Questioning *Dao*: Skepticism, Mysticism, and Ethics in the *Zhuangzi*

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Abstract
Few things seem less appropriate to the multiple transitional perspectives of the Zhuangzi than their reduction to one philosophical or religious standpoint. Nonetheless, two prevailing readings do this: One suspends the proto-Daoist religious context of the Zhuangzi and discovers a linguistically oriented skepticism; the other interprets the Zhuangzi's critical strategies as a means subordinated to the ultimate stereological purpose of becoming a Daoist sage through mystical union with an absolute called "the Dao." Although both interpretations have plausibility, they are inadequate to the Zhuangzi's ethical and existential character. Since this text cannot be appropriately interpreted according to any one discourse, including skepticism and mysticism, the Zhuangzi's destructuring and poetic strategies are not simply techniques serving an ulterior philosophical or religious purpose. Oriented by the immanent cultivation of the self (zhenren), linguistic and biospiritual practices performatively enact a critical, fluid, and responsive comportment or disposition in relation to the myriad things.

1. Introduction

The beginning of the *Zhuangzi* (莊子) portrays how one perspective can take itself for the whole, evaluating everything else according to the standards of its own existence. A quail would laugh at a giant bird Peng (鵬) that flies across the entirety of the world, and a local officer who is effective in one locale considers himself knowledgeable in all areas.[1] Whereas the first *Inner Chapter* (*Neipian* 內篇) suggested the difference between things, the inappropriateness of judging one

[1] *Zhuangzi*, chapter 1. See Martin Palmer's *The Book of Chuang Tzu* (London: Penguin/Arkana, 1996); and Hyun Höchsmann and Yang Guorang, *Zhuangzi* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007).

perspective from the limited scope of another, the second indicated the evenness and equality between perspectives. All are equal in each being itself.[2] Finding the pivot between equality and difference, the sage responds to all things without end, and wanders free and at ease through the dusty world, letting all things pursue their own course. I argue that the worldly freedom and spontaneous responsiveness (*ziran* 自然) of Zhuangzi's "highest man" or "perfected person" (*zhenren* 真人), who is individuated in dwelling in accordance with *dao* 道, entails neither skepticism nor mysticism as is frequently maintained. As an alternative, I contend that the *Zhuangzi* indicates an ethical and existential comportment or disposition enacted in relation to oneself and the myriad things (*wanwu* 萬物). This worldly yet emancipatory ethics of the *zhenren* needs to be situated, on the one hand, in relation to its proto-religious Daoist (i.e., *daojiao* 道教) and its wider historical and practical contexts that it modified and transformed.[3] On the other hand, contextualizing the content, historicity, and performativity of the *Zhuangzi* reveals the ethical and experiential significance of its uses of a variety of strategies, including skeptical argumentation, mystical ways of speaking, references to biospiritual practices, and mythic imagery.[4]

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[2] *Zhuangzi*, ch. 2; Palmer, 1996, 12-13; Höchsmann/Guorang, 2007, 91-92.

[3] The distinction between an early "philosophical Daoism" (*daojia* 道家) and later "religious Daoism" (*daojiao* 道教) is problematic. There are multiple overlapping and differentiated Daoisms, as Isabelle Robinet's discusses in *Taoism: Growth of a Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 34-35.

[4] This argument also responds to scholars like Russell Kirkland who deemphasize the significance of the *Zhuangzi* for Daoism while simultaneously relying on it. For Kirkland, the *Zhuangzi* has no great import for actual Daoism while arguing that it provides its central exemplar of the *zhenren*. Like Ge Hong's (葛洪) critique of *xuanxue* (玄學 "Dark Learning"), and despite Girardot's demonstration of the centrality of biospiritual practices, Kirkland only finds a beautiful yet empty idea of life in the *Zhuangzi* without any actual program of self-

2. Doubting Zhuangzi

Chad Hansen, who admirably demonstrated the epistemological radicalism and skeptical tendencies of the *Zhuangzi* in *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, has most rigorously argued that Zhuangzi is a "thoroughgoing relativistic philosophical skeptic," rather than a "mystical guru."[5] Although he is surely correct that Zhuangzi is not the New Age hippie of recent popular literature, there are several problems with Hansen's reading.

His argument that skepticism and mysticism are inherently incompatible is at odds with his own methodological premise that there is no need to assume one coherent or consistent position throughout a text such as the *Zhuangzi*, much less the constant identity of its author. Ironically, Hansen's refutation of coherence, consistency and authorial identity as interpretive criteria has the unintended consequence that "mysticism" cannot be excluded as incompatible with relativistic skepticism. As a figure that defies being identified with one constant authorial identity, Zhuangzi could happily wed these and other ways of speaking, and the text attributed to him presents multiple overlapping and incommensurable voices and communications. If this radical pluralism is not accidental or strategic but performatively constitutive of the phenomenological multi-perspectivism unfolded in the text, then it also applies to relativism and skepticism as fixed standpoints such that one cannot rest in reversal and assert and prefer non-knowledge to knowledge, silence to speaking, negation to affirmation. In rejecting "this" (one perspective) Zhuangzi does not rest in the "that" (the other perspective) but plays in the open field of their mutuality and separation.

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cultivation. See R. Kirkland, *Taoism: The Enduring Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2004), ch. 2 and ch. 5.

[5] See his article "Guru or Skeptic? Relativistic Skepticism in the *Zhuangzi*," 129-162, in Scott Cook (ed.), *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi* (Albany: SUNY, 2003); and *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

Even the characters of the *Zhuangzi* have no constant identity or position—we see a fish become a bird, a man a butterfly, and his Kongzi (孔子) occasionally plays the fool, sometimes a rigid and inflexible character, and other times Kongzi unfolds *dao* (道) itself.

Hansen rightly argues that Zhuangzi's *dao* should be understood in its ancient Chinese context. He himself fails to do this in focusing on its "philosophical" context to the exclusion of its proto-Daoist "religious" context that informed the text and later religious Daoist traditions in varied ways. The significance of proto-Daoist biospiritual practices in particular should inform interpreting the *Zhuangzi*, given that the text is littered with references (ironic and otherwise) to the sages who cultivate reality, riding the wind and living on mist, proper breathing and longevity, as well as to emptying the self and freely responding in accordance with *dao*.[6] The presence of these motifs in the *Inner Chapters*—including Hansen's preferred chapter two, the *Qiwulun* (齊物論), which begins with a scene of meditation and concludes with the "transformation of things"—indicates that its authors were responding to beliefs and practices later associated with religious Daoism.[7] Accordingly, given Hansen's own methodological premises, the *Zhuangzi* cannot be restricted to one preeminent context and reading. We ourselves need to respond to its diverse contexts and meanings, including those that are incommensurable with or considered secondary from contemporary Western perspectives.

More problematically for Hansen's position, the figure of Zhuangzi in no way seems committed to the priority of one position or perspective, including skepticism that—much like negative theology—fixates and reifies negation and apophatic language rather than freely and

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[6] Girardot's and Roth's exploration of biospiritual practices in the *Zhuangzi* is more accurate than Kirkland's claim that the *Zhuangzi* gives "no instruction for engaging in biospiritual practices" (Kirkland, 2004, 36), and offers no practices (ibid. 39), as the book is primarily concerned with practice (although not rules and techniques).

[7] *Zhuangzi*, chapter 2; Höchsmann and Guorang, 2007, 89 and 97.

resourcefully using both apophatic and kataphatic, negative and affirmative ways of speaking. Zhuangzi not only speaks in negations and in questions in chapter two. A variety of ways of speaking are at play indicating the metamorphosis of things and enacting the corresponding transformation of words, which still signify even though their meanings cannot be fixed. We find no reflection on doubt or its hierarchical priority, as is typical of Western varieties of skepticism, but the enactment and employment of strategies that throw into question various exclusionary and limited positions while simultaneously opening up larger perspectives. We are asked to consider things from their own perspectives and the immeasurable depths of the heavens and seas in contrast to conventional self-limiting perspectives of "small knowledge" that do not differentiate and equalize things.

The divergence between an active and ardent doubt and a critical yet equalizing self-transformation of perspectives and practices might seem trivial. It is fundamental, as this disparity suggests that the varieties of doubt and the assertion of its primacy found in Western skepticism are inadequate to the *Zhuangzi*. To sketch the differences: Zhuangzi is not so much an academic skeptic dogmatizing about the virtues of doubt in order to reassert the power of Platonic mysteries. He is not a Pyrrhonian skeptic developing methodologies of doubt to achieve the *ataraxia* that finds tranquility of mind in returning to ordinary beliefs and customs.[8]

Zhuangzi not only employed critical strategies against Confucian, Mohist, and "Sophist" philosophers, but against the reification of the conventions, customs, and "common life" to which Pyrrhonian skeptics appeal. Nor can Zhuangzi's use of critical strategies be assimilated to the methodological doubt of Descartes or epistemological solipsism, since Zhuangzi problematized the constancy of identity, the self, and the adequacy of rational argumentation. These strategies are not a means to

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[8] For a detailed comparison of Zhuangzian and Pyrrhonian Skepticism, see Paul Kjellberg, "Skepticism, Truth, and the Good Life: A Comparison of Zhuangzi and Sextus Empiricus," *Philosophy East and Wes*t, Jan. 94, 44:1; 111-133.

the alternative end of finding an absolute, namely oneself and one's own certainty, or an ultimate foundation of science. In the *Zhuangzi*, apparently absolute points of reference such as the self and *dao* are most deeply questioned and self-destructuring.

The "deconstructive" rather than skeptical character of the *Zhuangzi* is demonstrated in Youru Wang's *Linguistic Strategies in Daoist Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism*, which shows that Zhuangzi's discourse contests ordinary and philosophical communication and, more intriguingly, its own status as discourse and truth.[9] The *Zhuangzi* might be appropriately described as deconstructive in the sense that it inherently questions and destructures itself, throwing itself open to the myriad and transformative character of things and words. This self-referential questioning applies to any position or perspective that is articulated and fixed apart from the flow of *dao* in its constant saying and unsaying. Likewise, there is no affirmation or negation independent of the transversals, the reversals and interruptive transitions, of the text. Zhuangzi's critique of fixing words and distinctions is applicable to skepticism itself. The enactment and performance of critical strategies in the *Zhuangzi* are self-destructuring as opposed to dialectical insofar as they playfully and without anxiety challenge affirmation and negation. They undermine assertions of doubt as much as belief—both skepticism, as a proposition, representation, or content of knowledge, and its reversal and negation.

3. Demystifying Zhuangzi

In contrast to epistemic and linguistic accounts of the *Zhuangzi*, Harold Roth has sought to restore its "mystical dimension."[10] Although his analysis of the text is largely correct, his arguments are weakened by the use of the problematic and misleading language of mysticism.

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[9] Youru Wang, *Linguistic Strategies in Daoist Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism: The Other Way of Speaking* (London: Routledge, 2003).
[10] Harold Roth, "Bimodal Mystical Experience in the *Qiwulun* Chapter of the *Zhuangzi*," 15-32, in Scott Cook (ed.), *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi* (Albany: SUNY, 2003).

Western mysticism has traditionally implied an intuitive or irrational unification with and submersion into an absolute, while in the *Inner Chapters dao* is ironically freed from being identified with or fixated on as the "One," the absolute, or non-being. In chapter two, Zhuangzi ironically destabilizes the notions that a supreme guidance, a genuine lord, or ultimate source can be found. He unties the knots of discourses by claiming that only unfixed ideas can guide, that meanings cannot be fixed, that a beginning without previous beginnings cannot be logically posited—even if it is described as nothingness.

The closure and reification of "self" and "*dao*" are problematized and overturned such that *dao* is not a thing or concept but its own enactment—a way is formed by walking it, a name is formed by calling a thing by that name. Wang rightly argues on the basis of chapter two that the *Zhuangzi*'s *dao* is not a full absolute presence, as implied in mysticism. *Dao* is the interruptive absence of fixed distinctions. It is a means or a way indicating the partiality of arguments and perspectives in the mutual dependence yet irreducible difference of "this" and "that."[11]

Skepticism and mysticism are not inevitably incompatible. Yet just as Zhuangzi's so-called "skepticism" needs to be redescribed in terms of critical and self-overturning strategies, Zhuangzi's "mysticism" can be rethought in terms of transformative and potentially emancipatory biospiritual practices. As the former indicate Zhuangzi's answer to his "philosophical" context, so the latter reveal his response to his proto-Daoist "religious" environment—insofar as these can be distinguished in the Chinese context. Roth convincingly confirms that a number of passages refer to and presuppose proto-Daoist practices, especially practices of "inner cultivation" and "nurturing life" that flow into later Daoist traditions of self-transformation. Zhuangzi's commitment to inner cultivation can be seen in his discussions of the fasting of the mind and the emptying of the self, genuine breathing coming from the heels, and other passages related to breathing meditation, sitting and forgetting, letting the body drop away and become like dead ashes, expelling

[11] Wang, 2003, especially ch. 2, 30-51.

knowledge and adapting oneself to the way of things, and the critique of "small" knowledge in contrast with "great" knowledge.

The discussion of great and small knowledge illustrates the point that Zhuangzi is not a constant relativist, and that the equalizing of perspectives does not entail their equal identity or a reductive equality. A number of passages do not advocate the truth of each and every perspective nor indifference and neutrality between them. Indicating a pluralistic perspectivism instead of relativism, perspectives involve unequal insight into the multiplicity and depth of perspectives. By emphasizing the value of cultivating and nurturing perspectives that are responsive to the *dao* of things, those that take up and accord with the spontaneous and the natural (*ziran*) rather than remaining aligned with the artificial and constructed, and especially those that can playfully subvert themselves by multiplying and equalizing perspectives.[12] The sage's perspective is not without its own illumination and its privileges.[13]

Roth concludes that the *Zhuangzi* invokes a bimodal mysticism embracing introvertive and extrovertive moments. These biospiritual

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[12] In *Taoism: The Enduring Tradition*, Kirkland contends that *ziran* cannot be translated as spontaneity and naturalness since such terms are logically incompatible with the cultivation that is the guiding concern of ancient Chinese thought, including Daoism. I argue, however, that it is precisely the cultivation of an effortless, spontaneous naturalness that is one of the primary questions informing early Chinese texts later associated with Daoism. This nonassertive or noncoercive activity (*wuwei* 無為) occurs in relation to an anarchic knowing or understanding without deliberation (*wuzhi* 無知) and an objectless and non-attached desire (*wuyu* 無欲).

[13] The sage's clarity or illumination (*ming* 明) in the *Inner Chapters* constitutes a privileged perspective for Thomas Radice in "Clarity and Survival in the *Zhuangzi*," *Asian Philosophy*, March 2001, 11:1, 33-40. However, the sage's privileged perspective is to evenly and equally respond to things. Although longevity and survival play a role, they lack the centrality suggested by Radice since they are also called into question as absolute purposes.

practices need to be interpreted in relation to Zhuangzi's critical strategies. Are we faced with two varieties of Zhuangzi, one skeptical and the other mystical, haunting the same text? Or are the critical linguistic tactics and the biospiritual practices somehow connected? Zhuangzi connects them when he throws an ironic light on the proto-Daoist dimensions of his own thought, as in his portrayal of Liezi (列子), who is still dependent on the wind and on biospiritual practices themselves rather than the freedom and ease that they point toward: "he still had to depend on something to carry him. But suppose one traverses the course between heaven and earth with the changes of the six elemental forces, delighting in the infinite. What would he have to depend on?"[14] Likewise, despite many admirable qualities, Song Rongzi still "did not find a firm place."[15]

Roth is correct that the *Zhuangzi* emphasizes a disposition toward the world that is immanent and intra-worldly. In stressing this, one should not neglect its critical and transformative relation to everyday life. The *Zhuangzi* suggests not merely embracing the ordinary everyday world as a static set of values, institutions, and conventions. Zhuangzi decentered conventional values and language for the sake of worldly existence. Playfully placing into question and "moving beyond" the constructed, the linguistic, and the textual is not an otherworldly transcendence, it is a return to self-transforming worldly immanence. Zhuangzi did not emphasize conceptual or linguistic constructions, doubt or intuition, but the incessant transformation of things and perspectives, such that we can transform ourselves in accordance with the transformative character of language and things themselves.

What Roth describes as Zhuangzi's "mysticism" in fact shows its impossibility. In revealing the transitional nature of things and words, Zhuangzi's critical and deconstructive tactics call us to enact an openness

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[14] *Zhuangzi*, ch. 1; Höchsmann/Guorang, 2007, 85. Liezi is not necessarily being portrayed in a negative light, as his continuing dependence can be seen as part of a learning process (ch. 7; Höchsmann/Guorang, 2007, 126-128).
[15] Ibid.

and responsiveness to the situation and experience *dao* immanently in relation to the everyday in its self-transformations. It does not conclude in an intuition of or union with a supernatural, transcendent, or metaphysical entity or static absolute called "*dao*." Zhuangzi has no doctrinal skepticism, but his critical strategies are not merely a methodological undermining of propositional and conceptual fixity—they constitute the very disposition to be adopted. As Roth himself notes, Zhuangzi's discussion of the two perspectives of "this" and "that" and of the contrived (*weishi* 為是) and adaptive (*yinshi* 因是) "that's it" challenges the individual's confinement to the self, its schemas, and limited perspectives in order to be "illumined" in the equalizing dynamic of *dao* such that one does not mystify things and the world but responsively lodges or hides things in the world by recognizing their immanence: "if you could hide the world in the world, so that there was no place to which it could be moved, then this would be the reality of enduring things."[16]

Zhuangzi is not, then, a skeptic or mystic. He is an indirect, negative, or non-doctrinal realist in enacting a disposition according to which the myriad things can be themselves and "take their own course" regardless of our preferences, categories, likes and dislikes.[17] Each occurs in its own way with its own beginning and end without any need to appeal to an external agency outside of them.[18] The myriad things follow their own path without the anxious doubt of skepticism or the needy embrace of mysticism. The *Zhuangzi* is an ethical text, although not in the sense of establishing or justifying prescriptive principles or moral codes that fall into doubt. It is ethical in enacting and indicating multiple ways of responsively existing in relation to the world, things, others, and oneself.

4. What kind of Daoist was Zhuangzi?

Daoism is conventionally divided into a philosophical tradition, based on the works attributed to Laozi (老子) and Zhuangzi, and a later religious tradition that took these works as a point of departure even if in

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[16] *Zhuangzi*, ch. 6; Höchsmann/Guorang, 2007, 118.
[17] *Zhuangzi*, chapters 2 and 5; Höchsmann/Guorang, 2007, 90 and 115.
[18] Ibid.

a different spirit. Recent research reveals this division to be questionable. Early proto-Daoist religious traditions are not simply a transition between philosophical and popular Daoism but their beliefs and practices (if not the name itself) already inform the historical context in which the *Zhuangzi* was composed and disseminated. The *Zhuangzi* should be examined in light of the beliefs, customs, and practices of the Warring States period. The multiple tendencies of the *Zhuangzi* text and context complicate interpreting a text that is explicitly ambiguous, playful, and pluralistically perspectival. It also suggests that Hansen is incorrect in limiting the text to the milieu of a philosophical community, as if it had no relation to other contemporary literary, religious, medical, military, political, and cosmological discourses.

The Western reception of the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* has centered on the question of whether they can be read as philosophical texts in contrast with what is seen as a later degenerate Daoist religious tradition. Due to the secular and monotheistic character of modern Western thought and its conception of religion as defined by the question of the existence or nonexistence of a transcendent entity, the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* have been read as philosophical texts isolated from China's later "decline" into religious Daoism and Buddhism. This tendency is repeated in the contemporary Western reception of Zhuangzi. Hansen, while emphasizing Zhuangzi'*s* Chinese philosophical context based on the pioneering work of A. C. Graham, separates this from and dismisses as irrelevant Zhuangzi's Chinese religious context.[19] The current dominant reading characterizes the *Zhuangzi* as centered in epistemic claims supporting skepticism, relativism, perspectivism, and antirealism. Even supposing all of these designations can be applied to Zhuangzi's text, and it is questionable to read Zhuangzi as if he were only concerned with issues derived from contemporary epistemology and philosophy of language, they do not preclude the possibility that the *Zhuangzi* has a "religious" dimension, especially if religion is understood in its Chinese context, i.e., as primarily soteriological and ethical.

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[19] Hansen, 2003, 157.

It is not inconceivable then that Zhuangzi developed a sophisticated philosophy of language in the context of other concerns, such as the practice of wandering free and at ease without attachment and care, or affectation and calculation. The playful use and critique of language is part of overcoming the dust and grime of worldly conventions and concerns. This dimension of liberation or "overcoming" in the *Zhuangzi* is often categorized as "mystical." Despite the power of many of the arguments emphasizing various religious elements, the contested concept of mysticism is problematic. Critics of the mysticism thesis, like Hansen, interpret mysticism as a type of irrational union with a supernatural, transcendent, or metaphysical entity called "the Dao." This un-dao-like sense of mysticism is inappropriate in assimilating *dao* to monotheistic notions, or pantheistic variations. Such metaphysical reification of the inexhaustible and indefinable *dao* into a speculatively posited substance is opposed to Roth's portrayal of Zhuangzi's mysticism. For these authors, taking up and redefining traditional Chinese readings, *dao* is immanent instead of transcendent, natural rather than supernatural. It is the focus that allows for the self- or inner-cultivation that leads to clarity and insight. This is contrasted with discursive or conceptual knowledge.

The immanent "this-worldly" understanding of *dao* reveals an alternative to Hansen's either/or of Zhuangzi as mystical guru or philosophical skeptic. Zhuangzi shows no interest in explanation and speculation, activities constantly thrown into question, but seizes on the description and interpretation of experience understood through embodying "to the fullest what is without end and wandering where there is no path" (*yingdiwang* 应帝王). The *Zhuangzi* has a "religious" dimension to the extent that the religious can be this-worldly, naturalistic, immanent, and experiential. In contrast to faith, intuition, mystical union, or metaphysical speculation about some ultimate transcendent reality external to this reality, *dao* is not an object of belief or an entity at all. *Dao* is "the way," and it is a way unfolded by experientially following through on it in its manifold openness without goal or direction. To redeploy an idea from Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, *dao* is playful and

purposive yet without a knowable determinate transcendent, teleological or eschatological purpose.

Dao is its enactment, as "the way is formed by walking it."[20] If there is no *dao* besides the embodying of it in how one lives, then *dao* is nothing else then letting *dao* occur through the emptying of the self. Deconstructing and unsaying the reified contents and structures of language and knowledge, Zhuangzi's linguistic practice points beyond itself to a fundamental comportment of worldly, natural, and effortless responsiveness. Saying does not remain fixed. It adjusts in being attuned to, and transforms in attending to, the shifting things themselves. In chapter four, Zhuangzi described how it is by knowing without knowledge and by emptying the self through the "fasting of the mind" that one opens oneself to the spontaneous responsiveness of one's vital energy or force (*qi* 氣), receiving in sincerity and generously responding without assertion or imposition.[21]

The significance of *dao* rests not in the content of what is supposedly stated by the word but in its performance and enactment in practices. These practices include (1) the radical forms of argumentation that have been retrospectively interpreted as skeptical and relativistic because they undermine conventional knowledge claims; (2) the paradoxical use of language, which does not imply its meaninglessness but that "saying says but what it says never stays fixed"; and (3) the experience and interpretation of the ever changing transformation of the myriad things and of bodily and inner cultivation such that one listens not with the ear but with the vital energy.

The transformations of world and self, without knowing their purpose, origin, or end, indicate the possibility of the open and unending responsiveness of wandering free and at ease in this world without goal or destination.[22] This is not ethics in the sense of establishing explicit rules or norms, or in calculating values and acting according to fixed pre-

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[20] *Zhuangzi*, ch. 2; Höchsmann/Guorang, 2007, 92. Translation altered.
[21] *Zhuangzi*, ch. 4; Höchsmann/Guorang, 2007, 103-104.
[22] *Zhuangzi*, ch. 6; Höchsmann/Guorang, 2007, 121-123.

determined purposes that Zhuangzi challenges by praising the useless, the deformed, and the counter-purposive.[23] It is ethical in the Greek sense of *ethōs*, i.e., a way of life. A way of dwelling, of enacting and perfecting one's existence (*zhen*), does not merely consist of a set of rules that are its deformation and loss. Nor is the ethical only a relation to the self, or of self-concern and care of the self. The ethical in Zhuangzi is a worldly wandering concerning how one relates to the myriad things. Accordingly, in chapter seven, the purposive in the sense of a final cause or ultimate purpose is abandoned for a responsive comportment or disposition via the embodiment and enactment of emptiness:

> Do not yearn for fame. Do not make plans. Do not set up projects. Do not be a possessor of knowledge. Embody to the fullest what has no end and wander where there is no path. Hold what is from heaven but do not take it to be anything. Be empty. The highest man's [*zhenren*] mind is like a mirror. It does not operate anything. It responds without retaining. In this way he is able to work well with all things and not injure them.[24]

This an-archic ethics of wandering in simplicity and boundlessness unfolded in the *Zhuangzi* relies on—even as it transforms in ironic and ethical ways—the religious image of the Daoist immortal who avoids the five grains, climbs clouds, and rides dragons on travels beyond the limits of the known world. Even if Zhuangzi utilizes early proto-Daoist religious language ironically, as when Liezi is criticized for his fame and dependence on the wind he rides, or to make a different point such as the skeptical interpretation of wandering free and at ease as doubt and the suspension of judgment, the images of the Daoist sage and immortal and the emphasis on techniques of cultivation of mind and body constitute primary threads of the *Inner Chapters*. One need not presuppose textual coherence to explore why this text employs numerous mythical and meditative images and themes. These aspects demand interpretation as much as, if not more than, the passages poking fun at conventional logic and argumentation by producing absurdity, aporia, and paradox.

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[23] *Zhuangzi*, ch. 4; Höchsmann/Guorang, 2007, 107-109.
[24] *Zhuangzi*, ch. 7; Höchsmann/Guorang, 2007, 128.

To appreciate its plurality, fecundity, and contemporary significance, Zhuangzi's Daoism should be interpreted as a phenomenological making evident of experiences of the myriad things in their equality, difference, and transformation. The *Zhuangzi* exhibits a modified or transformed relation with everyday existence; one of a free responsiveness, which responds to each without possessing or injuring, rather than escaping from the world through union with an otherworldly entity or through a reification of doubt that separates linguistic and logical from existential and ethical issues.[25] Consequently, the *Zhuangzi* offers far more than another variety of mysticism and skepticism. Ironically, skeptical interpretations repeat the traditional dismissal of Zhuangzi as escapist, not as otherworldly mystic but now as unworldly skeptic. It seems more true to Zhuangzi's plural perspectivism or and experientialism to let the philosophical, religious, literary, and other approaches to the text bloom—and without the attachment and desire that reactively lead to their being crushed. It is written in the *Zhuangzi* that the true man (*zhenren*) of old "loved to receive anything" that was given to him "but also forgot what he had received and gave it away."[26]

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[25] On the further ethical character and implications of early Daoism, see E. S. Nelson, "Responding to Heaven and Earth: Daoism, Heidegger and Ecology," *Environmental Philosophy*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Fall 2004, 65-74; and (forthcoming) "Responding with *dao*: Daoist Ethics and the Environment." *Philosophy East West*, 59:3 (July 2009).
[26] *Zhuangzi*, ch. 6; Palmer, 1996, 48.