second, there are also diverging and directly conflicting interpretations of the teaching of *dao*. For example, the Eastern Jin Dynasty scholar Ge Hong 葛洪 (*c.* CE 283–364) linked Laozi and Zhuangzi together in his *Master Who Embraces Simplicity* (*Baopuzi* 抱朴子) and adopted interpretive strategies and vocabulary (such as "embracing simplicity" from DDJ 19) from both sources while also criticizing them. One can retrospectively speak of a *Lao-Zhuang* 老莊 teachings from the perspective of its critics, who (like Ge Hong who repeatedly used this expression) challenged the inadequate (from their perspective) discourses of inward alchemy and becoming a biospiritually realized *xian* (immortal or transcendent) in the *Zhuangzi* and in "mysterious learning."[22]

The division thesis that was once academic orthodoxy is inadequate in its rigorous form and needs more nuance: in traditional Chinese texts, the teaching/instruction of *dao* (*daojiao* 道教) was not distinguished from the school or

lineage of *dao* (*daojia*) and the two expressions were commonly interchangeable in pre-modern Chinese sources.[23] *Daojiao* and *daojia* were retrospectively construed in modern scholarship to indicate a fundamental difference between a later religiously oriented movement, with its own institutions and practices, and earlier (Laozi, Zhuangzi) and later ("dark learning") literati discourses consisting of individually oriented reflections concerning the philosophy of nature and the cosmos.

Contemporary scholarship has increasingly demonstrated how problematic this distinction is if it is fixated as an absolute difference that posits one as philosophical wisdom and the other as—relying on modern Protestant and secular assumptions—religious irrationality, occultism, and superstition.[24] This distinction is inadequate to the "philosophical" as well as the "religious" texts if it supposes that the most ancient "philosophical" texts are naturalistic without their own religious dimensions and the later "religious" movements are concerned with the personification of *dao* and the supernatural and are therefore either unrelated or a decadent form fallen from earlier heights.

The very distinction between philosophy (as rational and naturalistic) and religion (as anti-rational, mystical, and supernatural) is overly simplistic and anachronistic in pre-modern Chinese speaking worlds. The application of this Western conception to traditional Chinese discourses has resulted in distortions and unhelpful disputes between proponents of "philosophical" contemplative and "religious" biospiritual forms of Daoism given the complex intertextual referentiality and interdiscursive mediation between these discourses and practices.[25] First, "Daoist" sources are intertextually mediated composites, intersecting with and differing from themselves (as a text is formed from a variety of sources), one another, and the texts linked with other schools (*jia*). Second, the forms of Daoism categorized as contemplative and philosophical have their own religious and purposive contexts. Third, the discourses associated with the names Laozi and Zhuangzi describe and rely on "religious" practices and sensibilities and celebrate the counter-purposive and useless in ways that challenge conventional understandings of self-cultivation and political leadership, due to (as discussed below) their own practical orientations as a way to be enacted in embodied, generative, and vital life (*sheng* 生, signifying birth and growth) and (what can be described as) images of the good (*shan* 善, signifying the good as well as being good at and good for).[26] The good in Daoism is "natural" in the sense of immanent, intraworldly, and operative within and between things themselves.

Daoism as philosophy

Philosophy as an examined way of life

Exploring "early" ("proto-" in some accounts) Daoist sources as philosophical, instead of a doctrinal notion of "philosophical Daoism," the present work rejects the bifurcation of contemplative/purposive and philosophical/religious. Nor is it an attempt to reduce the variety of transmissions of the way to the

categories of modern Western philosophy or religious studies. It offers instead a philosophically-oriented interpretation of the natural and practical philosophies (with their cosmological, ethical, political, personal, and religious aspects) of the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*, along with other related sources such as chapters of the *Liezi*, the *Huainanzi* and the *Guanzi*, to "reimagine"—to adopt an interpretive strategy from Donna J. Haraway's works in the context of prospects for a contemporary intercultural reiteration of early Daoist discourses—their environmental dimensions and implications.[27] What do I mean (in an initial way) by "new Daoism"? This "new Daoist" reimagining is committed to its historical sources, and more significantly the myriad things and *dao* that these tried to address, while rethinking them in our own hermeneutical situation under existing material, intellectual, and intercultural conditions. It is not modern or anti-modern, but potentially—as the book will illustrate—critically diagnostic and therapeutic in regard to modernity and the contemporary ecological crisis-situation.

There are not only disagreements about the proper definition of Daoism, but also philosophy that has been frequently interpreted as a uniquely Western discourse that assumes a universalistic theoretical form in modernity.[28] To what extent can proto- or early Daoism be understood as philosophical at all?

First, philosophy in the Hellenistic milieu was not merely a way of life. Michel Foucault has depicted philosophy as a technique or training of the self and Pierre Hadot has argued that it is a way of life understood as forms of spiritual exercise.[29] Philosophy distinguished itself from ordinary life, common opinions, and worldviews insofar as they are unreflective. Philosophy meant rather to reflectively encounter, engage, and question the circumstances and conditions of one's life and engage in the art or technique of living.[30] Early Chinese literati engaged in conflicts of argumentation, interpretation, and rhetoric. They reflectively addressed problems of life, possibilities of living well, the flowing, plural, and relational nature of what is, and the achievement of wisdom in their own terms in myriad ways that would be retrospectively classified as the "hundred schools."[31] Early Chinese philosophies likewise concerned techniques of the cultivation of or—more critically expressed—the unfixing and dismantling of constructs concerning embodied generative life (*sheng*) that are referred to through expressions such as the heart-mind (*xin* 心), integral core nature (*xing* 性), emotional disposition (*qing* 情), and virtuosity or virtue (*de* 德).[32]

Second, the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* texts are said not to be philosophical insofar as they do not offer a systematic logical or theoretical analysis of reality and language. Although they do not take on the same forms as existing academic theoretical discourses, both texts do in fact deeply confront questions of the conditions of language and reality. Such texts also echo an older meaning of philosophy that was, at one time, first and foremost loving wisdom (*φιλέω σοφία*), examining questions of how best to live one's life that Socrates and Plato identified with the radically transcendent form of the good (*ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα*): a good that subsists as a form beyond nature and being.[33] Philosophy in its early Socratic sense is not only a systematic theorizing about an objectively available content; it is practical in concerning the good that poses a question and makes a

difference to the life of those who pursue it: "the unexamined life is not worth living."[34]

Based on the vocation of philosophy ordained by the god's oracle in Delphi depicted in Plato's *Apology*, one could ask: is there a way of examined life (perhaps of a profoundly different kind), involving specific forms of reflection and dialogue on self, community, and world, aiming at the good in early teachings of *dao*?

A preliminary indication is found in the *Daodejing*, chapter eight, where the highest good is not described as a form or an idea: it is like water (*shangshan ruo shui* 上善若水) in that it benefits (nourishes) the myriad things without contention (*shui shanli wanwu er buzheng* 水善利萬物而不爭).[35] The Chu bamboo-slip text "The Great One Births Water" (*Taiyi sheng shui* 太一生水) discloses the generative fecundity of water in which the great one that engenders it is concealed and sheltered (*dayi cang yushui* 大一藏於水), hiding itself in the world in which it is manifested.[36] The "Water and Earth" (*Shuidi* 水地) chapter of the *Guanzi* states that water is the root of all things and the source of all life.[37] The "Originating in Dao" (*Yuandao*) chapter of the *Huainanzi* portrays how water is an image of the highest virtue and potency (*de*) in flowing inexhaustibly, undoing fixations and limitations, and nourishing neither from partiality nor for the sake of receiving any recompense.[38] Genuinely good persons are impartial in asymmetrically not expecting reciprocity or profit. In the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), which stresses morally based discrimination and partiality, Confucius is reported to have stated that one must only treat virtue with virtue and treat injury with justice.[39] Instead of favoring some and refusing others, and discriminating according to conventional attitudes and moralistic measures concerning goodness and badness, highness and lowliness, the sage brings about parity by regarding both the good and the not good from the equalizing perspective of the good that replies to injury with virtuosity (*baoyuan yi de* 報怨以德).[40] In this vision of the good attributed to Laozi, one works with the myriad things and turns none away (*weier bushi* 為而不恃), and, without needing to do so or coercing them, supports the functioning of their own nature or that which is as it is (*wanwu zhi ziran* 萬物之自然).[41]

As is evident in this preliminary sketch of the nature-oriented and anti-moralistic language of the good in the *Daodejing*, the attempt to answer the Socratic question by turning to Daoist sources—interpreted in their own terms and conditions as well as in the context of intercultural philosophy and the ongoing environmental crisis—could potentially, as articulated in the present work, (1) lead to an alternative understanding of the natural world and practice than the ones articulated in dominant Western philosophical discourses and (2) indicate exemplars and models that could address problems arising from our precarious ecological situation and the intensifying contemporary environmental crisis-tendencies—generated by human social-economic activities—of catastrophic climate-chaos, the relentless overuse and destruction of entire habitats and species, and the detrimental effects of massive quantities and deadlier forms of pollution.

Daoist exemplars, models, and transformative strategies

The view of philosophy as a purely conceptual rational discourse (an assessment that is inadequate to the history and practice of "Western" philosophy) presents another problem. Western philosophical discourse focuses on argumentative strategies only partly evident in classical Chinese discourses that often proceed through cases, examples, and models drawing on the critical and imaginative capacities of interpreters to enact and practice their teachings.

The practical philosophy expressed in the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* (both of which are not stable and univocal but intertextually stratified and multivocal texts) relies on argumentative and interpretive strategies that aim at a transformative effect, and examples that generate models that guide—frequently in a negative form through their negation—embodied self-reflection, biospiritual cultivation, and practice as a whole.

Early Daoist discourses encompass argumentation in, for instance, the dialogues between Zhuangzi and Hui Shi 惠施 (*c.* 370–310 BCE). One finds a multiplicity of linguistic or (more accurately given the Chinese context that does not radically separate language and the body) communicative strategies (to adopt Youru Wang's phrase) such as skeptical and speculative forms of reasoning; poetic reflection and philosophizing; stories of the extraordinary and unusual; allegories, parables, and metaphors; contradictions and paradoxes; the reversing and overturning of conventional expectations and patterns of thinking about what is good and bad, high and low, useful and useless, big and small, and so on; the open ended posing of questions and of the "mystery within mystery" (*xuanxuan* 玄玄).[42]

The personalities and figures occurring in early Daoist indirect forms of communication are not only the personages of Laozi or Zhuangzi.[43] In particular, to mention examples from the *Zhuangzi*, a text that can confound the conventional philosopher, they range across animals and natural phenomena such as water and trees; Confucius and Confucians as befuddled or as teachers of the *dao*; criminals, the deformed, and the insane; eccentric literati, hermits, and shamans; shadows, skulls, and uncanny phenomena; and Liezi riding the winds (*Liezi yufeng* 列子御風) and the extraordinary figures of immortals (without yet using the word *xian* in the earlier strata of the text) inhaling the wind and drinking the dew, soaring with clouds and mists, and wandering beyond the boundaries of the four seas.[44]

The *Daodejing* concerns sages and sage-kings (*shengren* 聖人; it does not use the term *shengwang* 聖王) who are indicative, exemplary, aspirational models for human praxis. The text addresses the sage-king, yet has been taken by its readers and practitioners as addressing them. The *Zhuangzi* speaks of the *shenren* 神人 (the spirit-like or spiritualized person), *zhiren* 至人 (the arrived or perfected person), as well as the *shengren* (the sagely person).[45] These expressions point toward more perfected conditions arrived at through biospiritual techniques and practices that are elucidated in an early form in the "Inward Training" (*Neiye*) that conveys techniques of breathing and the circulation of vital

energies (*qi*).[46] As exemplary indicative types, they also speak to human life in the midst of its imperfections, and can be understood as communicative strategies offering exemplary illustrations and models to transformatively guide and be enacted in an examined way of life that contests the limits of conceptual and verbal categories as well as—in its more radical forms—of artificial, conventional, and prejudicial fixations, constructs, and attitudes.

Daoism, environmental philosophy, and political ecology

Daoist models and their ecological significance

Early Daoist texts are not written by one author or group of writers but are highly stratified, originating from multiple sources. They suggest multiple models of how best to live if thought of in reply to Socrates' question. Sources from the Han dynasty and later periods adopt, forget, and transform these earlier models while forming unique ones of their own. A preliminary sketch of Daoist sources indicates three focal points for the present work: (1) the cosmological event and self-ordering of "nature" (a word that we should consider continuing to deploy precisely because of its multivocal and ambiguous character that is open to a multiplicity of possibilities in contrast to the ideological fixations of "anti-nature" discourses); (2) techniques of biospiritual cultivation of one's nature and models of attunement and action; and (3) the art of governing and administrating society.[47] These three guiding concerns lead to a critique, diagnosis, and therapeutics of dysfunctional and pathological systems of life for the sake of nourishing life (*yangsheng* 養生) that can be renewed in the current environmental predicament as a Daoist (or Daoist-inspired) therapeutic ecology.

"Nature" and the environing world

Contemporary discourses have critiqued the idea of "nature" as romantic and ideological, calling for a renewed ecological thinking "after nature" and the "end of nature." The expression "nature," like any other expression, is used both ideologically and critically. Experiences and ideas of nature can reify it; yet, at the same time, they are interwoven with that which is other than and resists the reduction of things to anthropocentric concern, instrumental usefulness, and social construction that presuppose the denial and domination of nature.[48] Consequently, banning the word does not necessarily resolve genuine problems of the ongoing ecological crisis and might undermine the critical potential indicated in the word along with its ideological functions.

A more troublesome question concerns whether "nature" meaningfully translates anything at all from early Chinese discourses. Western discussions primarily have identified Daoism with mysticism and naturalism, and often with both as a variety of nature-mysticism.[49] Due to the sayings of its nature-oriented hermits, poets, and philosophers, it is a popularized idea that Daoism is ecological because

it advocates living according to or—as expressed in the *Yuandao*— following the "natural direction" of the continually transforming myriad things.[50] Philosophers have likewise defined Daoism as a form of naturalism even though early Daoist "naturalism" is radically different from the scientific and pragmatic conceptions of naturalism articulated in—now globalized—modern Western scientific and philosophical discourses. Therefore, to avoid misidentification and conflation, it is necessary to recognize the extent to which modern Western ideological, metaphysical, and scientific ideas of nature are not the same as classical Chinese understandings of the environing world. The English word "nature" arises from the Latin word *natura* that is derived from *nasci* ("to be born"). *Sheng* (life), as discussed above, is linked with birth, growth, and generation. Daoist "nature" (insofar as this English expression can be used to discuss early Daoist conceptions at all, a risk that we cannot avoid here) is primarily a spontaneous self-generative and self-organizing autopoietic relational "natural" reality (*ziran* 自然) that is interpreted between the poles of a fluid anarchic chaos and a hierarchically fixed and structured order.[51] The word "nature" should be read first and foremost in the flowing transformative (although not completely chaotic) sense of *ziran*, the happening that even *dao* follows and accords with, throughout this work.

There are several Chinese expressions that intersect with aspects of the multivocal concept of nature: (1) *Ziran* is often translated as nature, naturalness, and spontaneity, which are inadequate if these concepts are understood in their conventional meanings. Its two Chinese characters denote self-so-ness or as-is-ness, signifying the self-occurring of things and the world. *Ziran* means that the world and things happen according to their own self-functioning. (2) *Wanwu* 萬物 refers to the myriad things (non-human as well as human) in their specificity (the thing, *wu* 物), equality and parity, and interconnectedness in an interthingly (in contrast to an exclusively intersubjective as interhuman) relational whole.[52] *Wanwu* is sometimes translated as the "myriad creatures," that refers to human and other animal organisms as well as things. The devotion to the thing indicated in (1) and (2), as it is for instance depicted in the swimmer's loyalty (*zhong* 忠) to the water in the "Explaining Conjunctions" (*shuofu* 說符) chapter of the *Liezi*, entails the priority of the thing and its order—without contending with it—has noteworthy ecological implications.[53]

The priority of the thing is evident in Daoist depictions of according with things, of following their own nature rather than our calculations and projections concerning them, and letting things be themselves. This *ethos* of *dao* (an *ethos* with extensive permutations across different sources) is not the spontaneity of ordinary self-concerned thoughtlessness; it requires the nurturing of a non-indifferent recognition and (to employ a term adopted from A. C. Graham) "responsiveness"—which is more originary than moralistic conceptions of responsibility—in relation to things as they are in and for themselves in contrast to fatalistic indifference or the coercion of instrumental manipulation mesmerized by the limiting perspective of usefulness.[54] (3) *Tiande* 天德 is the dynamic order of heaven and earth that embraces humanity as the middle between the two (*tian ren di* 天人地). The word heaven (*tian* 天) is frequently used in early

Daoist sources such as the *Zhuangzi* to distinguish the non-human (as that which is naturally occurring and given in the self-ordering of things) from the human (as that which is produced through artifice, calculation, and convention).[55] There are also ideas concerning the cosmological-political order. It is the king rather than humanity that mediates between heaven and earth and the world is construed as "all under heaven" (*tianxia* 天下) in a hierarchical cosmological-political order centering around China and the Emperor.[56]

There are, as a path is made by walking it, multiple potential models of a *dao* (as articulated—to adopt two Greek words more familiar to Western ears—in an *ethos* and *praxis*) of natural ordering of significance for a contemporary Daoist-influenced environmental philosophy and political ecology. Environmental philosophy interrogates the conditions, reasons, and motivations of discourses and practices as to how they impact the natural world and diverse human and non-human animals within it. Political ecology addresses the relations between the reproduction of human systems and structures and their environing world. Daoist conceptions of the rhythmic transformational functioning of the great unity of the cosmos inform and are in turn shaped by patterns of biospiritual self-cultivation and biopolitical order that can be potentially reimagined without losing the critical function of their otherness with regard to the present.

Attunement and cultivation

Techniques, practices and arts of biospiritual cultivation, one illustration of which is the *Inward Training*, focus on techniques of breathing, the circulation of vital energies (*qi* 氣), internal power and virtuosity, and the body and heart-mind. They aim at bodily and mental health and longevity, but also at a more realized *xian* numinous state or an immanent sort of wandering freedom and ease (*xiaoyao you* 逍遙遊) in the midst of the world that echo earlier shamanistic practices and poetic depictions of far-wandering (*yuanyou* 遠遊) recorded in the *Songs of Chu* (*Chuci* 楚辭) as well as later poetry of hermits and immortals far-roaming in spiritual freedom (*youxian shi* 遊仙詩).[57] Biospiritual arts are schema of attunement or how to interact with the natural and spiritual worlds. Three models of relating practice and the environing world of particular significance to developing an environmental philosophy (as an intellectual discourse and as reflective life-praxis) are nourishing life, attuned action, and emptying and stilling to, as in DDJ 19, a comportment of manifesting plainness (*su* 素) and embracing simplicity (*pu* 樸).

(1) Tending to, nurturing, and nourishing life (*yangsheng*) has multiple meanings in Chinese traditions, and it is important to recognize the difference between early Chinese senses of "life" (*sheng*) in contrast to Western or modern Chinese conceptions of life. It can concern the art of promoting individual health, longevity, and well-being, a position attributed to the bodily oriented "egoist" Yang Zhu 楊朱 (*c.* 440–*c.*360 BCE); the art of being transformed into a higher embodiment of biospiritual being (*xian*); and the

art of nourishing the life of others and the world as is evident in passages in the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. Chapter 2 of the present work will consider to what extent a Daoist-inspired environmental philosophy of emptying nature of fixations and nourishing life (given the generative nature of life) can be articulated from these alternatives.

(2) *Wuwei* 無爲 in ordinary Chinese means non-action or non-doing, yet its significance in early Daoism is more closely approximated by the English expression "responsive attunement" that is frequently deployed throughout this work. *Wuwei* has been construed to imply worldly indifference and neutrality, detachment and separation, or a minimalistic relation to the happenings of the world. These analyses have their sources in classical Daoist and Legalist texts, and capture specific strategies; yet *wuwei* is more appropriately interpreted—in the early Daoist context and in relation to the last discussed relational sense of nourishing life—as non-calculative, non-coercive or non-dominating, responsive action or—more precisely—non-indifferent attunement. Such responsivity (transpiring prior to responsibility that is often linked with its loss) is articulated in images of the echo, the mirror, and the shadow in Daoist texts. In the interpretation of this book, *wuwei* is primarily an attunement and disposition in the midst of and in relation to the myriad things.[58] The third chapter of this book will elucidate the significance of resonance (address) and attunement (response) for environmental philosophy.

(3) The *Laozi*, the *Zhuangzi*, and related texts unfold a philosophical encounter with nothingness *wu* 無 as fundamentally generative and constitutive of reality.[59] In agreement with its conception of generative nothingness, texts from the *Daodejing* to the commentaries attributed to Heshang Gong and Wang Bi illuminate practices of stilling, emptying, and becoming empty (*xu* 虛; more rarely *kong* 空, which was used to translate *śūnyatā* in Sinicized Buddhism, and which is addressed further in Chapter 6).[60] Daoist expressions of nothingness and emptiness indicate that which is originary as opposed to a logically derivative or secondary negation of being.

Daoist destructuring strategies aim at undoing one-sided and limiting hypostatization and reification (that is, becoming "thing-like" in the reduced sense of the thing treated as a fixed object detached from its interthingly context) in life as well as in discourse. The enactment of emptiness undoes fixations and correlates with the openness, fullness, and generativity of nothingness. Chapter 4 will consequently clarify how practices of undoing fixations and emptying nature (in relation to nurturing life and attuned action) offer a "critical model" (an expression adopted from Theodor Adorno) for encountering the roots, in contrast to only the branches, of the human economically and socially generated environmental crisis-tendencies that characterize the contemporary epoch of the "Anthropocene" and its illusion of the human mastery of nature. Donna J. Haraway and others have argued that the present age would be better described as the "Capitalocene" given that the forces and relations of production

in modern capitalist societies thoroughly determine relations between humans, other animals, and nature with devastating ecological effects.[61] The frequently deployed concept of the Anthropocene should be used accordingly in a differentiated and nuanced way given unequal participation and responsibility in it, and in which various human economies, cultures, and societies are implicated to differing degrees. Although human cultures and societies occur within nature as modifications of natural conditions and contexts, they can be more or less ecologically (that is, aesthetically, ethically, scientifically, and social-politically) responsively attuned with the myriad things and their environing worlds.

Society and politics

Early Chinese philosophies are highly invested in issues of ethical and political philosophy. Daoist and related discourses are likewise concerned with how best to govern and administer society and the same text (such as the *Zhuangzi*) provides multiple diverging and apparently contradictory answers: anarchic and individualistic, communal and egalitarian, and weaker and stronger versions of authoritarianism.

First, to what degree did Daoism, as H. G. Creel stated, "push individualism to the point of espousing anarchy"?[62] A chapter on Yang Zhu was incorporated as chapter seven in the existing text of the *Liezi*, which is a later fourth century CE text composed—according to its translator A. C. Graham—in the spirit of the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*. He is described as refusing political participation.[63] Yang Zhu is presented here as advocating following one's own heart-mind and the nature of things, and "nurturing life" as ridding oneself of restraints and restrictions.[64] Efforts to order and organize life result in disorder and harm to individuals and society. Without such hegemony, individuals following the self-ordering of their own nature could be extended "until the way of ruler and ruled is ended."[65] The skull tells Zhuangzi in their conversation in the "Perfect Enjoyment" (*zhile* 至樂) outer chapter that all are equal before death such that there is neither lord above nor subject below (*wujun yushang, wuchen yuxia* 無君於上, 無臣於下). The Daoist inspired anti-governmental theme of needing neither lord nor subject (*wujun wuchen* 無君無臣) is articulated in the *Treatise on Not Having Rulers* (*Wujun lun* 無君論) attributed to the fourth-century figure Bao Jingyan 鮑敬言. Bao maintained that in antiquity there was neither lord nor servant and people found their own self-contentment (*zide* 自得) free and at ease with their natural environment. Ge Hong identified his anti-political thinking with Lao-Zhuang and criticized it as like abandoning one's amour to save oneself from the sword in the "Condemning Bao" (*jiebao* 詰鮑) outer chapter of the *Baopuzi*.

The portraits of Yang Zhu's teaching in the *Liezi* and Bao's thinking in the *Baopuzi* overlaps with the individualistic "Yangist" passages found in the *Zhuangzi* that likewise question the sacrifice of individual nature for an external collective order.[66] Yang Zhu was criticized by other literati such as Mencius (Mengzi 孟子) as an egoist and hedonist, whose art of nourishing life is preserving

one's own body as a whole and rejecting any social responsibility such that one refuses to sacrifice only a single strand of hair to save the empire.[67] If the Yangist is right that each ought to nourish their own life and preserve its integrity, then the sacrificial economy of the social-political order is no longer necessary or justifiable.

Another form of the rejection of the political, strongly linked with Daoist traditions, is the complexly mediated image of the hermit's withdrawal from society into the natural world to perfect their biospiritual nature independently of the disruptive forces of society.[68] Such images can lead to reifying Orientalistic fantasies of being one with nature and spiritual escapism into the mystical circulated by the culture industry. But they have other dimensions such as the critique of the political. Whether construed along Yangist, spiritual Daoistic, or other lines, one family of Daoistic political models centers on the refusal of the political as an adequate way of ordering life and relating with others. Such refusals of and withdrawals from the political have been (anachronistically insofar as these are modern political concepts) depicted as anarchistic, individualistic, or libertarian.[69]Accordingly, an eco-anarchistic reimagining of Daoist philosophy under the conditions of late modernity is a political option explored in Chapter 5.

Second, to what extent is Daoism communal and egalitarian? Another so-called "primitivist" model of Daoist politics found in passages of the *Zhuangzi* (Graham identifies chapters 8–10, and parts of chapter 11) is the rejection of complex hierarchical societies governed by artifice and convention for the sake of a more "primitive" agrarian, autarkic, and egalitarian form of life.[70] Both (1) and (2) emphasize the self-generating and self-organizing character of individual life or of the community. Such elements in the *Daodejing* are not expressed in the anti-political language of the *Zhuangzi* but in light of the mission of the genuine sage-king who can bring about such a genuine community. An egalitarian community living in simplicity could well be an ecological utopian idea, yet it is an outstanding question how this could best be approximated under the conditions of contemporary capitalism and consumerist societies with sizeable populations.

Third, Daoist sources beginning with the *Daodejing* offer instruction to rulers. What sort of ruler is being addressed? Passages in the *Daodejing* such as chapter three, which advises returning the people to plain simplicity without (artificial and excessive) knowledge and desire (*wuzhi wuyu* 無知無欲) by emptying the heart-mind (*xu qi xin* 虛其心) and lessening the will (*ruo qi zhi* 弱其志), strike some interpreters as anarchistic and others as totalitarian.[71] The sage governs through nourishing life (*yangsheng*), acts through responsive attunement (*wuwei*), and thinks and feels through emptying (*xu*). Chapter three has been interpreted as aiming at the realization of a less calculative and coerced, more balanced self-organizing way of living or, in light of Huanglao syncretism or Hanfei's Legalism, as constitutive of the power of the ruler who is all the more coercive in operating in hiddenness behind the scenes of administration.

Early Chinese philosophical sources are syncretic, overlapping, and intertextual to varying degrees. Given that proviso, a preliminary contrast between the *dao*-oriented and the law-oriented ruler, with variations in between, can be delimited according to their understanding of the *dao* and their social-political aims. While early teachings of the way elucidate the generative, nourishing, and almost anarchic characteristics of the *dao* that can take on political (Laozi) and anti-political (Zhuangzi) forms, syncretic Huanglao and Legalist discourses (we will bracket issues of their historical origins and development in the present work) tend to accentuate to differing degrees—as Hanfei does in the opening passage of "The Sovereign's Way" (*zhudao* 主道)—how the *dao* produces standards and measures, forms and names, to be applied by the sovereign power reposed in emptiness (*xujing* 虛靜).[72] In the milder depiction of the ideal model of the sage-ruler presented in multiple passages of the *Daodejing*, the genuine sage-king rules for the sake of nourishing the life of the people and the myriad things, bringing benefit without contending and without seeking acknowledgement such that people to the maximal degree possible govern themselves. In stronger authoritarian Huanglao Daoist and Legalist versions of administration, the king employs laws, methods, and techniques to retain and maximize positional power and authority (*shi* 勢): the enlightened ruler (*mingjun* 明君), according to Hanfei in "The Sovereign's Way" chapter, rewards like a timely rain (*shiyu* 時雨) and punishes like the thunderstorm (*leiting* 雷霆).[73]

The biopolitics of Yangist, Daoist, and Legalist discourses share overlapping registers, strategies, and concerns, and their own specificity, that point toward alternative routes for reflecting on and engaging with the environment. Proceeding from these divergent interpretations of nourishing life, non-doing, and emptiness in the contemporary hermeneutical situation, it is possible to revision political ecologies of nourishing life through: (1) the rejection of the political for the sake of cultivating one's individual nature that may—following anarchistic and libertarian readings—have emancipatory results; (2) the promotion of the life of others, modeled on the *dao*'s spontaneous and autopoietic self-generating nourishing and sheltering of the myriad beings, reconceived through an ecologically-oriented democratic social and political structures and processes of collective will-formation; and (3) an eco-authoritarian political order in which the hidden ruler, active in repose, follows *dao* as correct method, deploying the state apparatus and benefits and punishments to motivate a more effectively ecological society.

Daoistic and interdiscursively related forms of individuality, equality, and the art of the genuine ruler are three directions for reconsidering ecological politics in the contemporary world.[74] The problem of an appropriate political ecology is a crucial issue insofar as the existing social-political order has failed to adequately respond to contemporary ecological crises, and perhaps constitutively prevents it. To what extent can individuals, communities, statespersons, and social-political movements nourish life through responsive attunement and emptiness? Chapter 5 will be concerned with the possibility of a Daoist political ecology on two fronts: the *ethos* of the individual and the art of the ruler in a

modern democratic and progressive context that calls for maximizing while balancing the demands of equality, liberty, and solidarity.

Toward a critical therapeutic ecology

Despite the popularized impression that Daoism tells us to embrace nature and is intrinsically ecological, a fair amount of the vast literature on the topic is skeptical of the relevance of an ancient form of Chinese wisdom for a modern problematic.[75] An objection to the interpretation articulated in the present work might be that Daoism has nothing to do with modern environmentalism and, according to an interpretation contested in this work, its implications might be anti-ecological.

First, it might be thought that the desperately needed ecological transformation requires scientific research, not philosophy; activism, not passivity; democratic politics, not sages. Ecological research, direct engagement, and participatory politics are undeniably fundamental to addressing current environmental crisis-tendencies. However, such ideas are overly restrictive insofar as scientific inquiry informs but cannot replace reflective and dialogical self-examination and direct activism and participation call for an ecologically-oriented path in which plainness and simplicity, stillness and emptiness do not entail a fatalistic indifferent dormancy but the responsive recognition of and attunement with the myriad things and the conditions, patterns, and situation of life while at the same time being reposed in the midst of affairs.

Second, one could well pose additional questions concerning the appropriateness of Daoism as an individual and social *ethos*: doesn't Daoism advocate acceptance of and resignation before reality (including all of its injustices) first and foremost? Does accepting the whole mean that one embraces the piece of plastic—which has replaced the leaf—drifting down the river into a great mass of plastics (much of which is invisible to the naked eye) gathering in the swirling ocean? Is the pollution poured into the lake by a factory equal to the rain-waters running into it after a downpour? Should we accept the death of endangered species and wildernesses just as we should accept the natural death of individuals as outside of the practice of nourishing life?

Interpretations of Daoism that accentuate practices of detached biospiritual self-formation and fatalistic indifference might suggest so. If everything is left to its own nature (in the sense of the happening of *ziran*), things inevitably return to their allotted patterns without the need for artificial and coercive interventions. Still, one can give the latter claim a less fatalistic reading in that leaving things to their own nature signifies a therapeutic critique of existing states of affairs. If *yangsheng* is interpreted in the context of Zhuangzian freedom, early Daoist sources are "critical" in calling for a transformative turn within the crisis toward different, less distorted ways of living that tend to nourishing in preference to hindering life.[76]

While acknowledging the perils of conflating ancient teachings of *dao* and modern environmentalism, Daoist sources have much to say—directly and more

often indirectly and in need of renewed conceptualizations—about the issues posed to us by current crises of ecology, climate, and animal life: they offer understandings of the intrinsic nature and value of things (particularly living and non-living beings) and dynamic patterns of nature (interconnected climates, ecosystems, and environments).[77] They advise therapies of the embodied self in relation to other beings and the environing world. Even as early Daoism rejects overly assertive and coercive fixated action (*wei* 爲) that does violence to things and prioritizes minimalism, non-coercion or non-domination, and allowing self-ordering things and systems to flourish on their own in its experiences of nature (as *tiande* and *ziran*) and the highest forms of attuned action as *wuwei*, this does not entail an indifference or neutrality to the interruption and devastation of eco-systems, environments, and forms of life. The exemplary sages of old worked with things and were neither transfixed by nor indifferent to them.

Daoist strategies are often critical, deconstructive, and skeptical. Yet they are more than and in excess of these moments: its comportment or *ethos* of nourishing life, which is misinterpreted if taken as being either only cruelty or compassion, calls for responsively recognizing and cherishing things in their singular life and letting them go in their death. The sense of an appropriate reverence in life and releasement in death is disclosed in the contentious straw dog passage of chapter five of the *Daodejing*, Zhuangzi's celebration after mourning his wife's death, or the response of Yanzi (晏子) to Duke Jing of Qi's wish for immortality described in the "Endeavor and Destiny" (*liming* 力命) chapter of the *Liezi*.[78] In Yanzi's reply that the death of the duke's ancestors made his place and power possible, the valuing and letting go of one's own and the other's life does not signify indifference. It is the recognition of intergenerational justice of letting each take its turn in the temporality of its own seasonality (*shi* 时) that has implications for ecological justice.[79] We will consider the extent to which early transmissions of the way have critical and diagnostic features that entail therapeutic and restorative interventions for the sake of tending to and respecting diverse forms of life in the "Anthropocene" (a commonly employed expression that raises a number of problems) by restoring and reviving the broken, interrupted, and pathological patterns of an ecologically devastated earth and damaged life.[80]

Notes

1 *Daodejing* (= DDJ) 16. Note that the primary source of the Chinese text is *Laozi daode jing* 老子道德經, annotated by Wang Bi 王弼 (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1990) and Lou Yulie 樓宇烈, *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi* 王弼集校釋 [Collection of Wang Bi's Works: Critical Edition with Annotations] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1980). A number of translations have been consulted that I have silently modified in a number of places: Roger Ames, David Hall, trans., *Daodejing: Making this Life Significant* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003); P. J. Ivanhoe, trans., *The Daodejing of Laozi* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002); D. C. Lau, trans., *Tao Te Ching* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1996); Richard J. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue: A New Translation of the Tao-te ching of Laozi as interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Hans-Georg Moeller, *Daodejing*

(Laozi): A Complete Translation and Commentary (Chicago: Open Court, 2007); Edmund Ryden, trans., *Daodejing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

2 Roger T. Ames, D. C. Lau, trans., *Yuan Dao: Tracing Dao to its Source* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 61; John S. Major, Sarah A. Queen, Andrew S. Meyer, and Harold D. Roth, trans., *The Huainanzi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 48.

3 Arne Næss, *The Selected Works of Arne Naess* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 50.

4 For an overview of "Daoism," see Livia Kohn, *Daoism Handbook* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Fabrizio Pregadio, *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, two volumes (Oxon: Routledge, 2008); Kristofer Marinus Schipper, Franciscus Verellen, *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang*, three volumes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). On the modern European reception of Daoism, see J. J. Clarke, *The Tao of the West: Western Transformations of Taoist Thought* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2002).

5 See Kidder Smith, "Sima Tan and the Invention of Daoism, 'Legalism,' et cetera." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62.1 (2003): 129–156.

6 Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記, ten volumes (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1959). On Sima Qian, see Grant Hardy, *Worlds of Bronze and Bamboo: Sima Qian's Conquest of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Esther S. Klein, *Reading Sima Qian from Han to Song: The Father of History in Pre-Modern China* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

7 Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (Taipei: Muduo chubanshe, 1983).

8 Sima Qian, "Laozi, Han Fei, liezhuan 老子韓非列傳," *Shiji*, juan 63, vol. 7: 2139–2156.

9 See Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, *Hanfeizi xin jiaozhu* 韓非子新校注 (Shanghai: Guji. 2000), chapters 20–21; Tae Hyun Kim, "Other *Laozi* Parallels in the *Hanfeizi*: An alternative approach to the textual history of the *Laozi* and early Chinese thought." *Sino-Platonic Papers* 199 (March 2010): 1–76; Sarah A. Queen, "Han Feizi and the Old Master: A Comparative Analysis and Translation of Han Feizi Chapter 20, 'Jie Lao,' and Chapter 21, 'Yu Lao,'" in Paul R. Goldin, ed., *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Han Fei* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 197–256.

10 On Huanglao, see Feng Cao, *Daoism in Early China: Huang-Lao Thought in Light of Excavated Texts* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Randall Peerenboom, *Law and Morality in Ancient China: The Silk Manuscripts of Huang-Lao* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

11 W. Allyn Rickett, trans., *Guanzi: Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays from Early China*, two volumes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998/2001).

12 On "mysterious learning," see the comprehensive volume by David Chai, ed., *Dao Companion to Xuanxue (Neo-Daoism)* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2020); on Daoism, religion, and Daoistic religious movements, see Henri Maspero, *Le taoisme et les religions chinoises* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971); Isabelle Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

13 On *xuanxue*, Daoism, and Wang Bi, see Alan K. L. Chan, *Two Visions of the Way: A Study of the Wang Pi and the Ho-shang Kung Commentaries on the Lao-tzu* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); Richard J. Lynn, "Wang Bi and *Xuanxue*," in Xiaogan Liu, ed., *Dao Companion to Daoist Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015), 369–396; Eric S. Nelson, "Language and Nothingness in Wang Bi," in Chai, *Dao Companion to Xuanxue*; Rudolf G. Wagner, *A Chinese Reading of the Daodejing: Wang Bi's Commentary on the Laozi with Critical Text and Translation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

14 For an overview of early *Daodejing* commentaries, see Alan K. L. Chan, "The Daodejing and Its Tradition," in Kohn, *Daoism Handbook*, 1–29; Pregadio, *Encyclopedia of Taoism*, vol. 1, 611–624.

15 On Bian Shao's *Laozi Inscription* (*Laozi ming* 老子銘), see Pregadio, *Encyclopedia of Taoism*, vol. 1, 621–662; and (for an English translation) Mark Csikszentmihalyi, *Readings in Han Chinese Thought* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 105–112. On the

process of Laozi's deification during the Han period, see Anna Seidel, *La Divinisation de Lao-tseu dans le Taoism des Han* (Paris: Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient, 1969); on deification, see Michael J. Puett, *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002). On embodiment and personification of *dao*, see Kristofer Schipper, *The Taoist Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

16 See Barbara Hendrischke, *The Scripture on Great Peace: The Taiping Jing and the Beginnings of Daoism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); and the *Xiang'er Commentary* in Stephen R. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 29–148.

17 Terry F. Kleeman, *Celestial Masters: History and Ritual in Early Daoist Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016); Gil Raz, *The Emergence of Daoism: Creation of Tradition* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012); Pregadio, *Encyclopedia of Taoism*, vol. 1, 622–623.

18 On the former, see David Chai, "Ji Kang on Nourishing Life." *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 12.1 (2017): 38–53; Robert G. Henricks, trans., *Philosophy and Argumentation in Third-Century China: The Essays of Hsi K'ang* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 21–70.

19 See Christine Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face: Scripture, Ritual, and Iconographic Exchange in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008], 12; Shiyi Yu, *Reading the Chuang-tzu in the T'ang Dynasty: The Commentary of Ch'eng Hsüan-ying* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 125–130.

20 These distinctions can be found in Herrlee Glessner Creel, *What Is Taoism?: And Other Studies in Chinese Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (New York: Open Court, 2015), 172. See the account of these forms of Daoism in Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion*, 34–35.

21 Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 217; Kohn, *Daoism Handbook*, 261.

22 See Creel, *What is Taoism*, 22; Jay Sailey, *Master Who Embraces Simplicity: A Study of the Philosopher Ko Hung* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1978), 77, 187, 220; and the description of Ge Hong's ambivalence toward Zhuangzi in Robert Ford Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 84–85. On the image and notion of immortal/transcendent, also see Thomas Michael, "Ge Hong's *Xian*: Private Hermits and Public Alchemists." *Journal of Daoist Studies* 8 (2015): 24–51. On problems with the very expression "Daoism" with regard to Ge Hong, see Nathan Sivin, "On the Word 'Daoist' as a Source of Perplexity." *History of Religions* 17 (1978): 303–330.

23 Schipper and Verellen, *The Taoist Canon*, vol. 1, 6.

24 See Russell Kirkland, *Taoism: The Enduring Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2004); Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion*.

25 "Intertextual" in this context diverges from its pure structuralist definition, referring here to the mutual referentiality of texts and discourses without denying a role for authors and intersubjectivity in their production. See my argument in Eric S. Nelson, *Chinese and Buddhist Philosophy in Early Twentieth-Century German Thought* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 3.

26 On the *Daodejing* as expressing a practical philosophy prioritizing the good, see Eric S. Nelson, "Martin Buber's Phenomenological Interpretation of the *Daodejing*," in David Chai, ed., *Daoist Encounters with Phenomenology: Thinking Interculturally about Human Existence* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 105–120. On goodness in Daoism, also see Mary I. Bockover, "Daoism, Ethics, and Faith: The Invisible 'Goodness' of Life." *Journal of Daoist Studies* 4. 4 (2011): 139–153.

27 Strategies of reimagining and reconfiguring are deployed in works such as Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016). The idea of an intercultural new Daoism is a consequence of

Daoism having a plurality of historical forms that are polycultural, and not purely Chinese in an essentialist sense, and that can be rethought and reconfigured in relation to the conditions and processes of modernity such as—to name only a few—capitalism, democracy, globalization, industrialization, modernization, and the development of the sciences and new technologies. "New" is more appropriate than "modern" insofar as it must not only recognize and accept but also engage in a critique modernity when needed. In recognizing a proliferation of forms (such as traditional and non-traditional, Chinese and non-Chinese, religious and philosophical) of Daoism, it is distinct from the idea of "Eurodaoism" articulated in Peter Sloterdijk, *Eurotaoismus: Zur Kritik der politischen Kinetik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989).

28 I examine the issue of Eurocentric and intercultural definitions of philosophy in Nelson, *Chinese and Buddhist Philosophy*.

29 See Michel Foucault, *About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Lectures at Dartmouth College (1980)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016); Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995).

30 On philosophy as self-reflection (*Selbstbesinnung*) on life arising in diverse human milieus, see Georg Misch, *Der Weg in die Philosophie* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1926); and the substantially altered and revised English translation; *The Dawn of Philosophy: A Philosophical Primer* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951); and Nelson, *Chinese and Buddhist Philosophy*, 131–157.

31 There are affinities between the emergence of reflective interrogative discourses in China, Greece, and India during this period. But these affinities need not entail the strong theory of an "axial age" (*Achsenzeit*) as introduced by Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History* (London: Routledge, 2014). For a further discussion of Jaspers, Asian philosophy, and Daoism, see Mario Wenning, "The Dao of Existence: Jaspers and Laozi," in Chai, *Daoist Encounters with Phenomenology*, 135–158.

32 See Curie Virág, *The Emotions in Early Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 102–104. On the problem of identifying early Chinese forms of thought with philosophy, see Carine Defoort, "Is There Such a Thing as Chinese Philosophy? Arguments of an Implicit Debate." *Philosophy East and West* 51.3 (2001): 393–413.

33 On the question of the status of the good in Plato's dialogues, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986). On the question of "the good beyond being," see Sarah Allen, *The Philosophical Sense of Transcendence: Levinas and Plato on Loving Beyond Being* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2009); Matthias Baltes, "Is the Idea of the Good in Plato's Republic beyond Being?" in Mark Joyal, ed., *Studies in Plato and the Platonic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2017), 21–42; Tanja Staehler, *Plato and Lévinas: The ambiguous out-side of Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2009).

34 Plato, *Apology* (38a5–6), in Thomas West and Grace West, trans., *Four Texts on Socrates* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 92.

35 DDJ 8; Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, 10–11.

36 See Sarah Allan, "The Great One, Water, and the Laozi: New Light from *Guodian*." *T'oung Pao*, Second Series, 89, 4/5 (2003): 237–285. On water in early Chinese discourses, see Sarah Allan, *The Way of Water and Sprouts of Virtue* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

37 Rickett, *Guanzi*, vol. 2, 100.

38 *Yuandao*, 102–105; *Huainanzi*, 63.

39 *Analects* 14.34; Edward Slingerland, trans., *Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 167–168.

40 DDJ 49; Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, 70–71: 善者，吾善之；不善者，吾亦善之；德善; DDJ 63; Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, 92–93.

41 DDJ 2 and 64; Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, 4–5, 92–95.

42 The notion of "linguistic strategy" is adopted from Youru Wang, *Linguistic Strategies in Daoist Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism: The Other Way of Speaking* (London: Routledge, 2013).

43 On the non-duality and inseparability of the body and language in early Chinese thought, see Jane Geaney, *Language as Bodily Practice in Early China: A Chinese Grammatology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018). On indirect communication as a means of philosophizing, see Julian Baggini and Peter S. Fosl, *The Philosopher's Toolkit: A Compendium of Philosophical Concepts and Methods* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 256. Concerning Daoist indirect communication, see Wang, *Linguistic Strategies in Daoist Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism*.

44 On the development of notions of self-divination and the immortal/transcendent, see Michael, "Ge Hong's *Xian*," 24–51; Puett, *To Become a God*; Seidel, *La divinisation de Lao-tseu*.

45 *Zhuangzi*, chapter 2 (*qiwulun* 齊物論); references are to the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, annotated by Guo Xiang 郭象 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1990). See Thomas Michael, *In the Shadows of the Dao: Laozi, the Sage, and the Daodejing* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 121.

46 The text is incorporated in the *Guanzi* as chapter 49. See Harold D. Roth, *Original Tao: Inward Training (Nei-yeh) and the Foundations of Taoist Mysticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

47 There are other important arts and practices (such as those of astronomy, medicine, and military strategy) that this work will not have the space and time to discuss at length.

48 On the exclusion and domination of nature, see Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1979); William Leiss, *Domination of Nature* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1994); Arne Johan Vetlesen, *The Denial of Nature: Environmental Philosophy in the Era of Global Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 2015). This problematic with respect to Adorno and Levinas is unfolded more comprehensively in part one of Eric S. Nelson, *Levinas, Adorno, and the Ethics of the Material Other* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020).

49 I argue that the Western categories of mysticism and naturalism both reify and distort early Daoist philosophies in Eric S. Nelson, "Questioning Dao: Skepticism, Mysticism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi." *International Journal of the Asian Philosophical Association* 1.1 (2008): 5–19.

50 *Yuandao*, 72–73: *Huainanzi*, 53: "其自然而推之, 萬物之變"; on the distinctness of "following nature" in early Chinese philosophy, see Franklin Perkins, "Following Nature with Mengzi or Zhuangzi." *International Philosophical Quarterly* 45.3 (2005): 327–340.

51 See David Chai, "Rethinking the Daoist Concept of Nature." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 43.3–4 (2016): 259–274. On "acosmotic" *autopoiesis* in the context of early Daoism, see Hans-Georg Moeller, *Daoism Explained: From the Dream of the Butterfly to the Fishnet Allegory* (Chicago: Open Court, 2004), 40–41.

52 On the Daoist concept of the thing, see David Chai, "Meontological Generativity: A Daoist Reading of the Thing." *Philosophy East and West* (2014): 303–318; Sai Hang Kwok, "Zhuangzi's Philosophy of Thing." *Asian Philosophy* 26.4 (2016): 294–310. On the "interthingly," see A. A. Pang-White, "Nature, Interthing Intersubjectivity, and the Environment: A Comparative Analysis of Kant and Daoism." *Dao* 8.1 (2009): 61–78.

53 *Liezi jishi* 列子集釋, annotated by Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979); A. C. Graham, trans., *The Book of Lieh-Tzu: A Classic of the Tao* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 166.

54 On responsiveness in Daoism, see A. C. Graham, trans., *Chuang-tzŭ: The Inner Chapters* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001), 13–14; in contemporary Western philosophy, see Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 71.

55 See my discussion of this usage and its implications in Eric S. Nelson, "The Human and the Inhuman: Ethics and Religion in the *Zhuangzi*." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 41.S1 (2014): 723–739.
56 See DDJ 25; Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, 36–39. See Lynn, *Classic of the Way*, 96; Chan, *Two Visions of the Way* 60. On the development of the discourse of *tianxia*, see Junping Liu, "The Evolution of *Tianxia* Cosmology and its Philosophical Implications." *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 1.4 (2006): 517–538.
57 See Gopal Sukhu, *The Songs of Chu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 142–151; on the *Chuci* and the poetic forms it inspired, see Paul W. Kroll, "On 'Far Roaming.'" *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 116.4 (1996): 653–669; Fusheng Wu, "From Protest to Eulogy: Poems of Saunters in Sylphdom from Pre-Qin to the Late Six Dynasties." BIBLID 18:2 (2000): 397–426. On the shamanic background of classical Chinese thought, see Li Zehou 李澤厚, *You wu dao li, shi li gui ren* 由巫到禮釋禮歸仁 [From Shamanism to Ritual Propriety: Returning to Benevolence]. Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2015.
58 Concerning the interpretation of *wuwei*, which is a concept also used in non-Daoist discourses such as Confucian and Legalist ones, see the helpful discussion in Edward Slingerland, *Effortless Action: Wu-wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
59 For a systematic account of generative nothingness, see David Chai, *Zhuangzi and the Becoming of Nothingness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019).
60 On the Heshang Gong and Wang Bi commentaries, see Chan, *Two Visions of the Way*.
61 For an analysis of the concept of the Anthropocene and its potential and pitfalls, see Erle C. Ellis, *Anthropocene: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 30–57; Jason W. Moore, ed., *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland: PM Press, 2016).
62 Creel, *What Is Taoism*, 69.
63 Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 172.
64 Graham, *Lieh-Tzu*, 140, 142.
65 Graham, *Lieh-Tzu*, 145–146.
66 See Graham, *Chuang-tzŭ*, part five, 224–258. For an alternative classification of the chapters and intellectual tendencies in the *Zhuangzi*, see Xiaogan Liu, *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).
67 *Mencius* 7A26; Irene Bloom, trans., *Mencius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 150.
68 On hermits in classical Daoism, see Thomas Michael, "Hermits, Mountains, and *Yangsheng* in Early Daoism: Perspectives from the Zhuangzi," in Livia Kohn, ed., *New Visions of the Zhuangzi* (St. Petersburg: Three Pines Press, 2015), 149–164.
69 For interpretations of Daoism and anarchism, see Chapter 5 below and Roger T. Ames, "Is Political Taoism Anarchism?" *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 10.1 (1983): 27–47; John A. Rapp, *Daoism and Anarchism: Critiques of State Autonomy in Ancient and Modern China* (London: Continuum, 2012); Aleksandar Stamatov, "The *Laozi* and Anarchism." *Asian Philosophy* 24.3 (2014): 260–278.
70 See Graham, *Chuang-tzŭ*, part four, 200–223.
71 For an account of the *Daodejing* as heartless totalitarianism, without any space for compassion or responsiveness, see Jordan Paper, "'Daoism' and 'Deep Ecology:' Fantasy and Potentiality," in N. J. Girardot; Xiaogan Liu; James Miller, eds, *Daoism and Ecology: Ways within a Cosmic Landscape* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 3–21. On the significance of nourishing compassion/care (*ci* 慈) in the *Daodejing*, see Ann Pang-White, "Daoist *Ci* 慈, Feminist Ethics of Care, and the Dilemma of Nature." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 43.3–4 (2016): 275–294.
72 *Hanfeizi*, "The Sovereign's Way" (*zhudao* 主道), chapter 5.1; Wen Kwei Liao, trans., *The Complete Works of Han Fei Tzu* (London: Probsthain, 1939), 30.

73 *Hanfeizi*, chapter 5.3; Liao, *Complete Works of Han Fei Tzu*, 34–35.

74 On Daoism and contemporary ecological politics, with reference to the current Chinese situation, see Martin Schönfeld and Xia Chen, "Daoism and the Project of an Ecological Civilization or *Shengtai Wenming* 生态文明." *Religions* 10.11 (2019): 630–645.

75 For an overview of issues of Daoism and the environment, see the essays gathered in *Daoism and Ecology* as well as James Miller, *China's Green Religion: Daoism and the Quest for a Sustainable Future* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017). For analyses of the relevance problem, see Paul D'Ambrosio, "Rethinking Environmental Issues in a Daoist Context: Why Daoism is and is not Environmentalism." *Environmental Ethics* 35.4 (2013): 407–417; Paul R. Goldin, "Why Daoism is not Environmentalism." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 32.1 (2005): 75–87; Karyn Lai, "Conceptual Foundations for Environmental Ethics: A Daoist Perspective." *Environmental Ethics* 25. 3 (2003): 247–266; Eric S. Nelson, "Responding with Dao: Early Daoist Ethics and the Environment." *Philosophy East and West* 59.3 (2009): 294–316.

76 Concerning the critical potential of Daoism, see Mario Wenning, "Daoism as Critical Theory." *Comparative Philosophy* 2.2 (2011): 50–71.

77 For valuable accounts of the climate crisis in relation to Daoism, see Chen Xia and Martin Schönfeld, "A Daoist Response to Climate Change." *Journal of Global Ethics* 7.2 (2011): 195–203; Martin Schönfeld, "Grounding Phenomenology in the *Daodejing*: The Anthropocene, the Fourfold, and the Sage," in Chai, *Daoist Encounters with Phenomenology*, 275–308.

78 DDJ 5; Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, 8–9; *Zhuangzi*, chapter 18 (*zhile* 至樂); Graham, *Lieh-Tzu*, 133.

79 On the ecological justice of "taking turns," see Matthias Fritsch, *Taking Turns with the Earth: Phenomenology, Deconstruction, and Intergenerational Justice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).

80 Donna J. Haraway introduces "becoming with" as an alternative to the notion of becoming. This resonates with the interpretation of *ziran* as the transforming with of things in their interthingly and interspecies relations in the present work. As is clear in this book, "thing" (*wu* 物) encompasses any being, entity, or self-ordering relational system. Things are differentiated by observing and tracing their ways of changing (*yi* 易) and transforming (*hua* 化). On the becoming with between species and living in devastated ruinated environments, see Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 4, 12, 38. "Damaged life" is an expression adopted from Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 2005). On its ecological and ethical significance, see part one of Nelson, *Ethics of the Material Other*.