

Nothingness, Being, and Dao: Ontology and Cosmology in the *Zhuangzi*

by

David Chai

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of East Asian Studies
University of Toronto

© Copyright by David Chai 2012

Nothingness, Being, and Dao: Ontology and Cosmology in the *Zhuangzi*

David Chai

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of East Asian Studies
University of Toronto

2012

ABSTRACT

The following dissertation is a philosophical exploration of the cosmology of the *Zhuangzi*, arguing it is meontological due to the prominence afforded the Chinese word *wu* 無, rendered as both nothingness and nonbeing. It puts forth the argument that the *Zhuangzi*'s cosmology creates a relationship whereby nonbeing and being are intertwined under the purview of Dao 道. As a result, the text's axiology is unique in that it states cosmological freedom is attainable via uniting with primal nothingness. Chapter one seeks to disprove the notion that nonbeing cannot be anything but a transcendental other by arguing that Dao is a negatively creative source that simultaneously gives birth to nonbeing and being, making it impossible for nonbeing to be nihilistic or seen as an absolute void. Chapter two delves into the manifestation of things and how the sage, as an epitome of the naturalness of Dao, follows the becoming and returning of things to the One, darkening himself in nothingness in order to cultivate his life. Chapter three poses the question of whether or

not the ontological movement of things is temporal and how temporality can even be possible considering the meontological nature of the universe. The next two chapters focus on the arts of useful uselessness and forgetting, the two principal means by which the sage achieves harmony with the oneness of things. Chapter six concludes by arguing that freedom attained by perfecting the arts of uselessness and forgetfulness is not rooted in ethical virtue but is the pinnacle of one's cosmological relationship with Dao and is embodied in the act of carefree wandering. Zhuangzi's cosmology is thus rooted in the life force of nothingness and doing away with ontic distinctions so as to return to natural equanimity and stillness of spirit.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work is dedicated to my teachers, whose support and encouragement made its writing a stimulating and pleasurable experience. I owe a special debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Vincent Shen, whose erudition and patience inspired me to greater efforts than I would have made otherwise.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 The Mother of All Things: Ontological Investigations	10
1.1 The Plausibility of the Nonbeing of Nothingness	11
1.2 The Meontological Language of Nothingness	20
1.3 An Aesthetics of One: Why Dao is not a Singularity	31
1.4 Returning to Dao: Reversion and its Nihilistic Rebuke	40
1.5 Conclusion	47
Chapter 2 Tracing the Invisible: Phenomenological Discovery	48
2.1 On the Origin of the Thing	49
2.2 The Thing's Unveiling and the Gift of Nothingness	55
2.3 Trace and the Darkness of the Sage	63
2.4 Wandering in the Harmony of Dao	73
2.5 Conclusion	88
Chapter 3 Dao and the Temporal Field of Nothingness	90
3.1 Dao and Cosmological Time	91
3.2 The Static Nature of Human Causal Time	104
3.3 Conclusion	117
Chapter 4 Utility of the Useless: A Life Praxis in Accordance with Dao	119
4.1 Useless by Proxy and the Proxy of Usefulness	120
4.2 A Model of Life Praxis: the Useless Tree	128
4.3 Conclusion	137
Chapter 5 Playing in Nothingness so as to Forget Existence	139
5.1 The Mundaneness of Forgetting	140

5.2 Losing Oneself in Forgetfulness	153
5.3 Smashing one's Body in Order to Sit in Forgetfulness	162
5.4 A Prelude to Spiritual Freedom: Fasting of the Mind	167
5.5 Conclusion	173
Chapter 6 The Meontological Freedom of Dao	174
6.1 Seeking a New Definition of Freedom: the Cosmological	175
6.2 The Heavenly Principles of Cosmological Freedom	181
6.3 Nothingness as Dao's Great Harmonizer	189
6.4 Carefree Wandering	199
6.5 Conclusion	206
Conclusion	208
Chinese Glossary	214
Bibliography	215

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation presents an original reading of the Chinese Daoist text the *Zhuangzi* 《莊子》, the purpose of which is to illuminate and explore its views on themes related to cosmology and ontology while arguing for their inherent connectedness with nothingness. Given that Zhuangzi lived nearly two and a half millennia ago, the concepts and terminology he uses will at times appear unconventional, if not outright incomprehensible. Although much of the subject matter appearing in the text bearing his name has garnered its fair share of attention throughout the developmental history of Western philosophy, for the untrained reader of the *Zhuangzi*, its unique presentation of said themes (e.g., creation, temporality, personal well-being, freedom, etc.) makes establishing analogies of comparison all the more difficult.

Very little is known of Zhuangzi's personal life other than he hailed from the state of Song 宋 and reputedly left behind a work of one hundred thousand words in fifty-two chapters. According to the *Historical Records* or *Shiji* 《史記》, Zhuangzi lived during the time of king Hui of Liang 梁惠王 and king Xuan of Qi 齊宣王. He is also said to have turned down an offer to serve at the court of king Wei of Chu 楚威王. In light of such historical evidence, as well as other indications scattered throughout the *Zhuangzi*, we can conservatively claim that Zhuangzi lived from 375-300 BCE.¹

As for the text itself, much has been made of its redaction from an original fifty-two chapters down to thirty-three by the commentator Guo Xiang 郭象 (fl. 312 CE). Guo was also responsible for collating these chapters into their current sequence, doing so according to the sectional designators of Inner, Outer, and Miscellaneous chapters in place since the Han dynasty. This, however, does not testify to the state of the *Zhuangzi* before his editorship, a period in which the text varied in terms of sectional classification and the actual number of chapters.² Two of the earliest known

¹ For a more in-depth discussion of Zhuangzi's lifetime and the evolution of the *Zhuangzi*, see Chai 2008: 4-7, 15-18.

² For more on the dating and classification of the *Zhuangzi* chapters, see Chai 2008: 7-14, 18-26. Additional readings on the textual history of the *Zhuangzi* are available in: Angus C. Graham. "How Much of *Chuang-tzu* Did *Chuang-tzu* Write?" *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1990: 283-321; Liu Xiaogan. *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies Monograph, 1994; Harold Roth, ed. *A Companion to Angus C. Graham's Chuang Tzu: the Inner Chapters*. Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy Monograph. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002.

commentators to the *Zhuangzi*—Cui Zhuan 崔譔 (fl. 290 CE) and Xiang Xiu 向秀 (ca. 227-272 CE)—used a twenty-seven chapter version of the text that divided it into Inner and Outer sections only; what is more, both men differed in their opinion as to which chapters should be classified as Inner and which should be Outer. All of this testifies to a text whose structural framework was fluid at the time and subject to debate.

And yet many of the commentaries to the *Zhuangzi* referred to throughout this dissertation turned to Guo Xiang's redacted text, not the fifty-two chapter ancient text used by Sima Biao 司馬彪 (ca. 227-272 CE), or the truncated version of Cui Zhuan and Xiang Xiu. Bearing this spirit of intra-textual cohesiveness in mind, we shall refrain from making explicit references to the categories of Inner, Outer, and Miscellaneous chapters insofar as it only lends further credence to a dichotomist approach to the *Zhuangzi* instead of seeing the text as a holistic entity. To this end, passages and overarching concepts attributable to Zhuangzi himself shall make reference to him by name, while references to passages or concepts that embody the spirit of the text as a whole shall cite its title.

Although this work is a close hermeneutic reading of the *Zhuangzi*, said methodology is not taken to point to the ontology of man but the negatively creative onto-cosmology of Dao so as to espouse a language of meontology.³ Reading the text from the perspective of nothingness allows us to color the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* in positive shades of understanding, thus rendering the being of man secondary. Furthermore, scrutinizing the text and its exegetical tradition in such a manner forces us to approach it anew; we can no longer read it as pertaining to the domain of humanity alone but to the universe as a whole. This is one of the pillars of Daoism and helps differentiate it from classical Western philosophy.

It would, of course, be extremely convenient to engage the views of these two traditions using a concept-by-concept comparison but doing so would make this work unwieldy and dilute its interpretive import. In order to avoid such an undesirable outcome, we will only resort to a comparative dialogue whenever it serves to strengthen the argument being put forth by Zhuangzi and his text. What is more, we will only avail ourselves of those Western thinkers for whom the

³ The word meontology is derived from the Greek *me-on*, “the study of nonbeing.”

question of nothingness came to play a significant role in their philosophical discourse. The same principle of comparison will also hold true for other Daoist texts. In this way, we will not only examine the cosmogonist problematic set forth by Zhuangzi within the intellectual climate of his time, we can subsequently apply the insights gained to highlight the limitations of our present-day understanding too.

Bearing this program in mind, let us thus begin by asking the following question: When it comes to expounding the truth of the variegated things of the world, would it be better to do so from a monistic or dualistic perspective? When we extrapolate this methodology to the universe at large, will such cosmogony be taken as one of permanence or flux? In other words, how deeply we bore into the ontological structure of things so as to uncover the key to their existence—the space of their becoming—involves a dialectics that ultimately boils down to the question of what, in no uncertain terms, constitutes the ‘that which is’ and the ‘that which is not,’ while simultaneously explaining how they interact with the ‘that which is beyond.’ This last point seems to have caused much consternation for philosophers and theologians the world over, for the question of absolutism creeps into the picture once we take the ‘that which is beyond’ as an entity of absolute singularity (i.e., the One) whose standing is disjoined from the ‘is’ and ‘is not.’ Indeed, it would seem how one determines the prioritization of ‘is’ and ‘is not’ with the One also bears upon the extent to which we grant these terms their deserved ontology.⁴

Traditional logic would have us believe that what ‘is’ is while that which ‘is not’ is an absolute naught. However, if the naught has ontological priority over the ‘is,’ it will undoubtedly lead to a nihilistic consumption of the ‘is’ by the ‘is not.’ Reversing the process does not deny the ‘is not’ its inherent ‘is-ness,’ which would lead to its elimination from the ‘is’ ‘is not’ equation thereby rendering said equation moot; rather, the ‘is’ is acceded its priority over the ‘is not’ for the simple fact that only the ‘is’ can make the ‘is not’ into a thing while preserving its own sense of being.⁵

⁴ On the question of the One, there can be little doubt of its connection to the concept of Dao 道. It must be made clear, however, that for Daoism, the One is also referred to as a state of primal chaos. This will deny potential skeptics the claim that reduction to the One is nihilistic insofar as reducing the many to one still leaves the undifferentiated wholeness of chaos which is neither zero nor a monistic One. Thus, Dao is the nexus from which the marvelous possibilities of being unfurl themselves.

⁵ Conor Cunningham holds the ‘logic of nihilism’ responsible for turning nothing into something. My interpretation differs in that it views nothingness to be creational without altering its inherent nature. See Cunningham, xiv.

Such rationality has been the standard-bearer in Western thought since the time of Parmenides and is indicative of what Nicolai Hartman has poignantly labeled ‘old ontology.’ His call for a new ontology arises out of the recognition that we should no longer take nonbeing as an immobile opposite to being, as did the ancient Greeks, for everything real is in a state of flux; hence we are in need of an ontology that takes into account the ‘being of becoming.’⁶ Other recent calls for a new form of ontology come from thinkers such as David Bohm⁷ and those who are beholden to include the ontology of all forms of being as part of the equation so as not to deny them their rightful presence when faced with the growing presence of human culture.⁸

The conundrum that belies us is how to go about conceptualizing that which we take as the source for all manifest and non-manifest beings such that its mundaneness does not elude us or fall prey to a disillusioned construing. Choosing not to radicalize the dialectic between nonbeing as the ‘what is not’ and being as the ‘what is,’ we are either forced to introduce a nihilistic supposition or simply abrogate one term in favor of the other. Western philosophy is thus responsible for the apparent dialectical dilemma insofar as its founding figures chose to nominalize the ‘what is not’ rather than view it as having normative value, and this course of action instilled in those who followed the idea that the ‘what is not’ was either an absolute nothingness—a substitute for an existent form—or that it embodied the estranged consciousness of otherness. Things become even more complicated when we place this question in a modern context, and yet for ancient Chinese thinkers such as Zhuangzi, the question concerning the place of nonbeing and being was readily obvious.

Traditionally, the ancient Chinese felt no need to concoct a metaphysical interpretation of being (*you* 有) for their intellectual inquiries were more concerned with establishing the virtuosity of humanity while simultaneously fighting its vices. As for the One, since it was associated with heaven, or the cosmos, early anthropomorphic interpretations quickly became cosmogonist such that discussion of the One was carried out in an onto-cosmological manner. What remained to be worked out was the question of nonbeing. Unlike their Greek counterparts, Zhuangzi and other

⁶ See Hartmann, 13-18. Here, becoming is not to be understood in its Hegelian sense.

⁷ For example, Bohm speaks of implicate and explicate orders through which the primary reality of the world as a whole is revealed. See Bohm, 20.

⁸ I have in mind the recent field of evolutionary ontology. See for example, Smajs; Lowe 2006.

Daoist thinkers saw nonbeing as complimentary to being, not its negating foil. They even came to the realization that nonbeing was not simply an epistemological tool but an ontological element in its own right, resulting in furious debates during the 3rd and 4th centuries CE over whether or not things were born from nonbeing or being.⁹ Daoism, therefore, in its endeavor to formulate an onto-cosmological system went one step further than the Greeks by introducing an additional metaphysical layer to the tripartite puzzle of nonbeing, being, and the One and that was, I will argue, the notion of ontological nothingness.

Although they are the same Chinese character (*wu* 無), this dissertation makes the distinction between *wu* as nonbeing and *wu* as nothingness by holding the former to level of ontic absence of being while the latter applies to the original condition of the universe at large. Whereas nonbeing marks both the passing away of ontic being or symbolizes the lack of its presence, nothingness, when understood in a cosmological sense, is not to be comprehended as an absolute void or state of pure emptiness; rather, it is to be regarded as the meontological¹⁰ milieu in which the potentiality of Dao 道 (the progenitor of all things) is realized. Herein we can answer Hartman's call for a new form of ontology. By turning away from the traditional definition of ontology as one grounded in the being of man, this dissertation proposes the adoption of the language of meontology instead. The advantage of doing so lies in the fact that we will no longer have to deal with a negative rendition of nothingness but can now view it in the guise of 'negative creativity.'

Although not the first to investigate alternative connotations of Daoist nothingness (see the first section of chapter one below), this work is the first to specifically employ the language of meontology to Daoist literature and the *Zhuangzi* in particular. Regarding the notion that *wu* as nothingness bears unique cultural characteristics, Hisamatsu Shin'ichi can be credited with laying

⁹ The historical context of this debate were the 3rd and 4th centuries CE and involved a group of thinkers colloquially known as the "seven sages of the bamboo grove," the most prominent figure of which was Wang Bi 王弼 (226-249 CE), whose commentaries to the *Yijing* 《易經》 and *Daodejing* 《道德經》 spawned the birth of metaphysics in China.

¹⁰ It is owing to my interpretation of *wu* in this second sense that I claim Daoist cosmology to be meontological. While the Greek word *me-on* translates as "the study of nonbeing," in light of the centrality of Dao in Daoist thought, and that Dao simultaneously gives birth to both nonbeing and being, Dao itself must lie beyond the sphere of influence of nonbeing and being alike, doing so in the realm of ontological nothingness. Although Dao and ontological nothingness are inseparable, they are not equivalent: ontological nothingness existed prior to and is what sustains Dao but Dao itself is not nothingness. The importance of this subtle distinction will become clear as this work progresses.

claim to the phrase ‘Oriental Nothingness.’¹¹ A disciple of Nishida Kitaro (1870-1945), the founder of the Kyoto school of Buddhism in Japan, he espoused a philosophy premised on the idea of absolute nothingness. While all Kyoto school members dealt with nonbeing in one form or another, only Shin’ichi wrote an essay exclusively devoted to the subject. As part of his endeavor to formulate a new understanding of nothingness, Shin’ichi sought out the principal characteristics of the Western conceptualization of nonbeing and promptly refuted them one by one.¹²

He dismissed the first trait using the Buddhist notion that reality as it exists in the mind is empty of being per se, hence one cannot make the claim that nonbeing negates being. Regarding the idea that nonbeing is a negative predication, Shin’ichi argued that Oriental nothingness remains beyond the reach of delimitation or predication and as such, it avoids fulfilling itself as a purely abstract concept (the third attribute) due to its universality. Additionally, its transcendence allows it to be taken beyond the realm of simple dichotic markers such as nonbeing and being. As for the fourth aspect, that of conjectured nothingness, Shin’ichi once again drew upon Buddhist terminology so as to transfer nonbeing from the passive mind of the West to the subjectless, contemplating mind of the East. Finally, he took nonbeing to no longer be an unconscious awareness of oneself as an object within one’s own subjective experience of the world but saw it as a subject/object that loses its distinctiveness so as to become one conjoined state of awareness.

Shin’ichi’s arguments are, ultimately, as limiting in scope and application as those of the early Greeks. Availing himself of Buddhist terminology in order to lend credence to his theory does little to enlighten our quest to uncover a unique approach to understanding the role given nonbeing and nothingness proffered by the philosophical tradition of Daoism. While I find his expression ‘nothingness is alive’ to be initially inspiring, when he went on to claim it possesses a mind and self-consciousness of its own, such inspiration was at once lost. This showed Shin’ichi was taking liberties with the various doctrines of Buddhism, particularly those espoused by the monk Seng Zhao 僧肇 (384-414 CE).

¹¹ We must be wary when discussing the nothingness of Daoism of confusing it with Buddhist emptiness (*kong* 空). For more on this see part one of Jay Garfield’s *Empty Words: Buddhist Philosophy and Cross-Cultural Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. As for Shin’ichi’s arguments, see his “The Characteristics of Oriental Nothingness” in R. de Martino, trans. *Philosophical Studies of Japan*, volume 2, 1959: 65-97.

¹² The five characteristics he identified were: the absolute negation of being, a negative predication, an abstract concept, an imagined or conjectured nothingness, and unconsciousness.

Daoism is an atypical ideological movement in that its proponents saw in the rawness of Nature and the expanse of the universe a means by which to comprehend the creation and freedom of things. It has been labeled many things—monistic, mystical, skeptical, and relativist—but these do not accurately describe the entirety of its thought. What we can say of it is that it is a non-ecological naturalism whose cosmological outlook bears directly upon our knowledge of being, while its onto-holism sheds light on how nothingness, taken ontologically, assumes a complimentary role alongside Dao. Additionally, Daoism regards certain binomials (e.g., black-white, life-death) as not being oppositional in the strict sense of the word but mutually beneficial insofar as they are the conjoining of said cosmic forces responsible for universal harmony.

This dissertation thus seeks to reconcile the assumed conundrum between existential awareness and metaphysical expression by investigating the dynamics of ontological meaning as it occurs in phenomenological expression. In order to facilitate a dialogue between the ontological and phenomenological as it occurs in the thought of the *Zhuangzi*, we will engage its cosmogony of nothingness, being, and Dao. Taken together, we can describe this tripartite system as one that constitutes a complete process of cosmological change. This cosmology, however, is not directed to human beings but is imminent in the very fabric of what we take to be human reality. We can, therefore, refer to this work as one of ontological holism whose methodological apparatus arises from the meontological inquiry into the dynamic constitution of Dao.¹³

To this end, chapter one is devoted to explicating the *Zhuangzi*'s definition and implementation of nothingness. Additionally, it is responsible for delving into the connection that binds nothingness and being to that which makes their empirical reality possible—the Dao. Out of this emerges a relationship in which nonbeing underlies being and Dao is undergirded by nothingness. This trio of terms is not hierarchical in the traditional sense of the word for they align themselves in such a way that there is movement up, down, and comingling in-between. Where this activity occurs is in the One, a state of undifferentiated wholeness in which things lack names or other defining traits. The

¹³ David Bohm distinguished ontological holism from functional holism insofar as the former: “Defines the very being of an entity and its constituents in terms of their systematic unity...[such that it]...goes beyond functional holism in making the existence of the whole functional system a necessary condition for the continued self-identical existence of the parts of the whole.” See Bohm, 45-47.

One is thus the axis through which being emerges and nonbeing returns. Without the discovery of this interweaving penetration in what is otherwise known as primal chaos (*hundun* 渾沌), Daoist cosmology would appear incoherent and contradictory. Knowing what nothingness is and how it operates in the world, chapter two sets out to uncover the invisible traces of the One by way of discussion of the Thing. The idea behind using the Thing in order to elucidate the One is to avoid any connotation of the One in a theological sense. As the One is a state of undifferentiated unity whereby beings have yet to divide themselves into their myriad classes of name and form, the One acts as a holding ground for all ancestral Things. When ontological being becomes known as such, taking on particularized qualities, this is when it leaves the One and enters reality as ontic beings. In other words, each Thing is the root of all lesser things in its class and the branching off of these lesser things is what populates the world. The chapter ends by discussing several well-known stories of the *Zhuangzi* such as butcher Ding, the catcher of cicadas, and the maker of belt buckles as practical applications of mastering the art of returning to Dao in order to unite with the oneness of things.

Chapter three investigates the temporal nature of Dao, arguing against the traditional conception of time as a series of now points as well as the notion that time is bound to the being of man. These arguments can be made because the *Zhuangzi* neither subscribed to the notion that death renders time impermanent nor that time is restricted to a so-called lived time of the here and now. For the *Zhuangzi*, Dao exists beyond the realm of temporality, precluding it from the dialectics of finitude and infinite, eternity and impermanence. This is not to say that the text defined time as temporally relative; rather, time exists on a multi-dimensional plane in which the oneness of things becomes the ground for temporal experience. The goal is thus not to flee time in light of the reputed nihilism that is our impending death but to relinquish our need for temporal duration so as to return to the pivot of Dao. What we come to realize, however, is that this pivot lies not in the present-now but in the resting of ontological nothingness.

Chapter four shifts our attention from the fallacy of temporal *ekstasis* towards the embracement of a non-temporal praxis of uselessness. Resting in uselessness is more than just idleness or being non-accountable—it points to self-preservation through life prolongation. Seeing the time of our lives as but an extensional protrusion of the infinite non-time of Dao, to toil away with worry and concern over its beginning and end is to force this protrusion to break free from the substrate of

nothingness. Breaking free of nothingness's nourishment, our virtue (*de* 德) takes on unnatural qualities that will only lead to the premature ending of our lives. Hence this chapter employs the analogy of the jug and its useless inner-void, together with the old tree, to demonstrate the inherent use of that which we perceive to be useless. Furthermore, it will be argued that such useful uselessness was used by the *Zhuangzi* as a means to criticize humanity's cherishing of knowledge and that the only way to genuinely experience life is to follow the natural spontaneity of Dao.

Chapter five takes as its aim the elucidation of how one emulates the way of Dao by dealing with the psychological retreating of one's empirical self through forgetfulness. All told, three stages of forgetting present themselves: the epistemological, phenomenological, and cosmological. For the *Zhuangzi*, forgetfulness was not so much about the recollection of memories lost and in need of re-finding but learning how to let things be. Through forgetting the trace of things one can forget their names and images. By letting-go of things through sitting in forgetfulness and fasting of the mind, one can be said to bring coherency to world. Therefore, true forgetting is a forgetting of heaven and earth such that one enters the realm where nonbeing and being cease to exist. In this atemporal, aspatial realm there is only the dark mystery of Dao and it is here that true cosmological freedom occurs. At the time when such transmogrification is complete all that remains is a spiritual essence, one not all that different from Dao. Herein we are free in an onto-cosmological sense, a freedom whose similitude with the beings of the world results in the most genuinely natural form of existence possible.

Chapter six concludes this work by offering a discourse not only on the Daoist idea of freedom but arguing that for the *Zhuangzi*, freedom is none other than the cosmological harmony of things. There is no such thing as individual freedom because the *Zhuangzi* states we need to awaken to the fact that within the ultimate reality of Dao, we are but one being amongst a myriad of beings. In order to better convey this reasoning, the *Zhuangzi* spoke of the three capacities of heaven: its differentiation, measure, and harmony. These three capacities together constitute the perfect virtue of Dao, one grounded in the still quietude of cosmological nothingness. Given that the sage has as his abode the tranquil silence of nothingness, he knows of neither life nor death, right or wrong. His freedom is not dependent on any one thing and so is the freedom of non-freedom. To be free in nothingness is thus to let go of the world and in letting-go the sage attains his returning to the One.

Returning to the One is hence to unite with Dao thereby marking the completion of the *Zhuangzi*'s cosmological circle.

CHAPTER 1

The Mother of all Things: Ontological Investigations

In the great beginning there was nothingness, having neither being nor name;
from it arose the One, an oneness that was without form.

—*Zhuangzi*¹

In reading the above quotation, several pertinent observations regarding the cosmogony of the *Zhuangzi* can be made: first, before humans became consciously aware of the populated universe around them they simply referred to it as nothingness; second, in light of this fact, the universe *qua* nothingness lacked presence of being or a name designating it thereof, for to refer to it as a void or pure nothingness would entail its overcoming the presence of something other than itself; third, the first thing to emerge from this primal nothingness was the One; fourth, the unity of the One refers not to the oneness of beings but to the undifferentiated potential of the Dao; fifth, given that the One *qua* Dao points to nothingness and not ontological being, the Dao itself is also unnamable and formless; sixth, only when the universe is filled with the oneness of Dao can names and divisions reach fruition.

One might object that the above assumptions purport a false-premise on the grounds that as primal nothingness and Dao create a holism that is unknowable through conventional epistemological norms, descriptions of the latter are equally applicable to the former such that Dao *qua* nothingness and nothingness *qua* Dao become equivalent. Dao, therefore, cannot be responsible for creating the myriad things of the world.² The task of this chapter, then, is not only to clarify the *Zhuangzi*'s position regarding nothingness and Dao but also to establish a new hermeneutic language that will allow us to view Dao in an existential light.

¹ Unless noted otherwise, all Chinese translations in this dissertation are those of the author.

² Jean-Paul Sartre is a good example of the Western resistance to an antecedent nothingness arguing that: "Being is prior to nothingness and establishes the ground for it. By this we must understand not only that being has a logical precedence over nothingness but also that it is from being that nothingness derives concretely its efficacy." See Sartre 1992: 49.

1.1 The Plausibility of the Nonbeing of Nothingness

Of the many perplexing and fundamental questions that peaked human curiosity before the Cartesian revolution, one was that humans could not grasp or formulate an understanding of our place in the universe independent of a higher order. Indeed, during the Shang and Western Zhou dynasties of ancient China, such sentiments were inexorably tied to human ritual sacrifice and other social practices in order to appease the will of *di* 帝, the High Lord. By the time of the Eastern Zhou, however, trust in the Shang ancestor *di* had fallen out of favor and was replaced by the more universal concept of heaven (*tian* 天), thus planting the seeds for the cosmology and social ethics typifying the Warring States period in which Zhuangzi lived.

Following the *Daodejing* 《道德經》, the *Zhuangzi* chose to uphold the concept of Dao instead of *di* as representing the source of all natural phenomena and the key to advancing human virtue. The question that begs to be asked then is what is the Dao and how does it define reality such that what is inclusive to it is without form (i.e., nothingness) while that of form (i.e., being) is exclusive? This leads to yet another question: When the *Zhuangzi* speaks of ultimate reality as belonging to Dao while human reality belongs to the realm of heaven, how is Dao able to traverse one plane of reality to the other? Given the *Zhuangzi*'s argument that Dao proceeds from nothingness, only those things embodying similar characteristics can be embraced by its oneness. What is more, in light of the fact that Dao is formless and humans are of form, any inkling of the Dao in our midst will also prove elusive.

We thus have two apparent planes of reality—that of Dao and that of humanity. The former creates and is ever-present in the latter while the latter continuously distances and isolates itself from the former. The question, it would seem, is not whether Dao as ultimate reality and the source of things is transcendent or immanent,³ but how can humanity overcome the limits of its own understanding so as to entertain the idea that Dao is not only onto-cosmological but existential? Before we can even begin to entertain the possibility of an existential Dao, we need to first quash our dependence

³ Cheng Zhongying 成中英 offers the following explanation: “The best way to conceive the Dao is to consider it as both transcendent and immanent, as both originating and supporting, as both self-fulfilling and others-fulfilling, and to see its transcendence as linked to its immanence and vice versa.” See Cheng’s article “Dimension of the *Dao* and onto-Ethics in Light of the *Daodejing*.” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 31.2 (June 2004): 143-182.

on a transcendental other, turning instead to the meontological side of the spectrum from which we will be better equipped to acknowledge Dao not as a singularly static source of creation, but as a dynamic creative potentiality.

The following passage illustrates why the *Zhuangzi* holds nothingness to be so significant:

Brilliance queried nothingness, saying: Are you, sir, being or are you nothing? Brilliance, being unable to gain a response, carefully regarded the other's appearance, which was a far-reaching vacuity. He gazed the entire day and saw nothing, listened but heard no sound, reached out but was unable to grasp anything. Brilliance said: How perfect! Who can be as perfect as this! I can grant the fact of nothingness but not the nonbeing of nothingness. As for nothingness, how can one realize such perfection!⁴

光曜問乎無有曰：夫子有乎，其無有乎？光曜不得問，而孰視其狀貌，窅然空然，終日視之而不見，聽之而不聞，搏之而不得也。光曜曰：至矣！其孰能至此乎！予能有無矣，而未能無無也，及為無有矣，何從至此哉！

The above quotation was chosen for several reasons: first and foremost, it is the only time in the entire text where the term *wuwu* 無無 appears; second, it reinforces what we said earlier that within the creational conceptual framework of Daoism, nothingness is *prima facie* the root of being. This root, however, is different from that mentioned in the *Daodejing*.⁵

⁴ *Zhuangzi* ch. 22, “*zhibeiyou* 知北游.” See Guo Qingfan, 759-60. Burton Watson follows the *Huainanzi* 《淮南子》, amending the end of this passage from 「……及為無有矣，何從至此哉！」 to 「……及其為無無，至妙何從及此哉！」 See Watson, 244, note 14; for the *Huainanzi*, see Zhang Shuangli, 138. Watson was perhaps influenced by Liu Wendian's 劉文典 *Zhuangzi* annotation, which reads: “*wuyou* 無有 at the time was written *wuwu* 無無. Written as *wuyou* 無有 would have involved the previous passage's *youwu* 有無 which is incorrect. Chapter 2 of the *Huainanzi* says: “I can grant the fact of nothingness but not the nonbeing of nothingness. As for the nonbeing of nothingness, how can one realize such wonderment!” It has thus been carried over to this passage. However, the *daoying* 道應 chapter writes: “As for the nonbeing of nothingness, how can one realize such perfection!” Although the passage has a minor variance, it correctly writes *wuwu* 無無.” 「無有當作無無。作無有者，涉上文有無而誤也。《淮南子·俶真篇》：「予能有無而未能無無也。及其為無無，至妙何從及此哉！」，即襲用此文。《道應篇》作「及其為無無，又何從至於此哉」，文雖小異，亦正作無無。」 See Liu Wendian 1999: 610. Wang Shumin 王叔岷 also made this observation. See Wang Shumin 1999: 841.

⁵ Chapter 25 of the *Daodejing* says: “There is something undifferentiated and whole that existed before heaven and earth. Silent and empty, solitary and unchanging, it is found everywhere yet remains free from danger, thus it can act as the mother of heaven and earth. I do not know its name and so call it Dao. Forced to give it a name, I call it Great.” See Lou Yulie, 63. In the *Wenzi* 《文子》, a text whose authorship was thought to be spurious but is now considered to date to the Han dynasty, we see a very similar description: “Laozi said: There is something undifferentiated and

Although it appears to be a relatively straightforward passage, what should we make of its penultimate sentence? If we turn, for example, to the commentary of Guo Xiang 郭象 for clues, we are left empty-handed:

These are what unique learning means. From the uniqueness of Dao, only those who study it from within can arrive at its fundamentals. Thus, for those who study it well, it is not known as studying!⁶

此皆絕學之意。於道絕之，則夫學者乃在根本中來。故學之善者，其唯不學乎！

That the original text should contain this term while its most recognized commentator makes no mention of it in his glosses should be no cause for alarm; it simply tells us that Guo Xiang took the term at face value and nothing more. In other words, the *Zhuangzi* was arguing for the distinction between two types of *wu*—ontic nonbeing and ontological nothingness—and that to combine them as ‘the nonbeing of nothingness’ (*wuwu* 無無) would be nonsensical. And yet this is precisely what the contemporary sinologist Shang Geling has done, believing this doubling-up of *wu* points to the *Zhuangzi*’s intent to deny it any metaphysical value, thus distinguishing its theory of Dao from that of the *Daodejing* while simultaneously deconstructing Dao so as to prevent any inclination of it being a transcendental other.⁷

Influenced by the work of Fu Weixun some thirty years earlier,⁸ Shang took this singular instance of *wuwu* as signifying the *Zhuangzi*’s rejection of the principle of Dao-as-Origin, saying the text “no longer treats Dao or nonbeing as a metaphysical category or cosmological originator but as ‘yi

whole that existed before heaven and earth. It is only a formless resemblance, an abstruse profundity, solitary and indifferent, whose sound we cannot hear. Forced to give it a name, I call it Dao.” See Wang Liqi, 1. For more on the *Wenzi*’s history, see Ding Yuanzhi 丁原植. *Wenzi Ziliao Tansuo* 《《文子》資料探索》. Taipei: Wanjuan Lou, 1999.

⁶ *Zhuangzi* ch. 22, “*zhibeiyou* 知北游.” See Guo Qingfan, 760. Accused of plagiarizing the commentary of Xiang Xiu 向秀 (227-272 CE), his contemporary, Guo Xiang’s (252-312 CE) commentary, entitled *Zhuangzi Zhu* 《莊子注》, has survived in a variety of sources. References in this dissertation will be to the page numbers of Guo Qingfan’s 郭庆藩 edited collection of *Zhuangzi* commentaries, the *Zhuangzi Jishi* 《莊子集釋》. For more on Guo Xiang’s role in the textual evolution of the *Zhuangzi*, see Chai 2008: 7-18. For more on Guo’s life and writing see Fang Yong, vol. 1, 376-401.

⁷ See Shang Geling, “Embracing Differences and Many: the Significance of One in Zhuangzi’s Utterance of Dao.” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, 1:2 (June 2002): 229-250.

⁸ See Fu Weixun “Creative Hermeneutics: Daoist Metaphysics and Heidegger.” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 3:2 (1976): 115-143. Fu’s overall conclusion (pages 124-125) is that: “Zhuangzi’s view of the relation between being and nonbeing can [thus] be understood in terms of the transontological priority of the nameless nonbeing-of-nonbeing to the duality of nonbeing and being epistemologically differentiated and thus named.”

—’ or One that throughs (*tong* 通) all different beings by their own natures.”⁹ Putting aside Zhuangzi’s notion of oneness for the time being, Shang posited several misconceptions that need to be addressed first. Although noting that Zhuangzi’s explanation of *wuwu* was unclear, Shang nevertheless went on to say its implications were quite easy to comprehend. Surely if the concept of *wuwu* was of such importance it would have appeared in more passages than the one quoted, and yet it does not. Furthermore, it would have also appeared within the first seven chapters of the text, those reputed to be of Zhuangzi’s own hand, but again, it does not. What, then, are we to make of Shang’s claim that Zhuangzi ‘radicalized’ *wu* into its self-negating opposite? On what grounds is he justified in stating that *wuwu* “deconstructs the entire metaphysical account” of Dao?

First, Shang saw *wuwu* as the total repudiation of all metaphysical deliberations on Dao resulting in the denial of its transcendent character. Second, he depended on abstractionism to transform the ontological quality of nothingness into an imperceptible, empty process that was somehow able to preserve an originary force of coming-into-being and transformation.¹⁰ Third, since *wuwu* was able to surmount its own immanent dualism, Shang claimed it assumed monistic qualities that reaffirmed its presence of being through the act of its own negation. Finally, in being monistic, *wuwu* equalized all possibilities into one and this oneness was in turn translated as Nature. Thus, Shang concluded that: “Dao is for Zhuangzi simply nothing, not nothing-ness as something primary or substantial, not no-being as being, but straight *is-not*.”¹¹

Much of Shang’s argument, indeed his claim that Dao for Zhuangzi is-not, was derived from Guo Xiang’s commentary to the following analogy found in chapter two:

There is a beginning, a not begun to be a beginning, and a not begun to be no-beginning’s beginning. There is being, there is nonbeing, there is a not begun to be nonbeing, and there is a not begun to be nonbeing’s beginning. Suddenly there is nothingness, and yet when it comes to nothingness I do not know if it is actually being or actually nonbeing.¹²

⁹ Shang Geling, 241.

¹⁰ On a side note, Heidegger made an interesting and relevant point when he said that “the appearance ‘of something,’ thus precisely does *not* mean that something shows itself; rather, it means that something makes itself known which does not show itself. It makes itself known through something that does show itself.” See Heidegger 1996: 25-26.

¹¹ Shang Geling, 239.

¹² *Zhuangzi* ch. 2, “*qiwulun* 齊物論.” See Guo Qingfan, 79; Chai 2008: 85 [translation revised].

有始也者，有未始有始也者，有未始有夫未始有始也者。有有也者，有無也者，有未始有無也者，有未始有夫未始有無也者。俄而有無矣，而未知有無之果孰有孰無也。

Given that Zhuangzi's intent here was to unmask the presumed authority of linguistic conventions and epistemological norms by demonstrating their inherent relativity,¹³ to thus argue as Shang did that the above passage was instead describing a form of self-induced nihilism resulting in the monadic entity of Nature is to read the *Zhuangzi* through the lens of Guo Xiang. Indeed, just a few lines later Zhuangzi wrote that: "Dao has no defining boundary and speech cannot be constant. It is due to human discourse that demarcations arise." We can hence argue that the *Zhuangzi*'s differentiation between *wu* as nonbeing and *wu* as nothingness was part of its overall strategy to display how the ultimate reality of Dao unfurls beyond the nonbeing-being dichotomy to the realm of ontological nothingness in which it resides. Having said as much, since Shang Geling, and Fu Weixun before him, referred to Guo Xiang's use of *wuwu* in his annotation to the above passage instead of its original occurrence in chapter twenty-two, it would serve us well to see what Guo wrote and why Shang should take it as one of the keys to characterizing the *Zhuangzi* as a whole. Guo's text reads:

When there is a beginning there is an ending. This is known as no-ending and no-beginning and is to unify death and life. In unifying them, it is better not to unify them but allow them to do so themselves, which is also to forget their oneness. With being then there are categories of beauty and ugly, right and wrong. If one knows of nothingness but not the nonbeing of nothingness, then right and wrong, and good and evil cannot leave one's breast. If one knows the nonbeing of nothingness, then one will not yet be without any form of knowledge. When all of these forms of knowledge are forgotten, one can suddenly begin to understand nothingness. Once one understands nothingness, then heaven and earth, the myriad things, you and I, right and wrong, shall suddenly be authentically so.¹⁴

¹³ For more on this topic see Hansen, 265-306; Kjellberg; Shen, "Zhuangzi and the *Zhuangzi*" in Mou, 237-265; and Wong, 234-240. Vincent Shen has also addressed Zhuangzi's philosophy of language in the following paper: 沈清松〈莊子的語言哲學初考〉，《國立臺灣大學創校四十週年國際中國哲學研討會論文集》1985年11月。

¹⁴ *Zhuangzi* ch. 2, "qiwulun 齊物論." See Guo Qingfan, 80.

有始則有終。謂無終始而一死生。夫一之者，未若不一而自齊，斯又忘其一也。有有則美惡是非具也。有無而未知無無也，則是非好惡猶未離懷。知無無矣，而猶未能無知。此都忘其知也，爾乃俄然始了無耳。了無，則天地萬物，彼我是非，豁然確斯也。

In reading this annotation, indeed, in reading any commentator's notes to this particular section of text, how one understands and translates the term *wu* becomes vitally important. If we recall in the original dialogue between brilliance and nothingness how the latter was held to be a state of perfection—a metaphor for Dao—being perfect in every manner of speaking, to read the second *wu* as a reduplicate nonbeing is problematic insofar as it can no longer serve as the grounding horizon of the first *wu*. If Zhuangzi was to successfully relativize our onto-temporal construction of reality, which is what he appeared to be striving for, he could not do so if the cosmological horizon was defined in terms of a static, simple negation. Denying one nonbeing by way of another only results in an infinite loop of nonbeings; there needs to be something more substantial that can supplant nonbeing while also enveloping it.

This action of mutually supplanting and enveloping falls to Dao thus, if nonbeing is to abandon its circular dance with being and join the transcendent oneness of things, it is required to assume a higher, more cosmologically oriented role. This role is realized in the guise of *wu* as nothingness. In this way, rendering *wuwu* as the nonbeing of nothingness is not to say that nonbeing necessarily succumbs to a nihilistic void but that nothingness, as the meontological root of Dao, enfolds nonbeing as part of its own self-transformation. Thus, when Guo Xiang wrote that to know the nonbeing of nothingness is to not yet be without any form of knowledge, one can argue he was not denying Dao's existence per se but giving voice to the *Zhuangzi's* argument that there exists no epistemological difference between them. Once we accept the idea that nonbeing is just as mysterious as nothingness in that both are linked to Dao, we can forgo the dialectic of nonbeing and being altogether and return to a state of authentic naturalness.

Although Guo Xiang's commentary has become an indispensable hermeneutic tool for scholars wishing to break through the *Zhuangzi's* cryptic language, and being the oldest complete exegesis of the *Zhuangzi* it has earned a reputation for being a work of philosophy in its own right, he was not the only person to write such provoking annotations. Indeed, there are dozens of them, each

offering their own interpretative and philological insights.¹⁵ Returning to our discussion of *wuwu* as it appeared in the dialogue between brilliance and nothingness, a perusal of other commentaries will help put Guo Xiang's silence on the matter into better context. For example, Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 offered the following assessment:

Luminous brilliance, his knowledge has remained superficial in that he can only reach nonbeing at the loss of being. Unable to cast away both being and nonbeing, he therefore praises nothingness as most profound. Who can be so abstruse! He furthermore speaks of a nonbeing that is not genuinely nonbeing but is rather the nonbeing of nothingness, and yet all of the pairings and denials of being and nothingness still belong to the distinction between being and nothingness. As for the character *wu*, there is nowhere it cannot be applied, but given that words have their broad principle, we thus designate it nothingness. Furthermore, how can words reach perfection without doing so in the realm of nonbeing, in the limit of its principle or exhaustion of its nature, for they themselves do not have the mysterious virtue of the superior scholar. Who can embody it! This is superficial learning and small knowledge and from here perfection is unattainable.¹⁶

光明照耀，其智尚淺，唯能得無喪有，未能雙遣有無，故歎無有至深，誰能如此玄妙！而言無有者，非直無有，亦乃無無，四句百非，悉皆無有。以無之一字，無所不無，言約理廣，故稱無也。而言何從至此者，但無有之境，窮理盡性，自非玄德上士，孰能體之！是以淺學小智，無從而至也。

Lü Huiqing 呂惠卿, alternatively, observed that:

In being brilliant, the great universe gives off light and so illuminates things, hence nonbeing is simply the non-illumination of things. Such brilliance, therefore, does not act according to being or

¹⁵ This dissertation has consciously limited the breadth of commentaries consulted to those dating from the Song dynasty and earlier while keeping citations of Guo Xiang to a minimum. The reasons for this are as follows: Guo's commentary has been extensively studied in the Sinological community, hence in order to avoid redundancy it will be cited only when deemed necessary. A further reason for limiting our pool of commentaries to the Song and earlier is that they come across as more personable than those written in the Ming and Qing period when the number of said works increased exponentially. A final justification lies in the fact that said commentaries have yet to be translated into English and doing so here can only help broaden our understanding of the *Zhuangzi*.

¹⁶ *Zhuangzi* ch. 22, "zhibeiyou 知北游." See Guo Qingfan, 760. Although Cheng lived in the Tang dynasty, the dates of his lifetime are unknown. His commentary, the *Nanhua Zhenjing Shu* 《南華真經疏》，is traditionally grouped with that of Guo Xiang, forming a 'sub-commentary' of sorts. Their combined commentaries are known as the *Nanhua Zhenjing Zhushu* 《南華真經注疏》 and are contained in volume 13 of the *Zhonghua Daozang* 《中華道藏》. All references to Cheng's commentary are to the page numbers corresponding to Guo Qingfan's *Zhuangzi Jishi* 《莊子集釋》. For more on the life and writings of Cheng Xuanying, see Fang Yong, vol. 1, 492-514.

nonbeing; wanting to ask about them, no questions issued forth. Far-reaching and vacuous, gazing, listening, and reaching all failed to reach it; this is to act according to nonbeing. Only with nothingness can things be made brilliant; they cannot be so by the nonbeing of nothingness. This is because there cannot be nonbeing. When one realizes this about nonbeing then nothingness can be perfected, but how can such perfection be realized!¹⁷

光曜者，泰宇發光而能照，無有則無照矣。此光曜所以不知其為有為無，問之而不得問也。窈然空然，視聽搏之所不及，此所以為無有也。唯其有無，所以為光曜，不能無無，是以未能無有也。及其無有，則無所至，何從至此哉！

Chu Boxiu's 褚伯秀 magisterial compendium preserved many important commentaries, including that of Chen Jingyuan 陳景元:

Brilliance reflects inner luminosity; nonbeing reflects the root of wonderment. When inner luminosity embodies the root of wonderment, it is called being whose vacuity is then treasured. When it is called nonbeing, there is then nothingness, for there cannot be the nonbeing of nothingness. To even discuss nonbeing and being is doubly redundant and without end. Exhausting being and cutting off nonbeing, how is one to understand wonderment? How utterly profound! Brilliance's question thus forms the gist of the chapter Knowledge Wandered North.¹⁸

¹⁷ See Tang Jun, 411. Lü Huiqing (1032-1111 CE) wrote a commentary by the name of *Zhuangzi Yi* 《莊子義》. It has been preserved, albeit with textual variations, in the *Zhengtong Daozang* 《正統道藏》 and in Chu Boxiu's *Nanhua Zhenjing Yihai Zuanwei* 《南華真經義海纂微》. These two manuscripts, along with a third, the *E Zang Heishui Chengwen Xian* 《俄藏黑水城文獻》, have been reprinted in a modern edition under the name *Zhuangzi Yi Jijiao* 《莊子義集校》, edited by Tang Jun 湯君. References to Lü's commentary are to the page numbers of Tang Jun's text. For more on the life and writings of Lü, see Fang Yong, vol. 2, 37-42.

¹⁸ See *Zhonghua Daozang*, vol. 14, 365. Chu Boxiu (d. 1287 CE) is known not so much for his own commentarial prowess but his *Nanhua Zhenjing Yihai Zuanwei* 《南華真經義海纂微》. A truly enormous work, written in 160 *juan* 卷 (fascicles), it preserves the largest number of complete *Zhuangzi* commentaries from the Song dynasty and earlier to be found in a single work. Chu's text is preserved in volume 14 of the *Zhonghua Daozang* as well as volumes 337-338 of the *Siku Quanshu* 《四庫全書》. All references to Chu's text are to the page numbers of the *Zhonghua Daozang* edition. For more on his life and writings, see Fang Yong, vol. 2, 141-157. As for Chen Jingyuan (1025-1094 CE), like Cheng Xuanying he was an ordained Daoist priest and a prolific scholar who wrote commentaries to the *Zhuangzi* and the *Daodejing*. Chen Jingyuan's lesser commentaries to the *Zhuangzi* are found in volume 15 of the *Zhonghua Daozang*. References in this dissertation will be to Chen's principle commentary as preserved in Chu Boxiu's text. For more on the life and writings of Chen, see Fang Yong, vol. 2, 83-105.

光曜，喻內照。無有，喻妙本。內照體乎妙本者也，謂其有邪，則竇然空然；謂其無邪，則有無焉，而未能無無也。且論無議有，雙衍無窮；絕有斷無，妙從何悟。微乎哉！光曜之間，《知北遊》之大旨也。

From the above selection we can see that in each of them *wuwu* is taken onto-epistemologically while at the same time confirming our theory that *wu*, in its singular sense, can also be taken as ontological nothingness. In the words of Wang Youru, *wuwu* “goes beyond both negation and affirmation. It itself is neither negative nor positive, neither apophatic nor cataphatic...[making it] completely different from the Hegelian dialectic.”¹⁹ If anything, *wuwu* is an idealized state of awareness such that only the authentic person (*zhenren* 真人), or sage, has the capacity to nurture awareness of its presence. Rather than deeming it to have equivalency to the Buddhist idea of emptiness (*sunyata*), or no-mind, such that subject and object conjoin to form a state of oneness (*samadhi*), *wuwu* can best be thought of as the non-presence of Dao within the living space of ontological nothingness, the outcome of which is that Dao is no longer taken as transcendental but existential. We shall say more about the relation between Dao and its oneness in the section that follows, during which time it will be argued that the idea of Dao as oneness is not congruent with the thesis that Dao is Nature, one that transmutes itself into the self-so nature (*ziran er ran* 自然而然) of things.²⁰ On the contrary, the principle of Dao as the One is merely the allegorical reality of Dao whereas Dao as Nature is the actualization of such reality in things themselves.

In saying *wuwu* is but the psychological perfection of *wu* as nonbeing within the human mind, it would be easy to transpose such a definition onto *wu* as nothingness. To make such a claim, however, would be counterintuitive if not erroneous. To postulate that *wuwu* is equivalent to the *wu* of Dao would imply that Dao is but a state of mind thereby negating its role as the creative

¹⁹ See Wang Youru 2003: 153. In this regard, Daoist *wu* further distinguishes itself from Western conceptualizations of nonbeing as the negation of being. Kant, for example, described nonbeing as: “Negation is nothing, namely, it is the concept of the absence of an object,” while Heidegger declared it to be “the complete negation of the totality of beings.” See Kant 2007: 283; Heidegger 1993: 98.

²⁰ Fu Weixun made a point of saying that the term nature is hardly used by Laozi and Zhuangzi and that it was Guo Xiang who turned it into a philosophical concept. Fu wrote that: “Guo Xiang went beyond Wang Bi in reaffirming nature as one and the only one reality; Dao is simply brushed off as inessential or dispensable. The term *ziran* (nature) appeared five times in the *Daodejing*, four times in the *Zhuangzi*, and twenty-seven times in Wang’s commentary on the *Daodejing*, but astonishingly twenty-eight times in Guo Xiang’s commentary on the first two chapters of the *Zhuangzi* alone.” See Fu Weixun, 128.

potentiality of the universe. *Wuwu* is a self-negating solipsism whose purpose is to release us from the chains that bind our traditional conceptualization of what is meant by existence. It frees our imagination to ponder all the possibilities entailed in a nondiscriminatory reality. What is needed, therefore, is an alternative definition of *wu*; one whose fluid dynamism is released from our epistemological or phenomenological grasping while symbolically entailing its living presence.

Of course by ‘living presence’ I am being allegorical, but to some degree this does contain a hint of what is meant when speaking of *wu* as nothingness. I do not hold nothingness to be diametrically opposed to being, which is the more typical Western understanding, nor do I hold it to be of the same stature as Buddhist emptiness, as was mentioned earlier. For Zhuangzi, nothingness forms an integral aspect of Dao. It is neither isolated from being nor seeks its destruction for if it did, it would no longer be a constituent of Dao; rather, nothingness pervades being and Dao alike. Whether tangible to us or not, *wu* as nothingness differentiates itself from *wu* as nonbeing in that the latter is rudimentary ontic nonbeing while the former is the meontological material out of which the wonderment of Dao’s potential fulfills its own self-realization. In other words, what changes and transforms is the presence of being aspect of Dao, leaving behind an unchanging nothingness. In this way, Dao remains aloof and atemporal while at the same time giving birth to the myriad things. Nothingness thus represents the facilitative capacity of Dao while being is its phenomenological embodiment.²¹

1.2 The Meontological Language of Nothingness

What, then, is *wu* as nothingness? Ontologically, we can visualize it as having close proximity to

²¹ On a digressive note, Hegel’s explanation of the void, despite his characterization of it as an absolute negativity, conveys the role played by nothingness as the medium through which a more profound act takes place. Hegel’s theory is as follows: “That the void is the source of movement has not the trivial meaning that something can only move into an empty space and not into an already occupied space, for in such a space it would not find any more open room—understood in this sense, the void would be only the presupposition or condition of movement, not its ground, just as the movement itself, too, would be presupposed as already existing, the essential point, its ground, being forgotten. The view that the void constitutes the ground of movement contains the profounder thought that in the negative as such there lies the ground of becoming, of the unrest of self-movement—in which sense, however, the negative is to be taken as the veritable negativity of the infinite.” See Hegel 1969: 166.

another Chinese word, that of *qi* 氣.²² It is a type of living ether saturating the universe, forming the essential core of all objects, be they sentient or otherwise. Nothingness is thus the meontological structure through which Dao instantiates itself in the myriad things whilst remaining dark and mysterious. What is more, it is because of the pervasive quality of nothingness that Dao acts as the source of becoming in which ontological nothingness is the in-between-ness of coming-into-being and the source of all returning. For things in-themselves, however, we must refer to their ontic characteristics and this is done by referring to the contingency of ontology via nonbeing and being. Ontic nonbeing, then, marks the end and return to the realm of ontological nothingness. We can hence refer to the temporal presence of things as their being and their non-presence as their nonbeing. The non-presence of nonbeing, however, is not equivalent to nothingness, for while nothingness is present throughout nonbeing, nonbeing itself lacks ontological bearing and simply functions as a placeholder for a thing's lack of presence. This is why the *Zhuangzi*'s use of the term *wu* should not be regarded as either a void or emptiness, for neither term conveys the creative potentiality it affords or explains the onto-cosmological dialectic between *wu* as Dao and Dao as *wu*. It is owing to our inability to affect this relationship that I have proclaimed Zhuangzi's Dao to be existential.

Zhuangzi illustrated the inseparable indistinguishableness of Dao and nothingness as such:

If not for these states of mind, I would not be; if I am not to be, there will be no one to experience them. This principle comes close to being true but from whence they appear, no one knows. Although there seems to be a true self, any hint of its presence remains unseen. Its manifestation may be trusted, though we cannot see its form; its reality though real, is no indication of its form.²³

非彼無我，非我無所取。是亦近矣，而不知其所為使。若有真宰，而特不得其朕。可行己信，而不見其形，有情而無形。

It is interesting that both Guo Xiang and Cheng Xuanying took the self-negation of the opening sentence to be a result of Nature's doing. Guo wrote that: "As for that (*bi* 彼), it is Nature (*ziran* 自然). Nature gives birth to me and I am naturally born. Thus, what is natural is also natural to me.

²² The character *qi* has many English connotations, the most common being: vital breath, vapor, essence, force, spirit. In order to avoid any interpretive ambiguity, this dissertation shall leave it untranslated.

²³ *Zhuangzi* ch. 2, "*qiwulun* 齊物論." See Guo Qingfan, 51; Chai 2008: 77 [translation revised].

How utterly profound!” From this we can see why Guo’s tendency to interpret Dao as Nature was so easy to misconstrue. It would be rather preposterous to credit Guo Xiang with devising a unique philosophical system of Nature, for the time in which he lived (Jin dynasty) was one still heavily indebted to Huang-Lao cosmography and Buddhism, which had just started to make inroads with the Chinese intelligentsia. Thus, the only course of action available to Guo would have been to differentiate himself from earlier interpreters of the *Zhuangzi* and his contemporary commentator on the *Book of Changes* and the *Daodejing*, Wang Bi 王弼. In order to counter Wang Bi’s metaphor of root and branch, Guo thus devised a metaphorical use of Nature. To paraphrase Zhuangzi, that which governs the myriad things is hidden and unknowable, yet we implicitly trust it. How can such a thing be anything but Nature? Indeed, Nature cannot supplant or supersede Dao for they are one and the same. Both are responsible for bringing things to life, nurturing them, and ensuring they return to their source (i.e., Dao) when the time arrives.

We may strengthen our argument with another passage from the *Zhuangzi*:

As to Dao, it exists as reality with trustful manifestations, yet is without action or form. It can be passed on but cannot be privately owned. Although it can be obtained, it cannot be seen. Its root, then, is in itself. Its existence was secure before the time of heaven and earth.²⁴

夫道，有情有信，無為無形；可傳而不可受，可得而不可見；自本自根，未有天地，自古以固存。

Thus, Dao for Zhuangzi is not predicated on existence, nor can its operation be independent of the self-so nature of things as Guo Xiang postulated; rather, Dao is one with ontological nothingness. In light of its onto-cosmological character, Dao presents itself to us in the form of being-in-itself, and yet the form we speak of is an actionless, formless form. What makes it so is its self-creation. Being the source of its own being, Dao cannot be deemed a source as such but must be a non-source whose qualities are on par with nothingness. From this we can conclude that the source of Dao’s non-sourceness can be none other than nothingness, which is why Zhuangzi wrote that the root of Dao lies within itself. The existence of this root, being already present in Dao, exists before the time of heaven and earth in that the terms heaven and earth are terms of existence, yet

²⁴ *Zhuangzi* ch. 6, “*dazongshi* 大宗師.” See Guo Qingfan, 246; Chai 2008: 200 [translation revised]. In chapter 37 of the *Daodejing* the first sentence of the above passage reads 「道常無為而無不為」 while the *xinshu* 心術 chapter of the *Guanzi* 《管子》 says: 「正人無求之也，故能虛無。虛無無形謂之道。」 See Li Xiangfeng 2006: 759.

the root of Dao is the non-source of ontological nothingness. Zhuangzi's onto-cosmology can hence be said to present itself in a fashion unlike any other, including that of its predecessor, the *Daodejing*.

The *Zhuangzi* often referred to the historical Laozi by name (i.e., Lao Dan 老聃), having him more often than not act as a pseudo teacher to Confucius. In the *Daodejing*, the Dao is famously described in the opening lines of its first chapter. What is often overlooked is the third sentence of that passage, one declaring its onto-cosmological propensity: "Being without name, it is the beginning of heaven and earth; being named, it is the mother of the myriad things."²⁵ Wang Bi commented that "that which exists begins in *wu*; before it is formed or named it [Dao] serves as the beginning of the myriad things." This idea is similar to Zhuangzi's, however, the difference in terms of language between the passages derives from Laozi's tendency towards ontological matriarchalization whereas Zhuangzi adopted the notion of unity through oneness. Indeed, many of the concepts used by the *Daodejing* to describe Dao also occur in the *Zhuangzi*.²⁶ What is more, when examining other texts from the Han epoch such as the *Wenzi* 《文子》, *Huainanzi* 《淮南子》, and *Liezi* 《列子》, we see similar linguistic patterns.²⁷

For example, the *Wenzi* expressed *wu* as Dao and Dao as *wu* in this manner:

The formless is great while the formed is small. The formless are many while the formed are few...The formed has sound while the formless is silent. The formed is born from the formless hence the formless is the beginning of the formed...the named is born from the nameless hence the nameless is the mother of the named. For Dao, being and nothingness produce one another, while

²⁵ See Lou Yulie, 1.

²⁶ For example, in chapter 14 of the *Daodejing*, Dao is described as invisible, inaudible, and imperceptible while in chapter 25 it is characterized as undifferentiated and whole, existing before heaven and earth.

²⁷ The *Wenzi*, while now acknowledged to be an authentic work, was most likely written during the Warring States period but compiled into the form we know of today during the Han dynasty. To date, the only English translation is that by Thomas Cleary entitled, *Wenzi: Understanding the Mysteries*. Boston: Shambhala, 1992. Regarding the *Huainanzi*, the first complete English translation has just been published by a world-renowned team of scholars led by John Major. Finally, for the *Liezi*, A.C. Graham carried out a complete English translation entitled, *The Book of Liezi: A Classic of Dao*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, while Ronnie Littlejohn and Jeffrey Dippmann have just published an edited volume called, *Riding the Wind with Liezi: New Perspectives on the Daoist Classic*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2011.

the difficult and easy complete each another.²⁸

夫無形大，有形細。無形多，有形少……有形則有聲，無形則無聲。有形產於無形，故無形者有形之始也……有名產於無名，無名者有名之母也。夫道有無相生也，難易相成也。

In the *Liezi*, on the other hand, the ontological connection between Dao and *wu* is much more phenomenologically situated:

Thus, there are things born and the begetter of such things; there are forms and the giver of such forms; there are sounds and the sounder of such sounds; there are colors and the giver of such colors; there are flavors and the giver of such flavors. However, all that is born of the begetter will die, yet that which does the begetting is perpetual; all that shaping shapes is indeed actual, yet the giver of shapes is not actually existent; all that sounding sounds may be heard, yet the giver of sound does not issue them forth; all that coloring colors is visible, yet the giver of color is not apparent; all that flavors flavor may be tasted, yet the giver of flavor is not assumed: hence these are the duties of non-deliberate action.²⁹

故有生者，有生生者；有形者，有形形者；有聲者，有聲聲者；有色者，有色色者；有味者，有味味者。生之所生者死矣，而生生者皆未嘗終；形之所形者實矣，而形形者未嘗有；聲之所聲者聞矣，而聲聲者未嘗發；色之所色者彰矣，而色色者未嘗顯；味之所味者嘗矣，而味味者未嘗呈；皆無為之職也。

²⁸ See Wang Liqi, 52-53. On the idea that the formless is the beginning of the formed, we can cite two additional references: The first is in Wang Liqi's commentary to the passage just quoted where he cites the *chuzhen* 倣真 chapter of the *Huainanzi*: 「有有者，有無者，有未始有有無者，有未始有夫未始有有無者……有未始有夫未始有有無者，天地未剖，陰陽未判，四時未分，萬物未生，汪然平靜，寂然清澄，莫見其形，若光耀之間於無有，退而自失也，曰：子能有無，而未能無無也。及其為無無，至妙何從及此哉！」 See Zhang Shuangli, 137-38. The second is in chapter 2 of the *Zhuangzi*, which we discussed earlier (see note 20 above). Thus, although each of the three texts has slightly differing accounts, there is no denying they shared a common understanding when it comes to the progenitor of things.

²⁹ See Yang Bojun, 9-10. Zhang Zhan 張湛 (fl. 320 CE) in his commentary wrote: “Form, sound, color, and taste are all suddenly-so and born for they cannot give birth to themselves. Given that they are not self-birthing, they thus take non-deliberate action as their root. Taking non-deliberate action as their root, they do not cling to one appearance nor depend on one flavor; therefore they take the form of the *qi* as their master, acting according to its movement.” 「形、聲、色、味皆忽爾而生，不能自生者也。夫不能自生，則無為之本。無為之本，則無當於一象，無係於一味；故能為形氣之主，動必由之者也。」 A similar portrayal of Dao occurs in the *Wenzi*, which says: “Empty nothingness is the idea of tranquility, the ancestor of the myriad things. Putting these three to use then one enters into formlessness, and formlessness is also known as oneness...[oneness] is without form yet things having form are born from it, it is without sound yet all sounds emanate from it, it is without flavor yet all flavors are derived from it, it is without color yet all colors are produced from it. Therefore, being is born of nothingness and actuality is born of emptiness.” See Wang Liqi, 30.

In spite of the *Liezi*'s tendency towards fantastically mystical encounters, our argument is still viable in that nothingness is not only the core trait of all manifest phenomenon, it further serves as the complimentary aspect of being rather than its antithesis. Herein is where we are able to overcome the necessary condition of affirming nothingness so as to deny its presence in the face of being.³⁰ We can do so because nothingness is immune to the question of the pre-existence of the universe, for to say it existed before the world of being would imply that it is no longer present in the world, which would result in its own nihilism; rather, primal nothingness is absorbed by the myriad things in the form of the ever-present presence of Dao. This is why the *Zhuangzi* declared:

That which renders things as things is not limited by things. Things have their limits—what are called the limits of things. That which is unlimited [moves to] the limited and that which is limited [moves to] the unlimited...that which Dao acts as root and branch are not root and branch [to itself]; that which Dao acts as accumulation and loss are accumulation and loss [to itself].³¹

物物者與物無際，而物有際者，所謂物際者也；不際之際，際之不際者也……彼為本末非本末，彼為積散非積散也。

Thus, primal nothingness persists in a meontological 'plane of nothingness' that demarcates the ever-present presence of Dao. Such presence distinguishes itself from what we might think of as Nature insofar as only the latter may be regarded as an actual process. For *Zhuangzi*, Nature was associated with heaven and earth and the cyclical processes therein. The various transformations that occur throughout the universe, on both cosmic and human levels, whether the rotation of the seasons or the alternation of life and death, all occur within the realm of Nature. However, one must be careful not to ascribe such movement to Nature at the exclusion of Dao. Such a measure would lead to the conclusion that they are semi-autonomous, with the former falling under the governance of human society while the latter helplessly stands by. Humanity might vainly attempt to control or manipulate natural processes but such processes are themselves derived from and dependent on Dao. Thus, the only way by which one can nakedly comprehend the mysterious workings of Dao is to unite with it and this is done via the *Zhuangzi*'s idea of the One.

³⁰ In contrast, for Sartre, "negation cannot touch the nucleus of being of Being, which is absolute plenitude and entire positivity. By contrast, nonbeing is a negation which aims at this nucleus of absolute density." See Sartre 1992: 48.

³¹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 22, "*zhibeiyou* 知北游." See Guo Qingfan, 752.

We shall say more about the One in the next section of this chapter. Here, however, we are concerned with laying an onto-cosmological groundwork of coexistence between nothingness and the One. In the *Wenzi* one finds this principle of coexistence expressed in the nature derived metaphors of ocean and clouds:

As for the principle of the One, it can be said to apply to all over the four seas. As for the greatness of the One, it can be seen throughout heaven and earth. In its completeness, its solidity resembles an uncarved block; in its scattering, its diffusion resembles muddiness. Although muddied it gradually clears; although flushed away it slowly becomes full again. Its undulations resemble a great ocean while its vastness resembles floating clouds; it appears to be nothing yet it exists, seemingly lost yet still present.³²

故一之理，施於四海。一之嘏，察於天地。其全也、敦兮其若樸。其散也、渾兮其若濁，濁而徐清，冲而徐盈，澹然若大海，汜兮若浮云，若無而有，若亡而存。

In a similar vein, the *Liezi* analogized the partnership of Dao and *wu* in the form of *qi*:

In the Great Oneness, the *qi* had yet to appear. In the Great Beginning, the *qi* began. With the Great Beginning, things began to be formed. With the Great Elements, matter began. When *qi*, form, and matter were made but not yet separated, this was hence known as undifferentiated wholeness. Undifferentiated wholeness is to speak of the myriad things as indistinguishable and not yet separated.³³

太易者，未見氣也；太初者，氣之始也；太始者，形之始也；太素者，質之始也。氣形質具而未相離，故曰渾淪。渾淪者，言萬物相渾淪而未相離也。

However, the most lucid examples are to be found in the *Zhuangzi* itself, as shown by the following two passages:

In the Great Beginning there was nothingness, nonbeing, and namelessness. From it arose the One, an oneness that was without form. When things obtained it they were thus born and this was called Virtue. Before there were forms and divisions, they were innumerable though without separation,

³² See Wang Liqi, 30-31.

³³ See Yang Bojun, 6.

and this was called the Order of Things. From this flowing and moving things were born and once they became complete they gave birth to principles that were called Forms.³⁴

泰初有無，無有無名；一之所起，有一而未形。物得以生，謂之德；未形者有分，且然無間，謂之命；留動而生物，物成生理，謂之形。

Emerging from what has no root, it [Dao] enters what has no aperture. It has reality but there is nowhere it dwells; it has duration but is without beginning or end. As that which emerges does so from that which has no aperture, this refers to its reality. As it has reality but nowhere to dwell, this refers to its spatiality. Having duration but no beginning or end, this refers to its temporality. There is life and there is death, there is emerging and there is entering; it may enter and emerge but one cannot see its form. This is called the Gate of Heaven.³⁵

出無本，入無竅。有實而無乎處，有長而無乎本剽，有所出而無竅者有實。有實而無乎處者，宇也。有長而無本剽者，宙也。有乎生，有乎死，有乎出，有乎入，入出而無見其形，是謂天門。

Although the *Zhuangzi* did not explicitly use the word return here, it is nevertheless implied and forms one of his central philosophical constructs (the idea of return will be discussed in the third section of this chapter). For Zhuangzi, return is a returning to the oneness of Dao that is itself a returning to the undifferentiated wholeness that is ontological nothingness.³⁶ The point of conversion, what I refer to as the plane of nothingness, is none other than the Gate of Heaven

³⁴ *Zhuangzi* ch. 12, “*tiandi* 天地.” See Guo Qingfan, 424. Guo Xiang commented on the idea that things arise from a formless One, saying: “The One is the beginning of being, a state of ultimate wonderment. As it is ultimate wonderment, it thus does not have the principle of formed things. Since things arise from the One, they do not arise from nothingness. Hence Zhuangzi repeatedly said nothingness is the beginning of things, but how? In the beginning of things, they were not yet born and yet obtained life. Obtaining the difficulty of life, they were not endowed with nothingness from above, nor entreated with knowledge from below, for they suddenly and naturally obtained life. How could they seek life in what was already born and lose their self-born nature!” 「一者，有之初，至妙者也，至妙，故未有物理之形耳。夫一之所起，起於至一，非起於無也。然莊子之所以屢稱無於初者，何哉？初者，未生而得生，得生之難，而猶上不資於無，下不待於知，突然而自得此生矣，又何營生於已生以失其自生哉！」

³⁵ *Zhuangzi* ch. 23, “*gengsangchu* 庚桑楚.” See Guo Qingfan, 800. The *jingshen* 精神 chapter of the *Huainanzi* argued that: “Long ago when there was neither heaven nor earth, there were only images and no forms. Being obscurely dark, vast and unclear, hazy and cavernous, none could know its gateway.” 「古未有天地之時，惟像無形，窈窈冥冥，芒芘漠閔，瀕濛鴻洞，莫知其門。」 See Zhang Shuangli, 719; Major, 240.

³⁶ Chapter 40 of the *Daodejing* said: “Reversion is the movement of Dao, pliancy is the function of Dao. The myriad things of the world gain life from being and being is born from nonbeing.” 「反者，道之動；弱者，道之用。天下萬物生於有，有生於無。」 See Lou Yulie, 109-110.

(*tianmen* 天門).³⁷ Being a gateway between the nothingness wherein Dao resides and the beings of manifest reality, this gate must itself be a non-entity, which explains why Zhuangzi referred to it as nonbeing. Lin Xiyi 林希逸 explained it along these lines:

Being cannot be born of being but is born of nonbeing. Therefore, it is said being cannot take being to create being, it must emerge from nonbeing. Furthermore, this nonbeing is itself nothingness hence we say it is the nonbeing of nothingness. The *Qiwu* [chapter] says: as for nothingness, it is the nothingness of not yet beginning to be being, which is precisely what we mean. To hide oneself is to withdrawal oneself in concealment. The sage thus conceals his heart/mind in nothingness and is hence said to hide there.³⁸

有不生於有而生於無，故曰有不能以有為有，必出於無有。而此無有者，又一無有也，故曰無有一無有。齊物曰，有無也者，有未始有無也者，即是此意。藏者，退藏於密也。聖人之心藏於無有，故曰藏乎是。

Guo Xiang, in commenting on the sentence “being cannot take being to create being, it must emerge from nonbeing” argued that “this elucidation of the idea that being cannot take being to create itself is not to say that nonbeing can act as being, for if nonbeing can act as being, how can we call it nonbeing!”³⁹ We are able to call nonbeing an affiliate of being insofar as we are proposing a meontological deconstruction of the dialectic between nonbeing and being. What is alive is neither nonbeing nor being, for if this were true it would involve transforming it into something transcendent, which is not what we are postulating. Indeed, what we are proposing is that ontological nothingness is an inward inversion such that we fulfill our claim to a phenomenological meontology by locating it within the framework of Zhuangzian cosmological

³⁷ The *Zhuangzi* also referred to this gateway as the Repository of Heaven (*tianfu* 天府), the Spirit Tower (*lingtai* 靈台), and the Dark and Mysterious Gate (*yaoming zhi men* 窈冥之門). The *Daodejing* on the other hand preferred to call it the Gate of the Mysterious Female (*xuanpin zhi men* 玄牝之門).

³⁸ See Zhou Qicheng, 364. Lin Xiyi (1193-? CE), whose style name was Juan Zhai 虞齋, not only wrote commentaries to the *Zhuangzi* but to the *Daodejing* and *Liezi* as well, and each used the phrase ‘oral significance’ (*kouyi* 口義) in their title. His commentary has been preserved in volume 15 of the *Zhonghua Daozang*, and while it is known by a variety of names (*Zhuangzi Kouyi* 《莊子口義》, *Zhuangzi Juanzhai Kouyi* 《莊子虞齋口義》, *Nanhua Zhenjing Kouyi* 《南華真經虞齋口義》), its modern edition uses the title *Zhuangzi Juanzhai Kouyi Jiaozhu* 《莊子虞齋口義校註》. All references in this dissertation are to the second edition (2009) of this text, edited by Zhou Qicheng 周啓成. For more on the life and writings of Lin, see Fang Yong, vol. 2, 106-140.

³⁹ 「此所以明有之不能為有而自有耳，非謂無能為有也。若無能為有，何謂無乎！」*Zhuangzi* ch. 23, “*gengsangchu* 庚桑楚.” See Guo Qingfan, 802.

oneness. This oneness imbues the myriad things with the ontological nothingness of Dao thereby allowing them to partake in its marvelousness. Dao as nothingness is thus neither a thing-in-itself nor a functional process hence it remains hidden and complete. However, its completeness is both complete and incomplete in the sense that such epistemological quantifiers fail to describe the indescribable, multifarious nature of Dao. Seen from the other side, nothingness as Dao is the phenomenal nonbeing of nothingness; it negates any pretense of an absolutist interpretation of Dao while at the same time rendering mute any inkling of a supra-sensory mystic experience. This is why Zhuangzi declared: “Thus, the one who knows to stop at what he does not know is perfect. Who knows of the argument without words, of the Dao that that cannot be spoken? If one is able to know this much, he shall be the Repository of Heaven.”⁴⁰ It is also why the *Daodejing* noted that: “When it arises there is no brightness, when it declines there is no darkness. It is continuously so, nameless, always returning that which is no-thing. This is called the form of the formless, the image of that which is no-thing.”⁴¹

The significance of these varied expressions lies not in their use of transcendental language but in that what we perceive as transcendent is in fact a language of immanent discovery. The mysterious (*xuan* 玄) that the *Zhuangzi* and *Daodejing* point to, as the meta-phenomenological form of Dao, is none other than Dao’s meontological immanence in the myriad things of the universe. In light of this, it would be improper for us to associate the space-time continuum with Dao along the lines Kant had in mind when he argued that space not only possesses empirical reality, it was also a transcendental ideal.⁴² For Zhuangzi, what was in need of being transcended was neither being nor nothingness but the names we so readily attach to these concepts. In other words, we require a means to overcome our empiricist tendencies to view the world as filled with being and replace it

⁴⁰ 「故知止其所不知，至矣。孰知不言之辯，不道之道？若有能知，此之謂天府。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 2, “*qi wulun* 齊物論.” See Guo Qingfan, 83; Chai 2008: 87.

⁴¹ 「其上不皦，其下不昧。繩繩不可名，復歸於無物。是謂無狀之狀，無物之象。」 *Daodejing* chapter 14. See Lou Yulie, 31. To this Wang Bi added: “One may wish to say it is nonexistent but things complete their existence from it. One may wish to say it exists but its form cannot be seen. Thus we say, it is the form of the formless, the image of that which is no-thing.” 「欲言無邪，而物由以成。欲言有邪，而不見其形，故曰，無狀之狀，無物之象也」。 For more on Wang Bi’s contribution to Chinese philosophy, see Alan K.L. Chan. *Two Visions of the Way: A Study of the Wang Bi and Heshang Gong Commentaries on the Laozi*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1991. See also Chai 2010.

⁴² See Kant 2007: 64-66.

with a framework that is more world-centric—to see the worldliness of the world, as Heidegger phrased it. The *Zhuangzi* provided us with a most vivid account as to how this could be achieved:

Let go of your body, spit out your intelligence, and forget you belong to an order of things. Join the great harmony of the deep and boundless, dispel the mind and let go of the spirit, then you will be still and soulless.⁴³

墮爾形體，吐爾聰明，倫與物忘；大同乎溟溟，解心釋神，莫然無魂。

We can, therefore, once again assert our conviction that nothingness belongs to the fabric of reality and that its possibility cannot be explained by identifying one's consciousness with it. This is valid for while being is enclosed within human reality and can therefore only experience the cyclical rotation of birth and death, nothingness, although an inherent component of being, is immune to such conditions. Indeed, nothingness as the onto-phenomenological fabric of the universe exists on a plane that is beyond human manipulation or the threat of nihilism, a fate that can only befall ontic nonbeing. Nothingness is not the opposite of being in a Hegelian sense⁴⁴ but is a living hiddenness whose symbiotic ties to Dao enables it to serve as the reserved, non-manifest essence of things, as the cosmogonist root of Dao, and as the beckoning fold of return. Nothingness does not translate into Dao but is the catalyst from which the latter germinates, assimilates, and harmonizes things. Finally, Dao as *wu* and *wu* as Dao can be taken as a state of cosmic awareness unlike any other in that they do not define one's presence of mind regarding the more mundane aspects of awareness but engage Dao so as to unlock within us a supra-mundane awareness of the ontological nothingness lying at our core. Hence the *Zhuangzi* observed:

Dao permeates everything. Being divided, things are complete, but such completion is also what is harmful. What is vile about such division is that things seek out its completion; what is vile about seeking such completion is that it is a completion to what is already complete [in them]. Thus, they emerge but do not return, as if seeing a ghost. Emerging and obtaining it, this is called obtaining

⁴³ *Zhuangzi* ch. 11, “*zaiyou* 在宥.” See Guo Qingfan, 390.

⁴⁴ It is true that Hegel viewed nonbeing as an absolute negativity—the void—but I find it rather ironic, given our present discussion, that he should say: “The being-in-itself of the something in its determination reduces itself therefore to an ought-to-be through the fact that the same thing which constitutes its in-itself is in one and the same respect a nonbeing; and that, too, in this way, that in the being-within-itself, in the negation of the negation, this in-itself as one of the negations is a unity with the other, which at the same time is a qualitatively distinct limit, through which this unity is a relation to it.” See Hegel 1969: 133.

death. Exterminated and empty, they are but ghosts. Only when the formed resembles the formless shall there be stability.⁴⁵

道通，其分也，其成也毀也。所惡乎分者，其分也以備；所以惡乎備者，其有以備。故出而不反，見其鬼；出而得，是謂得死。滅而有實，鬼之一也。以有形者象無形者而定矣。

What is already complete is Dao and Dao attains completion by holding fast to its meontological essence. To those things of the world that refuse to acknowledge this, their life is but a ghostly emptiness. It is empty in that said beings are forever united in their indebtedness to Dao without ever realizing it, but should they do so, they will discover this obligatory connection is in fact one built upon Dao's propensity to misalign human conceptions of similarity and difference resulting in cosmic oneness. Smashing the associative divisions between life and death, right and wrong, form and formless, allows the *Zhuangzi* to overcome any epistemological barrier on its way to uncovering the ultimate reality of Dao, a reality that is embodied in a vibrant oneness that neither delimits beings nor disavows their implicit self-so-ness. How Dao *qua* the One avoids becoming monistic is, therefore, a question in need of answering and is one to which we shall now turn.

1.3 An Aesthetics of One: Why Dao is not a Singularity

Our discussion has thus far been focused on defining the term *wu* and establishing its connection to Dao. We have come to characterize it as symbiotic and meontological, as lacking dependency, determinacy, or transcendence. On the level of things, ontic nonbeing forces a measure of the aforementioned qualities onto ontic being, thereby ensuring its presence in the world. We need to remember, however, that for the *Zhuangzi*, *wu*, regardless of which plane of existence we choose to examine it from, is indubitably non-nihilistic in nature. As we begin to work outwards so as to uncover the broader uses and implications of our meontological language of *wu*, we come across a critical concept not just for the *Zhuangzi* but all Daoist texts alike—the cosmogonist One. Take the opening lines to the bamboo-slip text *Hengxian* 《恒先》 for example:

⁴⁵ *Zhuangzi* ch. 23, “*gengsangchu* 庚桑楚.” See Guo Qingfan, 798.

Heng precedes being and nothingness; it is simple, quiescent, and empty. Being simple, it is Great Simplicity; being quiescent, it is Great Quiescence; being empty, it is Great Emptiness. Not liking to stay contained within itself, it thus gave rise to space. Given the presence of this realm of space there was *qi*. With *qi* there came things, with the emergence of things there was beginning, and with beginning there came to be passing away.⁴⁶

恒先無有；樸，靜，虛。樸，大樸；靜，大靜；虛，大虛。自厭不自忍，或作。有或焉有氣，有氣焉有有，有有焉有始，有始焉有往。

While we are not concerned with the *Hengxian* text per se, it does offer us a new perspective on Warring States ideology, especially when it comes to the evolution of Daoist cosmography. Like other recently unearthed texts such as the *Four Classics of the Yellow Emperor* (*Huangdi Sijing* 《皇帝四經》), the *Hengxian* espouses cosmogonist ideas similar to those seen in texts that predate it, such as the *Zhuangzi*. Perhaps the most obvious correlation is to the Guodian 郭店 silk-text version of the *Daodejing* which uses the terms *hengdao* 恒道 and *hengming* 恒名 to describe the *changdao* 常道 and the *changming* 常名 found in the received edition. This substitution was employed so as to avoid using the surname of the ruling Han emperor, king Wen, which was Heng. We shall not doubt the veracity of this assumption as concrete support for the use of *heng* as symbolizing the oneness of Dao abounds.

If the *Hengxian* portrays the onto-cosmological progression of the universe as beginning in nothingness before proceeding to the use of the space and then *qi*, whereupon the appearance of things marks the delimitation of temporal division and hence a beginning and possibility for further creation, wherein does the *Zhuangzi* differ? Besides the obvious progression from nothingness as ultimate beginning to the rise of the One from which things emerge, the *Zhuangzi*'s

⁴⁶ The *Hengxian* was unearthed in 1994 and comprises 13 bamboo slips of approximately 500 characters. It is currently housed in the Shanghai Museum and was published as part of their bamboo-slip series edited by Ma Chengyuan entitled *Shanghai Bowuguan Cang Zhanguo Chu Zhu Shu* 《上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書》. See volume 3, (2003): 287-299. According to Liao Mingchun 廖名春 the character *huo* 或 should be read *yu* 域, an interpretation based upon the use of *yu* in *Daodejing* chapter 25 which reads: 「域中有四大，而王居一焉。」 It is also found in the *tianwen* 天文 chapter of the *Huainanzi*: 「道始于虚霏，虚霏生宇宙，宇宙生气，气有漠垠。」 See Liao Mingchun, “Shangbo Cang Chu Zhushu *Hengxian* Xinshi” 〈上博藏楚竹書《恒先》新釋〉 *Zhongguo Zhaxueshi* 《中国哲学史》 Issue 3, 83-92. During his translation of the *Daodejing*, Richard Lynn also chose to adopt *yu* 域 over *huo* 或 but his interpretation of *chengzhong* 域中 as “within the realm of existence” is misleading whereas Rudolf Wagner’s “in the beyond” better conveys the spatial connotation of the term. See Lynn 1999: 96; Wagner 2003: 202.

conceptualization seems to be lacking one thing—the Dao—or does it? Lü Huiqing had this to say of the One:

Without nothingness the One cannot be obtained. Being without name is where the One arose and the formless marked the beginning of heaven and earth. Since it was already called the One, how could it be nameless? Thus, things obtained it and were born and this is called Virtue, the mother of the myriad things. That which is incomplete has its divisions and such being the case, it is called Destiny. Destiny is thus an unseparated, formless beginning. From its movement things were born, giving birth to Principle, which were thereafter called Forms. When forms gained substance they protected the spirit, never being lost. Each thing has such an appearance, never taking them as unreal. What is called Nature is that which is not lost after already having its form. All are like this and not like that and the myriad things are without exception, for in obtaining oneness they are born. Destiny thus has its divisions but is not separated. Nature preserves the spirit and is not lost for the spirit of the myriad things is wonderful and bursting amidst heaven and earth. Therefore, self-cultivating nature is to return to virtue and this is to unite with the formlessness of the One. The perfection of virtue is to be one with the Beginning and this nothingness is unattainable. To be One with the Beginning is to be empty and this emptiness is found before the emergence of things. To be empty is to be great and its greatness is found in different unities.⁴⁷

無無則一亦不可得，無名則一之所起，而未形天地之始是也。既已謂之一，且得無名乎？此物得以生而謂之德，是為萬物之母也。未成者有分，且然而已，而謂之命，命則無間乎未形之初也。至留動而生物，物成生理，而後謂之形；形體保神，而未嘗失；各有儀則，而未嘗妄；謂之性，性則不失乎已形之後者也。凡此無他，萬物均之，得一以生。命則有分而無間，性則保神而不失，神則妙萬物而充塞乎天地之間者也。故性脩反德，則合乎一之未形，德至同於初，則無亦不可得矣。同乃虛，其虛至於未始有物；虛乃大，其大至於不同同之。

Oneness in its quiescent simplicity is regarded as emptiness in that it represents the amorphous nature of Dao. Since the One is affiliated with Dao and dwells in the realm of nothingness, the One for Zhuangzi was neither a numeric singularity nor monistic absolute; rather, it served as a holistic representation of the unfathomable mystery of Dao. To take the One as pertaining to Dao alone is to stop viewing it as One; to take the One as pertaining to humanity alone is also to stop viewing it as One. Hence the *Zhuangzi* argued that: “In this way, [the sage’s] likes and dislikes are reduced to

⁴⁷ See Tang Jun 2009: 240.

one. That which is one is one; that which is not one is also one. Knowing that one is one, he is a follower of heaven; not knowing that one is one, he is a follower of man.”⁴⁸

Indeed, the *Zhuangzi*'s discussion of the One has received little attention from contemporary scholars, for much of the debate has centered on rectifying the cosmology of the *Daodejing*'s forty-second chapter—which states that Dao gives birth to the One—with that of the bamboo-slip text *Taiyi Shengshui* 《太一生水》 (the Great One gave birth to water).⁴⁹ Given that Dao is able to give birth to anything at all, be it the One, nonbeing, or being, the question as to its temporal disposition thus arises. Furthermore, if Dao generates the conditions for the becoming of things, and as it is both atemporal and aspatial, the One of which we are now speaking also remains untouched by such movement. We shall have more to say on this in our third chapter but for now we can agree with the assessment made by Robert Neville some years ago that the movement between nothingness and the being of beings is cosmological, not ontological.⁵⁰

Returning to the *Hengxian*, we see various conditional states—primal simplicity, quiescence, and emptiness—which, when taken together, are indicative of the original condition of the universe. Dao, as an embodiment of the primal state of the universe, cannot itself be a thing; should it be taken as such, how could it continue to enfold the myriad things of the world that come to define it? It may, one can argue, be thought of as a universe-wide becoming, as a state emblematic of the beginning and ending of all beings, but a beginning that is beyond time and space. To be any

⁴⁸ 「故其好之也一，其弗好之也一。其一也一，其不一也一。其一與天為徒，其不一與人為徒。天與人不相勝也，是之謂真人。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 6, “*dazongshi* 大宗師.” See Guo Qingfan, 234-235; Chai 2008: 196.

⁴⁹ Regarding this “dilemma” James Behuniak proposed “a two-step solution to the problem, one that renders these two formulations consistent with each other. First, allow the One of Great One (*taiyi* 太一) to mean something like the One of continuity; meanwhile, allow the One of [*Daodejing*] chapter 42 to mean the One of particularity. Next, regard the *Taiyi Shengshui* as cosmogony and regard chapter 42 not as cosmogony but as cosmology. The difference then becomes that between a description of the origin of the world and a description of the world as it is.” See his article “Embracing the One in the *Daodejing*.” *Philosophy East and West*, 59.3 (July 2009): 364-381. For more on the *Daodejing* in its bamboo-slip variant along with the *Taiyi Shengshui*, see Ames 2004; Henricks 2000.

⁵⁰ Neville wrote: “Does the movement from nothing to being (in its three stages) back to nothing take place within the process of time—a cosmological generation and return—or does temporal process itself arise with the emergence of being (at one of its stages)? The metaphors are temporalistic, and I suspect that it would be reading in a *creatio ex nihilo* theory to interpret the movement from nothing to being and from being to nothing as transcending temporal process, as an ontological “movement” rather than a cosmological one.” See Robert Neville, “From Nothing to Being: The Notion of Creation in Chinese and Western Thought.” *Philosophy East and West*, 30.1 (Jan. 1980): 21-34.

different would imply that Dao has existence, making it a thing of the world.⁵¹ Only when Dao is taken as primal simplicity, quiescence, and emptiness can it be known as the mother of the myriad things or the Gate of Heaven. This would explain why the *Zhuangzi* stated: “The Gate of Heaven is nonbeing. The myriad things emerge from nonbeing. Being cannot create being from being, it must emerge from nonbeing; however, nonbeing is itself nothingness. This is where the sage hides himself.”⁵² For Han-era Daoists interested in distinguishing their own principles of origin from that of the *Zhuangzi*, the challenge would be a daunting one. Some, such as the *Liezi*, introduced *qi* as the intermediary step between Dao and manifested being:

Liezi said: The sages of old took *yin* and *yang* as regulating heaven and earth. If that which has form is born of the formless, whence do heaven and earth come? Therefore it was said: There is the Great One, Great Beginning, Great Foundation, and Great Simplicity. The time of the Great One was when the *qi* had yet to be encountered; the time of the Great Beginning saw the emergence of the *qi*; the time of Great Foundation was when forms began to take shape; and the time of Great Simplicity was the beginning of substance. *Qi*, form, substance were complete but not yet separated, therefore, they were known as undifferentiated wholeness. Undifferentiated wholeness describes the undifferentiated wholeness and inseparability of the myriad things.⁵³

列子曰：昔者聖人因陰陽以統天地。夫有形者生於無形，則天地安從生？故曰：有太易，有太初，有太始，有太素。太易者，未見氣也；太初者，氣之始也；太始者，形之始也；太素者，質之始也。氣形質具而未相離，故曰渾淪。渾淪者，言萬物相渾淪而未相離也。

In the *Zhuangzi*, we also witness a second form of oneness, one of epistemological import as seen in *Zhuangzi*'s claim that: “Heaven and earth came into being together and the myriad things and I were One.”⁵⁴ One might say that this is a perfect example of *Zhuangzian* monism but upon closer

⁵¹ Alain Badiou, interestingly enough, observed: “The multiple is the inertia which can be retroactively discerned starting from the fact that the operation of the count-as-one must effectively operate in order for there to be Oneness. The multiple is the inevitable predicate of what is structured because the structuration—in other words, the count-as-one—is an effect. The one, which is not, cannot present itself; it can only operate. As such it founds, ‘behind’ its operation, the status of presentation—it is of the order of the multiple.” See Badiou 2005: 25.

⁵² 「天門者，無有也，萬物出乎無有。有不能以有為有，必出乎無有，而無有一無有。聖人藏乎是。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 23, “*gengsangchu* 庚桑楚。” See Guo Qingfan, 800. Perhaps a similar realization also occurred to Hegel who wrote: “That which constitutes the beginning, the beginning itself, is to be taken as something unanalyzable, taken in its simple, unfilled immediacy, and therefore as being, as the completely empty being.” See Hegel 1969: 75.

⁵³ See Yang Bojun, 5-6.

⁵⁴ 「天地與我並生，而萬物與我為一。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 2, “*qiwulun* 齊物論。” See Guo Qingfan, 79; Chai 2008: 85.

inspection we discover it lacks such qualities. This is because the *Zhuangzi*'s epistemology took Dao as its starting and ending point, a point that is none other than a meontological emerging and returning to nothingness. We are already aware that Dao is an undifferentiated wholeness whose form is formlessness and whose being is nonbeing, thus heaven and earth, in owing their presence to Dao, are conjoined in its undifferentiatedness. Since Dao gives me life and heaven and earth sustain my form, my spontaneous emergence from the darkness of nothingness is not traceable to a transcendent void but to the One. As I only become aware of the oneness of things after I am born, once the realization dawns on me that the reality of heaven and earth is no different from that of Dao, I can proclaim their reality as being inseparable from my own.

And yet is such a position sufficient to counter the argument by those who insist that the 'is not' is incongruous with the One? Zhuangzi answered by saying: "When one's form is whole and spirit has returned, one may join in unison with heaven. Heaven and earth are the parents of the myriad things; together, they form a complete body, apart, they become the Beginning [of things]." ⁵⁵ Are we thus expected to equate the Great Beginning the *Zhuangzi* spoke of as specifically referring to the One? Does not ascribing the name 'one' to the One thereby preclude it from having any of the connotations assigned to Dao? If that were the case we would be limiting our conceptualization of oneness exclusively to the realm of being, the result of which would run contrary to our understanding of ontological nothingness.

We may, therefore, regard the *Zhuangzi*'s cosmology of oneness as functioning on two parallel planes: ⁵⁶ On the one hand, the non-specificity of Dao as an undifferentiated wholeness dictates that whatever is derived from it necessarily carries with it an aspect of this primal creation. This we know as ontological nothingness. All things are children of this living nothingness that is Dao and during the time of the primal (great) beginning and before the emergence of discrete forms, all was

⁵⁵ 「夫形全精復，與天為一。天地者，萬物之父母也，合則成體，散則成始。」Zhuangzi ch. 19, "*dasheng* 達生." See Guo Qingfan, 632.

⁵⁶ Michael Puett, who based his argument on that postulated by Levi-Strauss, described the cosmogonist system of Warring States thought as "correlative." Although in the fourth chapter of his work he offered us glimpses into various texts' conceptualization of the One, he spent the bulk of his time debunking the arguments of other Sinologists such as A.C. Graham and Benjamin Schwartz, especially when it came to their reading of Levi-Strauss. The result was a less than satisfying analysis of the relationship between Dao as One, Dao as Heaven, and One as Multiple. See Puett, *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divination in Early China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.

united in their potentiality. Such oneness prior to creation is onto-cosmographical. In describing the pre-phenomenal stage of things as the One, we can forgo the need to name such entities while sidestepping the issue of the unrepresentable as Other.⁵⁷ Oneness is not simply an epistemological simplification of the world in order to qualify such statements as “the myriad things and I were One;” it is to enter into a relationship of oneness with things wherein one joins with them in mindless freedom, knowing that the constant becoming of the One (Dao as *wu*) is always there to welcome their return. The *Wenzi* can be seen taking after the *Zhuangzi* (not to mention the *Daodejing*) when it wrote:

Pure tranquility is the perfection of virtue, effeminacy and weakness are the function of Dao, and calm empty-nothingness is the ancestor of the myriad things. Using these three, one falls into formlessness and formlessness is what we call the One. With the One, one mindlessly merges with all under heaven.⁵⁸

清靜者，德之至也，柔弱者，道之用也，虛無恬愉者，萬物之祖也，三者行，則淪於無形，無形者，一之謂也。一者，無心合於天下也。

However, what becomes of things should they be unable to maintain contact with the One? The *Zhuangzi* was not as forthcoming with a response as was the *Daodejing*:

In the beginning there was oneness. Heaven obtained it and was pure; the earth obtained it and was peaceful; the gods obtained it and were vividly powerful; the valley obtained it and was full; the myriad things obtained it and were born...Heaven without purity would split apart; earth without

⁵⁷ On the need to describe nothingness as an Other, Badiou postulated that: “...because the void is indiscernible as a term (because it is not-one), its inaugural appearance is a pure act of nomination. This name cannot be specific; it cannot place the void under anything that would subsume it—this would be to reestablish the one. The name cannot indicate that the void is this or that. The act of nomination, being a-specific, consumes itself, indicating nothing other than the unrepresentable as such. In ontology, however, the unrepresentable occurs within a presentative forcing which disposes it as the nothing from which everything proceeds. The consequence is that the name of the void is a pure proper name, which indicates itself, which does not bestow any index of difference within what it refers to, and which auto-declares itself in the form of the multiple, despite there being nothing which is numbered by it.” See Badiou 2005: 59. Many years earlier, Henri Bergson spoke of the nothing along these lines: “The representation of the void is always a representation which is full and which resolves itself on analysis into two positive elements: the idea, distinct or confused, of a substitution, and the feeling, experienced or imagined, of a desire or a regret.” See Bergson 1998: 296.

⁵⁸ See Wang Liqi, 30.

peacefulness would disintegrate; the gods without vivid power would desist; the valley without fullness would become exhausted; and the myriad things without life would be exterminated.⁵⁹

昔之得一者，天得一以清，地得一以寧，神得一以靈，谷得一以盈，萬物得一以生……天無以清將恐裂，地無以寧將恐發，神無以靈將恐歇，谷無以盈將恐竭，萬物無以生將恐滅。

The life-giving force that is the oneness of Dao stands in stark contrast to the abstractionist quality of, for example, German idealism.⁶⁰ Indeed, Dao as One is not merely a metaphorical depiction of Nature's way—of natural law—rather, it further serves as life praxis. In the process of self-becoming, of self-actualizing oneself to Dao, achieving unison with the motion of the universe becomes an objective of sublime importance. Mindlessly merging with the world, as the *Zhuangzi* called it is not a meditative state of mind in which the participant enters a state of no-mind; on the contrary, merging with Dao becomes a necessary measure if one is to wander in its existential freedom. Such language exhibits an exuberance that shocks the reader as much as its message. It describes the petty person as unable to tear himself away from 'gifts and wrappings' such that his spirit is worn down and wasted on what are shallow and petty, all the while believing he can "unite form and emptiness in the Great One." The result, the *Zhuangzi* said, is that the petty person "does not know of the Great Beginning." On the other hand, the authentic person "allows his spirit to return to the time of no-Beginning" such that he "flows like formless water dripping from Great

⁵⁹ *Daodejing* ch. 39. See Lou Yulie, 105-106.

⁶⁰ For example, Hegel wrote: "In the one, being-for-itself is the posited unity of simple being and determinate being, as the absolute union of the relation to other and self-relation; but, further, the determinateness of being also stands opposed to the determination of the infinite negation, to the self-determination, so that what the one is in itself is now only ideally present in it, and the negative consequently is another distinct from it." See Hegel 1969: 164. Heidegger concurred, saying: "Being and the nothing do belong together...because being itself is essentially finite and reveals itself only in the transcendence of Dasein which is held out into the nothing." See Heidegger 1993: 108. Kant, on the other hand, posited two views: supporting the idea of an absolute being, he noted that since "the beginning of a series of time can be determined only by that what precedes it in time, it follows that the supreme condition of the beginning of a series of alterations must exist in the time wherein that series was not yet." His antithesis, however, is more interesting: "...the world itself is a necessary being, or that a necessary being exists in it, there would then be in the series of its alterations either a beginning that would be unconditionally necessary and therefore without a cause... or the series itself would be without any beginning...which would be self-contradictory. [However, if]...there exists an absolutely necessary cause of the world outside the world, then that cause, as the supreme member in the series of causes of alterations of the world, would begin the existence of these alterations and their series...[hence] this cause would have to begin to act, and its causality would belong to time and therefore to the sum total of appearances; consequently the cause itself would not be outside the world." See Kant 2007: 412-419.

Pureness.”⁶¹ As an umbrella of Dao, the One thus designates the metaphysical situation in which the myriad things are transmutable with one another.

Indeed, the question of selfhood becomes redundant in light of the oneness of Dao, not because these concepts are no longer epistemologically valid, but insofar as the relationship between nothingness and Dao is symbiotic. Oneness as the pre-emergent state of ontic being cannot permit any form of classification other than the united wholeness of itself. This is the root of Zhuangzi’s ontological freedom—the One as the undistinguished oneness of pre-phenomenal being—and is a state of utter quiescence and stillness. It is, as Toshihiko Izutsu has put it, “a dynamic non-movement, full of internal ontological tensions...a something which goes on realizing and actualizing ‘ten thousand things’ in their myriad forms and transforming them in a limitless process of transmutation, and yet at the same time keeping all these things in their supra-temporal and supra-spatial Unity.”⁶²

We can, therefore, declare that the *Zhuangzi*’s onto-phenomenological progression of beings starts with the original state of the universe, that is, the nameless, formless, unknowable Dao. Having such qualities we envision it as nothingness. It is, however, not an empty nothingness in the traditional sense of both words but one that serves as the existential ground of becoming. At this earliest of stages, Dao *qua* nothingness has yet to be known as Dao *qua* the One. Dao *qua* oneness can only occur with the epistemological act of naming it the One, the Great Beginning, and so forth. Naming Dao the One, however, marks the deprivation of its holistic character and hence its virtue declines, depleted of all original generosity. The depletion and decline of Dao’s virtue occurs in progressive measures, each phase marking the further distillation of its pureness until it has been squeezed from the world of beings completely.⁶³ The One thus differentiates itself from

⁶¹ 「小夫之知，不離苞苴竿牘，敝精神乎蹇淺，而欲兼濟導物，太一形虛。若是者，迷惑於宇宙，形累不知太初。彼至人者，歸精神乎無始而甘暝乎無何有之鄉。水流乎無形，發泄乎大清。悲哉乎！汝為知在豪毛，而不知大寧。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 32, “*lieyukou* 列禦寇.” See Guo Qingfan, 1047.

⁶² Izutsu, 349. See Toshihiko Izutsu. *Sufism and Daoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

⁶³ Chapter 42 of the *Daodejing* conveyed the same principle, albeit more simplistically: “Dao gives birth to the One, the One gives birth to two, two gives birth to three, and three gives birth to the myriad things.” 「道生一，一生二，二生三，三生萬物。」 See Lou Yulie, 117. The *tianwen* 天文 chapter of the *Huainanzi* reflects this cosmogony when it says: “Dao begins with one. One [alone], however, does not give birth. Therefore, it divided into *yin* and *yang*. From the harmonious union of *yin* and *yang*, the myriad things were produced. Thus, it is said one produced two, two

non-One in that the latter is symbolic of a yet-to-be articulated being whereas the former is the undifferentiated wholeness that is primal chaos. And so, from the non-One that is Dao as *wu*, there is suddenly the latent possibility for things to beget life (*shengsheng* 生生),⁶⁴ an act that bears witness to the shift from the latent potentiality of Dao *qua* ontological nothingness to the realization of this latency in the form of Dao *qua* the One.

With the One of the *Zhuangzi*'s cosmology now established, ontic being and nonbeing emerge from this surrogate womb, populating the universe with their myriad variations. It would appear, then, that nothingness's role ends here, at the fulfillment of being's becoming. This is not the case. Nothingness persists in the world, unbeknownst to many. Undergirding nonbeing, the ontological nothingness of Dao nourishes beings by providing them with a form of meontological mobility humanity regards as temporality. In this way, Dao as *wu* accompanies things to their life's end just as it was there at the moment of their birth. However, nothingness also serves another purpose, which is to epitomize the life praxis of the sage. In order for the sage to become a living embodiment of Dao he needs to perfect those characteristics that typify it, qualities that are also applicable to nothingness. Hence the sage needs not transcend anything; rather, he turns his mind inward, returning to the nothingness that unites him with Dao.

1.4 Returning to Dao: Reversion and its Nihilistic Rebuke

Having established that the ground of our existential theory of Dao lies in the meontological language of nothingness, we subsequently revealed that its phenomenal expression occurs via the One. It thus behooves us to complete the circle by examining the concept of reversion or return. Describing cosmogonist completion as a process of return might seem like an odd choice of words, which begs the question, a return to what? This reversion that is a returning is not a return to one's empirical self as a being amongst beings, nor is it a transgressing to a transcendent other; rather,

produced three, and three produced the myriad things.” 「道始於一，一而不生，故分而為陰陽，陰陽合和而萬物生。故曰一生二，二生三，三生萬物。」 See Zhang Shuangli, 341; Major, 133.

⁶⁴ “He who forsakes life does not die; he who begets life does not live.” 「殺生者不死，生生者不生。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 6, “*dazongshi* 大宗師.” See Guo Qingfan, 252-253; Chai 2008: 205. Later in the text, the term *shengsheng* 生生 also appears: “Life is something borrowed; as the life of that which begets life is borrowed, it is but dust and chaff.” 「生者，假借也；假之而生生者，塵垢也。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 18, “*zhile* 至樂.” See Guo Qingfan, 616.

reversion is a transformative experience of returning to the oneness of Dao to complete the possibility of existence before it commences anew. From this we can characterize any returning to Dao as positive in that such reversal is to the ontological nothingness of the universe rather than the nihilistic void the West beholds as absolute nothingness. Thus, beings partake in a reversion from their present phenomenological state to their pre-ontological state of nonbeing.

This act of reversal can be described as functioning on two axes: the horizontal and the vertical. The case of horizontal return is the more unremarkable of the two, representing the ontic reintegration of being into the One. Horizontal reversal is that which humanity regards as the end-result of our passing from this world; it is a mark of our mortality and finitude of life. Returning to the One is a returning ingested with fear and apprehension, something Heidegger likened to the slipping away of being, the receding of which induces an anxiety in which the nothing is revealed.⁶⁵ Thus, in each thing lies the ability to return to Dao, whose innate presence is neither discoverable nor deniable rendering such in-born transformational tendencies an expression of natural law. Oneness is the principle law of Nature and to whom the myriad things of the universe owe their creation and departing. It is not, however, the principle law of cosmic procession. For that to become realized we must go one-step further than the returning of things to the One as a horizontal transference and turn to the ontological assimilation of the One with Dao as a vertical movement.

Differentiation and non-differentiation take place across the plane of existence, forming unified groups of being according to their unique class structure.⁶⁶ This simple process of transformational reversal is surpassed only when we acknowledge the greater cosmological activity of which *wu* is the pivot. On this vertical axis that pierces the plane-of-nothingness insofar as it extends from the depths of Dao to the territory of being, the process of returning is hence a meontological tracing of

⁶⁵ Heidegger noted that “all things and we ourselves sink into indifference. This, however, is not in the sense of mere disappearance. Rather, in this very receding things turn towards us. The receding of beings as a whole that closes in on us in anxiety oppresses us. We can get no hold on things. In the slipping away of beings only this ‘no hold on things’ comes over us and remains. Anxiety reveals the nothing.” See his essay “What is Metaphysics?” in Heidegger 1993: 101.

⁶⁶ The Jin dynasty scholar Pei Wei 裴頠 (267-300 CE) was the first person to use the term ‘collective being’ (*qunyou* 群有). It appears in his *Treatise on Revering Existence* (*chongyoulun* 《崇有論》) and can be found in his biography in the official history of the Jin (*jinshu* 《晉書》).

things from their present living condition back to the moment of their becoming. It is, therefore, the unmasking of being so as to arrive at nothingness. However, the arrival at nothingness does not deny being its presence of being in a nihilistic sense but reaffirms the potentiality of being's presence having separated from Dao. Horizontal reversal is hence taken as a circular progression of completion whilst vertical returning is infinite in magnitude and whose completion takes on the guise of non-completion.⁶⁷

To express the idea of return/reversal, the *Zhuangzi* used terms such as *fan* 反, *fu* 復, and *gui* 歸.⁶⁸ In order to illustrate the dynamic nature of returning to the One and how the One can be traced back to Dao, the following examples will prove most illustrative:

All things have their completion and destruction, yet upon their return they become one.⁶⁹

凡物無成與毀，復通為一。

[They see man's form] as a borrowing of different substances, coming together as one body. They forget their liver and gall, and discard their ears and eyes. Turning and overturning they end and they begin, not knowing head from tail. Absently they roam in what lies beyond the dust and dirt of the world, wandering carefree in the spirit of non-doing.⁷⁰

……假於異物，託於同體；忘其肝膽，遺其耳目；反覆終始，不知端倪；芒然彷徨乎塵垢之外，逍遙乎無為之業。

Life has its buds, death has its returning; beginning and end follow one another without stoppage and no one knows their limit.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Bergson, conversely, posited the interchangeability of being and nonbeing as an exercise of substitution. He wrote: “‘Nothing’ is a term in ordinary language which can only have meaning in the sphere, proper to man, of action and fabrication. ‘Nothing’ designates the absence of what we are seeking, we desire, expect. Let us suppose that absolute emptiness was known to our experience: it would be limited, have contours, and would therefore be something. But in reality there is no vacuum. We perceive and can conceive only occupied space. One thing disappears only because another replaces it. Suppression thus means substitution...The idea of absence, or of nothingness, or of nothing, is therefore inseparably bound to that of suppression, real or eventual, and the idea of suppression is itself only an aspect of the idea of substitution.” See Bergson 1946: 114-115.

⁶⁸ With regards the character *fan* 反, there are two combinatorial variations: the first is *xiangfan* 相反 which translates as ‘opposite,’ the second is *fangui* 反歸 which translates as ‘reversal.’ We are interested in the former, not the latter.

⁶⁹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 2, “*qi wulun* 齊物論.” See Guo Qingfa, 70; Chai 2008: 80-81 [translation revised].

⁷⁰ *Zhuangzi* ch. 6, “*dazongshi* 大宗師.” See Guo Qingfan, 268; Chai 2008: 217 [translation revised].

⁷¹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 21, “*tianzifang* 田子方.” See Guo Qingfan, 712.

生有所乎萌，死有所乎歸，始終相反乎無端而莫知 乎其所以窮。

The above examples give the clear impression that for the *Zhuangzi*, return only entails the event of one's own death. We will, however, in chapter six of this dissertation demonstrate that there is indeed another form of return, one whose outcome is complete freedom. For now though, our concern is to illustrate that Dao as *wu* involves no nihilism whatsoever. The returning to one's root that the *Zhuangzi* speaks of is a joyous occasion, despite its inevitability. Cosmologically speaking, the process of becoming and returning that all things undergo is natural and without interruption. To assign one the label 'birth' and the other 'death' does nothing to alter the course of their journey. Sounding slightly fatalistic, the *Zhuangzi* says we should simply accept these changes as part of the natural evolution of things and nothing more. The above examples were chosen in order to contrast them with others that are taken from the *Daodejing*, especially in regards to their use of language:

Returning is the movement of Dao; softness is the employment of Dao. The myriad things of the world are born of being, and being is born of nothingness.⁷²

反者，道之動；弱者，道之用。天下萬物生於有，有生於無。

While the myriad things prosper, each one returns to their root. Returning to the root is called quiescence; this is known as returning to one's destiny. Returning to one's destiny is known as constancy.⁷³

夫物云云，各復歸其根。歸根曰靜，是曰復命。復命曰常。

As the second *Daodejing* passage includes experiential attributes of returning to Dao, they offer more interpretative material to work with, as Lü Huiqing has illustrated in his commentary:

[In difference to others] I take the perfection of empty quietude; therefore upon seeing that which makes the myriad things arise and multiply, I know it from my perspective and not theirs. That which makes them arise is also what causes them to return. That which causes them to become numerous is the same thing that makes them return to their root. Thus, I observe their returning at the moment of their arising, knowing that each returns to their root at the moment of their

⁷² *Daodejing* chapter 40. See Lou Yulie, 109-110.

⁷³ *Daodejing* chapter 16. See Lou Yulie, 36.

multiplication. Furthermore, as for that which is called emptiness, it is not emptiness by way of emptying; rather, it is merely that things are not full, thus they are empty. As for that which is called quietude, it is not a quietude by way of being quiescent; it is simply in the multiplication of things, each returns to its root without knowing why it is so, and this is not enough to disturb its peace of mind, hence there is quiescence. Therefore, returning to the root is called quietude. As for destiny, it is that which I have received and gives me life. Only when my nature is quiet can I then return to that from which I was born and be able to control the destiny of other things. Thus, quietude is known as returning to one's destiny.⁷⁴

而我以虛靜之至，故見萬物之所以作與其所以云云，在我而不在彼。其所以作者，乃其所以復也。方其所以云云者，乃其所以歸根也。故以其並作而觀其復，則方其云云而各復歸其根也。然則所謂虛者，非虛之而虛也，直莫之盈，故虛也。所謂靜者，非靜之而靜也，夫物云云，各歸其根而不知，而莫足以撓心，故靜也，故歸根曰靜。命者，吾之所受以生者也。夫惟靜，則復其所以生，而能命物矣，故靜曰復命。

The One, through the movement of cosmological return, embodies the original virtue of things before they assume any particularities and begin identifying with them as such. Once they isolate themselves from Dao by identifying and assigning authority to the particularities of things, they subsequently deteriorate and perish.⁷⁵ Oneness is thus the initial point of the self-evolution of Dao⁷⁶ and subsequently serves as the root of being. The source of being's root, however, is nothingness, and so the One is forever tied to the meontological nature of Dao. In this way, the One can contain the marvelous possibilities of creation whilst simultaneously ensuring that the holistic freedom allotted each thing is preserved therein. The indwelling principle that is the undifferentiated wholeness of nothingness is hence the constancy of Dao imbued in all things and is the key to ensuring Dao's neutrality as things endlessly diversify and transform of their own doing.

The ontological circle spoken of in the above passages is a regression from quietude to destiny to constancy; put differently, the phenomenal manifestation begins in the constancy of nothingness,

⁷⁴ Lü's commentary, *Daode Zhenjing Zhuan* 《道德真經傳》, is preserved in the *Zhonghua Daozang*. See *Zhonghua Daozang*, volume 10, 321.

⁷⁵ See the story of chaos at the end of chapter 7 in the *Zhuangzi*.

⁷⁶ Izutsu, 402.

progresses to the destiny of individual things, and finds completion in their peace of mind. Peace of mind symbolizes the harmonization with Dao and is endemic of a psychological awareness of the root of things and said root is nothing other than the meontological condition of an existential Dao. That things owe their existence to Dao is to say that the myriad things of the universe emerge from the plenum of oneness and such is their indubitable fate. Where we go astray from the virtue of Dao is at the moment we pledge our allegiance to names and the false reality they convey, thereby establishing human culture as an oppositional system to the harmony of Dao. This is why the *Zhuangzi* was critical of artificial linguistic conventions, preferring to see things as they are of themselves rather than what we take them to be. To this end, the mind that is tranquil and empty of false truths is the mind of one who is authentic, a person whose thoughts trace back to the original beginning of things and the time before human demarcations divided the world.

One may also reframe the ontological circle in light of chapter 25 of the *Daodejing*: “Man models himself after earth, earth models itself after heaven, heaven models itself after Dao, and Dao models itself on what is natural.”⁷⁷ This, however, begs the question: If we are to achieve harmony with Dao by way of a returning, is it a multi-phase or singular process? Laozi, unfortunately, was ambiguous. The *Zhuangzi*, however, contains many deliberately shocking suggestions, one of which we have already seen:

You have only to rest in non-doing and things will transform themselves. Let go of your body, spit out your intelligence, and forget you belong to an order of things. Join the great harmony of the deep and boundless, dispel the mind and let go of the spirit, then you will be still and soulless.⁷⁸

汝徒處無為，而物自化。墮爾形體，吐爾聰明，倫與物忘；大同乎溟溟，解心釋神，莫然無魂。

How one goes about doing such things is, of course, up to one’s own interpretation, however, the *Zhuangzi* seems quite adamant for the need to return to a more natural state of existence, be it literal or figurative. The *Daodejing*’s evolutionary ontology, on the other hand, is broken down into four distinct stages: from the human realm to the earthly, from the earthly realm to the heavenly, from the heavenly realm to that of Dao, and from the realm of Dao to the self-so-ness of

⁷⁷ 「人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然。」 See Lou Yulie, 65.

⁷⁸ *Zhuangzi* ch. 11, “*zaiyou* 在宥.” See Guo Qingfan, 390.

Nature. Insofar as Laozi's meontology involves working backwards from the myriad things to their singular and infinite source (*wu* as Dao), we can liken his idea of return to a process of regressive intuition. Although the *Zhuangzi* does not resort to the numerology seen in the *Daodejing*, the text very clearly outlines the steps needed for such a journey. These four stages occur in a story created by the *Zhuangzi* between Confucius and his disciple Yan Hui as the latter attempted to return to Dao. The first stage involved forgetting benevolence and righteousness, followed by the forgetting of rites and music. Having unlearned all social norms and epistemological conventions, Yan Hui's mind thus returned to a state of original quietude and emptiness. He subsequently proclaimed to be able to 'sit in forgetfulness,' a statement that confounded Confucius. This led Yan to describe it as the discarding of his limbs and intellect, for only in abandoning one's body and mind can one become united with Dao.⁷⁹

Yan Hui thus began his quest at the stage of epistemological discrimination and moral certitude, a stage in which things rule over that which is natural, harming Dao in the process. Having learned to rid himself of such contrived virtues he moved beyond the realm of the earthly and entered the realm of that belonging to heaven. Since heaven cultivates the harmony of Nature and all that is natural, Yan had to learn to unlearn those arts associated with it (e.g., rites and music). With his mind empty of all human convention, he successfully returned to the stage second removed from Dao, what Zhuangzi termed the equalizing/equalization of things (*qiwu* 齊物). This was the stage in which ontological being had only just emerged from the undifferentiated wholeness that is the One. And yet given that this was still ontological being and not the ontic being we see in stage three, there remains an element of the One attached to it. This oneness that exists beyond the One is not the true One, for its existence has been classified and named. In order to rid himself of this primordial existence, Yan Hui must discard his own phenomenological embodiment so as to return to the existential ground of Dao. Only when he has returned to the pre-ontological state of being can he claim to have attained unity with Dao. This is what it means to return to Dao and this returning, for the majority of things, occurs when our present lifetime has drawn to an end.

⁷⁹ We shall say more of this passage, which occurs in chapter 6 of the *Zhuangzi*, in the final chapter of this work. See Guo Qingfan, 282-285; Chai 2008: 227-230.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter was devoted to establishing the *Zhuangzi*'s language of meontology so as to better equip ourselves when the time comes to explicating the uses and impacts of the cosmogonist trinity of nothingness, being, and Dao. The deftness with which the *Zhuangzi* understood and portrayed the cosmic circle of beginning and end, the question of being and nothingness, and how the One ultimately unites them by acting as Dao's ground of becoming, showed the positive gains to be had over the standard theory of *creatio ex-nihilo*. Having thus outlined the meontological mechanism of Dao, we can now cast our net wider by considering aspects of it that are slightly removed from the core element of nothingness. In the next chapter, we will look into how the principle of ontological nothingness manifests itself in the world by leaving clues in our midst as to its ephemeral presence, and how humanity attempts to encapsulate it in our thoughts and the things we create. To this end, we will investigate the Thing as the mythically perfect example of human ingenuity, providing us with the opportunity to delve into the onto-hermeneutic characteristics of human craft and learning. Moreover, as a mythical entity whose place of abode is the One, the Thing—along with those authentic persons who have successfully reverted to Dao—makes its presence felt via the concept of trace. The trace, as an element of formlessness within form, is an expression of the Thing's Dao-given nature. In other words, although the present chapter has portrayed Dao as being impossibly metaphysical and seemingly forever beyond our grasp, the next chapter will reveal that it is, in fact, constantly on hand in things and as we shall see in chapter three, in the time and space encapsulating them.

CHAPTER 2

Tracing the Invisible: Phenomenological Discovery

Dao has its reality and signs but is without action or form. It can be passed down but not received; it is obtainable but you cannot see it.

—*Zhuangzi*

In the previous chapter, our concern was with establishing and verifying the ground upon which nothingness could assert itself in the universe. Having done so, the question as to what becomes of it once its presence has been revealed subsequently arises. In order to answer this, we must take a different approach from that of the first chapter by tracing the becoming of things back to their root in ontological nothingness. This movement from *wu* to the One, from the non-differentiated One to the divided multiplicity of things, and back to the quiet, still nothingness enveloping Dao, can thus be described as a form of meontological cosmology. Looking into the specifics of this process, however, we soon realize that things are not moving to and from the ubiquitous oneness of Dao but to an original, self-replicating model within the One.

This model is what we refer to as the Thing—a mirage-like entity whose nature is as elusive as that of the sage. It is elusive in that it coalesces with other Things to form the One. The One, in turn, assumes the dark tranquility attributed to Dao, a darkness that is none other than the nothingness in which Dao is situated, and yet the One is neither Dao nor nothingness but symbolizes the pre-phenomenological plenum from which all things arise. Since humanity is incapable of directly knowing the Thing, we must learn of its presence by way of those lesser, more mundane things. These ontic things, however, can only act as a temporary lodging place for the Thing. Indeed, things can only provide a fleeting glimpse of the Thing, a glimpse that amounts to little more than a trace. It is here, in the trace of the Thing, that we can cross the divide between our everyday encounter with things and our yearning to unite with Dao. The trace, in other words, acts as a signpost on the road of return to the One. This chapter will, therefore, reveal in what ways the Thing and the One are connected, demonstrating how any connection cannot succeed without the

trace, while analyzing several well-known stories in the *Zhuangzi* that demonstrate the sage's unique ability to harmonize with the trace of things via the oneness of nothingness.

2.1 On the Origin of the Thing

If we recall, the previous chapter worked from the hypothesis that *wu* can be interpreted as both ontic nonbeing and ontological nothingness and that it contributes to the generative process of things. For the *Zhuangzi*, the idea of a pure or absolute nothingness was not only tautological it was downright illogical in that it focused on the thing-in-itself rather than on the meontological creativity of Dao. In this way, *wu* can be understood as more than a simple metaphysical tool in that it becomes the very embryonic material from which Dao weaves together the myriad things and their reality. This fashioning of things does not occur in isolation, however, but in the collective non-differentiation of the One. Therefore, if we are to affirm our determination that the origin of the Thing lies in the One, we must not only discover the particulars of this origin, we must also uncover the process leading to their becoming. The *Zhuangzi* analogized it as such:

In the Great Beginning there was nothingness, nonbeing, and namelessness. From it arose the One, an oneness that was without form. When things obtained it they were thus born and this was called Virtue. Before there were forms and divisions, they were innumerable though without separation, and this was called the Order of Things. From this flowing and moving things were born and once they became complete they gave birth to principles that were called Forms.¹

泰初有無，無有無名；一之所起，有一而未形。物得以生，謂之德；未形者有分，且然無間，謂之命；留動而生物，物成生理，謂之形。

We can see, then, that the Thing is a sub-category of the formless One. However, its dividedness follows the wholeness of the One *qua* Dao and so remains a division of mystery. Hidden within the formless confines of the One, the Thing has its characteristics as such. However, if we are to

¹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 12, “*tiandi* 天地.” See Guo Qingfan, 424. In contrast, Hegel wrote: “Becoming is the unseparatedness of being and nothing, not the unity which abstracts from being and nothing; but as the unity of being and nothing it is this determinate unity in which there *is* both being and nothing. But in so far as being and nothing, each unseparated from its other is, each is not. They are therefore in this unity but only as vanishing, sublated moments.” See Hegel 1969: 105.

become aware of those reified traits possessed by the Thing, they must also be embodied in the myriad things too. The Thing is thus the first created thing to appear out of the formless, nameless nothingness of Dao.² As mundane things are born of that which cannot be known (i.e., the Thing), a space is introduced between the moment of their conception and that of their becoming. We can thus express the time before a thing's becoming as one of pre-signification while its existence as a thing-in-itself is characterized by the transformation into something signified. The *Zhuangzi*, and in particular, the commentary of Guo Xiang, declared that one comes to know of this transitional space through the concept of trace (*ji* 迹).

Given that the Thing's pre-phenomenological disposition stands in contrast to the concretized things it propagates, making it knowable only through its trace, the Thing remains an inherent part of them whilst maintaining its own aloofness. What enables the Thing to behave in such a manner is not that it is the Thing per se, but that it contains an inherent thingness congruent to that of Dao. It is because of this particularly attuned thingness that the Thing is qualified to dwell in the One. In his essay, *The Thing (das Ding)*, Martin Heidegger wrote: "As a vessel the jug is something self-sustained, something that stands on its own...However, the thingly character of the Thing does not consist in its being a represented object, nor can it be defined in any way in terms of the objectness, the over-againstness of the object."³ Thus, when we read in the *Zhuangzi* allegorical stories of persons whose skill results in objects of creation taken to embody the marvelousness of Dao, we should not interpret them as a call for the emulation of said skill; rather, it is the indescribable thingness of said skill that should be regarded with utmost esteem.⁴

There is more to the Thing than its mere thingness however. We can also learn much about it by taking it as a psychological construct and the highest form of representative expression outside of the One. This line of reasoning, which was promulgated by Jacques Lacan, will allow us to compare the phenomenological dyad of Thing-trace with the more epistemologically oriented

² Wang Bi in his "Introductory Remarks to the *Daodejing*" echoed this idea: "Regarding the means by which a thing is born...it lies in their being born from that which is formless and from that which is without name. That which is formless and nameless is the ancestor of the myriad things." See Lou Yulie, 195.

³ Heidegger 2001: 164-165. One may also wish to consult Heidegger's *What is a Thing?* trans. W.B. Barton Jr. and Vera Deutsch, (Indiana: Gateway Editions, 1967).

⁴ The most obvious example is that of butcher Ding but others abound: the wheel-maker, the carver of bells, the belt-clasp maker, the catcher of cicadas, etc.

pairing of signifier-signified. From this we will come to delineate the thingness of the Thing from the trace of the Thing and hence appreciate how the sage can abandon his empirical self so as to render himself traceless.

What is interesting to note is that Lacan considered the Thing to be absolutely distinct from those things modeled after it. His belief that the Thing is a separate entity was based on his theory that any mundane thing emulating it was but a hollow representation and could in no uncertain terms embody the Thing in its entirety. The *Zhuangzi*, on the other hand, would say that using one thing to signify another is not as good as allowing both things to engage in mutual interaction or play.⁵ If Lacan's statement that the Thing is distinct and hence not an object holds true then we can go one step further in referencing *Zhuangzi* and decree that to name a thing as such, including the Thing, is no different than saying it is a non-thing.⁶ *Zhuangzi* can say this because Thing and non-Thing alike lose their determinate distinction in light of the traceless nature of Dao.

In the passage we quoted at the start of this section, the *Zhuangzi* used the term *xing* 形 to refer to the Thing and this would, on the surface, appear to resemble Plato's theory of forms. Such an assumption would be erroneous, however, insofar as the text was just expanding the cosmogonist model begun by Laozi. Needless to say, the *Zhuangzi* holds the Thing to be an intricate part of the pre-development of things and human reality. If, as Lacan argued, the Thing lies beyond the realm of the signified, then one may infer that within this realm there must exist a thing whose task is none other than to represent that which lies in the beyondness of nothingness: "The Thing is something that presents and isolates itself as the strange feature around which the whole movement of representation turns."⁷ *Zhuangzi*, however, would see this as counter-intuitive given his idea that the myriad things take Dao as their source, but also because his cosmology is not transcendently oriented but grounded in the meontological process of return. It is, in other words, a tracing of things from their present state of separation back to their original unity in the One.⁸

⁵ *Zhuangzi* wrote: "To use a signifier to show that a signifier is not signified is not as good as using a non-signifier to show that a signifier is not a signified." See *Zhuangzi* ch. 2 "*qiwulun* 齊物論." See Guo Qingfan, 66; Chai 2008: 80.

⁶ He wrote: "The sage takes right and wrong and mixes them together, and in doing so dwells in the balance of heaven." See *Zhuangzi* ch. 2 "*qiwulun* 齊物論." See Guo Qingfan, 70; Chai 2008: 81.

⁷ Lacan 1997: 57.

⁸ In his "Introductory Remarks to the *Daodejing*" Wang Bi remarked: "All names are born from forms, there has yet to be a form born from a name. Therefore, having a particular name entails there must be a particular form, and given that

As a result, things existing within an epistemological framework become accountable to the signifiers that name or represent them. From this we can see a degree of similitude between the *Zhuangzi* and Lacan regarding the incapability of language to convey the veracity of reality. Wherein they differ is the *Zhuangzi*'s delineation of space. The space in which the Thing resides is not an otherness distinct from itself but the link to the nothingness from whence it originated. This is not to imply that the signifier appears *ex-nihilo*; on the contrary, it is a reflection of the in-itself *qua* the Thing. Herein is the self-turning representation of the Thing. It moves between things without isolating itself from the movement or play of Dao because it represents or isolates itself in lieu of such play, never disrupting the harmonious accord of heaven and earth. Such a feat is impossible for the signifier due to its dependency on the discriminating mind of the subject.

At this stage though it would seem we run into a problem: How are we supposed to conceive of that which has yet to come into being (i.e., the pre-signified)? Furthermore, what mechanism do we have at our disposal that would allow us to engage in a pre-symbolic investigation of the Thing when there is no representation of it to be found? For Lacan, the answer involved a search for the Thing that would take us back to the exact time of its origin; it is, in other words, a quest to uncover the absolute beginning of things. The *Zhuangzi*, on the other hand, did not perceive time as either abstract or hypothetical for it is without beginning or end, precluding it from discussions as to whether or not it has a past, present, or future. Given the perpetual oneness of Dao, *Zhuangzi*'s temporality is thus a time-beyond-time—a non-temporal time—as he so aptly demonstrated:

There is a beginning, a not begun to be a beginning, and a not begun to be no-beginning's beginning. There is being, there is nonbeing, there is a not begun to be nonbeing, and there is a not begun to be nonbeing's beginning.⁹

有始也者，有未始有始也者，有未始有夫未始有始也者。有有也者，有無也者，有未始有無也者，有未始有夫未始有無也者。

Zhuangzi's cosmology of mutual dependence and co-arising thus makes it virtually impossible to distinguish the temporality of one thing in relation to another and as such, relations only exist in the sphere of human consciousness. It thus falls upon constant nothingness, the meontological root

there is this particular form, there must separation [between them]." See Lou Yulie, 199.

⁹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 2 "qiwulun 齊物論." See Guo Qingfan, 79; Chai 2008: 85.

of Dao, to sustain as elusive an entity as the Thing. Hence the collectivity of Things that coalesce to form the One do so not because of their indeterminateness, but as a result of their rootedness in nothingness. In this way, they retain their identity as the Thing without disrupting the integrity of the One or harming Dao. Thus, when Lacan insisted that the Thing's existence is tied to temporal human consciousness, he was dichotomizing the Thing's nature with humanity's epistemological awareness of it. To argue, as he did, that the inseparability of the Thing from those who perceive it is the link which brings together the signifiers of the world implies that the Thing is a singularity whose generative ability stems from its capacity to be infinitely divided into things. With its absolute historical beginning, Lacan demanded that the Thing constantly propagate itself or face annihilation. It does so through the act of signification even though these signifiers are but empty reflections of it.

Heidegger's approach to the Thing was not only a source of inspiration for Lacan's own treatise on the subject, as we shall soon discover, it shared many affinities with Daoism, particularly the *Daodejing*. Heidegger spoke of objects such as the jug in terms of 'what stands forth,' and yet "no representation of what is present, in the sense of what stands forth and of what stands over against as an object, ever reaches to the Thing *qua* thing. The jug's thingness resides in its being *qua* vessel."¹⁰ This notion of a self-originating thingness is quite Daoist in tone in that it attempted to explain how the space between the Thing and human reality could be bridged rather than driven further apart. For the *Zhuangzi*, this space is a bridgeable one in that the text's portrayal of the One does not foretell the nullification of the Thing's thingness but speaks of it being perpetually inherited by the myriad things of the world via the meontological nature of Dao. We can thus question Lacan's notion that the circumstances involving the Thing's origin are mythical and that only human creative action (*poiesis*) can produce signifiers that will successfully locate it.

As a product of *poiesis*, signifiers are no more intimate with the natural world than are the artifacts they were tasked with representing. Due to their need of a place onto which they can project themselves, signifiers become entangled in the world of artificiality, unable to establish an intimate connection with either Nature or the Thing. Such reasoning stems from the fact that human *poiesis* precludes inclusion of the Thing vis-à-vis the One, whereas the One resides in the

¹⁰ Heidegger 2001: 166.

tranquil nothingness of Dao. It is here, at the source of being, where the Thing is re-found, having been lost somewhere along the path of signification. And yet from the vantage point of Dao there has never been a time when the trace of signification succeeded in overriding the oneness of things. The *Zhuangzi* cleverly demonstrated this point with the following tale:

There was a man who was frightened by his shadow and disgusted with his footprints, and so he tried to outrun them. However, the more he raised his feet, the more footprints he left behind. He ran faster and faster but his shadow would still not leave him. Believing he was still too slow, he ran faster still, without pause, exhausting his strength and dying. He did not know that by staying in the shade his shadow would have vanished, and that by resting peacefully any trace of him would cease. How utterly foolish he was!¹¹

人有畏影惡迹而去之走者，舉足愈數而迹愈多，走愈疾而影不離身，自以為尚遲，疾走不休，絕力而死。不知處陰以休影，處靜以息迹，愚亦甚矣！

Based on the above passage we can describe the relationship between the Thing and signifier as one of muted dependency of recollection. What is recalled is the retracing of the Thing's veiling, its participation in the process of re-finding and unveiling that which was hitherto assumed lost. Although the Thing is veiled by the nothingness of the One, we cannot claim, as did Lacan, that it is "in the re-finding of the object that it becomes represented by something else."¹² If the Thing comes to be represented by something else, then somewhere along the path of signification the self-so nature of the Thing must become clouded, if not outright discarded.

Mysteriously the Thing emerges and mysteriously it vanishes; as it has no substantial opposition, its movement is unimpeded. Consequently, the Thing weaves a web of being that is neither limited nor exclusionary of being, allowing for movement of the real (object) and non-real (sign). The same cannot be said of the signifier whose existence beyond the realm of the Thing is a source of tension, for "a signifier is something that is always a certain distance from the Thing, even if it is regulated by the Thing, which is there in a beyond."¹³ Being beyond the realm of signifiers, the Thing is untouched by the opposition facing ordinary objects for only the Thing can represent itself

¹¹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 31 "yufu 漁父." See Guo Qingfan, 1031.

¹² Lacan 1997: 118.

¹³ Lacan 1997: 63.

by way of the signified. Moreover, the fact remains that the Thing “presents itself to the person who perceives it as a thing-in-itself, and thus poses the problem of a genuine in-itself for us...but the Thing holds itself aloof from us and remains self-sufficient.”¹⁴ The aloofness of the Thing is also an applicable way of regarding the mysteriousness of Dao. In light of Dao’s mysterious, indescribable nature, both the One and the Thing inherit its meontological gift of nothingness,¹⁵ transmitting it to the world of things in the guise of their own thingness. We shall discuss the applicability of said thingness shortly. In the meantime, however, we ought to address the question of the Thing’s needing to be re-found and how this is possible if, by its very nature, it is inherently mysterious.

2.2 The Thing’s Unveiling and the Gift of Nothingness

Lacan wrote that the subject desires the Thing and that the relationship between subject and object speaks to the process of creation and the role played by the presence of nothingness. This nothingness can be said to serve two purposes: as the ontological material from which things are fashioned and as the epistemological medium through which one latches onto the signified whenever the Thing appears lost and in need of being re-found. This is why he portrayed the Thing as “a pure signifying system, as a universal maxim, as that which is the most lacking in a relationship to the individual.”¹⁶ Zhuangzi, however, argued that “each thing has that which is so [to itself]; each thing has that which is acceptable [to itself]. There is no thing that is not so, no thing that is not acceptable...[yet] Dao makes them One.”¹⁷ Despite Zhuangzi’s reference to ontic things and not the Thing, the principle that Dao harmonizes all things, including the Thing, still applies. After all, it befalls upon the things of the world to shed light on the Thing, just as the collectivity of Things that comprise the One acts as a mirror for the presence of Dao.

¹⁴ Merleau-Ponty 2003: 375.

¹⁵ In contrast, Heidegger took the gift of the jug’s inner void to represent the presence of giving—the poured gift. See Heidegger 2001: 170. Although there is a hint of cosmology implied here, Heidegger’s idea of the gift of the void does not approach the holistic cosmogony seen in Zhuangzi’s meditations on ontological nothingness.

¹⁶ Lacan 1997: 55.

¹⁷ 「物固有所然，物固有所可。無物不然，無物不可……道通為一。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 2 “*qiwulun* 齊物論.” See Guo Qingfan, 69; Chai 2008: 81 [translation modified]. Wang Bi observed something quite similar: “When things are born or achievements completed, there is nothing to which it [Dao] does not adhere.” See Lou Yulie, 195

Here we can delimit one of the key points of divergence between how the *Zhuangzi* perceived reality from that of Western thinkers such as Lacan: the latter relies on human causality such that our phenomenological experience of things becomes stripped and isolated from the surrounding cosmological context, while the former united them under Dao's umbrella of mysteriousness. With regards to mystery, it is interesting to note that Maurice Merleau-Ponty also invoked it whilst making the connection between the Thing and the world, but only so long as "we do not limit ourselves to their objective aspect, but put them back into the setting of subjectivity."¹⁸ However, both he and Lacan failed to consider the cosmological import of the Thing *qua* mystery, let alone the fact that as a mystery, the Thing itself belonged to an even greater mystery—the mystery upon mystery that is Dao.

The mysteriousness of Dao that the *Zhuangzi* spoke of does not hinge on the privileging of human culture over Nature, separating the two realms such that any transcendence of one necessitates the loss of the other; on the contrary, from a cosmological point of view they are indubitably equal. There is nothing mysterious about them and this is why the Thing resides in an altogether different plane of existence. And yet the realm in which the Thing manifests itself is not a realm at all but the meontological domain of the One. Since the Thing is a non-thing and that which we call the One is in fact primal chaos, how can we not portray them as mysterious? What is more, as the One takes Dao as its source, which is in turn rooted in ontological nothingness, the oneness of the universe is hence a knowable mystery embedded in the unknowable and all-encompassing mystery of Dao. Thus, while Lacan wished to situate the Thing in a realm beyond *poiesis* whilst keeping it within reach of *episteme*, claiming the Thing lost and in need of re-finding, the *Zhuangzi* nullified such dichotomizing by employing the principle of return.

Given that the Thing for *Zhuangzi* is meontological and hence a non-Thing, as opposed to Lacan's statement that the Thing literally is not, how can its being lost transpire? If, however, we surmise that the Thing has been forgotten, this is a wholly different situation due to the Daoist view that through forgetting one is able to return to the root of reality. Indeed, the *Zhuangzi* contains many well-known tales of sages who proactively forgot the world so as to harmonize with the oneness of things, the most famous two being Nanguo Ziqi 'losing himself' and Yan Hui 'sitting in

¹⁸ Merleau-Ponty 2003: 388.

forgetfulness.’¹⁹ Since we shall have more to say on the importance of forgetting in Daoism later in this work, I shall not dwell on it further here; needless to say, the point is that Lacan’s losing and eventual recovery of the Thing is a static engagement whose purpose is none other than to tether it to the realm of human culture. In the case of the *Zhuangzi*, forgetting through letting-be nourishes the Thing while allowing it to retain its self-given nature.

Whatever the inspiration for Lacan’s notion that the Thing is inherently veiled, and owing to such concealment constantly finds itself in need of being re-found, it is a most beguiling description: “Since it is a matter of finding it again, we might just as well characterize this object as a lost object. But although it is essentially a question of finding it again, the object indeed has never been lost.”²⁰ If the Thing exists because humanity has conceived it as such, the same can also be said for its disappearance. What is lost is not the object itself but the space between objects—their in-betweenness—such that their propensity for change becomes veiled due to the damage inflicted upon them by human desire. Of course if what we seek lies solely in the domain of the signified, it shall never be found. It cannot be found because it is restricted to the level of ontic awareness—an awareness whose profundity is ruled by the mystery of the human mind. The mysterious darkness that permeates the mind maneuvers within the beyond-of-nothingness. Its purpose is neither to distance itself from things nor introduce distance between them; rather, the negativity of that which lies in the beyond is none other than the constant nothingness of Dao. This would explain why Wang Bi in his “Introductory Remarks to the *Daodejing*” (*laozi zhilue* 老子指略) made the following statement:

If one wishes to determine the root of things, although they are near, one must from afar give evidence as to their beginning. If one wishes to illuminate the cause of things, while obvious, one must begin from their concealment in order to discuss their root.²¹

For Laozi, the mystery of the Thing exists not because human desire made it so, but because the Thing *qua* Dao cannot be otherwise. Our craving for things on account of some imagined need

¹⁹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 6 “*dazongshi* 大宗師.” See Guo Qingfan, 283-285, 243-45; Chai 2008: 227-230, 65-67.

²⁰ Lacan 1997: 58. Heidegger, on the other hand, argued that “through the Thing’s annihilation, the Thing as a thing remains *nil*—it lies concealed and forgotten.” See Heidegger 2001: 168.

²¹ 「夫欲定物之本者，則雖近而必自遠以證其始；夫欲明物之所由者，則雖顯而必自幽以敘其本。」 See Lou Yulie, 197.

—what Lacan referred to as the pleasure principle—does not translate into the immediate presence of said thing but “leads the subject from signifier to signifier, by generating as many signifiers as are required.”²² We thus pursue our desire by jumping from one signifier to another, never completing our search for the ultimate thing—the Thing—to the extent it always remains on the horizon, just out of reach. Unable to explain how the Thing can evade our pursuits to claim it, Western thinkers tend to deny it or relegate it to the unknown. The mystery surrounding the Thing’s presence of being can, however, be reconciled if we think of it as a meta-phenomenon whose eluding our attempts to grasp it via *poiesis* or *episteme* arises precisely because of its intimate relationship with the nothingness of Dao. Heidegger, having briefly studied the *Daodejing*, was no doubt aware of this, writing that “if things ever had already shown themselves *qua* things in their thingness, then the Thing’s thingness would have become manifest and would have laid claim to thought...not only are things no longer admitted as things, but they have never yet at all been able to appear to thinking as things.”²³

If the Thing were not meontological, existing as a linguistic construct for example, there would be nothing mysterious about it. One would only be able to refer to the Thing as a thing—a particular instead of a multitude—from which things are given the task of signification. However, since the Thing is enfolded in the One, the relationship between itself, the myriad things, and signifiers cannot be premised upon traditional understandings of hierarchy or determinism. To free the Thing of the shackles of signification—from its psychic trap—it must not only function as the ultimate of things, it must also exemplify their ontological and pre-cognitive representation. Perhaps Merleau-Ponty had this in mind when he claimed that “psychological induction remains blind as long as we fail to draw together in one single phenomenon the three variables which it connotes, and as long as it does not lead us by the hand to some intuition in which the alleged ‘causes’ or ‘conditions’ of the phenomenon of constancy shall appear as ‘moments’ of that phenomenon and in an essential relation to it.”²⁴ This, however, is itself problematic in that it leads to either a repetitive loop or a complete nihilistic collapse. Since our world is one dominated by the

²² Lacan 1997: 119.

²³ Heidegger 2001: 168.

²⁴ Merleau-Ponty 2003: 360.

signified and not the Thing, “the Thing [therefore] is that which in the real, the primordial real, suffers from the signifier.”²⁵

Suffering as it does, the Thing is victimized by the signified—created in retrospect by humanity as a desperate attempt to repair the rift inserted between the world of Nature and the being of man. As a consequence, the Thing is presumed to assume an otherness it must overcome in order to absolve itself of succumbing to the bonds of signification. In the *Zhuangzi*, this ordeal is absent: things evolve according to the self-so nature of their being such that all transformations are natural and untouched by humanity. To return to the One is to harmonize with Dao, and harmonizing with Dao is a process of reverse accumulation, but an accumulation of what? One would think the more advanced one’s *poiesis* the more perfect would be one’s virtue, however, the *Zhuangzi* espoused the idea that we should follow Dao so as to uncover the true nature of things. How one goes about doing this is not painting it in mystical transcendence but treasuring the gift of nothingness.

The more one understands the participatory role of Dao’s meontological side, the more profound will be one’s harmonization with the universe.²⁶ The things that populate our world are everyday examples of the potential creative power of the Thing from which they are born. The power of the Thing, moreover, is itself but an example of the splendor and creative potential emanating from Dao. What we take to be the everydayness of things, when seen from the perspective of Dao, is in fact a coming-togetherness whose outcome rises above them in the form of a worldly Thing. Such worldliness cannot compete with the non-worldly character of the One and so the oneness of things is a unity in lieu of the nothingness of Dao. This gift of nothingness allows things to follow in the image of the Thing without realizing it is doing so; it also allows each Thing to coalesce into the One without forfeiting their own oneness. In this way, the restricted being of ontic things moves toward the semi-limited being of the Thing, and the Thing returns to the infinite nonbeing of Dao. This cosmic hierarchy was expressed in the *Zhuangzi* as:

To take things as things is to remain unlimited by them. Things have their limits—what is known as the limit of things. That which is unlimited moves to the limited and that which is limited moves to

²⁵ Lacan 1997: 118.

²⁶ For more on the centrality of harmony (*he* 和) in Daoism, especially in the context of the music thought of Xuanxue 玄學 (neo-Daoism or Dark Learning), see Chai 2009.

the unlimited...things take Dao as their root and branch yet Dao knows not of root and branch; things take Dao as their accumulation and loss yet Dao knows not of accumulation and loss.²⁷

物物者與物無際，而物有際者，所謂物際者也；不際之際，際之不際者也……彼為本末非本末，彼為積散非積散也。

The gift of nothingness that Dao bestows upon the Thing, however, is not exclusive to the realm of ontology but finds practical application in the world of ontic things too. The eleventh chapter of the *Daodejing* exemplified this point exceptionally well:

One kneads clay to make a vessel, but it is from nothingness that the vessel gains its use. One chisels out windows and doorways to make a room, but it is from nothingness that the room gains its use. Thus, existence gives things their benefit while nothingness gives things their use.²⁸

Clay might be the material from which the vessel's presence of being takes shape but what imbues the vessel's being with its useful nature is nothingness. The limitation of the vessel's physicality thus impels it to seek another means by which to move closer to its particular Thing and this measure of progress towards its eventual uniting with the One comes about thanks to its inner void. Drawing near the voidless void that is the nothingness of Dao, the vessel embraces this gift as its rooting center and so transcends the limits of its physicality. In this way, the gift of nothingness provides the vessel with the capacities of accumulation and loss, and yet what is accumulated and lost is not the vessel's thingness but the names 'full' and 'empty.' This is what the *Zhuangzi* meant when it spoke of the limit of things—an ontic limitation imposed by notions such as fullness and emptiness. By embracing the virtue of Dao, however, these notions are suddenly able to transform into the interchangeably complimentary ideal of cosmic harmony.

Heidegger was also keenly interested in the holding nature of the vessel's void and in its thingness as said thing. Wherein his understanding differed from the aforementioned was that he took the

²⁷ *Zhuangzi* ch. 22 “*zhibeiyou* 知北游.” See Guo Qingfan, 752.

²⁸ 「埴埴以為器，當其無，有器之用。鑿戶牖以為室，當其無，有室之用。故有之以為利，無之以為用。」 *Daodejing* chapter 11. See Lou Yulie, 27. Wang Bi explained this passage to mean: “Wood, clay, and mortar give us the three [i.e., the wheel, vessel, and room], but all of them attain their usefulness by way of nothingness. In other words, of those benefits derived from existence, all are dependent on their use of nothingness.”

nothingness lying at the center of the jug as being untraceable to a cosmological ancestor (such as Dao), claiming instead that it was that which defined the vessel's thingness:

From start to finish the potter takes hold of the impalpable void and brings it forth as the container in the shape of a containing vessel. The vessel's thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that holds.²⁹

The nothingness referred to by the *Zhuangzi* is not, however, the *nihil* of Heidegger. In the case of the *Zhuangzi*, its meontological character is inseparable from that of the universe at large; as for Heidegger, that which is not is merely naught. When Heidegger spoke of the empty void lying at the heart of the jug, his motivation was not to expound such nothingness on the level of cosmology but to convey its malleability in the hands of mankind. In other words, the void grants the vessel its thingness but wherein said thingness derives its use lies in the holding capacity of said thing. The holding that comes to characterize the thingness of the jug was then equated, quite interestingly, with its gift of pouring-forth and taking-in. And yet the gift of the void is not to be taken as a gift to that particular vessel alone. While the material of the jug may define its existence as a thing, it is the holding of the void's nothingness that bestows the jug with its thingness. The vessel is literally born of its own inner void—an emptiness that emblemizes the purported mythical creation of the Thing itself.

In comparison, Lacan believed the hole was just that—a void created out of the real by man:

Now if you consider the vase from the point of view I first proposed, as an object made to represent the existence of the emptiness at the center of the real that is called the Thing, this emptiness as represented in the representation presents itself as a *nihil*, as nothing. And that is why the potter, just like you to whom I am speaking, creates the vase with his hand around this emptiness, creates it, just like the mythical creator, *ex nihilo*, starting with a hole.³⁰

²⁹ Heidegger 2001: 167. Regarding the Thing, Heidegger associated it with the fourfold of the world: “The Thing stays— gathers and unites—the fourfold. The Thing things world. Each thing stays the fourfold into a happening of the simple oneness of world...If we think of the Thing as thing, then we spare and protect the Thing's presence in the region from which it presences. Thinging is the nearing of world. Nearing is the nature of nearness. As we preserve the Thing *qua* thing we inhabit nearness. The nearing of nearness is the true and sole dimension of the mirror-play of the world.” See *Ibid.*, 178-179.

³⁰ Lacan 1997: 121.

With a void now present in things, there is an oppositional tension between presence and non-presence, between the nothingness of the void and the perceived wholeness of the vessel. Of course, Zhuangzi would hold any disparity between these two components as illusionary, the implication of which leads to the possibility of things being fashioned in the image of the Thing rather than relying on signifiers. Such an image will thereby serve as a reflection of the positivity of nothingness pervading the universe instead of the limiting confines inherent to the ontological being of things. The dilemma facing Lacan and Heidegger, for example, was situating the Thing in such a way that it did not place man in the mediating role between things and their signifiers. It proved an impossible task hence the only available recourse to them was to sublimate the Thing such that it came to be represented by the emptiness of its own otherness.

If the Thing is an enclosure of the void and thus always represented by emptiness, does this not imply it is generated from nothingness? If the vessel is a signifier, and the first human one at that, it is in its signifying essence a signifier of nothing other than signification as such. Indeed, the Thing, as the source of things and signifiers alike, cannot be held to the immobile historical time of its dependents; rather, it continuously follows along with the movement of the One by way of the trace. For Lacan to describe the trace as self-sufficient and different from both the sign and signifier³¹ was to imply that although a sign and signifier may originally possess some trace-like quality, they must nevertheless refer to the otherness that is beyond them. From this epistemologically specific point of view, however, the trace is none other than the movement of signification in that such movement both confirms the existence of a thing by marking it while negating such marking by putting the subject in question under erasure. The trace thus symbolizes the mark of the absence of a presence—an always already absent presence—of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience.³² The *Zhuangzi* was able to overcome the tendency to ground trace in historical time by incorporating it into the ontological darkness of Dao.

Owing to the meontological character of Dao, the Thing and non-thing, trace and non-trace, sign and non-sign, lose their autonomy in the act of becoming operatives and manifestations of the

³¹ See Ed Pluth. *Signifiers and Acts: Freedom in Lacan's Theory of the Subject*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007: 24.

³² Derrida 1977: xvii.

equalizing harmony of the One. In Heidegger's terminology, "out of the fourfold [i.e., earth, sky, divinities, and mortals], the simple onefold of the four is ventured."³³ Eulogizing the world as the onefold of the four, Heidegger's presentation of the Thing inevitably weaned itself away from the existentialism of its thingness towards the metaphysical ontology of being. The drawing near of the Thing's thingness was thus limited to the boundaries set forth by the fourfold of the world. Just as Lacan pitted the Thing against human consciousness by way of the signifier/signified, so too did Heidegger refuse to acknowledge the Thing's inexorably cosmological freedom by setting it off against the reductionist equalization of *Dasein*/world.

Zhuangzi's unwillingness to enshroud the mystery of Dao in humanistic jargon meant he could discuss the root of things from a cosmogonist perspective. This, in turn, opened the seed of ontological nothingness from which the One and the Thing could spring forth. To this end, the Thing has never been a participant in the development of human social culture; rather, it shines forth because of the creative potential of Dao. Since the Thing has traditionally been colored in absolutist terms, its thingness has forever escaped our grasp. By embracing its mysteriousness through letting-be, Zhuangzi was able to draw the Thing near without knowingly doing so. Unveiled by its own meontological roots, the Thing epitomizes the mundane things of the world insofar as its dwelling in the One precludes it from being disharmonious with Dao. Neither an imaginary event nor an idealized abstraction, the Thing is the final frontier between the cosmology of the One and the ontic being of the things populating the world. It is, in other words, the most authentic means by which one can comprehend Dao, a comprehension only attainable when we relent in denying the generative capacity of creative negativity.

2.3 Trace and the Darkness of the Sage

Earlier we theorized that the transitional space lying between the becoming and later maturation of the Thing could be illuminated via the concept of trace. Before commencing our discussion of trace, however, we need to clarify in what sense the *Zhuangzi* took this term. If one reads the text on a merely superficial level, the immediate conclusion one would arrive at is this: as many of the

³³ Heidegger 2001: 177.

examples involving the concept of trace focus on the sages of old and their knowledge, it is an epistemological construct. When taken in the context of the Thing and Dao *qua* nothingness, however, the trace suddenly transposes itself to the level of cosmology:

The bright is born of the dark, the ordered is born of the formless, and spiritual essence is born of Dao. The bodily form is born of the seminal, and the myriad things gave birth to each other through their bodily form. Thus, those having nine orifices are born from the womb, and those having eight orifices are born from eggs. There is no trace of their coming and no outline of their leaving. They enter through no door nor dwell in in no room, wandering in all four directions.³⁴

夫昭昭生於冥冥，有倫生於無形，精神生於道，形本生於精，而萬物以形相生，故九竅者胎生，八竅者卵生。其來無迹，其往無崖，無門無房，四達之皇皇也。

Due to the nature of the Thing being inextricably tied to the virtue of Dao, the latter can thereby elucidate the former. As the Thing receives its gift of nothingness from Dao and Dao draws near the meontological ground of its reality, the territory of its grounding extends so far as to be darkly immeasurable. Such being the case, how can an inkling of the Thing's arrival and departure occur? It cannot, for to do otherwise would mean it is no longer the Thing but a thing amongst things. What allows us to have an encounter with the Thing in lieu of its unreachability is the trace. The trace of Dao, as we shall see, cannot be taken in a strictly epistemic sense in that Dao is unknowable through regular models of knowledge. Whether we are referring to the trace of the Thing vis-à-vis things or that of the sage vis-à-vis his words and deeds, any inclination we may feel to distinguish between the source of trace and the trace itself ought to be held in check in that they are both equal, cosmologically speaking.³⁵ In other words, one should not cherish the trace or that which created it because to do so would authenticate that which is beyond authentication. The *Zhuangzi* offered such advice in a fictional conversation between Laozi and Confucius wherein the former proclaimed:

³⁴ *Zhuangzi* ch. 22 “*zhibeiyou* 知北游.” See Guo Qingfan, 741.

³⁵ Brook Ziporyn, however, argued that such a distinction is indeed present and is justifiable from an epistemological perspective: “It is an epistemological distinction that is being made between traces and what leaves them, where each thing is simultaneously the essential darkness, in its relation to itself as its own self-forgetting self-rightness, and at the same time a trace, which is just the same content as perceived from without, from a point of view not fit and comfortable with this content.” See Ziporyn, 44.

How fortunate that you have not yet encountered a ruler who can govern the world! As for the six Classics, they are but the stale traces of the kings of old, much less those who leave the trace! Your words today are no different from such traces. As for the trace, it is like the imprint made by a shoe, it is not the shoe itself!³⁶

幸矣，子之不遇治世之君也！夫《六經》，先王之陳迹也，豈其所以迹哉！今子之所言，猶迹也。夫迹，履之所出，而迹豈履哉！

Here, the *Zhuangzi* (in Laozi's voice) made an important hermeneutic distinction between the trace and the sage-kings of old responsible for creating them. Although this passage served as the foundation upon which Guo Xiang developed his own particular reading of trace by differentiating it from 'that which leaves the trace' (*suoyi ji* 所以迹), Guo was not the only commentator to do so. Indeed, Lü Huiqing used the term trace as early as chapter seven in an anecdote in which Nie Que sought advice from Wang Ni. With the latter not answering any of his questions, Nie Que informed his master, Pu Yizi, of the situation, to which the latter said: "[Emperor Tai's] knowledge and emotions were true and his virtue was authentic. He never distinguished what was of man and was not."³⁷ Lü's commentary subsequently reads:

From Wang Ni's perspective, Emperor Youyu could not keep up with the knowledge of Emperor Tai. In not keeping up, his words advanced forth, and so Emperor Tai was then the 'that which advances' for Emperor Youyu. Wishing to obtain 'that which leaves the trace,' he sought to explain the heart and the spirit. This was only to further elucidate Wang Ni's ignorance and nothing more.³⁸

自王倪觀之，則有虞氏不及泰氏可知矣。不及者，言其進，泰氏則有虞氏之所以進也；欲得其所以迹者，解心釋神，深造乎王倪之所不知而已。

It would appear that the *suoyi ji* is not only a desirable state of existence, one atop the ontological ladder so to speak, it is even attainable. Yet how can this be so when the trace signifying it is just as ephemeral as its source? The answer is that there can be no differentiating the two; they are either

³⁶ *Zhuangzi* ch. 14 "*tianyun* 天運." See Guo Qingfan, 532.

³⁷ 「泰氏其外徐徐，其覺于于，一以己為馬，一以己為牛，其知情信，其德甚真，而未始入於非人。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 7 "*yingdiwang* 應帝王." See Guo Qingfan, 287; Chai 2008: 232-233.

³⁸ See Tang Jun, 152. For Jacques Derrida, however, the trace "marks the impossibility of an origin in that it constitutes the pure actuality of the living-present, thereby rendering uncertain the boundary that separates the sphere of the originary certainty of the now from the non-originary sphere of every re-presentation." See Marrati 2005: 124.

concrete epistemological tools used to delimit the world of things or they are taken to be metaphysical ideals epitomized by the sage. If our stance sides with the former then the trace and that which leaves it can have no affiliation with Dao; on the other hand, if we side with the latter then the elusory nature of the trace darkly reflects the mysterious workings of Dao. Of the two, we can argue that the *Zhuangzi* preferred the second interpretation, even admitting as such when it wrote: “The myriad things return to their true condition and this is known as muddied darkness.”³⁹ This muddied darkness is not only a metaphorical representation of Dao it applies to the Thing *qua* the One as well. If the One participates in the mutual darkness of Dao’s nothingness, then the Thing as that which leaves the trace shares in such traceless mysteriousness too.⁴⁰

Recalling for a moment the earlier dialogue between Laozi and Confucius, although the author of this chapter did not explicitly use the term traceless (*wuji* 無迹), his criticism of the six Classics was an attempt to usurp their social authority by demonstrating the cosmological supremacy of the Dao envisioned by Zhuangzi. Guo Xiang picked up on this point, going one step further by denying the very possibility of an attainable trace:

That which leaves the trace is itself traceless. Who in the world can name it! Lacking a constant name, how can it overcome existence! Thus, in being traceless it rides on collective change, walking through myriads of worlds—worlds that are smooth and rough—hence the trace is unattainable.⁴¹

所以迹者，無迹也，世孰名之哉！未之嘗名，何勝負之有耶！然無迹者，乘群變，履萬世，世有夷險，故迹有不及也。

Only when the inner and outer realms of reality obscurely join does our dependency on the trace vanish and we can return to the time when things retained their original traceless nature. Thus,

³⁹ 「萬物復情，此之謂混冥。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 12 “*tiandi* 天地.” See Guo Qingfan, 443.

⁴⁰ Guo Xiang, in commenting on the passage quoted in the previous note wrote: “The true condition and muddied darkness [of the myriad things] is that which is traceless.” 「情復而混冥無迹也。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 12 “*tiandi* 天地.” See Guo Qingfan, 443.

⁴¹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 7 “*yingdiwang* 應帝王.” See Guo Qingfan, 288. Additionally, the *quanyan* 詮言 chapter of the *Huainanzi* stated: “What people point at has a manifestation because it moves; what people observe leaves a trace because it acts. When movements have manifestations, they will be criticized; when actions have traces, they will be appraised. Thus, the sage conceals his brilliance in the formless and hides his traces in non-action.” See Zhang Shuangli, 1469; Major, 538.

when the *Zhuangzi* mocked the other schools of thought for revering past traditions and knowledge as holding the key to unlocking the true reality of things, it was not calling for the outright abandonment of said institutions but only our faith in their ability to hold sway over the ultimate, everlasting reality of Dao. Given the bond between Dao, nothingness, the trace, and that which leaves it, we can surmise that the trace points to the pseudo-ontological being of the Thing while the Thing as ‘that which leaves the trace’ points to the meontological being of Dao. In this way, these four elements have an inherent framework that resides in the atemporal, aspatial realm of ontological nothingness. What is more, for the authentic person, as one whose being has merged with the oneness of Dao, he too is traceless insofar as he wanders beyond the actuality of the world’s mundaneness. This ability to transcend the everydayness of the world grants the sage an opportunity to experience what precedes the becoming of the Thing, a state of dark tranquility whose sole resident is Dao:

The essence of Perfect Dao is profoundly obscure and mysteriously dark; the extremity of Perfect Dao is dimly muddled and enshrouded in silence.⁴²

至道之精，窈窈冥冥；至道之極，昏昏默默。

Since the darkness (*ming* 冥) that makes things naturally-so is the ultimate state of darkness and the first characteristic of things, it surpasses the trace of that which leaves it. Epistemologically, this surpassing can only occur through a direct knowing of the darkness of things, which hints at an implicit knowledge of the trace of things. That which knows the self-so nature of things, together with their trace must, therefore, be that which has transcended the earthly realm of being and is one with its inherent darkness. Such convergence of the darkness of the Thing with the darkness of the trace equalizes the production of things with their naturally-so self-birthing. Zhuangzi also noted that the brightness (*zhaozhao* 昭昭) born out of darkness and the structured born out of the formless, are traces of that which is dark. Therefore, that which leaves the trace together with the darkness of things cannot be derived from knowledge alone: “The form of the formless is the formlessness of the formed, and this is known by all, even though pursuing it one cannot reach it.”⁴³

⁴² *Zhuangzi* ch. 11 “*zaiyou* 在宥.” See Guo Qingfan, 381.

⁴³ 「不形之形，形之不形，是人之所同知也，非將至之所務也。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 22 “*zhibeiyou* 知北游.” See Guo Qingfan, 746.

As a consequence, the relationship between the dark and the trace is analogous to the dichotomy of inner and outer. Such dichotomy, however, does not result in the creation of the trace's agency as this would be wholly impractical given we are always one step behind it. In order to overcome our inability to grasp the perceptual gap existing between the trace and the Thing, the *Zhuangzi* turned to the darkness of the sage. Whenever the text referred to those sages of old such as the Yellow Emperor and Yao and Shun, it was only pointing to the traces of such men and not to the traces of those works attributed to them. To do so would imply that they can be made known through a kind of epistemological trace (*ming ji* 名迹) which is unlikely in light of their traceless nature:

[The sages] did what was upright without knowing that to do so was to be righteous. They loved each other without knowing that to do so was to be humane. They were dependable and honest without knowing that to do so was to be faithful. They were proper without knowing that to do so was to be trustful. They moved around clumsily in service of one another, without regard for the bestowal of gifts. This is to move yet remain traceless, to act yet leave no record of one's deeds.⁴⁴

端正而不知以為義，相愛而不知以為仁，實而不知以為忠，當而不知以為信，蠢動而相使，不以為賜。是故行而無迹，事而無傳。

Thus, the progression from recognizing trace to valuing it as a means by which to harmonize with Dao is not to be thought of as a separate process; rather, they are singular and indistinguishable. The sages of old and their traces—those vestiges known as the six Classics—do not share the same relationship we saw earlier with the signifier and the Thing. Whether we refer to him as authentic (*zhenren* 真人) or marvelous (*shenren* 神人), the sage acts as a form of transcendent go-between such that his trace becomes masked, uniting with the darkness of his being (*minghe zhi ji* 冥合之迹). In this way, the sage can be known by his trace while simultaneously remaining hidden and dark. The name given to the sage is, therefore, nothing but the trace of his darkened relational self, leaving his actions unknowable except through their traces which would explain why we see Guo Xiang proclaiming: “Although the kings of old were known as Yao and Shun, these were but their traces. The self may reside in these traces but the traces are not the self, hence the world astonishes itself.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *Zhuangzi* ch. 12 “*tiandi* 天地.” See Guo Qingfan, 445.

⁴⁵ 「夫堯舜帝王之名，皆其迹耳，我寄斯迹而迹非我也，故駭者自世。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 11 “*zaiyou* 在宥.” See Guo

Indeed, the *Zhuangzi* contains a few passages that attempt to show the destructibility of the trace, particularly that pertaining to Confucius. These passages, it would seem, were meant to be attacks both on Confucius personally as well as to mock his unwavering belief that the knowledge of the former kings still held relevance during his own lifetime.⁴⁶ That the *Zhuangzi*, in one fell swoop, simultaneously undermined the epistemological validity of these ancient rulers and Confucius testifies to the deftness of its argumentation and makes for some rather amusing reading:

Now here are you, master, picking up the straw dogs presented by the kings of old, calling together your disciples to wander, dwell, and sleep under them. Thus, the tree under which you studied was cut down in Song, your trace destroyed in Wei, and the way of Shang and Zhou has been exhausted. Was that not unlike a dream? Being stuck between Chen and Cai and going for seven days without cooked food, lying on the cusp between life and death, was that not unlike a nightmare?⁴⁷

今而夫子，亦取先王已陳芻狗，取弟子遊居寢臥其下。故伐樹於宋，削迹於衛，窮於商周，是非其夢邪？圍於陳蔡之間，七日不火食，死生相與鄰，是非其昧邪？

At this point in time we can make an interesting comparison between the *Zhuangzi*'s use of trace and that developed by Jacques Derrida. We are justified in doing so because for Derrida, the trace is the only means by which we may conceive that which exists outside a text. Going beyond the knowledge contained in written works so as to learn of the world outside was for Derrida akin to when the *Zhuangzi* called for the abandonment of the six Classics and the traces contained therein. The trace, for Derrida, was thus sheltered and dissimulated in the names given to it by metaphysics; it does not appear in the text as the trace itself insofar as the trace can never appear as such.⁴⁸ To

Qingfan, 375. We see another example in a later chapter: "The Odes and Rites are but stale traces of the former kings; if one is unsuitable for them, Dao will not move in vain." 「詩禮者，先王之陳迹也，苟非其人，道不虛行。」 See *Zhuangzi* ch. 26 "waiwu 外物." See Guo Qingfan, 928.

⁴⁶ Such mockery takes the following form: "Who can rid himself of achievement and fame, returning to place himself on the level of commoner men! His Dao flows but is not visible; he moves by residing in virtue, not dwelling in fame. Simple and commonplace, he would appear to have lost his mind. Destroying his trace and abandoning his influence, he does things for neither achievement nor fame. Hence he does not blame other and others do not blame him. The authentic person has no need for reputation. Why do you take such pleasure in it?" 「孰能去功與名而還與眾人！道流而不明，居得行而不名處；純純常常，乃比於狂；削迹捐勢，不為功名；是故无責於人，人亦无責焉。至人不聞，子何喜哉？」 See *Zhuangzi* ch. 20 "shanmu 山木." See Guo Qingfan, 680.

⁴⁷ *Zhuangzi* ch. 14 "tianyun 天運." See Guo Qingfan, 512. For more examples of how the trace of Confucius was summarily erased, see ch. 20 "shanmu 山木" (Guo Qingfan, 684), and ch. 28 "rangwang 讓王" (Guo Qingfan, 981).

⁴⁸ Derrida 1973: 158.

speak, as he did, of placing the trace under the erasure of selfhood,⁴⁹ reminds us of the *Zhuangzi*'s notion that knowledge is itself but a form of 'stale trace.' We can thus reiterate that as the trace is an inherent quality of the Thing, it must function on a level that is congruent with the ontological nothingness of Dao. As the trace exists beyond the realm of being, it overrides the fundamental nature of being, bringing about its erasure. In other words, the trace becomes a victim of its own erasure and in so doing, erases the presence of being of the Thing from the world of ontic things.

Thus, 'that which leaves the trace' is not the six Classics themselves but the sages who penned them. Indeed, the Classics are just the dusty embodiment of said men and the knowledge that died with them. The knowledge they contain cannot convey or capture the originating spirit of their creators, hence one must look beyond the text—to transcend the language captured and contained on the printed page—if one is to discover the reality of Dao. Names, being signs, become empty shells of the persona to which they are attached insofar as they point to the presence of otherness—the dark nothingness of Yao and Shun through which the operation of Dao occurs. Thus, the trace comes to represent the non-representable absence of presence that exists beyond the reach of words and signifiers.⁵⁰

Derrida, based on this assumption, made a most astute observation: "What the thought of the trace has taught us is that it could not be simply submitted to the onto-phenomenological question of essence. The trace is nothing, it is not an entity, it exceeds the question 'what is?' and contingently makes it possible."⁵¹ Put differently, the trace of that which transcends the truth of things is a trace of that which can never present itself, or be presented, for it is a trace that lies beyond what binds ontology and phenomenology.⁵² In the *Zhuangzi* we see Guo Xiang give similar remarks:

In imitating the sages, we are imitating just their traces. These traces are a thing already passed on and are not an implement for responding to change; how could they be worthy of holding onto!⁵³

⁴⁹ He wrote: "the trace is not a presence but is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself." See Derrida 1973: 156.

⁵⁰ Derrida noted that "the trace is the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent presence, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience." See Derrida 1977: xvii.

⁵¹ Derrida 1977: 75.

⁵² Derrida 1973: 154.

⁵³ *Zhuangzi* ch. 10 "quqie 祛箒." See Guo Qingfan, 344. Regarding the darkness of the sage, the *quanyan* 詮言 chapter of the *Huainanzi* noted: "The sage dwells in the formless, moves in the traceless, and wanders in that having no

法聖人者，法其迹耳。夫迹者，已去之物，非應變之具也，奚足尚而執之哉！

Despite the fact that the sage hides himself in the darkness of Dao, thereby making his authentic-self unknowable, Guo Xiang argued that the common people of the world could still know of him by way of his trace. For Zhuangzi, however, this would be seen as a violation of the sagely way, for once traces become accepted into our normative system they are no longer dark, pure trace. Thus, the act of naming the trace as such can be said to relegate it to the realm of a manifest and ultimately inferior trace (i.e., the trace of Guo Xiang).

The concept of trace is thus incommensurate with that of retention, which is the becoming-past of what had been present. This would seem to conflict with what Brook Ziporyn understands of Guo Xiang's reading of the *Zhuangzi's* use of darkness to represent that which leaves the trace as signifying the self-forgetting and darkening of cognition intrinsic to self-rightness.⁵⁴ Ziporyn went on to say that what is cognized are the traces, those objectified forms of original chaos which are the dark, self-right, self-forgetting fitness by which things come to be.⁵⁵ And yet the *Zhuangzi* was quite clear on the origin of traces when it wrote that 'that which leaves the trace' is traceless. From this we may conclude that the dimness or unknowability of the true nature of things does not stem from their wanting to be so but because all things, including the Thing, exist in an obscurity whose presence makes itself felt in the form of trace. As the Thing is unnamable, it is said to be dark; because the trace is the non-presence of the Thing, it too is dark. Thus, to trace the path of the trace will only lead to further darkness insofar as its obscurity has already dislodged itself from its creator. In knowing the trace one cannot know of 'that which leaves the trace,' for while the Thing that gave rise to trace was not a thing of this realm, as all that remains of it in this realm is its trace, it signifies that it has returned to the darkness of the One.⁵⁶ Thus, that which is without trace is purely dark, the sagely-way, or the movement of Dao itself. Guo Xiang explained it thusly:

beginning. He does not initiate things for the sake of good fortune, nor does he begin things to deal with misfortune. He remains in emptiness and nothingness and moves when he cannot do otherwise." See Zhang Shuangli, 1469; Major, 537. For a similar tale see Wang Liqi, 177.

⁵⁴ Ziporyn, 38.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 39.

⁵⁶ I say this as a counter-argument to Ziporyn who postulated that "traces are the means by which knowledge and will come about, by which one thing cognizes another." See Ziporyn, 36.

Yao, in his reality, is dark; it is his trace that is Yao. From the perspective of the trace looking at the dark, it is not really strange that the outer and inner should become foreign [to one another]. The world sees Yao only as Yao, how can they see the darkness of his reality!⁵⁷

What the trace reveals is a unique insight into the process of reversal we spoke of in chapter one. The trace, in other words, becomes a critical link in the chain of evolutionary progression and retreat in that it is the closest we can come to palpably touching the being of the Thing. As Zhuangzi observed, “to stand without moving is easy; to walk without touching the ground is difficult.”⁵⁸ The myriad things of the world surround us but they are shadowy imprints left in the dust of the earth. They are mere vestiges of the marvelous possibilities lying within the darkness of Dao. The trace is hence the empty husk of the Thing.

We can even go so far as to say that for the *Zhuangzi*, the trace as a derivative of the Thing is an imaginary event that allows for the opening of a space between the Thing and its signifier, breaking the link of dependency between them. This meontological space comes to be through the vanishing of things by way of their trace, and yet the space opened up by the introduction of trace upon a thing’s return to the One is not a realized space but the rejoining of ontological nothingness and Dao. The weakness of Guo Xiang’s interpretation of Zhuangzi’s trace lies in his dislocating Dao from the cycle of transformation resulting in things experiencing a return not to the oneness of Dao, but to their own inductive nihilism. There is, therefore, no self-becoming or self-returning to a cosmogonist root for Guo because there is no longer a Dao to which things can return. Without Dao there cannot be the One, and without the One there can no longer be a myriad of beings whose existence stems from it. Thus, we should not lose sight of the fact that the trace for Zhuangzi acts as a link between the phenomenological world of humanity and the cosmological realm of Dao. In other words, the trace lights the way towards that which is inwardly dark and mysterious, towards the ontological nothingness imbued in things, resulting in a harmony so profound there is nowhere it does not penetrate.

⁵⁷ 「夫堯實冥矣，其迹則堯也。自迹觀冥，內外異域，未足怪也。世徒見堯之為堯，豈識其冥哉！」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 1 “*xiaoyaoyou* 逍遙游。” See Guo Qingfan, 34.

⁵⁸ 「絕迹易，無行地難。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 4 “*renjianshi* 人間世。” See Guo Qingfan, 150; Chai 2008: 137.

2.4 Wandering in the Harmony of Dao

With the Thing and its trace now at our disposal, we can engage in a more tangible discussion of how ontological nothingness presents itself to the world and why such presence is indicative of Dao. In order to do this, several anecdotal stories from the *Zhuangzi* will be analyzed: those of butcher Ding, woodcarver Qing, the catcher of cicadas, and the maker of belt claps.⁵⁹ Each of these tales vividly illustrates how one may utilize Dao so as to attain harmony with the myriad things of the world, but also how such harmony can be retranslated into life praxis. It goes without saying, however, that grounding one's life praxis in Dao is no simple task; it involves not only a partial loss of self—a returning of one's self so as to glimpse inside the One—but also comprehending the role played by nothingness in its guise as the ontological fabric of Dao. If we were to choose one word that describes the experiences of these characters, it would not be mystical but sublime.⁶⁰

The first anecdote to be examined bears a disproportionate amount of scholarly attention compared to the others we will look at. The conversation between butcher Ding (*paoding* 庖丁) and king Wenhui 文惠君 occurs in chapter three (*yangshengzhu* 養生主) of the *Zhuangzi*. Given that this chapter deals with the principle of caring for life, it should come as no surprise that many interpretations take it to be descriptive of a spiritual encounter, although other theories abound.⁶¹

⁵⁹ The story of woodcarver Qing and the cicada catcher can be found in chapter 19 “*dasheng* 達生” of the *Zhuangzi*, while that of the clasp maker takes place in chapter 22 “*zhibeiyou* 知北游.”

⁶⁰ The following works are a few examples of how the *Zhuangzi* has been seen in a mystical vein: Livia Kohn, *Early Chinese Mysticism: Philosophy and Soteriology in the Taoist Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992; Jordan Paper, *The Spirits are Drunk: Comparative Approaches to Chinese Religion*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1995; Robert Allinson, *Chuang-tzu for Spiritual Transformation*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1989.

⁶¹ For example, Robert Eno read this story as an example of *Zhuangzi*'s particularization of knowledge into either skilled or theoretical epistemological modes (see his “Cook Ding's Dao and the Limits of Philosophy” in Paul Kjellberg and Philip Ivanhoe, eds., *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1996: 127-151; Lee Yearley interpreted the skill of butcher Ding as stemming from a transcendental state of mind in which Ding's spiritualism embraces both heavenly and daemonic realms (see his “*Zhuangzi*'s Understanding of Skillfulness and the Ultimate Spiritual State” in *Ibid.*, 152-182; William Callahan stated that Ding was in fact putting forth a theory of political decision-making (see his article “Cook Ding's Life on the Whetstone” in Roger Ames, ed., *Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1998: 175-195) while Michael Crandell translated the actions of the butcher as a form of Gadamerian play (see “On Walking without Touching the Ground” in Victor Mair, ed., *Experimental Essays on Chuang-tzu*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983: 101-124), and finally, Scott Cook took Ding's dance to be a literal dance of musical perfection invoking the spirits in a manner reminiscent of Confucian ritual (see “*Zhuangzi* and His Carving of the Confucian Ox” in *Philosophy East and West*, 47.4 (1997): 521-553).

What is more, of those who touch upon Ding's activities, none save for Guangming Wu, sufficiently account for the significance of this tale in relation to the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* as a whole. While the description of the butcher is not the lone example of the perfectibility of life praxis, it is the longest and most sophisticated and shall therefore garner most of our attention.

Taking Agehananda Bharati's notion of 'zero experience'⁶² as an intriguing parallel analogy, I shall leave aside its religious connotations in order to demonstrate how acts as mundane as those we are about to discuss have the potential to become a sublime union with Dao. Reveling in the task at hand, be it cutting up oxen, catching cicadas, or making wheels and clasps, each of the men in these stories have learned how to harmonize the humanly realm with the heavenly, and in so doing, attained perfection of life praxis through a zero experience rivaling none less than the sage. For Zhuangzi, life praxis is neither esoteric nor mystical; it is a holistic state of being in which the mind and body fuse into one and the individual comes to possess a form of meta-consciousness through which the internalization of all outward forms of awareness become one ineffable state of existence. This should not, however, be equated with transient bouts of spiritual possession or shamanic flights of fancy, as these are only capable of unidirectional modes of consciousness; rather, the life praxis of butcher Ding is all about achieving a higher state of familiarity with the world, much like Zhuangzi himself experienced with his butterfly dream at the end of his second chapter.

Since the aforementioned stories involve the perceived perfection of a physical activity, we can interpret them in several ways: aesthetically, in order to point out their harmony of movement and physical beauty; metaphysically, given that each character is endowed with a talent that defies explanation; and finally, in terms of textual relevance and coherence. We can thus demonstrate how these tales are neither mystically oriented nor a commentary on the application of knowledge, but are structurally coherent examples of how the lowliest of activities can be transformed into a thing of wonderment and beauty when seen through the eyes of Dao.⁶³ Here is the entire parable:

⁶² This term describes an ecstatic experience or oneness with the cosmic absolute. See Jordan Paper, 127.

⁶³ To date, Guangming Wu's account of the story of butcher Ding is the most competent and satisfying. See his *The Butterfly as Companion: Meditations on the First Three Chapters of the Chuang-tzu*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1990: 301-359.

Butcher Ding was cutting up an ox for king Wenhui. Every touch of his hand, leaning with his shoulders, placing of his foot, support with his knee, whoosh of his blade cutting flesh, was in such harmony that it resembled the *Mulberry Tree* dance, or the notes from the *Jing Shou*. King Wenhui said, “My, how splendid! How did your skill get to such a level?” Butcher Ding put down his blade and to the king replied: “What I cherish most is Dao, which exceeds any skill. At the time when I first began cutting up oxen, I only saw the complete ox. After three years, I no longer saw the complete ox. Today, I let my spirit guide me, not my eyes. My physical functions cease, giving way to my spirit. Following the great veins, my blade is guided through the great gaps and crevices, making use of what is originally there. I do not touch any of the veins or joints, much less the main bones. A good cook changes his blade every year, for he cuts with it. A common cook changes his blade every month, for he hacks with it. Today, my blade has been in use for nineteen years, has cut up thousands of oxen and its edge remains as sharp as when it first left the grindstone. Where joints between bones exist, empty spaces also exist, and a blade’s edge is without thickness. Using what is without thickness to enter that which is empty, there is a vast amount of space to freely maneuver. This is how I have used my blade for nineteen years and kept it as sharp as when it first left the grindstone. Although I may encounter a knotty section, I see its difficulty and guarding against weariness, I regard it and move with caution. With careful movements of my blade, the flesh separates from the bones like earth falling to the ground. I stand holding my blade, looking all around with a sense of satisfaction, wipe my blade and put it away.” Wenhui replied, “Excellent! I have heard butcher Ding’s words and learned of the cultivation of life.”⁶⁴

One of the first things we notice is the idea of harmony. This harmony is not the result of spiritual induction but is due to the careful coordination of body and mind to the task at hand. A touch of hand, leaning of the shoulders, bending of the knee and placement of feet are suggestive of a rhythmic flowing of the body as if one were dancing unaware of the external world. To some, such movement is indicative of the trance during a shamanic invocation, but nothing in the story supports this conclusion. If there is to be dancing then there must also be musical accompaniment and Zhuangzi provides us with a cacophony of sounds. The sound of the knife blade swishing through the air is a perfect counter to the sounds of the butcher bending here and there, huffing and puffing as he works his way through the dismemberment of the ox. It is interesting that Zhuangzi

⁶⁴ *Zhuangzi* ch. 3 “*yangshengzhu* 養生主.” See Guo Qingfan, 117-119; Chai 2008: 110-116. Butcher Ding is also mentioned in the *qisu* 齊俗 chapter of the *Huainanzi*. See Zhang Shuangli, 1165-66; Major, 416.

should associate this harmonic dance with two pieces of music normally associated with sacrificial ritual: the *Mulberry Forest* and the *Jing Shou*.⁶⁵ This is to say, butcher Ding's movements are carried forth with such relaxed ease that the undoing of the ox takes on the qualities of a carefree dance; figuratively in the form of a Shang-era dance in which his preparation of meals goes unseen and unheard, and literally as the shamanic rain dance invoked exclusively for the audience of the king.⁶⁶

The dance of death that is the way of the butcher is a dance played out countless times in Nature. This is not a ruthless butchering dance but one of the utmost finesse and compassion. It is so because Dao allows the ox to unfold of its own accord—an unfolding that is heavenly and natural. Through such undoing there is nourishment—the nourishing of spirit, mind, and body. These three levels of nourishment operate in unison to continuously nurture one's being until such time as it reaches its climax and we are called back to the One. Thus, the balletic gestures of the knife, Ding's arms and legs—his entire being—is a rhythmic coordination with Dao to the extent that he loses himself within himself, seeing what is before him as it naturally exists, yet seeing beyond its surface to unlock the very essence of its existence. In this way, he is able to dance as the spirits do inside the crevices and hollows of the ox, slipping his knife into the nothingness of the ox, yet preserving its sharpness as if it had just left the grindstone.

Another way we can describe Ding's encounter with the ox is by drawing an analogy to the process of return we spoke of at the end of our first chapter. While seeing things from the perspective of earthly conventions, Ding's understanding remained ontologically obstructed; the only thing before him was the complete ox. After three years of practice he had advanced to the second stage of reversal, the equalization of things. Here, butcher Ding encountered the beyondness of the ox's entirety, outwardly observing its head, legs, body, etc., and its internal division into organs, bones, muscles, and ligaments. Each element has its own internal function and natural ordering that

⁶⁵ The *Mulberry Forest* is another name for a piece of music stemming from the time of King Tang of Yin (Shang dynasty) and the *Jing Shou* is a movement from a shamanic rain dance called the *Xian Chi*. *Zhuangzi* ch. 3 “*yangshengzhu* 養生主.” See Guo Qingfan, 118.

⁶⁶ Guangming Wu went a step further: “Those musical pieces are unmistakably those of the spring, the rain, and the rising of life with the sun...the butcher's expertise is the skill that joins life and death, the spring and autumn, in the dance that rises with the rain and the sun.” This would seem to imply that the butcher is somehow tied in to the natural workings of the world that would place him on the same ontological level as the sage. See Guangming Wu, 317.

cannot be disturbed. Having discarded his own phenomenological embodiment so as to existentially unite with Dao, Ding was hence able to visualize the ox as a conglomerate of individual components, each of which could be known through the mind's eye. Where his sensory organs fail to guide his knife, he allows his spirit to take over, for his spirit can do nothing but follow the movement of Dao.

Butcher Ding has retreated from seeing the ox as a large lumbering figure, the intricacies of which are lost on the untrained eye, to being able to distinguish the various complexities inherent to the ox's disposition. Having learnt to recognize the division of muscle and bone, artery and joint, however, he still ran into difficulties. Previously, he viewed the ox in its entire three-dimensional existence and so could not see beyond what was formally before him. In time, however, he internalized his knowledge by forgetting it and observed the ox in four-dimensions, but even this proved inadequate for his vision was still grounded in his being. To overcome such an imposing obstacle, to see the ox as it exists from within the ox itself, Ding had to learn to experience the composition of the ox in the zero-dimension—a modeling of reality which melds together the experiential realities of subject and object much like the Thing. This is also known as the harmonization of heaven and earth—the spiritual vision of Dao—of which more will be said in our final chapter. Thus, Ding sees things as Dao sees them, lets them unfold as Dao unfolds them, and so uses the thickless knife blade to enter the nothingness of the ox's hollows and crevices. In this way, his life praxis is grounded in the preservation of that lying within things, for he uses what lies beyond them and so is able to dance with Dao.

Despite his marvelous transformation, Ding was still dependent upon his livelihood and thus was bound to his dependency of butchering oxen. His existence is in the world of butchery and he is thus a harbinger of death while also nourishing life. To dance with a double-edged sword is no easy task and many have failed trying. The common butcher hacks while the good butcher cuts. Hacking and cutting are not emblematic of dancing with Dao. They are the deliberate acts of a singularly dimensional mind out of step with an existential Dao. To change one's knife every month is to be ignorant of the harmony of Nature; hence the common man wields his knife as if it were a tool of power while the skilled man wields it as a tool of butchery. Wielding, however, is still a resistant form of yielding.

Yielding is to follow along with the harmony of things, to let things be as they are naturally meant, to dance in-step with the rhythm of Dao. Thus, the skilled man must still change his knife every year because he is unable to go beyond the reality of his skill. To be skilled at something is not equal to having a knack for it. Mediocrity of talent is still mediocrity and for the common man there can be nothing but mundaneness and stagnation. He is happy to switch his knife every month for he views this as a sign of his skill at butchery. In fact, butchery might be too kind a designation for one who hacks and chops his way through life. Cutting, however, is far superior to hacking. Thus, the skilled man is able to get a year's use out of his blade. But even this is far short of what butcher Ding can achieve. Cutting is not undoing insofar as it involves concentration of mind and body; a coordination between the earthly and the heavenly. A simple cut and an ox can be undone but such cutting does not imply that it is a natural cutting—a cleaving of natural seams and joints. Only one such as butcher Ding can adhere to the natural pathways and intersections invisible to the common man. Only one such as butcher Ding can use the illumination of Dao to light his way as he flows through the spaces of emptiness that are the key to undoing the ox. His is a skill of undoing—of using that which is without (i.e., the edge of the knife's blade) to enter the nothingness of the ox. Indeed, making use of nothingness is not the same as *doing* nothing, for using that which is not to affect that which is, is precisely to dance with Dao—to partake in its ontological nothingness.

The zero-experience allows butcher Ding to use the nothingness of Dao within the ox to guide him past the great veins, joints, and bones, for these are the carriers of life. It is the vital artery, that vital emptiness, which lets through the energy of life.⁶⁷ Recognizing these pillars of life is what distinguishes Ding from all other butchers. The ability to dance around the Dao-bearing elements of the ox, preserving its Dao nature whilst cutting it asunder, is the quality of the marvelous person, the sage. It is, in a manner of speaking, an anatomical co-habitation. Bone to bone, vein to vein, joint to joint, Ding knows the ox as well as he knows himself. Knowing the ox thusly, he enters its interstices and voids, allowing his knife to pass through untouched. And so, the art of butchery is more than mere chipping and breaking, it is walking without touching the ground, a carefree wandering through the great hollows and cavities that define and make the ox unique. By

⁶⁷ Guangming Wu, 341.

preserving those life-giving elements within the ox, Ding can thereby nurture his own life—his own internalization of Dao.

Should he encounter a place of difficulty, however, he spontaneously adjusts his disposition. Here, there is nothing magical occurring. The transient state of awareness has not passed nor is there any sign of divine intervention. It is as if the continuum of time somehow slows down, as if the flow of Dao coursing through Ding intensifies, exposing him to all possible outcomes instantaneously. But these outcomes are all natural outcomes; they are all means by which the ox can naturally undo itself. It, therefore, becomes a choice of the path of least resistance, one not based on physical reality, for remember, the knife is a nothingness entering the emptiness of the ox, but a resistance against the unity of butcher, knife, and ox. When the task is carried out in accordance with the natural disposition of the ox, the ox simply lets go of itself as if it were earth falling to the ground. Quite an interesting metaphor—*earth falling to the ground*—for the ground *is* the earth; the earth thus returns to itself in self-completion.

Everything returns to the ground, to the earth. The Great Clod, as the *Zhuangzi* called it, indeed has a purpose. The *qi* of the earth is what gives us life and in return, death gives life back to it. There is a circular motion between the earth and us. As Dao sets things into motion, a circular motion, this motion allows for the spontaneous rise and fall of things. The cycle of coming and going, living and dying, is the essence of Dao. And so, all existence is a menagerie of nourishment, one thing feeding upon another. Butcher Ding releases the ox of its being so that it may be devoured by king Wenhui. He, in turn, will be devoured by the earth and this revelation reveals to us the nourishment of life praxis. In essence, we all fall to the ground as if little more than clumps of dirt. For butcher Ding and others like him, however, the ox is not simply a thing to be done with as deemed fit. There is a Way to be followed—a dance. The Way of butchering oxen is not a skill to be taught and studied—that is the butchery of common men. It is an intuitive, spontaneous knack for things that is beyond words or knowledge. It is not a mechanical behavior either—a kind of memorized skill-set—for then Ding would merely be on par with the skilled butchers of the world. It is indeed much more.

Whilst butchering his ox, Ding becomes one with it, one with the oneness that is inherent to the ontological nothingness informing Dao. Such oneness allows him to internalize all aspects of the

ox's being such that the knife, as an extension of his arm, comes to physically manifest the Dao in him. It is interesting that Zhuangzi should have Ding exhibit his skill in this manner. Concentration of spirit becomes enhancement of Dao; enhancement of Dao leads to further purity of spirit;⁶⁸ purity of spirit in turn leads to a great awakening, which in turn results in returning to the One. The dance of the butcher is hence a self-fulfilling realization of the degree to which Dao exists inside him. There is no one-to-one relationship of man and heaven as we see in western religious traditions, no personalization of the true One, for to personalize the One is to deny it its ubiquity. For Zhuangzi, Dao cannot be personalized; it is ineffable and because of its ineffability it both is and is not. It is the potentiality of undoing that already exists within the ox; the potential for someone like Ding to allow the ox to undo itself. The butcher alone cannot undo the ox; the ox must permit him such an undoing. This is the natural way of things. Hacking and chopping are most unnatural and so encounter resistance in course of their hacking and chopping. If one approaches life by hacking and chopping, one will certainly not realize the completion of one's naturally allotted years. This is why Zhuangzi applauds those who live a life of undoing—a life of non-doing—for only by living in a way that follows the path of Nature can one nourish oneself. Through nourishing oneself one also nourishes others. This is the reciprocity of perfect virtue, the virtue of Dao.

The dance of butcher Ding is also a dance of the ox. The releasing of its flesh and innards becomes a sublime representation of what is meant by harmony. It is a peeling away of outer layers to reveal its true inner-self.⁶⁹ Without Dao, however, everything becomes stagnant, rotting. Dao is what animates things, both in life and in death; things spontaneously come and take their leave because Dao tolerates their doing so without predetermination or resistance. Thus, the dance of death is a cosmic dance of life. They are both required in order to maintain unity and harmony throughout the universe, for without such harmony there will only be chaos and the disingenuous virtue of petty men. And so, king Wenhui is able to learn of the cosmic rhythm of the world and the nourishment of life praxis through Ding's un-letting of oxen.

⁶⁸ For more on the role of spirit see Guangming Wu, 319-320.

⁶⁹ The Chinese character for dissect, split, and untie is *jie* 解 which can be broken down into the components of *jiao* 角, an animal horn, *dao* 刀, a blade or knife, and *niu* 牛, an ox or cattle. Thus, the ox's horn is an inherent representation of its own undoing. The implied symbolism is brilliant. Callahan, however, misreads such poetics as butcher Ding's application of instructive knowledge to "resolve" the ox into its component pieces. See Callahan in Ames 1998: 191.

Having wandered within the ox, butcher Ding can now rest, his whirlwind of activity finished. Such carefree wandering was neither aimless nor purposive but was the spontaneous wandering of universal harmony. Gathering himself up, sheathing his knife, he is now able to regain his formal, empirical self. This is not to say he had somehow ‘lost his self,’⁷⁰ for this would imply he had forgotten the world and himself, making him nothing more than a spiritual essence. As was already mentioned, the zero-experience is an enhancement of one’s sensory abilities. It is not a honing and refinement but, rather, an expansion and increased clarity of one’s role in the cosmic dance already underway. To rest is to rejuvenate one’s spirit, absorb Dao’s nourishment, and protect one’s allotted years. Endless effort—stressing of body and mind—can only lead to early death, thus Zhuangzi advises against such artificial life praxis. Without rest, butcher Ding cannot close the dance, cannot complete the circle of being and nothingness. One must know at what speed and when to emerge or risk exhausting one’s life energy; this is known as the balancing of life-forces, or the equality of things.

Yet the dance goes on despite butcher Ding’s need to rest. He who is in touch with Dao is always at rest, for what worries could possibly touch his heart? Rest is a figurative condition. Do we rest differently when awake than asleep? Zhuangzi is quick to criticize the goings-on of the Confucians and Mohists, their obsession with laying claim to the Way of things. Knowing one’s true place in the universe, one can rest with such knowledge. To labor one’s body and mind is to exhaust one’s given breath of life. Knowing when to stop and let things be as they may is a trait we see expressed in all of the characters esteemed by Zhuangzi. To let things be as they are is to know the heavenly principle of things. Resting, therefore, should not be regarded as a period of non-doing; on the contrary, to rest is to spontaneously stop doing—a purposeful undoing. Everything in the universe needs rest, needs a moment to rejuvenate and self-compose. Without rest, Ding’s butchery would be never ending—never complete—and his art of undoing oxen would be nothing more than mere butchery, unconnected to Dao and unworthy of his king’s appraisal.⁷¹

⁷⁰ A reference to the story of Nanguo Ziqi found at the beginning of chapter 2 of the *Zhuangzi*. We will discuss the theme of forgetting later in chapter five.

⁷¹ We will take up the idea of rest in chapter three when we discuss Dao and temporality.

Butcher Ding maintains the sharpness of his knife by utilizing the thinness of the blade to enter the gaps and spaces between the ox's joints and bones but do such pockets of nothingness exist within wood? They certainly do. What is ingenious about the stories of Ding and woodcarver Qing, our next tale, is that they both make use of knives as their tool of choice. The edge of Ding's knife is a thicklessness entering nothingness and the edge of Qing's chisel is no different. Both are tools of opposite dependency: one on hardness, the other softness. Qing's chisel edge is a nothingness that penetrates the emptiness of the air pockets within the wood, thereby releasing the wood of its own dependency. Like the ox, wood is bound together by the voids within; pockets of nothingness that define the physicality of its substance. Should the amount of applied pressure be equal to the force of resistance, the wood will shear off. If not, it will either hold or split into fragments. It becomes a matter of balancing what is known with what is unknown—the achievement of natural harmony—the cultivation of which nourishes one's life. This is known as matching heaven with heaven and is the core point of the woodcarver Qing story:

Woodcarver Qing was carving a *xu* and when it was complete, those who saw it were shocked as if it were the work of the supernatural. The marquis of Lu saw it and queried, "By what technique did you carve this?" to which Qing answered, "I am just a laborer, what technique could I possibly have! There is one thing though. When I am preparing to make a *xu*, I do not let it wear out my energy. I compose myself⁷² in order to still my mind. After composing myself for three days, I no longer yearn for praise or rewards, for titles or stipends. After composing myself for five days, I no longer yearn for praise or blame, for cunning or awkwardness. Having composed myself for seven days, I have then forgotten I have four limbs and a body. At that moment, the ruler and court cease to exist and with my technique focused, all outward distractions disappear. Afterwards, I enter the mountain forest, observing the heavenly nature of the tress. If I discover one of supreme form and can envision a *xu* within, I add my hand to the task otherwise I let it be. This is to join the heavenly with the heavenly and is most likely the reason why it is said my talent is nothing short of marvelous."⁷³

⁷² Although I follow Watson's translation of this term as 'fasting,' I believe Cheng Xuanying's description is more appropriate: "Composing his true state of mind, after three days Qing had suspended his need for reward and punishment, rank and title, profit or stipend, and they were no longer able to enter his emotional area." 「心迹既齊，凡經三日，至於慶吊賞罰，官爵利祿，如斯之事，並不入于情田。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 19 "*dasheng* 達生." See Guo Qingfan, 659.

⁷³ A *xu* 鑿 is an ancient bell-shaped instrument. See *Ibid.*, 658-660.

Reading of Qing's talent, we notice that although the material and craft may change, the means of attaining life praxis is the same. The secret to self-cultivation and life-preservation operates along the lines of denial of one's desire for fame and wealth, denial of logical distinctions, and denial of one's physical inseparability from Dao. It is because of this intuitive perspectivalism that we can dismiss the mysticism of encountering nothingness. What can easily be interpreted as a meditative, spiritual exercising of the mind is actually not so. Although in later Daoist texts such as the *Huainanzi* and the Daoist chapters of the *Guanzi* we see clear examples of spiritually meditative techniques, in the *Zhuangzi* there is little evidence for such speculation. Being receptive to the existential character of Dao entails a *sorting* rather than a *fasting* of the mind. This sorting is an evening out, an attempt to quiet the mind by way of emotional uniformity. It must be said that such uniformity of emotion should not be regarded as disinterest, nor should we look upon it as a form of mental sterility. Zhuangzi is not implying that the people of the world should become automatons; rather, what is needed is harmony.

One composes (*qi* 齊) oneself so that one's mind may become quiescent (*jingxin* 静心) and one's *qi* will not be consumed (*haoqi* 耗氣); this is nourishment of life praxis. After three days, woodcarver Qing had reached the level of butcher Ding's common man, still seeing the entire object through which he hacks and pounds. It takes another two days for Qing to reach the level of a skilled man, seeing things in their component parts but slicing and cutting nonetheless. It takes a full seven days, equivalent to Ding's three years, to be able to dance with Dao and reach the level of Nanguo Ziqi sitting in a stupor of self-abandonment. Indeed, the ideal state of living described throughout the seven inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi* is summed up concisely in the stories being discussed here. Self-importance is the destroyer of self-cultivation just as wealth and titles are an unwelcomed attraction that will inevitably cut short one's years. The idea is to go beyond such petty measures, to look past the artificiality of society and return to living in harmony with cosmic principle, or natural law. Forgetting one's outwardness, the preferential treatment we accord to our limbs and body falls by the wayside to the extent that one becomes a being of no-mind. Only when one learns to see with the eyes of Dao can one proceed with one's craft of perfectibility.

Entering the forest, woodcarver Qing uses what is of heaven to seek out the heavenly. He then begins a dance of his own, using the vision of heaven to seek out the material of heaven. What is of interest to the woodcarver is not the beauty of the tree itself, or even the utility of its wood; the

central question becomes whether or not a particular tree has within its nature the means to actualize a *xu*. By allowing the tree to realize what is inherently in its nature, woodcarver Qing garners use of it without deliberately using it. This is one of the central themes we see repeated throughout the *Zhuangzi*, and in the case of trees, stories of master carpenters abound.⁷⁴ Indeed, the cultivation of life praxis is all about deliberate non-action, of letting things undo themselves in a manner best suited to their constitution. Knowing when to stop—when to let things be—serves the same purpose as getting use out of something through its apparent non-use. The idea of useful uselessness is not unique to the woodcarver. To the common carpenter, the only thing useful about a tree is its wood. For a good carpenter, the quality of the wood in terms of both its aesthetic and structural properties becomes critical. A master carpenter, however, sees in the useless tree a full spectrum of potentiality: the shade it provides, the sound it makes in the blowing wind, the variety of creatures that take it as their place of abode, the safety offered by its upper branches, the strength and depth of its roots, and so on. In other words, they are aware of the entire eco-system encircling each and every tree.

Certain trees are best used for certain applications, just as certain knives are designed for particular functions. As a manifestation of Dao, trees serve no other purpose than to be themselves. Those deemed useful by man are cut down while the useless are left untouched. Which of these does carpenter Qing prefer? Trees that flower and produce fruit are treasured for their beauty while trees whose wood is strong and sturdy are treasured for their utility. Being a follower of Dao, Qing chooses neither the beautiful nor the utilitarian, preferring a tree whose existence adheres to natural law rather than human standards. To seek out the heavenly in a forest of trees, Qing must himself be in possession of the heavenly and we see the steps he takes to obtain it. These steps are repeated in different guises throughout the *Zhuangzi* but what is common to them all is the idea of cultivating one's life praxis based on the guidance of Dao; of attuning oneself not to the concerns of humanity but to the cosmos in such a way that the empirical self loses any sway over how one engages the things of the world. This is what is known as unlearning knowledge—of adhering to simplicity—and such cultivation is what lends a sense of altruism to *Zhuangzi*'s worldview.

⁷⁴ See the story of carpenter Shi in chapter 4 of the *Zhuangzi*.

In the remaining two stories, we are further enlightened as to the means of self-cultivation in order to bring oneself into harmony with the universe. The first tale involves an encounter between Confucius and a catcher of cicadas.

On his way to the state of Chu, Confucius was passing through a forest when he saw a hunchback catching cicadas with a pole as easily as if he were catching them by hand.⁷⁵ Confucius said, “What talent! Is there a special technique you use?” The hunchback replied, “There is.” “For the first five or six months I practiced with two small balls (on the end of a stick) until they ceased to fall off, but even then I still lost some cicadas. I then tried with three balls and I only lost one cicada in ten. Having succeeded with five balls, I caught them as if I were grabbing them with my hand. My body is like a broken tree trunk and my arm like a withered tree branch. No matter how great are heaven and earth, how numerous the myriad things, I am only aware of cicada wings. Not rocking, not inclining, I do not allow any of the myriad things to take the place of my cicada wings—how can I not succeed?” Confucius turned to his disciples saying, “If you concentrate all of your will you can accommodate it up to the level of spirit—this is how we should refer to our gentleman the hunchback.”⁷⁶

The second story is another example of a master craftsman, this time a maker of clasps.

The Ministry of War’s ironsmith⁷⁷ was eighty years old and had not lost the slightest edge in his ability. The chancellor said, “What skill you have! Is there a technique to this?” “There is” he replied. “Since I was twenty years old I have loved to forge clasps. I look at nothing else. If it is not a clasp, I take no notice of it.” To use something without formally using it, one will over time obtain some use from it; how much more so will he who uses nothing! What things will not come to depend on him!⁷⁸

⁷⁵ This story also occurs in chapter 2 of the *Liezi*.

⁷⁶ *Zhuangzi* ch. 19 “*dasheng* 達生.” See Guo Qingfan, 639-641.

⁷⁷ The term *chui* 捶 means to beat or pound; *gou* 鉤 is a hook or a hook-like sword. In chapter ten of the *Zhuangzi* there is the phrase “he who steals a belt clasp shall be executed [竊鉤者誅]” thus, I feel inclined to use clasp over sword and refer to him by trade rather than by the product of his labors. *Zhuangzi* ch. 10 “*quqie* 祛篋.” See Guo Qingfan, 350-351.

⁷⁸ *Zhuangzi* ch. 22 “*zhibeiyou* 知北游.” See Guo Qingfan, 760-761. This story also appears in the *daying* 道應 chapter of the *Huainanzi*. See Zhang Shuangli, 1271; Major, 465.

Our hunchback is a magical character, dancing an acrobatic ballet. It is surprising how one whose body is so contorted is able to become a contortionist! He contorts himself to appear as a dead, withered tree; a tree that is dead yet attracts life. Cicadas die only to be reborn. They molt, shedding their former selves in exchange for new ones. Thus, the cicadas exemplify the usefulness of the useless; how obtaining use from something can be obtained without deliberately using it. Their skin has a purpose yet at a certain moment in time, that purpose expires. With their skin now rendered useless, the cicadas are forced to shed it in exchange for one that is useful. They undergo a transformation from being useful to useless and back to useful once again. By not deliberately exerting the useful quality of their skin, they are thus able to extend their lifetime. Knowing when the cicadas will emerge from underground, the hunchback anticipates their arrival and so the uselessness of time also finds a use.

Returning to the dance of the hunchback, it is a solitary, unmoving dance; it is a dance of life imitating death in order to lure life! In order to lure the cicadas to his position, he must adjust his constitution to compliment that of the cicadas. Using the method of no-method, letting the cicadas come to him rather than chasing them, he is able to preserve his original being whilst exhausting that of the insects. The hunchback's stick is the chisel of the woodcarver, the knife of the butcher. They are apparatuses for the manifestation of Dao—useless in and of themselves yet of great use in the hands of a master. Concentrating his mind such that nothing but cicada wings exists, it would be hard indeed not to catch them! In this regard, our hunchback does not use the heavenly to seek out the heavenly, as the woodcarver or butcher do, but rather, we can place him in butcher Ding's frame of mind by letting his spirit replace his dependency on physical sensation. This replacement of sensory dependency is not a numbing of the senses however. With a body like a broken tree trunk and arms like withered branches, the hunchback disguises his vitality by concentrating and allowing it to consume him.

Concentration of spirit should not be equated with a spiritualized spirit. It is instead a spirit of natural harmony, a spiritual state of freedom that is exclusive to the nothingness of Dao. Such a multi-variant outlook is central to Zhuangzi's conception of how the natural world ought to be perceived and explains how the ironsmith is able to use things without actually using them while still benefiting from the experience. What the sage does is precisely this; he allows others to come to him and benefits from them doing so. For the man who has made clasps his entire life, there is

no visible gain to be had, only a knowledge of how to make clasps. He has gained much more than that however. Be it making clasps, buckles, or swords, the ironsmith must still reach a level of knowing that is similar to butcher Ding's. Knowing is not knowledge, for knowledge is what blocks us from Dao. Knowing is a knack, an intuition, a veritable awakening of all bodily senses through interaction with nothingness, allowing the spirit to concentrate and harmonize with heavenly principle. This is where Western interpreters of the *Zhuangzi* mistake holistic sensory awakening for mysticism. The catcher of cicadas and the maker of clasps preserve their vitality during the manufacture of real-world objects. That these objects are useless in and of themselves is beside the point; what Zhuangzi is emphasizing is the journey, not the outcome.

The hunchback catches cicadas as if he were grabbing them out of the air with his hands because he understands their ways. He has committed himself to learning the art of disengaging the human side of his mind so that he may free the Dao-mind locked within. Making his body appear as dead wood and withered branches, his mind becomes quiet. Such quietude is vital if one wishes to join with the One, for a still mind is a mind receptive to Dao. With the mind quiet and one's spiritual vitality focused, all possibilities of knowing become available and one thus achieves a harmonious state of existence with the world.

We began this discussion with the violent dissection of oxen and rounded it out with talk of bells and insects. We progressed from the taking of life to its reception; from the nourishment of others through death to the joy received in witnessing the transformation of birth. Discarding our vices and judgmental tendencies, we can look upon the beings of the world as they exist of themselves. To dance to the cosmic harmony of Dao is to experience the nothingness that transcends all forms of language and perception. In the act of letting-be we are able to affect change, a change that elevates our presence of being to the level of cosmic oneness and perfectibility. This is the key to nourishing life, to living out one's natural lifespan, and wander carefree in the world without imposing or depending upon anything other than following the way of Dao.

The tale of butcher Ding is a fuller development and elaboration of the opening passage on the danger in using what is limited to pursue the limitless. Knowing that our life is finite, one should stay the middle course and not endlessly chase after the infinite. Being infinite, it is unknowable; being unknowable, one cannot possibly hope to grasp it using what is known. Thus, one must use

the unknown to comprehend the known and not use the known to pursue the unknown. This is the heavenly nature of things and forms the basis of Zhuangzi's discussion on life praxis.

Every ox, bell, and clasp is a metaphor for the inner potentiality of human virtue. Every time we carve one of them, we carve our ethical selves in such a way that our life praxis unfolds amidst the constancy of heavenly praxis. There exists, therefore, a methodless method; a reliance on natural law as an expression of the larger cosmic principle, and in following such a method one is thus able to follow along with the way of things, adapting and adjusting oneself to the individual being of each encountering. But such praxis is also a mutual echoing of others. King Wenhui learned from his butcher just as the butcher learned from undoing oxen. He interpreted the words of Ding along the patterns of heaven, undoing them as Ding undid the ox. In other words, the uselessness of the words spoken by Ding became useful for Wenhui in that they nourished him by steering him towards the middle path, illuminating for him how to adjust his response to the situations of life and thus attain harmony and longevity by way of his own encounter with Dao. And so, the lesson Zhuangzi teaches us is that we are all at one time or other a butcher Ding or a king Wenhui; here a master, there a disciple. Only in the oneness of Dao can we blur the distinction between the two and enter the vibrant, magical world that Zhuangzi took such pains to bring to our attention.

2.5 Conclusion

As we begin to delve ever deeper into the cosmology of the *Zhuangzi* we are slowly unraveling the mystery that has enshrouded it for many a person. Being able to differentiate Dao from the One not only proved to be a productive exercise, it set forth the theory that Dao generates the Thing which, in turn, generates the myriad things we know and interact with on a daily basis. Dao, in other words, imbues the Thing with the potential to produce other things and when at such time this potential has run its course, things return not to Dao, but to the Thing. In their togetherness they are one and the One is not only a collectivity of Things, it symbolizes the oneness of all things too. What unites things in their oneness is the potentiality of Dao coursing through them. Of course, this potential for life and death is but a trace, a trace of the traceless nothingness that is the root of the universe itself.

The stories we examined of men whose harmonization with Dao was so complete it enabled them to engage the things of the world in such a comprehensively holistic manner that they no longer saw the world from a human standpoint but through the eyes of Dao. With everything around him in constant flux, how is the sage able to return to the constancy of Dao? Indeed, is it even appropriate to think of Dao in temporal terms when doing so would bring it into the world of human norms? These are some of the issues awaiting our attention in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

Dao and the Temporal Field of Nothingness

The life of things is like a gallop, a mad sprint, changing with each movement,
shifting with each passing moment.

—*Zhuangzi*

This chapter continues with our investigation into the *Zhuangzi*'s meontological language of Dao by turning to its temporal nature, arguing against the tendency to tie time to the "presence of the for-itself to being-in-itself."¹ In addition to disputing this notion we shall also argue that binding time to ontological being by way of a so-called primordial time fails to disclose its existential traits. This stems from the fact that the *Zhuangzi* did not subscribe to the impermanence of time in light of the death of the subject, nor did it hold to the belief that time's movement is linear and whose fulcrum is the lived-time of the here and now. This is not to say that the text viewed time in absolutist terms; rather, the non-temporality of Dao manifests itself through the corporeal signification of the myriad things. Not only does this eliminate the subjectivist nature of time, it releases it from the bonds of human consciousness and world formation. The goal, then, is not to flee time in light of the reputed nihilism that is humanity's impending death, but to relinquish the human need for temporal duration altogether so as to return to the undifferentiated oneness of Dao.

We shall, therefore, not only explicate the *Zhuangzi*'s conception of time but also address how the human perception of it can be incorporated into the cosmological milieu without any form of dialectic. We will soon realize, however, that the pivot of time lies not in the present-now but in the resting of nothingness. The restful nature of nothingness thus becomes a critical vantage point from which to perceive the passage of time for only from the perspective of the unmoving hub can we see the rotation of the wheel's spokes, from the vantage point of perpetual Dao can we notice

¹ Sartre 1992: 176. The difference between the two terms, simply put, is that the in-itself is conceivable as something having substance (i.e., it is a thing) while the for-itself acts as its internal negation (i.e., it is a not-thing). Although mutually exclusive, they come together in human reality. It is the degree to which they mix that determines our ability to transcend our inner nothingness which subsequently lays the ontological ground for human freedom.

the flow of finite beings. On account of this, the present chapter will put forth a reformulation of the traditional notion of time so as to reflect the meontological undercurrent of Dao and from this new theoretical envisioning, authentic time (i.e., the non-time of Dao) will come to pass as the norm of creation *qua rest*.² By engaging time via creation *qua rest*, we can thus uncover the *Zhuangzi*'s definition of time while grasping its cosmological and static (i.e., human) orders too.

3.1 Dao and Cosmological Time

Before entering into a discussion of what time means for the *Zhuangzi*, it seems pertinent to first lay forth the connection between cosmogenesis and temporality. This step is necessary because the two states of existence are not mutually inclusive. Cosmogenesis differs from temporality insofar as it is a mark of a non-temporal universe populated by ontological nothingness and Dao. A time of primal chaos, it bore witness to the birth of the One and the eventual formation of the Thing. It was during this time—a time before time—that each Thing remained undifferentiated and whole. Dao's virtue had yet to be despoiled by humanity and everything was in a state of harmonious oneness. Only after the classifications nonbeing and being had arisen did temporality commence. And yet to brand the temporality of being as also applicable to the nothingness of the cosmos would be to take what is inclusive to time and apply it to that which is exclusive. Things exist in the world and the world is a temporal body, however, the temporality of the world cannot reach either the One or Dao for they dwell in the dark mystery of ontological nothingness. The *Zhuangzi*, as we saw earlier, described the formation of the universe along these lines:

It may enter and emerge but one cannot see its form. This is called the Gate of Heaven. The Gate of Heaven is nothingness and it is from here that the myriad things emerge. Being cannot use being to create being, it must arise from nonbeing; however, nonbeing is itself nothingness.³

入出而無見其形，是謂天門。天門者，無有也，萬物出乎無有。有不能以有為有，必出乎無有，而無有一無有。

² For Bergson, the intertwining of time and creation results not because of nothingness but from the self-determining nature of being: "As soon as we are confronted with true duration, we see that it means creation, and that if that which is being unmade endures, it can only be because it is inseparably bound to what is making itself." Bergson 1998: 373.

³ *Zhuangzi* ch. 23, "gengsangchu 庚桑楚." See Guo Qingfan, 800.

When we look at two other examples, the first written before the *Zhuangzi*, the second after, we are presented with more vivid descriptions. The first example takes us back to the *Hengxian*:

Heng precedes being and nothingness; it is simple, quiescent, and empty. Being simple, it is Great Simplicity; being quiescent, it is Great Quiescence; being empty, it is Great Emptiness. Not content to be within itself, it gave rise to space. Given the presence of this realm of space there was *qi*. With *qi* there came things, with the emergence of things there was beginning, and with beginning there was passing away.⁴

恒先無有，樸，靜，虛。樸，太樸；靜，太靜；虛，太虛。自厭不自忍，或作。有或焉有氣，有氣焉有有，有有焉有始，有始焉有往者。

The second example comes from the *Four Classics of the Yellow Emperor*:

At the beginning of constant nothingness, there was only Great Emptiness. Since emptiness was identical to oneness, the constant stopped at the One. Misty and indistinct, it was neither bright nor dark. Its spirit was subtle yet pervasive, its vital force quiescent yet dim. Thus, things cannot come to be without it; formless, it reaches everywhere while remaining nameless.⁵

恒無之初，迴同大虛。虛同為一，恒一而止。濕濕夢夢，未有明晦。神微周盈，精靜不配。古未有以，萬物莫以。古無有刑，大迴無名。

What is intriguing about the above examples is the variation with which they described the progenitor of things and the condition of the universe wherein it dwelled. We see three names ascribed to the progenitor (Dao, the constant, constant nothingness) and two related to the state of the universe (great emptiness, that which precedes nonbeing and being). Each series of names within their particular grouping are synonymous with one another. What is more, it would be quite easy to misconstrue the second pairing of names as in fact describing the object of the first triad. Needless to say, they all agreed that cosmic time did not commence with a thing-in-itself but with

⁴ See Ma Chengyuan, 288-289.

⁵ See Chen, 2004: 470. This chapter, entitled *daoyuan* 道原 was uncovered in 1973 alongside several others in tomb number 3 at Mawangdui in present-day Changsha city in Hunan province, China. The site is famous because it also contained a silk manuscript version of the *Daodejing* that differed radically from previously known copies. A comprehensive study of the *Huangdi Sijing* was carried out by Chen Guying 陳鼓應 in 1995. All references are to the 2004 reprint of Chen's *Modern Commentaries and Annotations to the Four Classics of the Yellow Emperor* (*Huangdi Sijing Jinzhu Jinshi* 《黃帝四經今注今釋》).

Dao's emergence amidst a field of nothingness whose unspoiled, unperturbed nature proved fertile ground for the oneness of primal chaos that ensued. Nothingness as empty equanimity thus gave rise to the realization of that which is ultimate and beyond knowing—Dao as Great Simplicity, Emptiness, and Quiescence. These are the qualities of Dao at the time of its becoming while also characterizing a universe bereft of being and explains why the *Zhuangzi* argued that Dao itself is not to be thought of in terms of thing and no-thing.⁶

We face a theoretical dilemma however. In agreeing that the universe was originally non-temporal and indiscriminate—a nothingness whose silent emptiness was unperturbed by anything other than its own self-reckoning—there appears a divergence of opinion on how to explain the transition from non-temporal nothingness to pre-temporal chaos. At the end of our first chapter we discussed this transition in terms of a thing's return to its Thing within the One, while the beginning of chapter two examined it from the perspective of the Thing's becoming. The issue that now comes to light has to do with the order in which things, including space and time, emerge from the primal chaos of the One. For the *Hengxian*, Dao created space and this space was filled with the *qi* of Dao. The filling of space with the *qi* of Dao led to the birth of things and the start of temporality. And yet this *qi* does not belong to time but changes according to the spontaneous tendencies of Dao.⁷ Space, therefore, is simply the milieu in which the essence of Dao proclaims itself to itself. We may thus characterize space as the spreading forth of Dao's nature and is what we have been referring to throughout this work as the empty, still quiescence of ontological nothingness. The *Zhuangzi* pointed this out when it stated:

In the Great Beginning there was nothingness, nonbeing, and namelessness. From it arose the One, an oneness that was without form. When things obtained it they were thus born, and this was called

⁶ The text asked: “Of that born before heaven and earth, is it a thing? That which treats things as mere things is not a thing. Those things that issue forth cannot precede other things, yet there were things already extant. Furthermore, there were things already extant before then too, and so on without end.” 「有先天地生者物邪？物物者非物。物出不得先物也，猶其有物也。猶其有物也，無已。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 22, “*zhibeiyou* 知北游.” See Guo Qingfan, 763.

⁷ We may refer to the story of Zhuangzi's wife dying and his explanation for why he ceased mourning her: “I thought back to the beginning of her being, when she had yet to be given life. Not having any life, she was also without form. Not yet having any form, she was also without *qi*. Amidst the vast and remote darkness, a change occurred and she had *qi*. When her *qi* changed, she then had a form. When her form changed, she was thus born. Today there has been yet another change and she is dead.” 「察其始而本無生，非徒無生也而本無形，非徒無形也而本無氣。雜乎芒芴之間，變而有氣，氣變而有形，形變而有生，今又變而之死。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 18, “*zhile* 至樂.” See Guo Qingfan, 614-615.

Virtue. Before there were forms and divisions, they were innumerable though without separation, and this was called the Order of Things. From this flowing and moving things were born, and once they became complete they gave birth to principles, which were called Forms.⁸

泰初有無，無有無名；一之所起，有一而未形。物得以生，謂之德；未形者有分，且然無間，謂之命；留動而生物，物成生理，謂之形。

The virtue ascribed to the One is thus a reflection of the virtue of Dao and embodies characteristics taken throughout Daoist literature to include: Great Illumination (*taizhao* 太昭), Great Simplicity (*taipu* 太樸), Great Quiescence (*taijing* 太靜), and Great Emptiness (*taixu* 太虛). Cosmic time hence entails the embodiment of these virtuous qualities of Dao and nothing more; it is a time in which Dao self-completes itself by ever going-forth without ever retaining-for. Although the *Zhuangzi* did not directly speak of the *qi* of Dao in the context of cosmological time while texts such as the *Hengxian*, *Four Classics of the Yellow Emperor*, and *Huainanzi* did, it turns out to be an inconsequential omission in that they all belonged to a tradition in which nothingness gives rise to Dao, and Dao subsequently gives birth to the myriad things.⁹ What is more, these texts were all of the opinion that time could only take hold once the universe lost its empty, indiscriminate nature. Indeed, amongst these texts, the *Liezi* can be said to have offered the most explicit of accounts:

If the formed is born of the formless, then where do heaven and earth come from? Therefore it is said: There are (the states of) Great Yi (*taiyi* 太易), Great Origin (*taichu* 太初), Great Beginning

⁸ *Zhuangzi* ch. 12 “*tiandi* 天地.” See Guo Qingfan, 424. The *Yinwenzi* 《尹文子》 adds to the discussion when it stated: “The Great Dao is formless but as a thing it is named. As for names, they name what is proper in form. Only when forms are proper can there be names. Thus, names cannot be wide of the mark...names are used to name the form of things and forms ought to have their names.” 「大道無形，稱器有名。名也者，正形者也。形正由名，則名不可差……名者，名形者也。形者，應名者也。」 See Qian Xizuo, 1. Alternatively, in the *jingshen* 精神 chapter of the *Huainanzi* it is proclaimed: “When heaven and earth were without form, all was colliding vigorously, mingling imperceptibly, and was thus known as the Great Illumination. Dao began in an empty void, the empty void gave birth to the universe, and the universe gave birth to *qi*.” 「天墜未形，馮馮翼翼，洞洞濶濶，故曰太昭。道始于虛廓，虛廓生宇宙，宇宙生氣。」 See Zhang Shuangli, 245. Gao You 高誘, in his commentary to this statement wrote that these characteristics describe “the appearance of that which is formless” 「馮、翼、洞、濶，無形之貌」, hence I cannot agree with John Major’s translation of *fengfeng yiyi* 馮馮翼翼 as ‘ascending and flying’ and *dongdong zhuzhu* 洞洞濶濶 as ‘diving and delving’ for they fail to viscerally portray a universe in the midst of creation, portraying it instead as one would a spiritual journey or creature of fancy such as a dragon or phoenix. See Major, 114.

⁹ The *Zhuangzi* preferred to use the phrase ‘one *qi*’ (*yiqi* 一氣), which only occurs on two occasions: the first is in chapter 6, “wander in the one *qi* of heaven and earth.” 「而遊乎天地之一氣」, the second is in chapter 22, “one *qi* penetrates heaven and earth” 「通天下一氣耳」. See Guo Qingfan, 268; 733 respectively.

(*taishi* 太始), and Great Simplicity (*taisu* 太素). The Great Yi is the condition before *qi* has formed while *taichu* marks its beginning; *taishi* marks the demarcation of forms while *taisu* is the beginning of their characteristics.¹⁰

夫有形者生於無形，則天地安從生？故曰：有太易，有太初，有太始，有太素。太易者，未見氣也；太初者，氣之始也；太始者，形之始也；太素者，質之始也。

What is interesting to note about the above quotation is the temporal order ascribed to the cosmos as it slowly unfolded from primal nothingness toward ontic being. We also cannot but notice the *Liezi*'s call for *qi* itself to partake in a series of transformational states (*taichu*, *taishi*, *taisu*) in which each served as a means to an end while furthering its own phenomenological evolution. The comingling of these states can, therefore, be seen as a variation of the *Zhuangzi*'s idea of primal chaos.¹¹ The Great Yi is thus equivalent to *heng*, which as we have said, is itself an alternative name for Dao. Given the procession of pre-phenomenological activity that comes to define the recognizable universe, and that time is thought of as the penultimate stage before the appearance of ontic beings, we should be careful to avoid describing said time as empty.

For the *Zhuangzi*, the question was not so much how we ought to characterize the presence of time in relation to human experience, but that we perceive its true nature as an absolute operating within the infinite spatiality of nothingness. What this means is that cosmological time is rendered inferior and incomplete when compared to the non-time of Dao in that for every moment of measurable human time, there has already elapsed an infinite amount of Dao time. Therefore, the universe lies within a temporal framework whose boundary is not created by humanity but is enshrouded in the perpetuity of nothingness.¹² This is why the nature of Dao lies beyond the realm of time, for to imply otherwise would mean that the non-time it creates for itself is bound to

¹⁰ See Yang Bojun, 5-6.

¹¹ The famous story of the death of chaos occurs at the end of chapter 7 of the *Zhuangzi*.

¹² I differentiate Dao-time, Cosmic-time, and Measured-time in this way: Dao-time is the non-time of Dao and ontological nothingness; Cosmic-time refers to the temporality of the One and the physical presence of the universe; Measured-time is the causal or durational time of humanity, divided into past, present, and future. The first two forms of time are typical of Daoism whereas the third is typical of the Western tradition. For Merleau-Ponty, however, "time is, therefore, not a real process, not an actual succession that I am content to record. It arises from my relation to things. Within things themselves, the future and the past are in a kind of eternal state of pre-existence and survival...Past and future exist only too unmistakably in the world, they exist in the present, and what being itself lacks in order to be of the temporal order, is the not-being of elsewhere, formerly and tomorrow." See Merleau-Ponty 2006: 478.

something other than itself, rendering impossible the idea that things are born of nothingness and that their becoming and returning are subject to yet a higher source, resulting in a repetitive loop of infinite magnitude.

While the *Zhuangzi* does not deny the existence of the human experience of time, any authentic encounter would have to be traced back to that which existed prior to humanity's empirical measurement of time. We can thus argue that the authentic, non-temporal nature of Dao is a kind of *heng*-time, albeit one which elapses at a pace so uniform as to be unfathomable. Additionally, the *Zhuangzi* espoused the belief that time is without an absolute beginning or end and since it takes such endless unfolding to comprise the authentic time of Dao, so Dao-time is a by-product of its own arising. Cosmic time is thus neither transcendental nor idealistic but meontologically existential. It can thus neither flow towards the future nor come to comprise a series of points whose collectivity results in the present-now. Time, simply put, is the becoming of Dao in lieu of the creative potential of nothingness:¹³

Things cannot avoid being born before they are born and cannot resist dying when they are already dead. Death and life are close to one another, yet their principle cannot be seen...I look for its root but it extends back without end. I search for its end but it stretches on without stopping. Without ending or stopping, having no room for words, this is the shared principle of things...Dao cannot be taken to have being, for if it did, it could not be taken as nothingness. To call it Dao, this is but a temporary measure.¹⁴

未生不可忌，已死不可阻。死生非遠也，理不可觀……吾觀之本，其往無窮；吾求之末，其來無止。無窮無止，言之無也，與物同理……道不可有，有不可無，道之為名，所假而行。

The shared principle of things is thus traceable to the boundless possibilities of Dao. Fundamental events such as death and life arise within the ever-present milieu of cosmological time, yet the

¹³ We may contrast this unique way of visualizing time with Bergson's definition of time as the elaboration of intuition such that: "The living being essentially has duration; it has duration precisely because it is continuously elaborating what is new and because there is no elaboration without searching, no searching without groping. Time is this very hesitation, or it is nothing. Time is something...time is what hinders everything from being given at once. It retards, or rather it is retardation. It must therefore, be elaboration." See Bergson 1946: 109-110.

¹⁴ *Zhuangzi* ch. 25 "zeyang 則陽." See Guo Qingfan, 917.

Zhuangzi does not regard it as being *a priori* or purely intuitive, as doing so would imply that time is empty.¹⁵

Wherein the *Zhuangzi* was able to counter the assertion that any conception of time preceding the presence of a cognitive mind must be fallacious stems from the ever-present presence of Dao. Cosmic time is perpetual, not because the very notion of it possesses eternal properties, but that the ever-lasting nature of Dao envelops time in the darkness of its own mysteriousness. The time that marks the presence of Dao thus acts as the backdrop for the ontological time of the Thing and is the root from which the branches of human causal time arise. The latter is, therefore, static insofar as it is but a pinned marker of our existence against the ever-dynamic presence of Dao. If we wish to compare the time of our being to that of Dao, it is better, the *Zhuangzi* argued, to use something of a higher order; we can accomplish this by holding it against the constancy of nothingness. Although Dao is perpetual and dwells beyond the reaches of time, it is nevertheless a spontaneous existence. It would, therefore, be easy to criticize *Zhuangzi*'s argument that one can go further and further back in time *ad infinitum* as an example of empty time, and yet what undercuts the standing of such an argument is the fact that Dao is inseparable from the meontological nature of the universe. The latter can certainly exist without the former but it is the former that gives life to the latter. Thus, the continual movement of springing forth and retreating makes it impossible to claim that Dao exists either within or beyond time. For Dao, there is no time, only the constancy of nothingness.¹⁶

¹⁵ This was the argument made by Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. He reasoned that: "time is not an empirical concept...[and] therefore is given *a priori*. This *a priori* necessity also grounds the possibility of apodictic principles of the relations of time... [such that]...time is not a discursive, or what is called a general concept, but a pure form of sensible intuition." See Kant 2007: 67. Rudolf Hermann Lotze, on the other hand, argued that the standard definition of time as a flowing stream from one point to the next was meaningless because said time was empty and in being empty, anything within it would remain unmodified. He reasoned that: "Time, as a whole, is without doubt merely a creation of our presentative intellect. It neither is permanent nor does it elapse. It is but the fantastic image which we seek, rather than are able to project before the mind's eye, when we think of the lapse of time as extended to all the points of relation which it admits of *ad infinitum*, and at the same time make abstraction of the content of these points of relation. But the lapse of events in time we do not eliminate from reality, and we reckon it a perfectly hopeless undertaking to regard even the idea of this lapse as an *a priori* merely subjective form of apprehension, which develops itself within a timeless reality, in the consciousness of spiritual beings." See Lotze, 350.

¹⁶ We may once again cite Kant as an example of a linear conceptualization time, particularly the idea of empty time. His reasoning went: "For let us assume that it [the world] has a beginning. Then, as beginning is an existence which is preceded by a time in which the thing is not, it would follow that a time must have preceded in which the world was not, that is, an empty time. In an empty time, however, it is impossible that anything should take its beginning, because of

To speak of cosmic time as intuited becoming—as the self-negating of the negative nonbeing of that which is past due to the becoming of its future self—is to think of time as a statically abstract entity whose potential pales in comparison to the ontological becoming of nothingness. There, cosmic time involves a predicated intuiting of a single potential becoming amongst a myriad potential becomings.¹⁷ In order for cosmological time to exist unbounded by human intentionality, it must be left to its own devices so as to engage the things of the world in a non-temporal, meontological manner. Knowing that things emerge from the non-differentiated darkness of Dao, they are at their most primal level when they are temporally indistinct. However, those beings whose existence assumes an air of temporality stemming from their emergence from the One must overcome said temporality so as to reunite with Dao:¹⁸

Nanbo Zikui said, “Can I study Dao?”

Nuyu replied: “...only when one perceives one’s solitude can one abolish the distinctions of past and present; only when one has abolished the distinctions of past and present can one then enter the realm where there is neither death nor life. That which destroys life does not die, and that which gives birth to life does not live. As it is such a thing, there is nothing it does not support, nothing it does not welcome; there is nothing it does not destroy, and nothing it does not complete. Its name is

such a time no part, as compared with any other, possesses any distinguishing condition of existence rather than non-existence. Hence though many a series of things may take its beginning in the world, the world itself can have no beginning, and so is infinite with respect to past time.” See Kant 2007: 391. Hegel, moreover, believed that: “Time, as the negative unity of self-externality, is also purely abstract and of an ideal nature. It is the being which, in that it is, is not, and in that it is not, is. It is intuited becoming; admittedly, its differences are therefore determined as being simply momentary; in that they immediately sublimate themselves in their externality however, they are self-external.” In his comments to this section (§258), Petry wrote: “Time is merely this abstraction of destroying. Things are in time because they are finite; they do not pass away because they are in time, but are themselves that which is temporal. Temporality is their objective determination. It is therefore the process of actual things which constitutes time...” See Hegel, vol. 1, 1970: 231.

¹⁷ The question involving the becoming of time can be rephrased in modern terminology as: “Time as the immanent object of a consciousness is time brought down to one uniform level, in other words it is no longer time at all. There can be time only if it is not completely deployed, only provided that past, present and future do not all three have their being in the same sense. It is of the essence of time to be in process of self-production, and not to be; never, that is, to be completely constituted. Constituted time, the series of possible relations in terms of before and after, is not time itself, but the ultimate recording of time, the result of its passage, which objective thinking always presupposes yet never manages to fasten on to.” See Merleau-Ponty 2006: 481-482.

¹⁸ Interestingly, Merleau-Ponty took a more monistic approach, declaring: “There is, then, not a multiplicity of linked phenomena, but one single phenomenon of running-off. Time is the one single movement appropriate to itself in all its parts.” See Merleau-Ponty 2006: 487. At the other end of the spectrum, Heidegger in *Being and Time* wrote of being-toward-death in terms of an ending that does not signify a being-at-an-end of Dasein but a being toward the end such that it becomes the eminent possibility of Dasein. See Heidegger 1996: 224-233.

known as disturbance within tranquility. In disturbance within tranquility, there must first be disturbance before there can be completion.”¹⁹

南伯子葵曰：道可得學邪？女偶曰：……見獨，而後能無古今；無古今，而後能入於不死不生。殺生者不死，生生者不生。其為物，無不將也，無不迎也；無不毀也，無不成也。其名為撻寧。撻寧也者，撻而後成者也。

In the above passage, Nuyu’s response to Zikui not only expounded the process by which one returns to Dao, she also explicated Zhuangzi’s theory of cosmic temporality. The Western tradition tends to base many of its normative values on the alternation of life and death, regardless of how we classify them ethically. We associate being with life and nonbeing with death, and for obvious reason; however, for one who has attained clarity of mind and dwells in the ultimate reality of Dao, all divisions blend into an unified wholeness while oppositional distinctions merge to become complimentary pairings. The sage sees his place in the world as clearly as he sees the morning sun—his self has morphed into a non-self whose reflection spreads throughout all other selves. As he recognizes the authenticity of a non-authentic presence of being, the sage returns to the manifold of cosmic oneness.

United with Dao and all non-manifest beings, time for the sage is a misnomer—a contrivance of the human mind—as have the categories of nonbeing and being. Thus, forgetting the distinctions of past and present, the sage enters the realm where life and death blur into one. The Heavenly Gate was for Zhuangzi what the wheel hub was for Laozi: a place where all things come together in tranquil harmony. Though things enter and leave the world through it, the gate itself remains unchanged; though the spokes are what give a wheel its motion, the hub is unperturbed. Things are as such due to their inborn nature and this inborn nature bestowed upon them by Dao is timeless. Hence the traditional argument that things move from not-yet-being to coming-to-pass is problematic, if not invalid, for what remains constant (*heng* 恒) is the meontological nature of Dao while that which undergoes change (*hua* 化) in time is the ontic form of things.²⁰

¹⁹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 6 “*dazongshi* 大宗師.” See Guo Qingfan, 252; Chai 2008: 204-205.

²⁰ For someone like Hegel, however, this would be inconceivable as Petry explained: “The present is, only because the past is not: the being of the now has the determination of not-being, and the not-being of its being is the future; the present is this negative unity. The not-being replaced by now, is the past; the being of not-being contained in the present, is the future. If one considers time positively one can therefore say that only the present is, before and after is

Cosmic time is thus a measuring of the plenum of Dao's marvelous possibilities whose principle is ultimately unknowable. The course of transformation experienced by things is not due to the action of time but their inborn nature reflecting the way of Dao. To anthropomorphize time is to imbue it with qualities that are alien to its authentic self. Therefore, as things transmogrify from the darkness of the One to the brightness of their being as the Thing, this transformation should not be taken as evidence of a process of continual self-negation so as to conform to the sequence of past-present-future; on the contrary, it symbolizes the invariable breadth of Dao.

When the *Zhuangzi* speaks of a thing in the past it does not cease to be in the present-now, and when the text speaks of a thing in the future, said thing's former self in the here-and-now likewise does not fall by the wayside.²¹ To speak of time as the principle of motion such that it becomes inseparable from motion, thereby implying that on a higher plane, it is in fact an eternal absolute is to deny it any meontological merit. Zhuangzi's cosmology forbids such a closed reading of time, as does the *Daodejing*: "One can know of the earliest of beginnings, and this is called the thread of Dao."²² The universe did not begin with time but empty stillness, while the nebula which dark nothingness came to constitute was a state of timelessness unbeknownst to any but Dao. Given that Dao was present before the presence of time, if we wish to know the true origin of things we must use Dao to trace their roots to primal nothingness. Tracing a thing's root from its now time to its yet to be time of undifferentiated chaos is, in effect, using the mystery of Dao to harmonize with the oneness of things. Wang Bi explained the thread analogy of the *Daodejing* stated above in this way:

What is without form or name is the ancestor of the myriad things. Although present and past are different, customs change, as do the times. Thus, there can be no one who because of it fails to

not, but the concrete present is the result of the past, and is pregnant with the future. The true present is therefore eternity". See Hegel, vol. 1, 1970: 235.

²¹ Charles Sherover, however, claims exactly the opposite is true, arguing that: "If change and development are crucial, then the principle of the negative assumes prime importance. For as a thing develops, it changes from its initial stage to a subsequent stage and each stage is, in turn, negated, as the thing progressively moves on from what it was into what it was not...change requires time, and time is, then, 'the negative element in the sensuous world' as it is continually negating the present." See Sherover, 159. We thus continue to see how restrictive the Western understanding of time and temporality is when compared to the fluid holism of Daoism. Indeed, we can so far as to say that Western time is inherently nihilistic whereas the Chinese version is exuberantly bountiful in its life-giving capacity.

²² 「能知古始，是謂道紀。」 *Daodejing* chapter 14. See Lou Yulie, 32. Here the meaning of "ancient beginning" (*gushi* 古始) is identical with "great beginning" (*taishi* 太始) seen in the first chapter of the *Liezi*. See note 10 of this chapter.

succeed in bringing order. Thus, one can grasp the Dao of old so as to administer that which exists today. While high antiquity seems remotely distant, its Dao still exists. Therefore, although one is here now, it is possible to know of the earliest of beginnings.²³

無形無名者，萬物之宗也。雖今古不同，時移俗易，故莫不由乎此，以成其治者也。故可執古之道，以御今之有，上古雖遠，其道存焉，故雖在，今可以知古始也。

We can thus surmise that the Dao of old and the Dao of today are engaged in a relationship unlike any other in the universe. It would be quite easy to say they are one and the same, which would make them absolute and eternal, forever unchanging and incapable of uniquely affecting things. The Dao of today is not a replica of that of old in the sense that Western thinkers have in mind when they view time as a series of now-points strung together for the duration of a being's lived experience. Instead, the Dao of old persists for eternity as that original Dao. There can be no before or after in an ontologically temporal sense since before and after have no bearing on the cohesiveness of primal oneness. This is why the *Zhuangzi* declared:

Dao has neither end nor beginning but things have their death and birth, hence they cannot be relied on for completion. Now empty, now full, they do not adhere to one form. Years past cannot be repeated, and time cannot be stopped. Decay and growth, fullness and emptiness, each ends and begins anew. It is from this that we discuss the method of Great Meaning, and debate the principle of the myriad things. As for the life of things, it is similar to a hurriedly galloping horse. With each movement there is change, with each moment of time things alter. What should you do? What should you not do? One should simply allow their self-transformation.²⁴

道無終始，物有死生，不恃其成；一虛一滿，不位乎其形。年不可舉，時不可止；消息盈虛，終則有始。是所以語大義之方，論萬物之理也。物之生也，若驟若馳，無動而不變，無時而不移。何為乎，何不為乎？夫固將自化。

Time, on a cosmological scale, is of such enormity that it makes any other temporal duration seem relative at best. Humanity has its allotment of years but compared to a thousand year old tree, of what significance are a mere hundred? We constantly wish to transcend the chains of time but to what end? Time cannot be transcended because its impermanence lies in a realm that is beyond our

²³ See Lou Yulie, 32.

²⁴ *Zhuangzi* ch. 17 “*qiushui* 秋水.” See Guo Qingfan, 584-585.

capacity to comprehend. Only the sagely person can stand outside of time, but even then, he is still within the temporal bounds of Dao. What this means, then, is that all things emanating from the One have a self-sameness that is pervasive without being exclusionary. The act of becoming, therefore, becomes a node of quiescence through which creation is achieved. In this regard, becoming in the form of creation *qua* rest can avoid being labeled a process insofar as it preserves the spontaneous creative possibilities of Dao on the one hand, while remaining non-temporal on the other. The by-product of becoming is of course temporally tinged; however, until the Thing begets its ontic things, its enveloping darkness keeps its mysteriousness intact. This is what the *Zhuangzi* meant when it said that we ought to discuss the method of Great Meaning and the principle of the myriad things.

All things in the universe come together as multiple threads of the oneness of Dao. The myriad things each find their source in their respective Thing and the Thing dwells in the One. Oneness is thus an undifferentiated chaos, a blending together of collective Things whose things have yet to break through the realm of nothingness and enter their ontic reality of time and form. Being nondescript in appearance and indiscriminate in action, the mixing of the myriad things so as to comprise primal oneness is spontaneously natural in its ordering. Things are derived from the Thing, the Thing traces itself back to the One, the One arises due to the working of Dao, and Dao finds its home in the ontological nothingness of the universe. In this way, the *Zhuangzi*'s cosmology is not temporally grounded but rooted in the quiet stillness of meontological non-time. It is a cosmology whose unfolding is best described as anti-processional and non-linear. In other words, the connectedness of things is not due to their presence in a particular series of now-moments but to the perpetually productive receptivity of Dao.²⁵

To limit any cosmology of time to the corporeally real would be to damage the holistic nature of the universe. Although Dao is perpetual, time is not. The possibility to arrest moments of time and designate them as we temporally see fit comes about thanks to the spontaneity of Dao. Past,

²⁵ Alfred North Whitehead described the oneness of things in terms of biological concrescence (a growing together of disparate parts) such that the becoming of each present-now moment is knitted together into an organic whole: "The production of novel togetherness is the ultimate notion embodied in the term concrescence...That the potentiality for being an element in a real concrescence of many entities into one actuality is the one general metaphysical character attaching to all entities, actual and non-actual; and that every item in its universe is involved in each concrescence. In other words, it belongs to the nature of a 'being' that it is a potential for every 'becoming.'" See Whitehead, 22.

present, and future are merely relative placeholders for the human ordering of the natural realm. Within the realm of Dao as ultimate reality, such designations become absurd. The causal time that is the lived-time of humanity is in fact but the spontaneous fulfillment of a particular possibility of human time come to light. Nonbeing and being, not yet beginning and beginning, are but two variations of the same happenstance. Knowing that Dao's perpetuity roots itself in the empty quietude that is ontological nothingness, whether or not one proceeds backwards or forwards in time, the outcome remains unaffected. The infinite regresses that we often encounter throughout the *Zhuangzi* are but metaphorical fishhooks intended to grab our attention and show us the error of holding onto time as a linear, being-centric movement.

If we wish to attain the kind of holistic freedom Zhuangzi postulates through successfully harmonizing with Dao, we must accept the idea that the time of our lived-presence is beyond our control; we can no more relive the past than we can advance to the future. The time bestowed upon us, indeed, that given to all things, owes itself to its self-so nature (*ziran* 自然). This self-so nature of things is but a sprout from Dao's root—it bursts forth and dies off without knowing why it is so. The alternation of the seasons occurs not because they will it upon themselves but because Dao instills in them the temporal acuity to do so. The myriad things of the world are the spokes that tie into the unmoving hub of the One, and the oneness of the hub is constituted of the dark stillness of nothingness. Motion reverts to non-motion and the propagation of becoming is countered by a returning to the naught. Through its non-deliberateness (*wuwei* 無為), Dao allows things to be created of their own doing—a feat only possible because of the centrality bestowed upon rest.

Dao's becoming can be regarded as creation *qua* rest because only when things are at ease do they forget their relational self (i.e., their ego) and revert to a condition of authenticity. Having coalesced around their authentic selves, things complete their natural years unburdened by the artificial passing of time. Their coming and going and endless cycles of transformation cannot hide the fact that beneath it all, there is the meontological realm of Dao. To this end, we can conclude that the *Zhuangzi*'s notion of cosmic time is a theory that, when set against the unknowable nature of Dao, dispels the illusion of an *a priori* temporality in order to reveal its dependence on the non-temporal, non-spatial character of nothingness. If we are to accept the idea that cosmic time is a reflection of the still, empty constancy of ontological nothingness, then we can also accept the definition of time as the symbolic representation of the creational moment of our coming-to-be.

Such becoming is a durational moment whose temporality is not bound to the presentness of our being but to the thread of oneness that ties all things together. In this regard, time is a timeless duration;²⁶ its meontological structure can only follow that of Dao. We can no more personalize time than we can attach to it a label of intention. In the section that follows, we will see how this can pose difficulties for anyone hoping to identify with a particular moment of time; and yet our definition of time is a means by which to overcome the inherent dilemma facing human causal time by abandoning designations of past, present, and future altogether so as to uncover the phenomenology of time contained in the physical being of things.

3.2 The Static Nature of Human Measured Time

Now that we have come to terms with time in a cosmological sense, we can shift our focus to the everydayness of its presence, what is also known as human measured time. As any discussion of this measurable causal time indubitably centers on the role of consciousness and how use of the mind guides our conception of world, our examination of temporal *ekstasis* commences from the Daoist assumption that the three successive states of temporal *ekstases* (past, present, and future) are but imaginary happenstances of one whose unity with the non-worldly no-mindedness of Dao has been disrupted. This stands in opposition to the common belief that the past is a retreating of the present while the present progresses to fill the future. To demonstrate the *Zhuangzi*'s unique construction of human time, I offer the following anecdote of his:

²⁶ The concept of perpetual time failed to convince Merleau-Ponty, however, who wrote: "The feeling for eternity is a hypocritical one, for eternity feeds on time... eternity is the time that belongs to dreaming, and the dream refers back to waking life, from which it borrows all its structures. Of what nature, then, is that waking time in which eternity takes root? It is the field of presence in the wide sense, with its double horizon or primary past and future, and the infinite openness of those fields of presence that have slid by, or are still possible. Time exists for me only because I am situated in it, that is, because I become aware of myself as already committed to it, because the whole of being is not given to me incarnate, and finally because one sector of being is so close to me that it does not even make up a picture before me—I cannot see it, just as I cannot see my face. Time exists for me because I have a present. It is by coming into the present that a moment of time acquires that indestructible individuality, that 'once and for all' quality, which subsequently enables it to make its way through time and produce in us the illusion of eternity. No one of time's dimensions can be deduced from the rest. But the present (in the wide sense, along with its horizons of primary past and future), nevertheless enjoys a privilege because it is the zone in which being and consciousness coincide." Merleau-Ponty 2006: 492.

Mr. Ran Xiang grasped the principle on which all things revolved and followed them to their completion. His joining with them was without ending or beginning, attainment or time. Changing with them on a daily basis, he himself remained unchanged...The sage has yet to begin thinking of heaven, has yet to begin thinking of man, has yet to begin thinking of a beginning, and has yet to begin thinking of things.²⁷

冉相氏得其環中以隨成，與物無終無始，無幾無時。日與物化者，一不化者也，闔嘗舍之……夫聖人未始有天，未始有人，未始有始，未始有物。

That which has not yet begun (i.e., the past) has yet to surpass that which has already begun (i.e., the present). Given that it has not yet come into being, it has yet to enter the realm of human time. To be within causal time—time measured by variables deduced by humanity—however, is to possess both a start and an end. The variables that pronounce when these two moments take place are also what determine the staticity of our lifetime. To be static is thus to be caught in the durational moment of our existence such that we are said *to be*. The being that is our condition, therefore, renders us visible to the world and such visibility is what constitutes our temporality.

Given that Dao has neither a measurable beginning nor end and lacks attainment of being or time, it can only be characterized as a thing whose spontaneity lies in the realm of unknowability. The same cannot be said of the myriad things of the world however. Thus, we can only refer to the source of all things as that whose root infiltrates temporal *ekstases* without being entrapped by it. This is why the *Zhuangzi* declared the sage joins with things in Dao and that such joining occurs beyond the reach of time. Since the sage changes along with things without being changed by them, he darkens himself with Dao's mystery. His form is thus a forgotten non-form whose nature is infused with nothingness. He is mysterious in that he does not make distinctions between substance and non-substance, choosing instead to live according to the natural way of the world. Being purely empty and dark, his harmony with the oneness of things is unspoiled. By preserving his place in the hub of still quietude, the sage dwells where there is no temporality whatsoever; all is existent and non-existent, finite and infinite. It is here, the dwelling place of the sage, where

²⁷ *Zhuangzi* ch. 25 “*zeyang* 則陽.” See Guo Qingfan, 885.

creation abounds and the true nature of things is freed of the seductive language of time whose artificial durations are but the rationalizations of the human ego.²⁸

The sage, therefore, does not follow the linearity of *ekstasis* but the circularity of heaven and earth.²⁹ Heaven, being another name for Dao, is an embodiment of the circular motion ascribed to it and symbolizes the cyclical rotation of natural patterns such as growth and decay, spring and winter, and so forth. By choosing not to resist the natural outcome of such patterning, the sage is able to see things through to their completion. In seeing the true nature of things as stemming from the undifferentiated wholeness of Dao, the sage encounters no futility in his endeavors and so rests in the negative creativity of nothingness. Since he changes with things as they themselves change, the sage thus shares in their experiences at the time of their experiencing.

Herein is yet another key finding to unlocking the *Zhuangzi's* cosmology: one must forget the distinctions between things so as to grasp their true beginning; having grasped the concept of a true beginning, the sage discards it so as to comprehend humanity; in knowing humanity the sage then moves to the heavenly. Only when he sees things as heaven sees them can the sage be said to move together with things yet remain unaffected by them. For the common man who only sees a thing at the level of ontic existence, measured time is both real and inescapable. The world moves in a tandem of before's and after's immune to the changes of the present-now. That the common man puts his faith in the veracity of temporal *ekstasis* is proof of his refusal to learn from heaven, blindly following the heart of man instead.³⁰ Each day for the common man is the arrival of the

²⁸ Merleau-Ponty helps us clarify the role given consciousness when he declared that time is no longer a 'datum of consciousness' but that it is consciousness that deploys or constitutes time and that in light of the ideal nature of time, consciousness therefore ceases being restricted to the time of the present. See Merleau-Ponty 2006: 481.

²⁹ Bergson is a good example of a proponent for the linear nature of cosmic time when he wrote: "The future is bound to succeed the present instead of being given alongside of it, it is because the future is not altogether determined at the present moment, and that if the time taken up by this succession is something other than a number, if it has for the consciousness that is installed in it absolute value and reality, it is because there is unceasingly being created in it, not indeed in any such artificially isolated system as a glass of sugared water, but in the concrete whole of which every such system forms part, something unforeseeable and new." See Bergson 1998: 339-340.

³⁰ Merleau-Ponty's view is of an action of life which unfolds before it: "time's 'synthesis' is a transition-synthesis, the action of a life which unfolds, and there is no way of bringing it about other than by living that life, there is no seat of time; time bears itself on and launches itself afresh. Time as an indivisible thrust and transition can alone make possible time as successive multiplicity, and what we place at the origin of intra-temporality is a constituting time." See Merleau-Ponty 2006: 491.

future in the present and of the present getting pushed backwards into the past. All of his hopes are put into this yet-to-be future such that the present becomes little more than the awaiting of the possibility of egoistic hope. It is hope because we are constantly looking to transcend the present in the hope of a better and brighter future. This, however, is not the way Zhuangzi wished us to live.

The toil of things weaving its way through the presence of lived experience owes its authority not to the fate bestowed on man by heaven but to the critical bearing of his empirical self:

Standing beside the sun and moon, embracing the whole universe, he takes everything, blends them into one, ignoring the confusion of distinction, treating those of different rank equally. The common man labors and toils; the sage appears ignorant and unknowing. He blends ten thousand years into one. The myriad things are what they are, pursuing their course in the same manner as the sage.³¹

奚旁日月，挾宇宙？為其脗合，置其滑濶，以隸相尊。衆人役役，聖人愚菴，參萬歲而一成純。萬物盡然，而以是相蘊。

The sage succeeds where others fail because he adheres to the principle of successively modeling oneself after the way of Dao, which the *Daodejing* phrased in these terms: “man models himself after earth, earth models itself after heaven, heaven models itself after Dao, and Dao models itself after that which is natural.”³² Bearing this principle in mind, we can return once more to the tale of Ran Xiang so as to examine the commentary of Lin Yidu 林疑獨:

Mr. Ran Xiang, a sage prior to the three sage emperors, grasped the principle of true emptiness as the limitless evolving proceeding of Dao and followed the myriad things to completion. In joining with the transformation of things the One knew not of ending or beginning, attainment or time. In joining with the transformation of things the One remained unchanged and being unchanged it could thereby spontaneously transform. As his age had such a means, he used it to return to what is natural thereby attaining his true character. Furthermore, using one’s mind to seek out heaven as a teacher will not succeed. What can be done to reverse such blind following? The sage has yet to think of heaven and man but heaven and man exist of themselves. The sage has yet to think of a

³¹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 2 “*qi wulun* 齊物論.” See Guo Qingfan, 100; Chai 2008: 99. For similar tales on the toil of human life, see *Zhuangzi* ch. 6 “*dazongshi* 大宗師.” See Guo Qingfan, 242, 262.

³² 「人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然。」 *Daodejing* chapter 25. See Lou Yulie, 65.

beginning or things but the beginning of things lies in selfhood. The movement of the ages bends and stretches but does not stop. Complete in motion it remains vigilant without being excessive, joining with the dark principle of things. How can it be any other way but this!³³

冉相氏，三皇已上聖君，得真空之理，運轉無窮，隨順萬物以成其道。無終始、幾時，與物化也。與物化者一不化，一不化者能化也。世之有為者何不合其所為而復於自然，真性可得矣。然有心於師天，則不得，況與物殉而不反者乎？未始有天有人，而天人自存；未始有始有物，而始物自我。行世則屈伸而不替，備行則守謙而不溢，與理冥合，若之何而如此也！

Saying much of what was said before him, Lin appeared to support Laozi's hierarchical model while reinforcing Zhuangzi's own understanding of time. What distinguishes his reading of the *Zhuangzi* from both Guo Xiang and Cheng Xuanying was his use of the term 'selfhood' (*ziwo* 自我). Heaven and man appear simultaneously but there is no distinguishing the two ontologically. That which belongs to man also belongs to heaven and the heavenly exists in all things. Thus, while the common man may see himself as being apart from heaven, the sage says nothing of the sort. Time and being become inextricably and existentially woven together such that the idea of a beginning to things becomes a misnomer. Things begin of themselves insofar as their self-so-ness fails to be linked to any beginning other than their own spontaneous arising from the One. From this we may conclude that the *Zhuangzi*'s take on human measured time has a more onto-phenomenological slant than one might at first presume.

What is more, if we take Hegelian or Sartrean terminology as a means of comparison, then the time of the for-itself can no longer be sustained as a duration contained in or moving from one temporal *ekstases* to another. This is because ontic time is brought about by the ontological nature of things, a nature that is itself meontologically grounded. The stretching and bending of time can thereby be regarded as a stretching and bending of man's empirical self in order to establish cohesion to that which, in its original nature, is complete and self-fulfilling. Our argument is thus a challenge to the phenomenological understanding of temporality in place since Husserl and to which Merleau-Ponty built upon when he argued:

³³ See *Zhonghua Daozang*, volume 14: 429. Lin Zi 林自, whose pen name was Yidu 疑獨 (Song dynasty, dates unknown) authored the *Zhuangzi Zhu* 《莊子注》 which survives in Chu Boxiu's *Nanhua Zhenjing Yihai Zuanwei* 《南華真經義海纂微》 and in Jiao Hong's 焦竑 (1540-1620 CE) *Zhuangzi Yi* 《莊子翼》. References to Lin's commentary are to Chu Boxiu's text. For more on the life and writings of Lin Yidu, see Fang Yong, vol. 2, 49-57.

I do not pass through a series of instances of now, the images of which I preserve and which, placed end to end, make a line. With the arrival of every moment, its predecessor undergoes a change: I still have it in hand and it is still there, but already it is sinking away below the level of presents; in order to retain it, I need to reach through a thin layer of time. It is still the preceding moment, and I have the power to rejoin it as it was just now; I am not cut off from it, but still it would not belong to the past unless something had altered, unless it were beginning to outline itself against, or project itself upon, my present, whereas a moment ago it was my present. When a third moment arrives, the second undergoes a new modification; from being a retention it becomes the retention of a retention, and the layer of time between it and me thickens...Time is not a line, but a network of intentionalities.³⁴

Zhuangzi would declare the above account unsatisfactory for two reasons: first, although Merleau-Ponty tried to avoid describing time as a linearity, his continued use of the markers past, present, and future still resulted in a circular linearism in that although one can reach through time—its layer as Merleau-Ponty called it—one is still reaching towards an inescapable past or future; second, Zhuangzi would find fault with the idea *that time is not a line, but a network of intentionalities* because any measureable intentionality traces itself to human consciousness instead of the immeasurable darkness of Dao. If we presume that the above is applicable to human time the world over, what are we to make of the sage whose relational self is supposedly beyond the clutches of measurable division? To fully answer this question we will have to wait until our penultimate chapter when we discuss the relationship between memory and forgetting. We can, however, make the preliminary claim that while time on the level of humanity is but a measuring of our existence as a singular momentary span, the sage as a transcendent being knows only of the perpetual constancy of the non-time of Dao. For him, cosmological time cannot be measured by units of human experience or the events of life and death; rather, the sage sees time as an indicator of the presence of Dao. During the time before things existed there was only primal chaos; during the time before primal chaos existed there was only Dao and during the time before Dao existed there was only the still quietude of nothingness. This is the temporal home of the transcendent sage.

³⁴ Merleau-Ponty 2006: 484.

For ordinary persons, however, the age in which we find ourselves living is but a temporal bending of that which is anterior while stretching in the direction of that which is posterior. This lived time, which is a continual measuring forth of the allotted period bestowed on us by Dao, ceaselessly sways back and forth between what we perceive as past and future. The point of equilibrium is thus the constant present, and yet the constant present that forever accompanies us to the end of our days is not a moving constancy but one at rest. All that precedes and proceeds from the constancy of the now-moment is in motion; it is only by letting-go of such notions as before and after that we can stand at the pivot of Dao, resting in the eye of nothingness that lies at the center of the storm of chaos around us. In rest things remain quiet and dark, and in their quiescent darkness they revolve and transform in accordance with heavenly change—the mirror of Dao. This, however, does not account for how we, as conscious beings, experience and engage the temporality of our lived time.

On the question of the measurability of human time, Heidegger posited the idea that time does not belong to consciousness but serves as the ground for the possibility that self-becoming can be actualized.³⁵ If we contrast this with what Sartre argued—that time is the medium through which the for-itself supplants or annihilates the in-itself—then we discover that the past is related to the future in a manner no different from how the in-itself is related to the for-itself. In other words, the facticity of so-called past time translates into the possibility of a so-called future time, with the present-now acting as an admixture of them both.³⁶ Because being-in-itself is unconscious being and hence lacks the capacity for change, it exists unaware of its own selfhood. Being-for-itself, on the other hand, is not only conscious of its own consciousness, it has the ability to actualize its own being. Being-for-itself can thus only complete itself by foraying into the future. Given the for-itself

³⁵ Heidegger stated: “As the ground for the possibility of selfhood, time already lies within pure apperception, and so it first makes the mind into a mind...Time and the ‘I think’ no longer stand incompatibly and incomparably at odds; they are the same.” See Heidegger 1997{b}: 134.

³⁶ Sartre defined the temporal modes of past, present, and future as the following: “The past...is that which is without possibility of any sort; it is that which has consumed its possibilities; the present is a perpetual flight in the face of being...the fundamental meaning of the present: the present is not; the future is the ideal point where the sudden infinite compression of facticity (past), of the for-itself (present), and of its possible (a particular future) will at last cause the self to arise as the existence in-itself of the for-itself.” See Sartre 1992: 170, 179, and 184 respectively. Heidegger, conversely, argued: “The movement of nature which we define spatio-temporally, these movements do not flow off ‘in time’ as ‘in’ a channel. They are as such completely *time-free*. They are encountered ‘in’ time inly insofar as their being is discovered as pure nature. They are encountered ‘in’ the time which we ourselves are.” See Heidegger 1985: 320.

lacks a predetermined essence, Sartre declared its arrival in the world comes from nothingness. This nothingness, however, is but a simple naught and for all intents and purposes serves no other function than allowing the for-itself to displace the in-itself.

We have thus far examined the relationship between nothingness and cosmic time but how does it operate in the everydayness of causal time? When one normally considers the past, we tend to use expressions such as ‘my past,’ ‘in the past,’ ‘what’s done is done,’ and so forth. There is a sense of finality brought to bear when discussing what took place before the moment of the present. But herein is the catch: everything may be thought of as having occurred at one time or another before the present moment in which it is discussed. If this were the case then the present would do little but continually slide from moment to moment, never ceasing or resting. Indeed, the idea of time as the continual flow of now-moments lends credence to such an analogy. Add to this the layer of human consciousness and we can see why someone like Sartre would claim the past has been consumed of any further possibility.³⁷ But why should this be the case when we can argue that the memory of past events imprints itself onto our consciousness ensuring its survival long after the actual event has turned into an in-itself. Sartre cleverly responded by taking both the image and our perceiving of said image as indistinguishable such that when the for-itself recalls this memory, it is in fact transcending the presence of the present-now so as to relive what has already past.

What is interesting to note is that Daoist thinkers take exactly the opposite approach: instead of transcending the present in order to relive the past, Zhuangzi and Laozi stated that we should forget them both. This purposeful forgetting is quite different from that of which Sartre spoke insofar as Daoist forgetting is a letting-go of the designation ‘past’ while for Sartre, forgetting is a symbolic obliteration of the contents of that period rather than its designation.³⁸ The past is what our life has already played out; it is a recollection of memories to be savored or forgotten. Try as we might, we can never forget that which has come to be, not because it has fallen into nothingness but because the past marks the beginning of our selfhood. Phenomenologically, the presence of the past marks

³⁷ Sartre’s claim was that: “Since the past is no more, since it has melted away into nothingness, if the memory continues to exist, it must be by virtue of a present modification of our being.” See Sartre 1992: 160.

³⁸ For example, Sartre said of the past that: “It exists as the function of a certain being which I am. The past is not *nothing*, neither is it the present, but at its very source is bound to a certain present and to a certain future, the both of which it belongs.” See Sartre 1992: 163.

the presence of our physicality in the universe and the start of our existence. The past thus marks the beginning of our future while symbolizing our gradual return to the One and is why the *Zhuangzi* observed:

Moreover, my life is because it is the time for me to come; my death is because it is the time for me to leave. When one quietly obeys his time for birth and quietly obeys his time to die, neither sorrow nor joy can enter his mind. This is what the people of ancient times called ‘freeing oneself.’ Those that cannot free themselves are held fast by their bonds. That the myriad things cannot overcome heaven has been known for a very long time; why should I detest my condition!³⁹

且夫得者，時也，失者，順也；安時而處順，哀樂不能入也。此古之所謂縣解也，而不能自解者，物有結之。且夫物不勝天久矣，吾又何惡焉！

Whenever we encounter the past we do so in the capacity of being present in the time of the present-now. Regardless of the terminology we choose in pursuance of what has already been or will come to be, as members of a holistic cosmology, the duration of our presence of being is not quantifiable using the measurements of past, present, or future but are held against the standards of change embodied by Dao. Thus, the past does not exist in isolation from the present any more than it functions as the semantic foundation that makes any concept of the present possible.⁴⁰ Neither is the past a form of indebtedness to which a current present imposes on a former present.⁴¹ Indeed, there can be no distinction between past and present for *Zhuangzi*'s sage because the idea of past and present are annulled when he takes Dao as his authentic self. In following the heavenly or natural, past and present become but fleeting moments to which no second thought is afforded, the outcome of which is the complete abolishment of any divide between the temporal and the

³⁹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 6 “*dazongshi* 大宗師.” See Guo Qingfan, 260; Chai 2008: 210.

⁴⁰ Indeed, Heidegger attributed the confusion surrounding the relationship of past and present to the now missing its datability and significance: “In the vulgar interpretation of time as a succession of nows, both datability and significance are lacking. The characterization of time as pure sequence does not let these two structures ‘appear.’ The vulgar interpretation covers them over. The ecstatic and horizontal constitution of temporality, in which the datability and significance of the nows are grounded, is leveled down by this covering over. The nows are cut off from these relations, so to speak, and, as thus cutoff, they simply range themselves along after one another so as to constitute the succession.” See Heidegger 1996: 387.

⁴¹ Sartre explained such indebtedness in this way: “There is a past only for a present which cannot exist without being its past-back there, behind itself; that is, only those beings have a past which are such that in their being, their past being is in question, those beings who have to be their past.” See Sartre 1992: 167.

ontological for all is one: “Nothing lives longer than a dead child and Pengzu died young. Heaven, the Earth, and I came into being together and the myriad things and I are one.”⁴²

The past, Zhuangzi argued, is a past shared with no other insofar as it is a trace of the One. Upon the actuation of my corporeal being from the One, I have become one amongst a myriad of branches emanating from Dao’s root. As a singular manifestation amongst an infinite number of possible manifestations of Dao, the fact that it has managed to fulfill itself in the form of my being is nothing if not marvelous. This marvelous possibility, which has resulted in my existence, cannot, therefore, seek another root in the form of the in-itself. The sage, therefore, is a for-itself whose self is a non-self; he is an ungrounded, uprooted spirit whose fluid freedom traces itself to the oneness of Dao’s wonderment. He does not bequeath resentment towards his coming-to-be nor does he display any angst at the certainty of its demise. However, he who clings to his past, begrudges the present, and lies in terror at the prospect of the future, is one to be condemned to the bonds of epistemic norms and petty virtues. The oneness of things thus serves to protect things from any threat of alienation from either the past or the future.

Rather than be dogmatic by declaring the past is inalienably cut-off from the present such that the for-itself must find a means by which to identify with the in-itself that is its past, we ought to relish our past, not as something lost only to be rediscovered, but as the gateway through which we may peer into the dark nothingness of our ontological root.⁴³ Doing so will release us from our conception of the past as a solitary event and enlighten us to the truth that there can never be ‘the past’ but only an infinitely repetitive loop of pasts and not-yet-pasts. Thus, the notion of a past is as much a fallacy as is the future. It is not a question of whether we are or are not; rather, the issue lies

⁴² [莫壽於殤子，而彭祖為夭。天地與我並生，而萬物與我為一。] *Zhuangzi* ch. 2 “*qiwulun* 齊物論.” See Guo Qingfan, 79; Chai 2008: 85.

⁴³ Sartre phrased it thusly: “From the content of the past as such I can remove nothing, and I can add nothing to it. In other words, the past which I was, is what it is; it is an in-itself like the things in the world.” See Sartre 1992: 170. In a similar view, albeit one geared towards the temporality of the everydayness of being, Heidegger put forth the idea of tarrying: “The ‘already there’ in the past, and indeed this ‘already there’ in its vivid multiplicity of forms, is being encountered by the tarrying which sees it in a definite manner and looks toward its contexts of reference in such a way that a pull arises from itself, from the content of the subject matter which has been defined in advance in it—a pull which constantly draws the tarrying which compares anew into the looking-into which becomes involved in and pursues, and it does this in such a manner that the looking-into must of itself hold itself in this pursuing and linger in it.” See Heidegger 2008: 42.

in our willingness to accept the cosmological reality that our ontological becoming and return is but one and the same thing. This is why the *Zhuangzi* advised us to “ride along with things and allow your heart-mind to wander. Entrust yourself to the inevitable and nourish that which lies central within—this is perfection.”⁴⁴

As for the future, although it is infinite, it may still be said to belong to me in that it is a future whose uncertainty is shared by all, even itself. We are thus forced to view the present *qua* future as a time of becoming and potentiality. It is an unknown whose ominous presence forces humanity to reconcile our ever-present consciousness of it with platitudes and hope. Ultimately, the future is the carrier of our own undoing, hence Heidegger opined that time is the *ekstasis* of being.⁴⁵ When we look at Sartre in comparison, the future is brought to the world via human reality, and yet it does not exist as a phenomenon of the original temporality of the in-itself for this would imply that the future of the in-itself exists in-itself, cut off from being.⁴⁶ In this regard, Sartre argued that it is the present, not the future, which undergoes becoming leaving the future to see to it that the for-itself completes its transference to an in-itself.

To say the future is not included in the reality of the present is to deny it the freedom of returning to whence it came, as is the case in the thought of Zhuangzi. What is possible about the future is not the possibility of the possible but rather the becoming of the future’s mystery. The future in lieu of the mysteriousness of its own nothingness is none other than the marvelous potential of returning to the undifferentiated wholeness of the One. By describing the future as a future *qua* mystery, our goal becomes to point out the deficiency of contemporary temporal understanding which takes durational progress as a series of nihilistic steps—the present nihilates the past and the future nihilates the present. This is indeed a static way of looking at things; we can instead propose something new. Time cannot be nihilated by itself any more than each individual moment of time may be said to succeed the one prior to it. Our account of present time must be taken in its entirety as it applies to the duration of my separation from Dao. The concepts of before and after can,

⁴⁴ 「且夫乘物以遊心，託不得已以養中，至矣。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 4 “*renjianshi* 人間世.” See Guo Qingfan, 160; Chai 2008: 143 [translation revised].

⁴⁵ Heidegger wrote that: “The being of having-been is the past, such that in such a being I am nothing but the future of Dasein and with it its past. The being, in which Dasein can be its wholeness authentically as being-ahead-of-itself, is time.” See Heidegger 1985: 319.

⁴⁶ Sartre 1992: 180.

therefore, be used to refer to the phases of emergence and return to the One.⁴⁷ As our appearance and disappearance from the One are in fact one and the same, we may moreover clarify our temporal presence of being as but one amongst a myriad of such presences, the ordering of which can only be described as the filling and emptying of the marvelous potentiality of Dao. To engage in semantic quibbles over the authenticity and priority of temporal *ekstases* is to fail to see beyond the phenomenon of the world and wander carefree in the wonderment of nothingness. Wang Bi in his “Introductory Remarks to the *Daodejing*” illustrated this point superbly:

Given that the past and present are interchangeable, ending and beginning become identical. By grasping the Dao of old one can manage what occurs in the present. By investigating the present one can know of things at the very beginning of time. This is what we refer to as constancy.⁴⁸

故古今通，終始同；執古可以御今，證今可以知古始；此所謂常者也。

Heidegger’s description of the present as the *enpresenting* of being, as the intrinsic spannedness of now-time,⁴⁹ comes close to what Wang Bi was implying yet it lacks the meontological import of Wang’s words. By ascribing a label of irreversibility to time in our insistence that it be a series of successive transitions, we only cause it to become further entrenched in tautological dualisms. The goal of our philosophical reflection here is thus to move beyond viewing temporality as bound to being, or to insist that the three modes of temporal *ekstasis* are intra-dependent.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Heidegger’s definition of Dasein also includes an emerging and returning to an existential source. The source he speaks of, however, is not nothingness, which he takes to be an absolute naught, but is Dasein’s own present-time: “[Dasein] can be as having been only as long as it exists. And it is precisely when the Dasein no longer is, that it also no longer has been. It has been only so long as it is. This entails that (pastness in the sense of) having-been-ness belongs to the Dasein’s existence...this means that since the Dasein always comports itself more or less explicitly toward a specific capacity-to-be of its own self, since the Dasein always comes-toward-itself from out of a possibility of itself, it therewith also always comes-back-to what it has been.” See Heidegger 1988: 266.

⁴⁸ See Lou Yulie, 195.

⁴⁹ See Heidegger 1988: 269-270.

⁵⁰ Herein we yet again agree to disagree with Sartre when he said: “The present is not ontologically ‘prior’ to the past and to the future; it is conditioned by them as much as it conditions them, but it is the mold of indispensable non-being for the total synthetic form of temporality. Thus temporality is not a universal time containing all beings and in particular human realities. Neither is it a law of development which is imposed on being from without. Nor is it being. But it is the intra-structure of the being which is its own nihilation—that is the mode of *being* peculiar to being-for-itself. The for-itself is the being which has to be its being in the diasporatic form of temporality.” See Sartre 1992: 202.

The *Zhuangzi* viewed time as neither a nihilistic force to be reckoned with nor one that is subject to nihilism. The temporality of human measured time has no inherent bearing on the onto-phenomenological nature of reality or the world. Besides being self-serving, time is but the fetishizing of human ego over the apprehension of its own mortality. Should we accept the idea that human causal time is a fantasy of our own creation and can in no uncertain terms equal the cosmological temporality of Dao, not only will we be able to transcend our own static experiences of time, we can discard them altogether. Zhuangzi justified such discarding during a tale in which he revealed his state of mind whilst mourning the death of his wife:

At the time of her death, how could I not grieve like everyone else! However, at the time of her beginning there was also a time before she was born. As there was a time before she was born, there was also a time before she had a body. As there was a time before she had a body, there was a time before she had qi. In the midst of this vast indistinctness, there occurred a change and there was qi. This qi changed and there was a body. Then the body changed into life. Now there has been another change and she is dead. This is no different from the movement of the four seasons—spring, fall, winter, and summer.⁵¹

是其始死也，我獨何能無概然！察其始而本無生，非徒無生也而本無形，非徒無形也而本無氣。雜乎芒芴之間，變而有氣，氣變而有形，形變而有生，今又變而之死，是相與為春秋冬夏四時行也。

Zhuangzi's analogy served as a warning against blindly accepting any of the various modes of temporal existence for their presumed self-evidence is never conclusive. Although the sage knows of the self-evident inauthenticity of time, it remains elusive to the common man in that he constantly distances himself from his own temporal activity. The desire for distance between one's own actions and the measured duration it takes to complete them leads to the illogical conclusion that the past of human causal time is in fact a time that has come to pass—the past is in the past, having vanished from the realm of the present, the result being its significance is overlooked. Heidegger spoke of how the significance of the present is overlooked but he said nothing of the sort for the past. The being-toward-death that is the future thus becomes continuously reinforced by the amassing of past time whose ever-growing significance only increases our anxiety over the impending end of our ontic lives.

⁵¹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 16 “zhile 至樂.” See Guo Qingfan, 614-615.

What we see in the *Zhuangzi* is an explication of time and temporality expunged of references to consciousness, no matter if they are made obliquely or otherwise. To describe temporality as “the evolution of a consciousness, in which the past presses against the present and causes the upspringing of a new form of consciousness, incommensurable with its antecedents,”⁵² would seem utterly incomprehensible. As the sage and Dao are not disparate entities, the sage conceals his darkness to the world, moving in conformity to the changes of things and reflecting the universe in his mind, thereby merging past and future into a state of timelessness. What is old becomes new and what is new becomes old; so too, beginning and end are identical. In this way temporal dualism is avoided. Through Dao’s unbroken extension and interpenetration, the phenomenon of the world unfold according to their innate nature and as this nature stems from Dao, the sage responds to them without interacting with them, moving along with them whilst remaining at rest.

3.3 Conclusion

Humanity’s deep-seated fear of being overrun by future time is an ontological misnomer and existentially incoherent. If we have learned anything it is that Daoism attenuates rather than destroys the dynamic nature and continuity of things, especially when it comes to time. The heavenly movement the *Zhuangzi* spoke of is none other than the movement of Dao in the universe—a motion that penetrates the myriad things by simultaneously unifying past, present, and future. In this way, Zhuangzi avoided being labeled a nihilist or monist for his emphasis on the existential meaning of time showed it was also ontologically inseparable from the presence of Dao as ultimate reality.

Wherein the cosmological time of Dao ostensibly differs from traditional Western theories lies in the latter’s tendency to deconstruct present-time via the temporal and even socio-historical condition of being in the context of past- and future-time. The *Zhuangzi*, on the other hand, chose to emphasize the meontological and existential import of time by forgoing the distinct categories of past, present, and future so as not to deny the spontaneous emerging and returning of the myriad

⁵² Bergson 1998: 27.

things from the One. In other words, the text took each moment of our existence as a realized state of Dao whose presence could be felt in the conjoining of temporal *ekstases*. The past, present, and future thenceforth are regarded as but a shift of perspective from within the selfless hub of non-temporal emptiness in which the sage dwells.

Thus, the existential and ontological reality of time lies not in a theory of recalling or projecting, of past repetition appearing as future possibilities; rather, it lies in the naked realization that time is a totality whose non-temporality enfolds and dissolves any conception of there being distinct and unique temporal moments. Abolishing our association of time—of our epistemologically driven phenomenology—with the everydayness of being serves to free us from the bonds of the present-now and the quest to understand and master the finitude of man's of temporality. If we wish to partake in the marvelous possibilities of Dao, we must engage the phenomenon of the world as belonging to a non-transcendent whole whose unity grounds itself in the principle of quiet non-doing, pervasive self-sameness, empty impartiality, and returning to the One. Only in these can we nurture ourselves, living out our years to their fullest. This is the inherent value of being useless and forms the topic of our next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Utility of the Useless: Life Praxis in Accordance with Dao

A man must first know of the useless before he can be told of the useful.

—*Zhuangzi*

One aspect of the *Zhuangzi*'s thought that distinguished it from other early Chinese thinkers was the attention it gave to illuminating the benefits of that which we perceive to be useless. Indeed, we may go so far as to say that *Zhuangzi* is unique amongst philosophers, East and West, for his didactics of the useless, morphing it into a kind of life praxis. As we approach the penultimate chapter of our investigation into *Zhuangzi*'s cosmology, our attention turns from the nothingness of the universe at large to how its ontic variant serves as a precursor for the attainment of existential freedom. For *Zhuangzi*, therefore, the use value of that thing which is perceived to be useless extends beyond any attached worth to the thing itself such that its uselessness becomes strangified,¹ affecting all who encounter it.

Of all the examples used by the *Zhuangzi*, its favorite for illuminating wherein the useless obtains its usefulness is unquestionably the old, withered tree. In contrast, Heidegger chose the void of the jug to illustrate his understanding of the dichotomy of a useful uselessness.² Although Heidegger's encounter with the notion of the usefulness of the useless came late in his career and shows obvious signs of influence from his reading of the *Daodejing*,³ what he said about the jug's void is nevertheless intriguing to say the least. Before we can draw upon his insight as a point of comparison, however, we must first discern the basis of *Zhuangzi*'s own understanding and to do

¹ Vincent Shen uses the idea of strangification as the virtue of original generosity but here we can interpret it as the generosity of nothingness extending itself throughout the universe under the cover of uselessness. For more on strangification as an "intercultural interaction and religious dialogue" see Shen 1994; 1997; 2002.

² In his *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Heidegger's discussion was succinct to say the least. He offered a much fuller engagement in his essay "The Thing." Although we raised the subject of Heidegger's jug in chapter two, our discussion of it here has a decidedly different focus.

³ For more on Daoism's influence on the later thought of Heidegger, see Reinhard May. *Heidegger's Hidden Sources*. Graham Parkes, trans. London: Routledge, 1996.

so, we will not only entertain his idea that life praxis rooted in uselessness is possible, we shall argue that it is already pervasive amongst the myriad things of the world. This chapter is thus a challenge to the idea that usefulness renders the useless irrelevant, arguing against the assumption that things are assumed to be useful by proxy and that life praxis only arises out of a discourse that is proactive.

4.1 Useless by Proxy and the Proxy of Usefulness

The keenness with which the *Zhuangzi* wrote of its surroundings is nothing if not remarkable. Take, for example, the following passage:

Zhuangzi said, “One must first know of the useless before one can discuss [with him] the useful. The earth is most certainly broad and vast but a man only uses that area on which his feet are planted. However, if one dug away the soil beneath one’s feet until the yellow springs were reached, would one still be able to use it?” Huizi answered: “No, it would be useless.” “Then,” Zhuangzi responded, “it is clear that the useless has its use.”⁴

莊子曰：知無用而始可與言用矣。天地非不廣且大也，人之所用容足耳。然則廁足而墊之致黃泉，人尚有用乎？惠子曰：無用。莊子曰：然則無用之為用也亦明矣。

What did Zhuangzi mean when he said that one must first possess knowledge of the useless *before* one can discuss with him that which is useful? How peculiar of him to posit such an idea. One normally does not engage the things of the world by assessing the usefulness or uselessness of their characteristics. If anything, we tend to shun that which is useless and frown upon the discarded for in being discarded, it has lost whatever use was originally ascribed to it. Zhuangzi was thus prodding us to question the priority and proximity of the normative values assigned to the things of the world. He wished to turn our social norms upside down insofar as they were predisposed to the being of man and not that of Nature. We view the soil surrounding our feet as little more than a clod of earth; we fail to see its extended purpose, one whose non-intentionality gives way to a purposeless purpose. The soil of the earth is what defines the earth and is indeed the heart of the

⁴ *Zhuangzi* ch. 26 “*waiwu* 外物.” See Guo Qingfan, 936.

worldliness of the world insofar as we continue to believe in the platitude that we rise from and return to such soil. In other words, our being owes its existence to the earth and as such we come to possess it in ways that other living things do not. This, as we saw earlier, was one of the central shortcomings of Lacan's discourse on the Thing—he saw its creation as a creation for the sole purpose of man and not for the sake of the world. The same was also true for Heidegger who believed that every authentic thing has a use-value and those objects that are valued for their use emerged into the unconcealedness of their being.⁵

Zhuangzi, however, was hinting at something altogether different. Like the parable of the fish that transformed into a bird during the opening lines of his text's first chapter (*xiaoyaoyou* 逍遙游), Zhuangzi was alluding to the idea that we are conditioned and limited by our environment. The fish are limited to the water in which they swim just as birds are limited by the air needed to lift their wings. In the case of that which is taken to be useless, it is left to the condition of human desire to deem it useful or not. We take for granted the usefulness of everyday things, expunging on a whim their in-born merits. To take the ground beneath our feet, which is useful on its own, as but a clod of earth is to deny the earth its self-so nature to be such earth; in calling it a clod we thereby make it our clod. Never for a moment do we ponder the notion that our feet are purposely so as a result of the physicality of the earth. If we dig away the earth until there is none surrounding us, this will not only redefine the relationship between our feet as an instrument for motion and the ground upon which they depend for such motion, it will also dismantle our place atop the ontological ladder. Thus, while the ground appears to be without purpose, its non-purposiveness turns out to be its purpose. This is why the *Zhuangzi* said, “the area of earth upon which one's foot treads is small, and although small, it must rely on the un-trodden earth surrounding it.”⁶

Taking the earth as an example of the usefulness of the useless—useless in and of itself yet useful as that which supports the feet standing upon it—does not, however, reach the heart of the matter. To do that, we must turn to the mundaneness of everyday things. In our second chapter we saw how the Thing served as the ontological root for all ontic things, ejecting them from the milieu of

⁵ See Heidegger 2001: 35.

⁶ 「故足之於地也踐，雖踐，特其所不蹶而後善博也。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 24 “*xuwugui* 徐無鬼。” See Guo Qingfan, 871.

undifferentiated chaos in which the Thing dwells. This discarding of things from the One was not the result of their being useless; on the contrary, given that they were derived from the oneness of Dao, they are imbued with useless nothingness from before the time of their inception. Their inception and subsequent cessation is hence an unfolding and refolding of Dao's ontological nothingness lying at their core. It is owing to this inbred quality of empty stillness that things gain the freedom to grow and develop in ways that are not incongruent to their nature. We shall have more to say of this in our final chapter, however, it will be important to bear in mind when investigating the merits of uselessness. It would seem, then, that there are two distinct types of uselessness to account for: the first is a pragmatics of the useless while the second is the idea that life prolongation is best served through unpretentious self-reliance and harmonization with Dao. We can offer a third form of uselessness—the linguistic—but the *Zhuangzi's* epistemological relativism is a well-worn path so we shall have to leave that discussion for another time.

Returning to the pragmatics of uselessness, traditional understanding defaults to a discourse by proxy. Take for example the following anecdote: “A man from Song who sold ceremonial hats went to Yue but the people there cut their hair short and tattooed their bodies, and so had no use for them.”⁷ Wherein ceremonial hats gain their use is, of course, as a head covering, but for a culture whose people do not groom their hair and shroud their bodies in fine robes, such decorative items are irrelevant. What is of use for one man is thus, by proxy, taken to be true for all others. With something as banal as a hat we can view Zhuangzi's objections to its implied use-value from several implicit perspectives: material, epistemological, and even ontological.

Materially, a hat is but a head covering, and yet its use stems not from its ability to cover, protect, or warm one's head; rather, it functions as a sign of social standing. People from the kingdom of Song were eager to flaunt their status and wealth whereas those from Yue held no such aspiration. The assumption was that the finer the material used to make the cap, the greater was its use-value. A hat made of coarse hemp is useless because it possesses none of the required criteria from which one can assign it a nominal value. This says nothing of the emotional or symbolic value given

⁷ 「宋人資章甫而適諸越，越人斷髮文身，無所用之。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 1 “*xiaoyaoyou* 逍遙游。” See Guo Qingfan, 31; Chai 2008: 55.

things despite of their outward plainness. None of these were behind Zhuangzi's anecdote of the usefulness of the useless however. To look at the problem in this light would be to see things merely as things. This is the perspective from which the common man sees the world—as a massive jumble of disparate entities whose chaotic interaction holds no logical sequence or meaning.

Epistemologically, Zhuangzi's criticism of the man from Song was both directed to the ritual practices and social etiquette of the Yin people of ancient times while, at the same time, tacitly acknowledging that said institutions were of importance in regulating human civilization. The ceremonial hat represented an achievement of learning for the Ruist in that it was a marker of one's success in securing government office, an idea abhorrent to Zhuangzi. For him, the man of wisdom is a man who has united with Dao, forgoing human knowledge altogether. Thus, while the people of Yue may be said to live freely, they were most definitely not sagacious.

We see more examples of the mundane in a series of exchanges between Zhuangzi and his sophist friend, Hui Shi. In the first, Hui Shi complained about some gourd seeds that have produced gourds too large to be of any use; in the second, Hui Shi described Zhuangzi's words as being as big and useless as an old, gnarled tree of his. In the latter case, Zhuangzi's response was nothing if not amusing:

Now, you have this great tree and worry over it not being good for anything. Why not take this tree and put it in the land of nothingness, in the limitless wilds, so that you may wander in non-action by its side, or sleep carefree beneath it. Its life won't be cut short by an axe, nor would anything bring it harm, for it is useless for everything!⁸

今子有大樹，患其無用，何不樹之於無何有之鄉，廣莫之野，彷徨乎無為其側，逍遙乎寢臥其下。不夭斤斧，物無害者，無所可用，安所困苦哉！

One might take Zhuangzi's response as being sarcastic but when we continue reading the text, it is not long before the answer appears as to why he dismissed Hui Shi's anxiety:

⁸ *Zhuangzi* ch. 1 “*xiaoyaoyou* 逍遙游.” See Guo Qingfan, 36-40; Chai 2008: 58-63.

As a result, the sage does not walk along the path of distinction but views things in the light of heaven. Even ‘this’ is a way of ‘that’ and ‘that’ is a way of ‘this.’ However, ‘that’ has its right and wrong, and ‘this’ has its right and wrong. Is there, in fact, a distinction between ‘that’ and ‘this,’ or is there no distinguishing the two? Where ‘that’ and ‘this’ cease to be in opposition, one finds the Dao as pivot. Standing at the pivot, one can deal with the infinite changes of right and wrong. Thus, it is said, “The best thing to use is mutual clarification [of ‘this’ and ‘that’].”⁹

是以聖人不由，而照之於天，亦因是也。是亦彼也，彼亦是也。彼亦一是非，此亦一是非。果且有彼是乎哉？果且無彼是乎哉？彼是莫得其偶，謂之道樞。樞始得其環中，以應無窮。是亦一無窮，非亦一無窮也。故曰莫若以明。

Man delegates the title ‘useless’ by proxy whereas heaven does not. Be it a gourd seed, a crooked old tree, or what have you, heaven sees everything as a ‘this’ and a ‘that;’ each gives rise to the other and each completes the other. Within the framework of Dao there is no designation of useful or useless—everything just is. Before we digress into semantics, let us return to the original issue at hand, that being how one can know of the useless before knowing of the useful.

The wheel hub to which Laozi referred in his eleventh chapter is the same as the socket of which Zhuangzi spoke. The spokes that tie into the hub are no different from the socket fitted with a hinge; both are symbolic of the capacity of the useless to transform into something useful. Such transformation is not the result of man’s doing but is imminent in each one of the myriad things. Whether living or inanimate, each entity emergent from the One is imbued with the qualities of nonbeing and being through which our manifest potentiality fulfills itself via an infinite series of phenomenological changes. The catalyst for such change depends on whether or not nonbeing is suppressed by being or vice versa. In other words, Zhuangzi’s theory of uselessness was a reflection of his cosmology of ontological nothingness. The crooked tree was able to complete its heavenly allotted years because the element of nothingness has been freed from the chains of being such that it becomes ontologically quiet and harmonious with the empty stillness of Dao. Herein lies the crux of Zhuangzi’s life praxis—to be inwardly quiescent while outwardly unmoving.

⁹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 2 “*qiwulun* 齊物論.” See Guo Qingfan, 66; Chai 2008: 79-80.

Praxis by way of proxy, however, is doomed to fail as it is a doctrine of the useless whose only recourse is to recount the indomitable presence of being. This, however, does not give us many examples with which to explicate the usefulness of the useless. The aforementioned tree is one, of which we shall say more shortly, the clod of earth is another, while beyond the text altogether there is the famous example of Heidegger's jug. We saw previously how the vase was taken by Lacan to be a surrogate Thing and the jug for Heidegger was no different. Now, however, we may take the object of the jug as illustrating the usefulness of that which we perceive to be useless.

The jug demonstrates the utility of its useless void in two manners of speaking: as a taking and as a keeping. What the jug takes in is nothingness; it is scooped up and collected by the walls of clay as the potter molds and shapes its form. "From start to finish," Heidegger wrote, "the potter takes hold of the impalpable void and brings it forth as the container in the shape of a containing vessel... The vessel's thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that holds."¹⁰ That the jug is made of clay is not what lends it its functionality though. Indeed, all qualitative aspects of the jug fail to convey the true purpose of its inner void. Hence the *Zhuangzi* said:

Thus, what can be looked at and seen are but forms and colors; what can be listened to and heard are but names and sounds. How sad, that the men of the world take form and color, name and sound, as sufficient for expressing the truth of things! Since form and color, name and sound, are insufficient to express the truth of things, then those who know do not speak, those who speak do not know, and yet how is the world able to know this!¹¹

故視而可見者，形與色也；聽而可聞者，名與聲也。悲夫，世人以形色名聲為足以得彼之情！夫形色名聲果不足以得彼之情，則知者不言，言者不知，而世豈識之哉！

What we desire in any object is the emotive quality conveyed to us, the observer. Seldom do we ponder its inner presence of being, that unquantifiable aspect of a thing whose inclusion in its constitution results in its completion as such. The jug's thingness is incapable of being disclosed through the medium of its being just as the Dao cannot be fully articulated using words. The

¹⁰ Heidegger 2001: 167.

¹¹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 13 "tiandi 天地." See Guo Qingfan, 488.

uselessness of the jug's inner nothingness thus lies not in its imperceptibility but in our ignorance of its potentiality, and this inner potentiality takes the form of nothingness. Dao speaks through the nothingness lying at the center of the jug as the jug's giving and receiving. By constantly giving and receiving whilst retaining nothing for itself, the jug is forever self-completing and whole. We cannot speak of this process of self-completion and self-nourishment in that it does not belong to mankind but Dao.

The nothingness that forms the vessel's inner void does not belong to that particular vessel, or even to all vessels as such; rather, the nothingness found within and beyond all things is a constant, coherent nothingness from which particular or localized instances of it assume spatial traits.¹² The potter does not form his vessel in, or around, a so-called void; rather, the void that is nothingness is pre-existent and alters as the vessel slowly takes shape. Herein is the key to knowing how nothingness gains its temporal presence of being. For Zhuangzi, the void that defines the shape of the jug is seen meontologically—not as an *a priori* substance but as the dark matter underlying the fabric of reality. Conversely, Heidegger envisioned it ontically, as something to be manipulated by the hands of man. And so, it is because of its pliability that nothingness becomes entrapped in the everyday objects of the world, be they vessels, rooms, or even the shoes we wear. It is a distinction of the subtlest kind for sure but is nevertheless an important point of clarification.

We can make a similar argument regarding the hollow that is the jug's void not being that which lends the jug its gift of pouring but, conversely, is that which allows the act of pouring to occur in the first place.¹³ Zhuangzi demonstrated this idea with the following analogy:

Ziqi said, “When the great earth breathes, its name is wind. If it does not issue forth then nothing happens, but should it do so, the myriad apertures give out a furious roar. Have you not heard the howling wind before? In the winding crevices of mountain forests, whose trees measure a hundred spans around, their apertures resembling noses, mouths, or ears; as a pillar's support, as a goblet, or mortar; as a deep pool or a shallow pond. The sounds flaring off them resemble the sounds of

¹² Heidegger, conversely, wrote that Western science has misunderstood the void of the vessel because it “did not let the jug's void be its own void.” See Heidegger 2001: 169.

¹³ Heidegger's claim, in comparison, is that “the jug's jug-character consists in the poured gift of the pouring out.” See Heidegger 2001: 170.

rapidly flowing water, arrowheads flying, harsh breaths, fine breaths, great shouts, howls of sorrow; some are deep, others small. Some seem like they are leading a chorus, others like echoes. Small wind gives birth to small responses; great wind gives birth to great responses. When the great wind stops, the apertures become empty and quiet. Have you not seen the shaking and wavering that occurs?”¹⁴

子綦曰：夫大塊噫氣，其名為風。是唯無作，作則萬竅怒呿。而獨不聞之蓼蓼乎？山林之畏佳，大木百圍之竅穴，似鼻，似口，似耳，似枅，似圈，似臼，似洼者，似污者；激者，謫者，叱者，吸者，叫者，譟者，突者，咬者，前者唱于而隨者唱喁。泠風則小和，飄風則大和，厲風濟則眾竅為虛。而獨不見之調調，之刁刁乎？

By themselves, the holes and hollows of the trees would appear to be useless, and yet when the wind blows they alight with sound only to fall silent once such blowing comes to an end. Similarly, the empty nothingness that carves out a hole at the center of the jug is but a quiet opening until such time it finds use as a bearer of liquid. We may ring off a long list of mundane artifacts whose sole purpose is to remain useless for the benefit of others. In this way, the useless is able to preserve its use-value whilst that which was originally useful is rendered useless. Indeed, Zhuangzi extended his argument of the usefulness of the useless to the realms of epistemology and ontology too.

Our body contains orifices without which our existence would be fundamentally altered, if not outright impossible. As empty spaces, these orifices permit the living presence of ontological nothingness to flow throughout our being in a manner reminiscent of butcher Ding’s edgeless blade entering the nothingness that lies between the ox’s joints and muscles. Zhuangzi thus conveyed the usefulness of the useless—the importance of preserving that which is whole—as the key to life praxis. The following tale acts as a good illustration:

The ruler of the southern sea is called Shu. The ruler of the northern sea is called Hu. The ruler of the center is called Chaos. Shu and Hu would frequently meet in the land of Chaos, and were always treated well by him. They consulted each other on how to repay Chaos’ kindness, saying: “Men all have seven openings, for seeing, hearing, eating, and breathing, but Chaos alone has none.

¹⁴ *Zhuangzi* ch. 2 “*qiwulun* 齊物論.” See Guo Qingfan, 45-46; Chai 2008: 68.

Let us try and give him some.” Each day they bore one opening into him, and on the seventh day Chaos died.¹⁵

南海之帝為儵，北海之帝為忽，中央之帝為渾沌。儵與忽時相與遇於渾沌之地，渾沌待之甚善。儵與忽謀報渾沌之德，曰：人皆有七竅以視聽食息，此獨無有，嘗試鑿之。日鑿一竅，七日而渾沌死。

What is inherently useless to one thing turns out to be a source of sustenance for another. The message Zhuangzi was trying to get across is epistemologically pushed on the one hand while being ontologically pulled on the other. It would thus appear that his message was two-pronged: in order to achieve a life praxis that will see one live to the end of one's heavenly allotted years, one must in turn be prepared to abandon certain normative principles and logical presumptions. The one thing that we take for granted the most is nothingness, and yet our lives could not be carried out as they are without it. From the physiology of our bodies to the vast expanse of space in which our planet is positioned, nothingness is omnipresent without being omnipotent. It exists without our realizing and its presence is as obscure and mysterious as Dao. However, because of its ability to perplex us, we deny it can be good for anything and so toss it aside. This, Zhuangzi argued, is fundamentally wrong. The only way, he claimed, to preserve one's state of wholeness is to remain useless, and the only way one can keep one's wholeness intact is to return to Dao. Returning to Dao so as to uphold one's state of uselessness was Zhuangzi's notion of life praxis, and the example he took as a model was not from the world of men, nor even the sage, but the withered old tree.

4.2 A Model of Life Praxis: The Useless Tree

Living in turbulent times as he did, it should come as no surprise that the *Zhuangzi* sought solace in a realm as far removed from humanity as possible. The search for solace and a life praxis that was not predicated on the ethics of an empirical self took him to the world of Nature. Neither idolizing nor succumbing to the tendency to anthropomorphize Nature, the text contemplated the things whose lives came as close to symbolizing Dao as possible, settling upon the great trees of times

¹⁵ *Zhuangzi* ch. 7 “yingdiwang 應帝王.” See Guo Qingfan, 309; Chai 2008: 251.

past. The *Zhuangzi* thus took the old, withered tree as a model not because of its size or owing to its grace and beauty; rather, it based its theory of life praxis on said oaks and pines in that they lived for themselves without interfering in the lives of others. In doing so, they bestowed upon others the means by which they could carry out their own lived experience. This is what Zhuangzi referred to as ‘going both ways:’¹⁶

From the perspective of utility, to take something as being of use due to there being some degree of usefulness to it, then among the myriad things there will be none that are not useful. To take something as being useless due to there being some degree of uselessness to it, then among the myriad things there will be none that are not useless.¹⁷

以功觀之，因其所有而有之，則萬物莫不有；因其所無而無之，則萬物莫不無。

We walk down a road leading nowhere, down a useless path for which the only positive outcome is the self-realization that life cultivation can only come about once we relinquish our desire to objectify things to fit our pre-conceived conception of them. To say that the useless has its use is not to relativize things but to be aware of their being on a fundamental level. The argument for and against the myriad things being either useful or useless if only one of them is such is not to deny the possibility of differentiation amongst them, for Zhuangzi was saying something much more conceptually driven than that. Recalling how we earlier revealed that the myriad things all tie back to the oneness of Dao, how the thread of Dao’s nothingness weaves its way through them, we can now understand why Zhuangzi valued the idea that all things can be useful whilst appearing useless. They are useless insofar as the One is useless, and yet the uselessness of the One is nevertheless the source from which all things emerge.

Turning to the useless tree, Zhuangzi’s thesis was that the tree preserved its life because it adhered to the thread of Dao, and this thread was in turn transmitted to those other beings for which the tree had become centrally important. Indeed, Zhuangzi devoted a considerable amount of time to the discussion of trees but what we must bear in mind is the distinction between trying to be useless

¹⁶ *Zhuangzi* ch. 2 “*qiwulun* 齊物論.” See Guo Qingfan, 70; Chai 2008: 81. The phrase going both ways (*liangxing* 兩行) actually appears in an altogether different context, one regarding a keeper of monkeys. Its relevance here is no less diminished however.

¹⁷ *Zhuangzi* ch. 17 “*qiushui* 秋水.” See Guo Qingfan, 577.

and being so naturally. Uselessness that is naturally so is a uselessness endowed by heaven and is thus the outpouring of heavenly virtue as the gift of self-preservation. The sage's knowledge may be regarded as useless, and yet others are drawn to it; the sage does nothing yet he leaves nothing undone.¹⁸ The fruit born of a tree is useless to the tree but for those that would pluck it, such plucking only brings the tree harm. The same can be said for those men who feign uselessness due to injury or what not. The *Zhuangzi* was most scornful of such disingenuous acts of uselessness in that they were carried out under the pretext of false virtue. When false virtue fills the minds of men, Dao becomes harmed and things lose their way; losing their way, things move away from their mutual dependency and cohabitation with the other beings of the world, turning this relationship into one of isolation and self-gain. With the false virtue of men ruling the world, Dao is subsequently discarded and forgotten. It is because of this that the text espoused a life praxis that was modeled after the naturalness of Dao, a usefulness that was derived directly from the so-called uselessness of nothingness. Zhuangzi demonstrated this principle with the following analogy:

The mountain is weakened by the trees growing on it; the grease administered to the fire causes itself to be fried. The cassia tree can be eaten and so is cut down. The varnish tree can be used and so is covered with incisions. Men know the advantage of being useful yet no one knows the advantage of being useless!¹⁹

山木自寇也，膏火自煎也。桂可食，故伐之；漆可用，故割之。人皆知有用之用，而莫知無用之用也。

For Zhuangzi, life-prolongation was achieved by way of self-obfuscation. Since the tree cannot inwardly remain hidden in the darkness of Dao as does the sage, its only recourse was to outwardly conceal its use to the world—to hide itself away from the perils of being useful: “Thus, birds and beasts do not detest great heights, fish and turtles do not detest great depths. As for one who wants to keep whole his body and life, he must hide himself, detesting neither the depth nor remoteness of the place.”²⁰ As the gift of pouring-forth defined the usefulness of Heidegger's jug, here such an

¹⁸ *Daodejing* chapter 48 says: 「損之又損，以至於無為，無為而無不為。」 See Lou Yulie, 128.

¹⁹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 5 “*dechongfu* 德充符.” See Guo Qingfan, 186; Chai 2008: 163.

²⁰ 「故鳥獸不厭高，魚鱉不厭深。夫全其形生之人，藏其身也，不厭深眇而已矣。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 23 “*gengsangchu* 庚桑楚.” See Guo Qingfan, 773.

attribute would have disastrous consequences. Whereas the gift of the jug lies in its inner void, the tree, as a metaphor for the sage, lacks such recourse to nothingness as a means for ontological fulfillment. In other words, the life praxis of the tree is not due to the proxy of its being but from its withdrawal to the realm of nothingness. In ridding itself of all outward adornment, the tree can thus escape the axe of men. To escape the axe of men is to escape the perils of being useful and to escape the perils of usefulness is to engage in the practice of life-prolongation.

Life-prolongation, however, is not simply extending one's life as far as possible; this would achieve nothing but to extend one's toil. The earth bequeaths our body and takes it away, which explains why Zhuangzi argued that: "The great earth provides my physical form, gives me a life of toil, provides me with leisure and comfort in old age, and is my resting place in death. Thus, what is good for my life is also good for my death."²¹ The interchangeability of the designations 'useful' and 'useless' is thus comparable to 'this' and 'that,' 'dark' and 'bright,' and yet these terms only refer to the everydayness of the useless, not constant uselessness. Only by adhering to constant uselessness can one engage in the nourishment and prolongation of life. That which is constantly useless is nothingness but what gives it its useful purpose is the marvelous creativity of Dao. From nothingness all things arise and from uselessness all things obtain their use. We can see this idea quite clearly in the *jingshen* 精神 chapter of the *Huainanzi*:

When the people of Yue catch a python it is seen as something precious for eating. When the people of the middle kingdom catch one, however, it's seen as useless and thus discarded. Thus, knowing a thing is useless, even one who is greedy would decline it; not knowing a thing is useless, even one who is incorruptible would be unable to part ways with it...To know that a fan in winter and a fur coat in summer are of no use, then the transformations of the myriad things is but chaff and dust. Therefore, if one uses hot water to stop a thing from boiling, the boiling will never cease; if one truly knows its root, all that needs to be done is to snuff out the fire.²²

越人得髯蛇，以為上肴，中國得而棄之無用。故知其無所用，貪者能辭之；不知其無所用，廉者不能讓也……知冬日之簾，夏日之裘無用於己，則萬物之變為塵埃矣。故以湯止沸，沸乃不止；誠知

²¹ 「夫大塊載我以形，勞我以生，佚我以老，息我以死。故善吾生者，乃所以善吾死也。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 6 "*dazongshi* 大宗師." See Guo Qingfan, 242; Chai 2008: 198 [translation revised].

²² See Zhang Shuangli, 791; Major, 259-60.

其本，則去火而已矣。

We may thus understand the useless epistemologically, not in terms of redacting the useful to the useless, which would imply that the useless is merely a less functional form of usefulness; on the contrary, to be useless is to be altogether removed from the spectrum of human desire thereby granting it a degree of freedom utterly beyond the grasp of the useful. All men know the use of the useful whilst failing to know the use of the useless because such men live by proxy and not in accordance with Dao. To live by proxy is to use things in a manner unnatural to their inborn nature. It is easy to use something only later to discard it; it is an altogether different matter to not use something while still benefitting from it. By allowing others to avail themselves of the opportunity to be useful, the useless remains intact and pure. The purity of its intactness is the wholeness of Dao; thus, to be useless yet remain in accordance with the wholeness of Dao is to be in harmony with the oneness of everything in the universe.

The *Zhuangzi* contains two passages that describe how the useless tree can be taken as a model of life praxis. The first occurs in chapter two while the second occurs in chapter four. One passage offers a warning against the danger of being useful while the other is a critique of Confucian normative judgments pertaining to uselessness. While the first instance is actually two separate analogies, the second is an extended discussion that makes use of a common literary element in the *Zhuangzi*—the dream.

The crux of the first tale goes as follows: Nanbo Ziqi came across a tree of such enormity that it could shelter a thousand oxen. Proclaiming it to be of tremendous use, he proceeded to inspect it more closely only to discover its wood was utterly unusable. He hence concluded that it could only have grown to such great size because of its uselessness and that this must be that to which the sage clings. *Zhuangzi* then went on to offer us a different account, albeit one whose message was the same.²³ He described a region in the state of Song that was famous for its trees, some of which were used as monkey perches, others for roof beams, while the best quality wood was taken to form the sides of coffins. In the former case, the sage took hold of the principle of being useless while in the latter, doing so would have separated him from Dao leading to a premature death.

²³ *Zhuangzi* ch. 4 “*renjianshi* 人間世.” See Guo Qingfan, 176-177; Chai 2008: 155-157.

Thus, Zhuangzi argued that the useless has its use while the usable is inherently useless insofar as it induces danger to one's being.

These two stories serve to reinforce the message Zhuangzi was trying to get across in a previous, lengthier example involving carpenter Shi and his encounter with and dream of, an old oak tree. As we have more to say about this tale, it would be best to first quote it in its entirety:

Carpenter Shi was on his way to the state of Qi, when having reached a bend in the road, he saw an oak tree next to the alter of the god of earth. This tree was so large that it could shade thousands of oxen, measuring a hundred spans round. It rose up like a mountain, reaching a height of 70 *chi* and more before throwing out any branches. Of these branches, there are ten or so from which a boat could be carved. People came from all directions to see it, such that the scene resembled a marketplace, but carpenter Shi did not even glance at it, continuing on his way without pause.

His apprentice Yan looked at it with admiration, before running to catch up with carpenter Shi to ask: "Since I began following you with my axe, I have never seen such a beautiful tree. Why did you not even stop to take a look but keep on walking?"

Carpenter Shi replied, "Enough, say no more! This tree is useless; to make a boat from it, such a boat would certainly sink; to make a casket from it, such a casket would quickly rot; a piece of furniture would soon fall apart; a door would be covered with seeping sap; a pillar would be infested with insects. The wood of this tree is of no use hence it has lived to such a great age."

After carpenter Shi returned, the tree appeared to him in a dream, saying: "With what other tree do you propose to compare me? Will you compare me to a tree having use? There are hawthorn trees, pear trees, orange trees, teak trees, gourds and other fruit-bearing plants. When their fruits are ripe, they are stripped-off and thrown to the ground. Their main branches are broken whilst their smaller ones are torn away. Because of their ability to produce fruit, they encounter suffering and are unable to complete their given lifespan. Such is the case with all things. I have sought to be useless for a very long time, such that it nearly killed me, but now I know how and it has been of great value. If, supposing I possessed some use, could I have attained the great size that I am?"

Furthermore, you and I are both things; how can you as one thing judge me, another thing, in such a manner? How are you, a useless man, able to know so much about me, a useless tree!”²⁴

In this story, people were drawn from far and wide but their drawing was not due to the gracefulness of the oak; rather, they amassed so as to gather in the clearing created by its enormous canopy. Under the umbrella of its limbs and branches nary a fruit or flower bloomed. Thus, what the oak had to offer was nothing of practical use other than the uselessness of its sheltering mass. In the nothingness of its shadow things took shelter and thrived. This thriving and sheltering were thus symbolic of the gathering of nothingness, a gathering that cleared itself of prejudice and avarice. In other words, the gathering of nothingness that resulted from the clearance of being created a delimited zone of ontic emptiness whose presence marked the unfolding of Dao in the world of beings.

Given that Dao is demarcated by the meontological resonance of nonbeing, the *Zhuangzi*'s theory of life praxis is thus, by extension, a cosmological phenomenology of how ontological nothingness manifests itself in human reality. Just as the useless inner-nothingness of the vessel comes to define the outer usefulness of its walls, so does the outer-nothingness of the tree's shadow define the inner usefulness of the region it shades. Furthermore, while the gift of the vessel stems from its out-pouring, the gift of the tree stems from its inward-retention. The vessel is useless to the world only to the extent that its self-contained void cannot be extended beyond the boundary of its physical being; its degree of usefulness, in other words, is directly proportional to its material presence of being. If one were to smash the vessel, one would no longer be able to make use of its inner uselessness. This is what makes the nothingness that is the vessel's inner-void so useful. The old oak tree is no different in that what makes it so useful to others is absolutely of no use to itself. Had it grown to be only of medium height, it would be no different than all the other trees and would hardly garner the attention that it did. Had it flowers or fruit, the unspoken use of its useless shadow would surely have gone unnoticed. Thus, with no discernibly useful qualities, the oak is utterly useless as an object in and of itself, and yet in being so completely lacking, it attained its

²⁴「匠石之齊，至乎曲轅，見櫟社樹……而幾死之散人，又惡知散木。」*Zhuangzi* ch. 4 “*renjianshi* 人間世.” See Guo Qingfan, 170-172; Chai 2008: 150-152.

greatest strength—self-preservation. And so with this rather innocuous example, the *Zhuangzi* has carefully revealed one of the key principles to following Dao.

As a symbolic representation of Dao, the oak roots itself in the endless darkness of the earth's soil, soaring towards heaven as if trying to embrace it. With its great height, the oak tree offers refuge to the beings on the ground below just as the harmonizing oneness of Dao shelters the myriad things of the world from succumbing to the petty desires of their ethical selves. Moreover, the clearing created by the tree's girth is a clearing away of being so as to uncover the nothingness lying underneath; it is a clearing away of the presence of being in favor of the non-presence of nothingness. In light of this, we can look at the story of the useless tree by employing an altogether different perspective. Take for example the following:

Confucius answered, saying: I once served as an envoy and was in the state of Chu when I saw some piglets suckling at their dead mother. After a while, they all became scared and abandoned her. This is because they were no longer seen by her and regarded her as not being of their kind. Those piglets loved their mother, not for her physical form, but for her spirit. When a man is killed in battle, at his funeral there are none of the customary images adorning his coffin. For a man whose feet have been cut off, he no longer has a reason to love wearing shoes. In each case, these things have lost their root.²⁵

To the little pigs, the body of their dead mother has lost its utilitarian value just as the wood of the twisted old oak is useless to the carpenter wishing to make a house or a boat. As for one whose feet have been cut-off, the shoes that he previously adorned are now discarded and looked upon as wholly irrelevant. From these examples we can see that for *Zhuangzi*, the labels 'useful' and 'useless' were inconsistent in their application and were relative in their designation. Regardless of the moral implications one can attach to the morbid images of a dead pig and a mutilated man, we should remember that for *Zhuangzi*, the mother pig and crippled man's feet were emblematic of how things suddenly and spontaneously transform from one state of existence to another. Whether the body's animating spirit has departed, or the integrity of one's physical form has been broken,

²⁵ 「仲尼曰：丘也嘗使於楚矣，適見純子……皆無其本矣。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 5 “*dechongfu* 德充符.” See Guo Qingfan, 209; Chai 2008: 178.

these are but minor variances in light of the oneness of things. Faced with such uncertainty, how can we not come to view the utilitarian or beautiful as useless and the mundane and grotesque as useful!

Encountering the oak tree once more in a dream, carpenter Shi was accused of unfairly comparing it to trees having use. This was not an argument based on aesthetic or other quantitative factors such as the type of fruit it produces, the size of its gourds, the quality and aroma of its wood, and so forth; rather, Zhuangzi wanted us to look beyond such superficial merits when deciding what is of use or not. He told us that if a tree produced fruit, harm would befall it. In the course of such suffering, hope becomes lost and the way of Dao abandoned. Once Dao has been abandoned, things are discarded or cut down in mid-life. The dilemma, then, is how to disrupt the tendency to view trees of use as inherently more valuable and worthy of preservation than those that are useless. Indeed, the oak itself says it has sought to be useless for so long that it nearly cost it its life, but what does this mean? How does one seek to be useless? Part of the solution lies in the act of forgetting, of which we shall say more in our next chapter, but for now we can only surmise it is closely dependent on the playful interaction that takes place on a thing to thing level.

Uselessness arises out of the discriminatory behavior one thing directs towards another and is not a trait imbued in it by Dao. Indeed, in the eyes of Dao, the useless becomes useful while the useful becomes useless. Such mutually complimentary characteristics ensure that universal harmony prevails and that things may continuously engage in self-cultivation, living out their naturally allotted years. In light of this, we can understand why Daoism is seen as a philosophy of the middle way, never favoring one side over its perceived opposite, and why its cosmology is neither idealistic nor deterministic but links itself to the indescribable characteristics of Dao. To disprove a particular attribute using a similar attribute is not as good as using a non-attribute. This holds true for the useless in that it can only serve as a base of comparison for the useful because the useless manifests the qualities of Dao in such a way that the useful remains unchanged because of it. Hence in the story of the maker of belt clasps it was said: “To use something without formally using it, one will over time obtain some use from it; how much more so will he who uses nothing!” The useful, then, instigates change in others through which its purpose becomes realized; the useless, on the other hand, leaves things to their own devices and while this may sound eerily

similar to the idea of non-doing, or non-purposeful action (*wuwei* 無爲), the useful is based on a conscious decision while the useless is a non-decisive recourse whose unity with the oneness of things prevents it from making such conscious-driven decisions in the first place.

If, however, we base our judgments of what is useful on our experience of the useless, how do we know what is useless, and naturally so at that? The useless is found in the everydayness of being and its presence of being takes the guise of nothingness. Nothingness is thus the ultimate state of uselessness, and yet it is from nothingness that the myriad things are born. Born out of nothingness rather than being, those things closest in their state of being to the nothingness from whence they came are also said to be the most genuine in disposition. This is why the *Zhuangzi* made constant mention of the darkness of the sage, the inherent uselessness of things, and those disfigured persons and artisans whose life praxis or craft was none other than the practicing of the arts of Dao.

To be useless in a manner that is not artificial entails harmonizing oneself with the world. Through the process of unification, the nothingness of Dao supplants the uselessness of the Thing such that it incurred a degree of usefulness. In this way, what was formerly useless is now useful while the formerly useful return to a state of uselessness. Before their separation from the One, all things were useless, for to be otherwise would imply they have already assumed an ontic presence of being, which in itself is grounds for usefulness. The challenge, then, is to successfully lose one's air of usefulness so as to return to one's original condition of useless oneness, a returning that is not cosmologically rooted but ontic in bearing.

4.3 Conclusion

In their quest to reacquire their inborn uselessness by reuniting with Dao, many beings fail; for the few that do succeed, they are rewarded with a lifetime uninterrupted by toil or hardship. This would explain why the old oak tree said it has sought to be useless for a very long time, such that it was nearly killed, but knowing how to succeed in said endeavor, it proved to be of great value. By shunning its need for self-flattery in the form of fragrant wood or flowers, the oak was able to break away from the shackles of humanity's conception of utility and beauty. Having learnt to return to a life praxis that is natural to its own inborn nature, the oak was thereby able to live out its

remaining years untouched by the axe of the carpenter while drawing others to it, rendering its newfound state of uselessness useful. Given the non-sagacious character of carpenter Shi and the holistic existence of the oak, is it any wonder the latter questions the authority of the former when referring to it pejoratively as a useless thing? Thus, the useless has its use while the useful becomes useless.

The question that was previously raised, and which remains to be answered, is how does one go about making oneself useless? In the case of things, it would appear losing a physical trait is sufficient, but for humanity that is not necessarily a desirable outcome. Owing to the presence of an empirical self, however, man has the unique capacity for psychological reversion; a reversion not in the sense of a regression of one's mental capacity but the ability to shut off one's conscious mind through the act of forgetting. The idea of forgetting—either as a literal forgetting of one's being or as the fasting of the mind—plays a central role not only in the *Zhuangzi's* theory of life praxis but also in its understanding of the steps needed to return to the nothingness of Dao. Although the present chapter has illuminated the much overlooked framework engaging conceptions of what it means to be useless, it falls upon the next chapter to approach uselessness as representative of the ontological nothingness of Dao from the standpoint of forgetting in order to achieve a state of simplicity. Simplicity is, in turn, achieved through fasting of the mind, and the outcome of such fasting informs the final chapter of this dissertation—a holistic freedom whose culmination leads to one's harmonious unison with Dao.

CHAPTER 5

Playing in Nothingness so as to Forget Existence

When men do not forget that which can be forgotten but forget that which cannot be forgotten, this is known as true forgetting.

—*Zhuangzi*

Humanity has been blessed with a mind whose sophistication is unmatched in the natural world. It is perhaps our greatest strength, and yet its loss is something we fear tremendously. The *Zhuangzi* was well aware of the power of the mind to inflict harm on oneself and others. Its solution, which some might deem as nothing short of epistemological relativism, was quite the opposite. To accuse the *Zhuangzi* of relativism is to be relativistic; it is to lose sight of the centrality of nothingness and collapse the bridge being forged between it and the reality of being. This bridge, which I refer to as the plane-of-nothingness, is the pivot by which things respond to the spontaneous changes of Dao and is where the process of returning to the One is initiated. In the previous chapter we discussed how things engaged in such returning by acquiring an air of uselessness, one that ultimately came to inform the *Zhuangzi*'s theory of life praxis. Due to the dominating nature of our empirical self, however, we are unable to follow this route and thus require an alternative approach, one wherein we may attain longevity whilst preserving our link to Dao. This is found in the act of forgetting.

Forgetfulness as perfection of human life praxis cannot be achieved in one fell swoop however; indeed, mastering the art of forgetting is carried out in a series of measured steps beginning with the ontic, working one's way through the ontological before culminating in the cosmological. The present chapter, therefore, will discuss these three stages of forgetting, arguing their progression is not only a necessary preparation if one is to wander carefree in nothingness, but that in doing so, one harmonizes with the oneness of things in an onto-cosmological manner. To forget the division of mind and body such that one's relational self (i.e., the mind) rejoins the non-selfhood of Dao, thus becoming the highest state of awareness an individual can achieve. The challenge for the *Zhuangzi*, then, was methodological; rather than ascribe humanity the task of forgetting the ontic world and the things contained therein, forgetting the epistemological difference pertaining to their

names and reality was instead the assumed course of action. This most mundane form of forgetfulness is, moreover, the most problematic and calls for special attention. When it comes to the mildly rarefied form of ontological forgetting, Zhuangzi coined two expressions to specifically address it: the forgetting of one's empirical self in the world (*zuowang* 坐忘 / *wu sang wo* 吾喪我), which can be interpreted as a form of phenomenological self-redaction, and fasting of the mind (*xinzhai* 心齋) whereby ontological coming-into-being is rarefied to the extent it is taken as a non-presencing presence. This, in turn, gives way to a fully rarefied form of cosmological forgetfulness whereby one no longer associates one's ontological presence with an empirical self but with the meontological character of Dao. Playing in nothingness not only allows us to forget our own existence, it is, as we shall see in our final chapter, the penultimate step towards attaining spiritual freedom.

5.1 The Mundaneness of Forgetting

In the previous chapter we saw how the banality of the useless, when taken in concert with nothingness, offered a strong rebuke to the nihilistic inclination of the everydayness of being. Our practice of dismissing useless nothingness out of hand should, in light of the *Zhuangzi's* counter arguments, start to unhinge themselves. This unhinging has thus far been carried out in a manner that directly addressed the corporeal but it now behooves us to examine its more psychic elements. What needs to be questioned, however, is the means whereby one can actually experience nothingness so that the everydayness of our being is rendered conceptually useless without disrupting its harmony with Dao. Said differently, the unhinging of our being upon encountering the still quiescence of Dao results not in a loss of consciousness or free will; rather, our undoing is the unwinding of our memory in the face of forgetfulness.

Whereas Heidegger took the ancient Greek notion of truth as symbolic of the unconcealment of things, forever linking appearance and one's mental recollection of it, the *Zhuangzi* saw things quite differently. Instead of drawing lines of attachment between images and words in order to uncover their authenticity, Zhuangzi believed that the concealment of things, indeed the world at large, lay precisely in our habitual tendency to associate with everything according to human linguistic constructs. Hence the concept of truth was not to be sought through deliberate disclosure

or denial of a thing's trace but through the process of return. In doing so, the norms of human cognition become disassociated from our memory of them as a result of their being forgotten, an act whose epitome is the fasting of the mind. Thus, Zhuangzi argued that we need to first learn how to forget before we can be free, for only in forgetfulness are we able to recover our non-empirical, naturally self-so selves:

Forget about years and discriminating principle, hurl yourself into the infinite, making it your place of abode.”¹

忘年忘義，振於無竟，故寓諸無竟。

We may characterize the distinction between forgetting and forgetfulness as a matter of degree in that to forget things, including life itself, is an act forever tied to the consciousness of the mind, whereas the state of having forgotten how to forget is a cosmological conjoining with both the One and Dao. When the *Zhuangzi* spoke of forgetting, it was not acknowledging the existence of a temporal past nor was it attempting to attenuate an ontological difference between how a thing associates the self of today with its self from yesterday; rather, it was seen as a means by which all things learned to perfect their virtue so as to join with the infinite.² This explains why the *Zhuangzi* contained statements such as: “Forget things, forget heaven, and be called a forgetter of self. The man who has forgotten his self may be said to have entered heaven.”³ As for forgetfulness, it is akin to the constancy of nothingness insofar as it represents the fulfillment of one's return to universal oneness and the abandonment of any inclination of self-identity other than with Dao. In other words, the perfection of forgetting takes the form of a perpetual forgetting of names and designations such that all that remains is the profound mystery of Dao: “Even if you forget the former me, I will still have something which cannot be forgotten!”⁴

¹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 2 “*qiwulun* 齊物論.” See Guo Qingfan, 108; Chai 2008, 104 [translation revised].

² With regards the temporality of being in the context of forgetting, Heidegger wrote that: “...Dasein has forgotten itself in its ownmost thrown potentiality-of-being. This forgetting is not nothing, nor is it just a failure to remember; it is rather a ‘positive,’ ecstatic mode of having-been; a mode with a character of its own.” See Heidegger 1996: 311-312 [§339].

³ 「有治在人，忘乎物，忘乎天，其名為忘己。忘己之人，是之謂入於天。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 12 “*tian di* 天地.” See Guo Qingfan, 428.

⁴ 「雖忘乎故吾，吾有不忘者存。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 21 “*tian zifang* 田子方.” See Guo Qingfan, 709. Heidegger, oddly enough, spoke of the power of forgetting as a “just barely living, which ‘lets everything alone’ as it is, is grounded in

The *Zhuangzi* saved the bulk of its discussion on forgetting for the outer and miscellaneous chapters. Any mention of the mind was done so under the pretext of its nourishment or potential detriment to the wellbeing of mankind but again, the text happily chose to ignore the extent of the relationship between mind and memory, something Western thinkers like Augustine would have found inexcusable. Since Augustine had a tremendous influence on Western philosophy, let us briefly look at his theory of forgetting and what it involved. Describing memory as the belly of the mind,⁵ Augustine argued that the forgetting of signifiers would make any knowledge of names impossible. Since he understood mind and memory to be inseparable, the recollection of a memory was a recalling of that which was of itself present in the mind. Forgetfulness thus assumes the characteristics of both memory and the act of forgetting such that: “Forgetfulness is present which I have remembered. But what is forgetfulness but a privation of memory? ...Forgetfulness is not present unto the memory, when as we remember it, by itself but by its image, because if it were present by itself, it would cause us not to remember, but to forget.”⁶

The paradox that Augustine was unable to overcome lay in the very nature of forgetfulness and its tendency to blot out all attempts at recollection. Acknowledging that one’s mind belonged exclusively to one’s own self, forgetting is thus an exclusive act of one’s own mind. Hence any loss of memory due to the subversion of forgetfulness cannot be attributed to any outside source but originates within the mind alone. Augustine thus called absurd the idea that we only remember that which we have forgotten—a remembered forgetfulness. So what did he mean when he spoke of forgetfulness? Being part of the mind, we cannot very well declare it to be a thing, nor can we deem it to be an imaginary event, for what is forgotten is not a thing-in-itself but the image of its presence to mind. He therefore theorized that, “if forgetfulness is held in memory by means of its image, and not immediately by itself, then plainly, it has itself been sometime present that its image might be then taken.”⁷

giving oneself over to thrownness and forgetting. It has the ecstatic meaning of an inauthentic having-been.” See Heidegger 1996: 317 [§345].

⁵ See Augustine’s *Confessions*, book 10.14, vol. 2, 113.

⁶ *Ibid.*, book 10.16, vol. 2, 117-119.

⁷ *Ibid.*, book 10.16, vol. 2, 119-121. In a manner not dissimilar to Augustine, Merleau-Ponty believed forgetfulness was an act designed to keep memories at a safe distance. We forget our memories, he said, because: “Although it is of the essence of consciousness to forget its own phenomena thus enabling ‘things’ to be constituted, this forgetfulness is not mere absence, it is the absence of something which consciousness could bring into its presence: in other words

It thus appears that for Augustine, forgetting was little more than the symbolic representation of a thing's absence. With nothing before us we are very likely prone to forget it. The act of recalling the forgotten thing's image is, therefore, a reaffirmation of the impression left on our mind but it says nothing of the thing's actual absence of being. Formerly, any object in our presence created an image that imprinted itself onto our memory and whose absence gave rise to the forgetting of said image. Now, however, memory functions as the means by which things undergo a re-presencing of their being. Thus, while things make an original impression upon our consciousness, it is the recalling of the mental image of said impression that accounts for how one subsequently constitutes the object in question. Given Augustine's impression of forgetfulness, we can classify it as humanity's affirmation or denial of the existence of any particular thing-in-itself. Forgetting in this sense can hence be interpreted as an epistemological behavior whose import with regards to elucidating Zhuangzi's theory of forgetfulness is tenable at best.

Of central importance for the *Zhuangzi* was the unification of one's authentic self (i.e., non-self) with those of all other beings in the realm of Dao. In order to accomplish this one must lose the empirical self of this realm so as to allow the relational self to return to the cosmological realm of the One. Of the various means by which this can be achieved, progressively forgetting the world is certainly an attractive option. If we look past the surface of this statement, however, we will soon realize that ontic forgetting of this kind is little more than a first step in fulfilling the greater objective of onto-cosmological forgetting. The *Zhuangzi*'s goal of returning to the oneness of things in Dao not only involved the forgetting of ontic beings and their ontological differentiations, but also the mind and selfhood of the one doing such forgetting:

One forgets one's feet when one's shoes are comfortable; one forgets one's waist when one's belt is comfortable; and one's knowledge forgets right and wrong when one's mind is comfortable. No change occurs internally and no compliance occurs externally when the assemblage of events is comfortable. If one begins with what is comfortable and never experiences the uncomfortable, one can forget the comfort of the comfortable.⁸

consciousness can forget phenomena only because they are the cradle of things." See Merleau-Ponty 2003: 67

⁸ *Zhuangzi* ch. 19 "*dasheng* 達生." See Guo Qingfan, 662-663.

忘足，履之適也；忘要，帶之適也；知忘是非，心之適也；不內變，不外從，事會之適也。始乎適而未嘗不適者，忘適之適也。

When one is in an environment conducive to letting-be, it is not the presence of being of things that is left alone but the ontic distinction between them. Hence shoes that fit as if they were a second skin are forgotten in that they do not impinge upon the self-so character of the feet wearing them. The same is true for the waist belt. The belt that is too tight restricts the movement of the wearer, just as shoes of an improper size make for difficult walking. Wherein each element succeeds is attributable to their ability to preserve their inward completion whilst engaging others in a way that does them no outward harm.

This says nothing of the role given the mind however. Zhuangzi said that when the mind is comfortable, the distinctions of right and wrong are forgotten. As right and wrong are but a 'this' and a 'that,' each being a mutual compliment of the other, in the realm of Dao where there is only unity, they are forgotten. Oneness in Dao leads to comfort of mind while stillness of mind signifies that one has attained harmony with the world. In its comfort with Dao, the mind forgets the distinctions of right and wrong, allowing the myriad things to exist according to their naturally imbued character. In this way, things that are in harmony with Dao preserve the constant Dao (*hengdao* 恆道) within while endlessly responding to its changes through outward transformation. This is why the sage is described as inwardly dark while appearing outwardly bright. To begin with the comfortable one shall never encounter the uncomfortable, and to forget the comfort of being comfortable is to roam in the realm of nothingness.

What we are most comfortable with, of course, is not the unknown nothingness of a dark universe but the historical condition of our own presence of being. This self-presencing presence of our ontological constitution within the temporal framework that comes to define our very presencing is not a historical event, which would involve binding the meontology of Dao to the mind of man; rather, freedom vis-à-vis ontological forgetting is a letting-go of the world and our temporally historical conception of it so as to return to a state of non-particularity and sublime openness.⁹ To

⁹ On the connection between forgetting and mind, Hans-Georg Gadamer not only argued that the two were indeed related but that the former leads to the latter's regeneration: "In a way that has long been insufficiently noticed,

argue for a historically authentic form of forgetting such that the mind both garners the ability to recall previous states of consciousness and actively relive them not only contradicts the *Zhuangzi*'s interpretation of time and temporality discussed in our third chapter, had the text done so, it would have immediately dismissed such notions on the grounds that any reliving of said memories would be inauthentic and destructive of Dao. On a more fundamental level, such assumptions would have been wholly implausible given the meontologically atemporal nature of the universe. Although forgetfulness of mind can be seen as positivistic,¹⁰ the objective of Zhuangzi's deconstruction of mind and memory was to instill in us an awareness of the danger of having a one-dimensional mind insofar as we fail to utilize it for purposes other than selfish indulgence and personal gain, both of which are detrimental to our self-enrichment and cultivation of heavenly virtue.

The life praxis of useful uselessness we spoke of in the previous chapter is yet again prevalent in our discussion of forgetfulness, only now it is in reference to unhinging one's dependency on mind so as to forget one's fellow man and return to the One. Of course, Zhuangzi was not insinuating that we should literally forget everything in the world; on the contrary, he was implying that our tendency to regard the outward appearance of things whilst forgetting their inner virtue was behind the decline of Dao witnessed during his lifetime:

For my entire life I have encountered you from one arm's distance yet I lost you, how sad! What you perceive of me is that which can be seen. It, however, is already exhausted and yet you still seek it believing it exists; this is like seeking out a horse when the fair is over and done with. I serve you best when I have completely forgotten you and you serve me best when you have also completely forgotten me. Given this, what do you have to worry about! Even if you forget the former me, I will still have something which cannot be forgotten!¹¹

forgetting is closely related to keeping in mind and remembering; forgetting is not merely an absence and a lack but, as Nietzsche in particular pointed out, a condition of the life of mind. Only by forgetting does the mind have the possibility of total renewal, the capacity to see everything with fresh eyes, so that what is long familiar fuses with the new into a many leveled unity." See Gadamer 2004: 14.

¹⁰ We saw in the previous note why Gadamer took this to be the case and here we may cite Heidegger as further proof: "When one projects oneself inauthentically upon the possibilities drawn from what is taken care of in making it present, this is possible only because Dasein has forgotten itself in its ownmost thrown potentiality-of-being. This forgetting is not nothing, nor is it just failure to remember; it is rather a 'positive,' ecstatic mode of having-been; a mode with a character of its own. The ecstasy of forgetting has the character of backing away from one's ownmost having-been in a way that is closed off from oneself." See Heidegger 1996: 311-312 (§339).

¹¹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 21 "*tianzifang* 田子方." See Guo Qingfan, 709.

吾終身與汝交一臂而失之，可不哀與！女殆著乎吾所以著也。彼已盡矣，而女求之以為有，是求馬於唐肆也。吾服女也甚忘，女服吾也亦甚忘。雖然，女奚患焉！雖忘乎故吾，吾有不忘者存。

We see in one another the psychophysical constitution of our being while overlooking that which is responsible for this state of being. Looking past the image-of-being that meets the eye, we will soon come to the realization that the properties comprising our state of existence are linked to but a few core components. The spontaneous manner in which Dao transforms and re-envisions itself can do nothing but result in it appearing anew on a daily basis. As certain as night follows day and day follows night, Dao follows itself and thus remains intact and undoing; it does nothing for its own sake yet manages to complete others nonetheless. We are born already on the road towards death hence the *Zhuangzi* said we should not fret over what is in fact but a natural law of the universe. This is why the time before my life belongs to Dao and should be forgotten, and why the time following my death also belongs to Dao and should likewise be forgotten.¹²

As we learn more about the arts of Dao, we must ask ourselves why the *Zhuangzi* at this earliest of stages in the perfection of our life praxis asked us to go beyond simple ontic forgetting and engage in mutual forgetfulness on an ontological level. Take for example, the following:

Fish are mutually happy in water; men are mutually happy in Dao. Living in water, the fish are able to obtain their provisions by cleaving the pools; having Dao, men do nothing and yet their life is sustained. Thus, it is said: “Fish forget each other in the rivers and lakes; men forget each other in Dao.”¹³

魚相造乎水，人相造乎道。相造乎水者，穿池而養給；相造乎道者，無事而生定。故曰，魚相忘乎江湖，人相忘乎道術。

Similar notions are given several passages earlier, albeit in the context of the sage:

¹² In his commentary to the passage quoted above, Cheng Xuanying had this to say: “As for the transformation of Dao, there is no time when it is suspended. Although my old self is lost and my new self is still present, this presence of existence has not been forgotten. As the old I have yet to begin to be a not-I, why are you fretting so!” 「夫變化之道，無時暫停，雖失故吾而新吾尚在，斯有不忘者存也，故未始非吾，汝何患也！」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 21 “*tianzifang* 田子方.” See Guo Qingfan, 711.

¹³ *Zhuangzi* ch. 6 “*dazongshi* 大宗師.” See Guo Qingfan, 272; Chai 2008: 219.

The genuine man of old knew neither to love life nor loath death. At the time of his birth he showed no elation; facing his own death he offered no resistance. Unconstrained he entered and left the world. He did not forget from whence he came and did not inquire as to where he would finish. He received things in joy and he returned things in forgetfulness. Such is called not exercising one's mind to abandon Dao, not wielding men to aid heaven. This is what I call the genuine man.¹⁴

古之真人，不知說生，不知惡死；其出不訢，其入不距；儻然而往，儻然而來而已矣。不忘其所始，不求其所終；受而喜之，忘而復之，是之謂不以心捐道，不以人助天。是之謂真人。

The above passages reveal two key arguments: first, that freedom in Dao is attained not through an act of transcendence but forgetting; and second, the ethics of forgetting is as much about letting things return to their natural selves as it is about cultivating one's authentic self. For the sage, to wander carefree in the domain of Dao is to spontaneously engage things in a playful, traceless manner. Each encounter transcends being historical insofar as the genuine person retains no aspect of said event for himself; his embrace and letting-go of things is as traceless as his own darkness rendering his relationship with the world one of becoming-with rather than becoming-for.¹⁵ The historicity of things is thus bound to our memory of them as opposed to things-in-themselves, yet the sage is able to preserve his atemporal, ahistorical nature through the praxis of forgetfulness. In this way, his mind *qua* memory and ontological presence of being remain traceless and whole.

Ontic forgetting for the *Zhuangzi* was thus implicitly tied to forgetting any epistemological value attached to a thing, be it titular or descriptive. Having let go of the implicit authority attached to words, the trace of the thing-in-itself can subsequently be forgotten. To pursue forgetfulness along these lines is to open oneself to the perpetually wordless, traceless nothingness of Dao. Letting-go of words and their images (i.e., things) through forgetting not only allowed the *Zhuangzi* to offer a

¹⁴ *Zhuangzi* ch. 6 “*dazongshi* 大宗師.” See Guo Qingfan, 229-230; Chai 2008: 191 [translation revised].

¹⁵ Paul Ricoeur, in a work entitled *Memory, History, Forgetting* defended the notion that memory and forgetting are implicitly historical in bearing saying, “there is forgetting wherever there had been a trace. But forgetting is not only the enemy of memory and of history. One of the theses to which I am most attached is that there also exists a reserve of forgetting, which can be a resource for memory and for history, although there is no way to draw up a score sheet for this battle of the giants. This double valence of forgetting is comprehensible only if the entire problematic of forgetting is carried to the level of the historical condition that underlies the totality of our relations to time. Forgetting is the emblem of the vulnerability of the historical condition taken as a whole.” See Ricoeur 2006: 284.

uniquely original take on how we perceive and utilize language, doing so became emblematic of the journey towards becoming a sage:

The trap exists because of the fish. Once you have the fish the trap can be forgotten. The snare exists because of the rabbit. Once you have the rabbit the snare can be forgotten. Words exist because of meaning. Once you have the meaning the words can be forgotten. In light of this, where can I find a man who has forgotten words so that I can talk to him!¹⁶

荃者所以在魚，得魚而忘荃；蹄者所以在兔，得兔而忘蹄；言者所以在意，得意而忘言。吾安得夫忘言之人而與之言哉！

Words are but temporary utterances that fail in their capacity to convey the underlying truth of things. Such being the case, what better way to express their intent than via imagery, and yet images are themselves but empty traces of the Thing. Words, being born of images, exist as words, but they are nevertheless unable to express the original meaning of the images from which they are derived. Seeing as words are derived from the minds of men and not heaven, they are merely the words of man and are not the authentic non-words of Dao. Wherein we must forget words so as to obtain the images underlying them and thereupon forget the images so as to obtain their meaning, comes from the need to expose their being in a manner that is as unconcealed as possible, for words do nothing but conceal the truth of reality.¹⁷ If Dao is unnamable and its indescribability is not due to an insufficient vocabulary on the part of humanity but arises from the singular dimensionality of our language, then is the reality of the myriad things any different? It is indeed.

The idea that we must forgo language in order to comprehend the visual cues comprising the world was a notion shared by all early Daoist thinkers. Zhuangzi, being the second in this lineage, was

¹⁶ Zhuangzi ch. 26 “*waiwu* 外物”. See Guo Qingfan, 944.

¹⁷ As part of his commentary to the *Yijing*, Wang Bi justified ontic forgetfulness using precisely this argument: “Thus, if one preserves words, one cannot obtain the image; if one preserves the image, one cannot obtain the idea. Images are born of ideas and are thus preserved as images, but these images are not the images themselves. Words are born of images and are thus preserved as words, but these words are not the words themselves. Such being the case, if one were to forget the image, one could then obtain the idea; if one were to forget words, one could then obtain the image. Obtaining the idea lies in forgetting the image, and obtaining the image lies in forgetting words.” 「是故，存言者，非得象者也；存象者，非得意者也。象生於意而存象焉，則所存者乃非其象也；言生於象而存言焉，則所存者乃非其言也。然則，忘象者，乃得意者也；忘言者，乃得象者也。得意在忘象，得象在忘言。」 See Lou Yulie, 609.

pushing us to go beyond the dichotomy-driven nature of our value-laden epistemic norms towards a more non-discriminating and intuitive means in which to engage the world. This is why his text stressed that to view the myriad things from the perspective of their names (e.g., rabbit snare and fish trap) was to fail to see the broader image lying beyond the horizon (e.g., rabbit and fish). Even this, however, was not good enough, for what awaits us beyond the horizon are the non-words grounding the image behind names. Such steps might succeed in getting someone to the ontological level of forgetfulness but it would fail to advance them beyond that.

We cannot, therefore, take these three stages of forgetting (i.e., words, images, and meaning) as representing a comprehensive picture of the *Zhuangzi*'s ideal of cosmological forgetting in that they are still mind-dependent forms of forgetfulness. It would serve the sage no good to remain tied to the very thing that binds him to our onto-phenomenological reality. If he is to successfully return to the One in a capacity other than through his own death, he will not only have to let go of the desire to view everything from the perspective of lived-being but also learn to see things from the vantage point of their root. Viewing things from the standpoint of Dao thus entails engaging them as butcher Ding engaged the ox—from the nothingness permeating the universe whilst outwardly embracing the ox in the entirety of its oneness.

Forgetting the names, images, and significance of the things of the world is, of course, more than just an indiscriminate forgetting; it is a complete re-evaluation of how we perceive and distinguish them. In the course of our perceiving and distinguishing, things make an impression on our mind, the image of which is recalled in the event of our forgetting. This returning to the forgotten image becomes a projection of one's mind onto the trace of things.¹⁸ It is, however, a forgotten projecting towards a long vanished presence of being. The vanishing of the thing's mark of existence can thus be taken as the potentiality of said being insofar as the possibility of its return is wholly dependent

¹⁸ Speaking of the trace in a more permanent light, Ricoeur argues that: "All traces are present to our minds. There is no hint of something that is absent. It is necessary then to endow the trace with a semiotic dimension, so that it functions as a sign, and to regard the trace as a sign-effect, a sign of the action of the seal in creating the impression...A trace must therefore be conceived at once as a present effect and as the sign of its absent cause. Now, in the trace, there is no otherness, no absence. Everything is positivity and presence." See Jean-Pierre Changeux and Paul Ricoeur. *What Makes Us Think? A Neuroscientist and a Philosopher Argue about Ethics, Human Nature, and the Brain*. M. de Bevoise, trans. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002: 149-150.

upon the recollection of mind. In contrast, Heidegger preferred to describe forgetting as an inauthentic having-been that is related to its own thrownness of being:

When one projects oneself inauthentically upon the possibilities drawn from what is taken care of in making it present, this is possible only because Dasein has forgotten itself in its ownmost thrown potentiality-of-being. This forgetting is not nothing, nor is it just failure to remember; it is rather a 'positive,' ecstatic mode of having-been; a mode with a character of its own. The ecstasy of forgetting has the character of backing away from one's own most having-been in a way that is closed off from oneself.¹⁹

The thrown potentiality of any being hence transforms into an act of mental projection and can in this way be said to be an ontic denial by way of forgetfulness. Forgetting in this sense can thus act as an outgrowth of man's knowledge of the true state of reality. However, regarding the *Zhuangzi*, the ultimate realm of truth lay not with ontological being but with the meontological quality of Dao. From this we can draw the conclusion that in order to attain true ontic forgetting, one must not only forget how things present themselves to the world, but their trace too. Given this, forgetting in the sense *Zhuangzi* implied does not result in the fragmentation of reality but in its cohesion. Wherein the act of forgetfulness brings about a degree of cohesion between things is attributable not only to the fact that it is the mind of man that is being forgotten but more importantly, that this forgetting absolves the tendency of the mind to delineate a thing's name from its ontological trace.²⁰ The common man, on the other hand, clings to this supposed distinction and so unavoidably succeeds in what *Zhuangzi* so poignantly referred to as forgetting that which is real (*chengwang* 誠忘):

Therefore, if one's virtue endures, appearance can be forgotten. When men do not forget the things they ought to forget and forget the things they should not forget, this is a case of forgetting what is real.²¹

¹⁹ See Heidegger 1996: 311-312 (§339).

²⁰ This forgetting of both the Thing and its trace, of the distinction and separation of the two, was referred to by Merleau-Ponty as the night of forgetting: "It is in better understanding perception (and hence imperceptions)—i.e., understand perception as differentiation, forgetting as undifferentiation. The fact that one no longer sees the memory, not a destruction of a psychic material which would be the sensible, but its disarticulation which makes there be no longer a separation, a relief. This is the night of forgetting." See Merleau-Ponty 1968: 197.

²¹ These lines occur in a passage involving two deformed men (Yinqi Zhili Wuchun 闖歧支離無唇 and Wengang

故德有所長而形有所忘，人不忘其所忘而忘其所不忘，此謂誠忘。

To forget the genuinely real is one of the greatest errors a person can commit for Zhuangzi insofar as it is a forgetting of one's own rootedness in Dao. To forget that the being of one's existence is intimately connected with the ontological nothingness of Dao is to overshadow the authentic virtue of Dao with the impurity of the human. This why Zhuangzi stated above that physical deficiencies could be overlooked so long as one's moral virtue remained equivalent to that of Dao. If, however, the virtue of Dao is forgotten, such forgetfulness may be considered a forgetting of that which is real. Examining the commentary of Guo Xiang, for example, this theory would appear to hold:

When one's virtue endures when following things, things forget their vileness. When enduring by preceding things, things forget their preference. With birth there is love, with death there is abandonment. Therefore, when it comes to virtue, there is nowhere in the world it can be forgotten; when it comes to form, there is nowhere in principle it does not exist. Thus, when it comes to forgetting form, it is not forgetting; to not forget form but forget virtue is to forget what is real.²²

其德長於順物，則物忘其醜；長於逆物，則物忘其好。生則愛之，死則棄之。故德者，世之所不忘也；形者，理之所不存也。故夫忘形者，非忘也；不忘形而忘德者，乃誠忘也。

From the above we can thus see that ontic forgetting for the *Zhuangzi* involved a letting-go of the outward trace of things and is not inexorably tied to the mental recollections of said things by the subject. Each encounter with the things of the world is hence at once stored in the mind and not in memory per se, and yet this encounter and its subsequent recalling must already be present to both the mind and memory if it is to succeed.²³ Wherein forgetfulness poses a potential danger is in its

Daying 甕盎大癩) and the Dukes (Ling of Wei 衛甯公 and Huan of Qi 齊桓公) of their respective home states. *Zhuangzi* ch. 5 “*dechongfu* 德充符.” See Guo Qingfan, 216-217; Chai 2008: 182.

²² *Zhuangzi* ch. 5 “*dechongfu* 德充符.” See Guo Qingfan, 217-218. Cheng Xuanying likewise offered a reading in line with our assessment, saying: “Daying and Zhili both have a moral virtue that is exemplary and far-reaching, satisfying the needs of the Dukes of Qi and Wei, allowing them to forget the vileness of their bodily form. The real has its actuality. What can be forgotten is form; what cannot be forgotten is virtue. To forget form is easy and to forget virtue is difficult. Thus, it is said what is known as form is forgettable and what is known as virtue is unforgettable. To not forget form but forget virtue is the true actuality of forgetting. This is what is meant by virtue without form.” 「大癩支離，道德長遠，遂使齊侯衛主，忘其形惡。誠，實也。所忘，形也；不忘，德也；忘形易而忘德難也，故謂形為所忘，德為不忘也。不忘形而忘德者，此乃真實忘。斯德不形之義也。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 5 “*dechongfu* 德充符.” See Guo Qingfan, 218.

²³ The presumed unity of mind and memory was taken by Augustine, for example, in the following sense: “When I

capacity to not only eradicate our memories and thereby undo our conceived knowledge of the world, as an unchecked aspect of the mind it could also devastate the very existence of the subject. Zhuangzi was able to nullify such a threat by treating the trace and act of forgetting as a means by which one may return to and unite with the oneness of things; it is, in other words, a form of life praxis rooted in the art of useful uselessness whilst embodying the self-nourishing power of Dao.

If our memory is constantly being held hostage by the effacement of its trace from forgetting, then as it is an integral part of our assumed historical condition, the loss of our ability to recall and/or recognize former occurrences of memory cannot but be seen as nihilistic. Forgetting, therefore, is regarded as a threat whose progression must be slowed or halted at all cost. Such a threat did not exist for the *Zhuangzi*, as it took it to be a necessary measure in becoming more authentic and in touch with Dao. Additionally, the dilemma over *ekstasis* we raised in chapter three does not figure into the text's argumentation over forgetting either, rendering moot the idea that forgetfulness occurs in the past while remembering is a recalling of said past in the present-now.²⁴

Trace, in being a human invention, is absent in the realm of Dao; the traceless nature of Dao makes even the naming of trace impossible. One might then pose the question, if Dao is without trace, how can one come to know of it? One can know of Dao by embracing its still quiescence while tracing its non-presencing presence to the ontological nothingness found everywhere and in everything. As nonbeing is the authentically meontic expression of Dao and nothingness is the meontological mode by which ontic unfolding occurs, any attempt to trace the tracelessness of Dao requires that we first forget any inclination that such the trace can find its way back to its source.

Indeed, Zhuangzi argued that we must go even further by unlearning the artificial value attached to our epistemological norms as a necessary first-step if we are to recall and join in the oneness of things. Through forgetting we forget being, and in forgetting being, we retrieve nonbeing and set it

remember memory, then is the memory itself present with me by itself: but when I remember forgetfulness, then is present both memory and forgetfulness: memory is present, by which I have remembered; forgetfulness is present which I have remembered." See Augustine's *Confessions*, book 10.16 (vol. 2: 117).

²⁴ Ricoeur argues precisely the opposite, citing Heidegger as proof-of-point: "Just as expectation is possible only on the basis of awaiting, remembering is possible only on the basis of forgetting, and not the other way around. In the mode of forgottenness, having-been primarily 'discloses' the horizon in which Dasein, lost in the 'superficiality' of what is taken care of, can remember." See Ricoeur 2006: 442. See also, Heidegger 1996: 312 (§339).

free. To forget, in other words, is to recall how all things take nothingness as their root and Dao as their source. It is our obsession with positive, manifest trace that serves to distance us from the ultimate truth of reality which grounds itself in the milieu of primal oneness. Forgetting is thus not an addressing of the temporal state of being referred to by one's mind during the act of remembrance; on the contrary, it is an opportunity for humanity to have a glimpse at the freedom awaiting us when we forgo the pursuit of fame and title, right and wrong, and other socio-ethical coveting that takes us down a path ever-more deviating from the way of Dao. In order to rectify such deviation, we must not only learn to forget things ontically, we must also learn to forget them ontologically, and this is attained by way of perfecting the art of 'losing oneself.'

5.2 Losing Oneself in Forgetfulness

Thus far we have focused on how the *Zhuangzi* makes use of the idea of ontic forgetting in order to initiate the process of return to the One. In this section, we will continue to examine this process by delving into how ontological forgetting through loss of the relational self can further the authentic person's quest for cosmological freedom via an existential union with Dao. If the first stage in the journey towards a holistic experience of forgetfulness centered on epistemological forgetting, the second can be said to revolve around a phenomenological letting-go. As for the title of this section, it contains a metaphor we will get to shortly but for now what can be said of it is best illustrated with reference to an altogether different passage, one that nevertheless contains an equally powerful expression:

To stand without moving is easy; to walk without touching the ground is difficult...Look at that which is empty. The empty room gives birth to a state of pure whiteness and in such stillness, fortune and blessing gathers. If you do not stop there, this is called sitting while the mind gallops.²⁵

絕迹易，無行地難……瞻彼闕者，虛室生白，吉祥止止。夫且不止，是之謂坐馳。

²⁵ *Zhuangzi* ch. 4 “*renjianshi* 人間世.” See Guo Qingfan, 150; Chai 2008: 137 [translation revised]. The expression ‘sitting while the mind gallops’ (*zuochi* 坐馳) also appears in the Lan Ming 覽冥 chapter of the *Huainanzi* which reads: 「於遠方之外，是謂坐馳陸沈，晝冥宵明，以冬鑠膠，以夏造冰。」 See Zhang Shuangli, 643; Mair, 218.

Stage one forgetting (i.e., the ontic) took a course of action proactive in bearing, requiring the subject to physically engage the myriad things of the world so as to forget their images and trace. Given the relatively high frequency with which the terms for forgetting (*wang* 忘 and *wuxin* 無心) appear in the *Zhuangzi*, we are quite justified in referring to it as a wholly mundane, even banal notion. And yet Zhuangzi's attention on the ontic form of forgetfulness was only one in passing; indeed, his refusal to engage it in any sort of profound discourse spoke volumes of his disinterest. When it comes to the next and higher level of forgetting, however, the number of textual examples available to us shrinks considerably while Zhuangzi's interest rises noticeably. What is more, the *Zhuangzi* spent more time on this form of forgetfulness than on either of the other two forms combined, and for good reason.

What needs to be said regarding the passage quoted above is that it is requisite for composing a still and quiet mind. This is where the forgetting of trace comes into play, for without the letting-go of trace and its superimposed image, the mind will continue to race even though the body may be at rest. Stillness of mind is thus first needed in order to open it to the possibilities of an existential engagement with Dao. Should one stubbornly cling to fears and desires, events past and those yet to come, the situation will arise whereby one remains 'sitting while the mind gallops.' We ought, Zhuangzi wrote, to learn to see with the non-mind and listen without the intellect, shuttering and turning inward our eyes and ears, for nothing is better than seeing and listening with Dao.

Characterizing the mind as an empty, brightly lit room is to describe a mind synchronous with the non-discriminate, non-existent mind of Dao. In being still and empty like the room, the sage is able to receive all things; in being purely white, he reflects all things without retaining any aspect of them for himself. Although the white emptiness is in fact a metaphor for both Dao and the mind of the sage in his state of meditation, its allusion here to Dao should not be misconstrued for the dark mysteriousness of its original meontological condition. We are thereby able to distinguish between whiteness and darkness in that the first points to the sagely mind that has yet to achieve an ultimate clarity of things (i.e., he has attained second-stage forgetting), whereas the sage regarded as dark and mysterious has not only exceeded the highest level of forgetfulness in which both body and mind cease to exist, he has reached a degree of freedom only possible by conjoining with Dao on an existential level.

The holistic, experiential immersion required of self-forgetting was broken down by the *Zhuangzi* into a series of measures that the text described thusly: “Cultivating the will, one can thus forget the body. Cultivating the body, one can thus forget profit. Being devoted to Dao, one can thus forget the mind.”²⁶ This onto-phenomenological approach to self-forgetfulness was also taken up by Heidegger who framed the issue as one indelibly tied to the idea of angst: “The existential and temporal meaning of fear is constituted by a self-forgetting: the confused backing away from one’s own factual potentiality-of-being, which is threatened being-in-the-world taking care of what is at hand.”²⁷ Thus, the *Zhuangzi* understood forgetfulness as a pushing forward or going beyond the limit of our own being while for Heidegger, it symbolized a retreating.

Following the *Zhuangzi*’s line of reasoning as seen in the passage quoted above, three modes of phenomenological forgetting may be discerned—things, self, and body—all of which precede the onto-cosmological forgetting that is embodied in the act of fasting of the mind. Each of these three stages occurs in some of the most well-known allegorical passages of the text though, oddly enough, Western scholars have failed to pay them their due diligence. The same, however, is not true of the Chinese commentarial tradition, wherein each example is amply supported with debate and insightful discussion. What is interesting to note is that the majority of these allegorical examples involve Confucius or one of his disciples. This technique of creatively repeating the words of elders (*chongyan* 重言) was one of the many unique traits of *Zhuangzi*’s thought, and in collaboration with two more terms (*yuyan* 寓言 and *zhiyan* 卮言), constituted his philosophical discourse.²⁸ One cannot help but notice the irony here—the *Zhuangzi* placed the call for the forgetting of ethical norms into the mouths of the Ruists, calls they themselves would have found inconceivable.

With regards to the first type of loss, that of the self, the *Zhuangzi* employed several terms to express it: one literal (*wu sang wo* 吾喪我), another metaphorical (*xing ru gaomu, xin ru sihui* 形如

²⁶ 「故養志者忘形，養形者忘利，致道者忘心矣。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 28 “rangwang 讓王.” See Guo Qingfan, 977.

²⁷ Heidegger 1996: 314 (§341). More recently, Gadamer has discussed forgetting in the context of the spectator, a most intriguing of metaphors: “Being outside oneself is the positive possibility of being wholly with something else. This kind of being present is a self-forgetfulness, and to be a spectator consists in giving oneself in self-forgetfulness to what one is watching.” See Gadamer 2004: 122.

²⁸ *Zhuangzi* ch. 27 “yuyan 寓言.” See Guo Qingfan, 947.

槁木，心如死灰). They take place in a story from chapter two of the text between Nanguo Ziqi and his disciple Yancheng Ziyou:

Nanguo Ziqi sat behind his desk, exhaled and turned his head towards the sky, his expression stupefied, his relational self seeming to have left him. Yancheng Ziyou, who stood in attendance before him said, “What is this? Can the body appear like withered wood and the mind like dead ash? How is it that your sitting behind your desk now is not the same as when you sat here previously?” Ziqi said, “Yan, the question you ask is a very good one! Just now, I forgot myself; do you understand?”²⁹

南郭子綦隱机而坐，仰天而噓，荅焉似喪其耦。顏成子游立侍乎前，曰：何居乎？形固可使如槁木，而心固可使如死灰乎？今之隱机者，非昔之隱机者也。子綦曰：偃，不亦善乎，而問之也！今者吾喪我，汝知之乎？

It is clear that Ziyou’s remarkable description of his master’s countenance referred to his physical form, but what was Ziqi implying when he claimed to have forgotten himself? In an earlier work, I have pointed out that the phrase *qi ou* 其耦 has the meaning of ‘paired self’ or ‘relational self,’ and that in his commentary to this sentence, Sima Biao 司馬彪 wrote that such pairing was between one’s relational self and the soul (*shen yu shen wei ou* 身與神為耦).³⁰ We can, therefore, conclude that what Ziqi meant was that we should surrender our relational self to the domain of Dao. In order to supplement our knowledge of what the *Zhuangzi* meant by the above metaphor, let us turn to several of its appended commentaries.

To begin, I offer Wang Pang’s 王雱 annotation:

The sage embodies Dao and is thus without a relational self. Being selfless, there is nothing in him opposite to the world hence Nanguo Ziqi resembles one who has lost his companion. As for this companion, it is his equal. There is not a thing that is without its opposite and Dao alone in its marvelousness is unequalled. Being without equal and returning to the One, the opposition between

²⁹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 2 “*qi wulun* 齊物論.” See Guo Qingfan, 43-45; Chai 2008: 65-67.

³⁰ See Chai 2008: 66.

self and other is forgotten. This is the equality of things. Thus, the body can be said to be like withered wood and the mind can be said to be like dead ash.³¹

聖人體道而無我，無我則無對於天下，此南郭子綦似喪其耦也。夫耦，匹也。物莫不有匹，而惟道神妙而無匹，無匹則歸於一致而忘彼我。此物之所以齊也。故形可使如槁木，心可使如死灰。

Whereas the *Zhuangzi* used the expressions *sang qi ou* 喪其耦 and *wu sang wo* 吾喪我 to convey the sage's loss of his relational self, Wang Pang adopted just the first and replaced the second with the phrase *wang bi wo* 忘彼我. In the original text, the character for loss (*sang* 喪) is reduplicated, conveying a sense of parallelism and continuity. What is lost in both cases is the empirical self; it is lost because the sage embodies Dao and Dao is without self. The implication of this state of existence is that the sage no longer regards himself as an ontological being but one who has become a transcendent companion of Dao. Wang Pang, however, believed the sage remained in the world of men and merely let-go of his relational self through the act of forgetfulness. Such behavior will not only prove to be more practical when the time comes to recall the self, it exempts the sage from finding himself in a situation similar to the one we spoke of in the previous chapter regarding the Thing being lost and in need of re-finding.

For Wang Pang, Ziqi's companion was been lost not because his ascension to the existential plane of Dao has induced its destruction, but out of the need to forget the ontic distinction between empirical self and other, as well as the pairing of the relational self and the meontological non-self. What we see then in Wang's argument is that only amidst the marvelous possibilities of Dao can Ziqi find his genuinely authentic self, a self that identifies with the myriad things through the oneness of Dao. In this way, the body and mind are rendered as but temporary place-holders which, when vacated, result in what the *Zhuangzi* peculiarly characterized as a state whereby one's body resembles withered wood and the mind dead ash.

³¹ Wang Pang (1044-1076 CE) was a literary genius who succumbed to illness at age of thirty-three, but not before producing commentaries to the *Zhuangzi*, *Daodejing*, *Lunyu*, and *Mencius*. His commentary to the *Zhuangzi*, entitled *Nanhua Zhenjing Xinzhuan* 《南華真經新傳》, has been preserved in volume 16 of the *Zhonghua Daozang* as well as volume 337 of the *Siku Quanshu*. All references to Wang's commentary are to *Siku Quanshu* edition. For more on his life and writings see Fang Yong, vol. 2, 61-82.

If we turn to the commentaries of Lü Huiqing and Lin Xiyi as further points of discussion, we immediately notice that neither used expressions similar to Wang Pang's *wang bi wo* but instead retained the *Zhuangzi*'s original language of *sang qi ou* and *wu sang wo*. Their respective commentaries are:

Men all have their body and their mind and because of this there is the 'I' of the self. If there is no 'I' then one would be no different from dead ash or withered wood. Ziyou does not know from whence I arise, taking his body and mind as laboring without rest, not knowing where they reside and how they can be used to reach such a state. However, at the time of his forgetting he came to realize that his former and present leaning on the table were different and so he examined them anew. His former leaning was a time in which to reflect on things; his present leaning is a time in which to forget things. If I know from whence I arise then existence and loss neither begin nor exist in me. If we say that a flute is a thing then all men can listen to it and know that its empty void lacks being. As for what I take as being myself, such is the case too.³²

人之所以有其形心者，以其有我而已。苟為無我，則如死灰槁木，不足異也。子游不知我之所自起，為形心所役而不得息，不知何居而可使至此也。然於嗒然之間，知今昔隱几之不同，則其觀之亦察矣。益昔之隱几，應物時也。今之隱几，遺物時也。苟知我之所自起，則存與喪未始不在我也。比竹之為物，人皆聞之，知其空虛無有也。我之所以為我者，亦然。

Leaning against the table is to depend on it; where there is forgetting, things assume an appearance of mindlessness. Losing one's companion, men all take things to be their counterpart hence they are forgotten. Withered wood has the meaning of no life; dead ash is a heart-mind that has yet to arise. As for the leaning of today, it is to say that the man leaning now is not like the man who leaned here earlier. When there is an 'I' then there are things, but when the 'I' is lost the self also ceases to be; with no 'I' things no longer exist. You know this, so I say you also know its principle. The self is in fact the 'I' but one does not say I have forgotten I; rather, one says I have forgotten myself. To speak of man's ability to draw a line between a selfish mind and one that does not change is to say what lies between I and my self has a difference. The three words 'I forgot myself' achieve this idea most superbly.³³

³² See Tang Jun, 18.

³³ See Zhou Qicheng, 13.

隱几者，憑几也；嗒然者，無心之貌也；喪其耦者，人皆以物我對立，此忘之也；槁木者，無生意也；死灰，心不起也。今之隱几者，言今日先生之隱几非若前此見人之隱几也。有我則有物，喪我，無我也，無我則無物矣。汝知之乎者，言汝知此理乎。吾即我也，不曰我喪我，而曰吾喪我，言人身中纔有一毫私心未化，則吾我之間亦有分別矣。吾喪我三字下得極好。

According to Lü Huiqing, what distinguished the sage in this story (e.g., Ziqi) from the common man (e.g., Ziyou) was the former's ability to recognize that the true suchness of selfhood does not reside within him but is the shared self-so-ness of the myriad things. Forgetting one's self, therefore, leads to the realization that the transformation of things takes place on a non-temporal plane of reality, and being without beginning or end, it is the perpetual non-self of Dao which comes to supplant the relational self, hence it is forgettable. Knowing that death and birth are but a part of a continuous cycle that is seen throughout the universe, the sage clings to the root of their constancy which is nothingness. He behaves in a similar manner when differentiating the ontic and ontological self. This is why Lü employed the image of the hollow bamboo flute for it nicely reflected the *Zhuangzi*'s idea that the human body was a shell whose vitality was wholly dependent on the *qi* of Dao.

Lin Xiyi's explanation was certainly the most colorful of the three discussed and it stands out for its introduction of the concept of mindlessness (*wuxin* 無心)—a rejection of one's reliance on things, including the idea of self. Epistemologically, Lin's argument over the separation of 'I' and 'self' appears to be one of semantics. Cosmologically, however, we can declare that which puts the 'I' into the 'self' is the vitality of Dao. In this way, the self enters a partnership between the cosmic breath of Dao and the physical form it bequeaths us. Bequeathing our body as it does, Dao instills in us its enervating nature and it is for this reason that its cosmic spirit is taken to be the companion of our corporeal selves. The mind, however way we view it, is simply a tool by which to engage things in logical or emotive terms; it has no bearing whatsoever on the state of our partnership with our spirit but influences how far one is able to progress in harmonizing with things. Given that the myriad things share in the *qi* of Dao, we owe them no allegiance, nor are we dependent on them. Our dependency can only be traced to Dao itself and nothing else.

What we must bear in mind, moreover, is that the sense of self that we tend to assign to ourselves is not the self that exists in the eye of Dao. Recalling our earlier discussion of the One, things possess

a degree of particularity about them yet such qualities are at the same time assimilated into the oneness of all things thereby rebuking any individualism they may experience in favor of one belonging to the collectivity of the One. In this way, the 'I' that I identify with ontically is forgotten when considered from the cosmological 'I' of Dao. Indeed, to say that Dao has an 'I' would be to describe it as an ontological being, something that is infeasible; rather, the 'I' of Dao is a meontological 'I' that equalizes all disparate 'I's' into a singular 'non-I.'

If the 'I' of myself is not the 'I' of Dao but its 'non-I,' it does not require too great a leap in logic to arrive at the realization that any forgetting of the egoistic 'I' is in fact a remembrance of the 'non-I' of Dao. The act of forgetting one's self is, therefore, an act of uniting with one's non-self in Dao insofar as it is an inward self-extension of nothingness that partakes in the oneness of the myriad things collectively. Since Dao is non-temporal, the 'I' that is the 'non-I' of the One cannot be forgotten. This is why those who have written commentaries to this passage are in agreement when they say that the forgetting which leads to the loss of one's self is actually a reflecting on the true nature of things, while the forgetting that takes place while one is still in possession of one's self is an occasion to begin forgetting things so as to lose one's self.

The reason it is crucial to lose one's self is that the presence of the 'I' diminishes the presence of Dao's spirit in one's body. It is as Zhuangzi claimed: "The genuine man breathes with his heels while ordinary men breathe with their throats."³⁴ In order to keep our bodies intact and preserve our spirit, we must not only rid ourselves of the desire for fame and wealth, we must learn to view the world using the *qi* of the universe, not the mind of man. This involves hiding our spirit rather than flaunting it, nourishing it by forgetting the things of the world, after which all that remains is the non-essence of Dao. If all that remains is Dao, how can our spirit suffer harm? If all that remains is Dao, of what need is there to forget things so as to return to simplicity? The answer lies in a life praxis grounded in nothingness:

Those who have a head and feet but are without mind or ears are numerous. Those having form believe they can exist alongside that without form or shape but they end up being exhausted. Men

³⁴ 「真人之息以踵，衆人之息以喉。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 6 "dazongshi 大宗師." See Guo Qingfan, 228; Chai 2008: 190 [translation revised].

have their movement and stoppage, their death and life, their decline and arising. Of these he can do nothing. Believing their governance lies with man, he forgets things, forgets heaven, and so is named a forgetter of self. He who has forgotten his self is thus known as one who has entered heaven.³⁵

凡有首有趾無心無耳者眾，有形者與無形無狀而皆存者盡無。其動，止也；其死，生也；其廢，起也。此又非其所以也。有治在人，忘乎物，忘乎天，其名為忘己。忘己之人，是之謂入於天。

In the previous chapter we spoke of a life praxis modeled after the usefulness of uselessness, but this would not be nearly as effective as cultivating oneself in forgetfulness so as to return to the equanimity of emptiness. Zhuangzi's advice that we ought to hide our spirit so as to preserve the presence of our being shows the extent to which his meontological understanding of the universe permeates his philosophy. Owing to the oneness of all things as demonstrated by the fact that everything emanates from and returns to nothingness, both body and spirit take their source in Dao. If body and spirit alike take Dao as their source and nothingness as their root, then the notion that humanity possesses them independently of Dao is untenable. Without the animating spirit of Dao we are but withered wood and dead ash.

Having said as much, where does this leave us with regards to the forgetting of self? The idea of a self whose existence is autonomous of Dao has now become a misnomer and that which we refer to as the mind only clouds the clarity of Dao's essence within us to the extent that we associate mind, spirit, and body as one amalgamated entity. Dao gives us our form and sets it alight with its breath but the mind of man is, at its core, a limited thing that prevents us from encountering the boundless potential of Dao. The best way to bring equality to things is to discard the selfish concept of self and think in terms of a selfless non-self. Letting-go of the 'I' in myself is to be like the small pile of ash produced by an individual incense stick joining the larger pile of ash filling the cauldron—each mind transforms into the non-mind of the selfless-self, the outcome of which is “heaven, the earth, and I came into being together” and “nothing lives longer than a child who dies young.”³⁶ In other words, dichotomies such as life and death, old age and youth, self and other, become meaningless terms when considered against the backdrop of nothingness to which they all

³⁵ *Zhuangzi* ch. 12 “*tiandi* 天地.” See Guo Qingfan, 427-430.

³⁶ *Zhuangzi* ch. 2 “*qiwulun* 齊物論.” See Guo Qingfan, 79; Chai 2008: 85 [translation revised].

inevitably return and arise anew. Forgetting the self is thus a means by which to illuminate the error of our ways as we go about dividing and assigning names to things; it is, in other words, a non-purposeful non-doing that awakens us to the fact that it is natural law, not human knowing, that acts as the true standard-bearer by which things co-exist with one another.

To forget the self is to forget things and when things are forgotten one can forget the distinction between heaven and earth. Thus, one who practices forgetfulness of things, the self, and heaven and earth is one who has entered the realm where neither nonbeing nor being exist but only the mysteriousness of Dao. It is here in Dao's dark mystery that true onto-cosmological freedom occurs. Such freedom in the oneness of things is only accessible to the non-discriminating mind of the sage; a mind which has forgone its associative dichotomy with the body to root itself in the constancy of nothingness. Thus, while we have seen how loss of self equalizes man and the myriad things of the world, if we are to transcend this plane and reach cosmological freedom of a spiritual bearing, we must learn to master what is arguably the most difficult stage, that being sitting in forgetfulness.

5.3 Smashing one's Body in Order to Sit in Forgetfulness

In his story of butcher Ding, Zhuangzi outlined three stages one must traverse in order to master the art of butchery. Our current discussion on the art of forgetting displays a similar pattern of progression. We have thus far looked at two stages of forgetting: those of things and the self. The third stage, the art of sitting in forgetfulness, can be regarded as approximating butcher Ding's ability to view the ox from within by using the nothingness of the knife blade to enter the gaps of nothingness amidst the ox's muscles and bones. Employing the analogy of the butcher is valid in that such sitting not only obliterates the mind and body but is a sitting whose scope extends to the essence of spirit itself. If we are to truly become one with the myriad things—to join with the ox as does butcher Ding—forgetfulness of this magnitude must not only touch the core of man's spirit, it must nullify it along with the initial act of forgetting, for only when we have forgotten our body and mind can we attain the cosmological freedom engendered by the ontological nothingness.

In the *Zhuangzi*, the word ‘to forget’ (*wang* 忘) is seen eighty-seven times³⁷ while the expression ‘sitting in forgetfulness’ (*zuowang* 坐忘) is seen just three, all of which occur in a conversation between Confucius and his disciple Yan Hui:

Yan Hui said: “I have forgotten benevolence and righteousness.” Confucius said: “That is good but there is more to be done.” After a few days, Yan Hui again saw Confucius and said: “I have made progress.” Confucius replied: “What do you mean?” Yan Hui said: “I have forgotten rites and music.” Confucius said: “That is good but there is more to be done.” After a few days, Yan Hui once again saw Confucius, saying: “I have made progress.” Confucius asked: “What do you mean?” Yan Hui said: “I can sit in forgetfulness.” Confucius, startled, said: “What do you mean by sitting in forgetfulness?” Yan Hui answered: “I discard my limbs and lose my intellect. Leaving my body, I abandon wisdom and unite with the great penetrator. This is called sitting in forgetfulness.”³⁸

曰：回忘仁義矣。曰：可矣，猶未也。他日，復見，曰：回益矣。曰：何謂也？曰：回忘禮樂矣。曰：可矣，猶未也。他日，復見，曰：回益矣。曰：何謂也？曰：回坐忘矣。仲尼蹴然曰：何謂坐忘？顏回曰：墮肢體，黜聰明，離形去知，同於大通，此謂坐忘。

Yan Hui’s progressive development towards total forgetfulness is carried out in three measures. To begin with, Yan proclaimed to have forgotten benevolence and righteousness (*ren* 仁 and *yi* 義), qualities which, oddly enough, helped define the Ruist gentleman (*junzi* 君子). The irony here cannot be overlooked; Zhuangzi was not only discreetly criticizing the Ruists for clinging to what he viewed as artificial motivators, his call for their dismissal added to his mocking by deeming them unworthy of preservation in one’s pursuit of unification with Dao. The *Zhuangzi* thus said: “The Ruist wears a round cap to show he knows the time of heaven, walks in square shoes to show he knows the form of earth, and hangs jade ornaments around his waist to resolve disputes when they take place. A gentleman has his way but he does not need to adorn himself with its robes; wearing its robes, he may still fail to understand his way.”³⁹ What the Ruists took to be the most

³⁷ The word ‘no-mind’ or ‘mindlessness’ (*wuxin* 無心), which can also be understood as a form of forgetting, is only used in three instances.

³⁸ *Zhuangzi* ch. 6 “*dazongshi* 大宗師.” See Guo Qingfan, 283-284; Chai 2008: 227-230 [translation revised]. This story also appears in the *Huainanzi*. See Zhang Shuangli, 1282; Major, 468-469.

³⁹ 「儒者冠圓冠者，知天時；履句履者，知地形；緩佩玦者，事至而斷。君子有其道者，未必為其服也；為其服者，未必知其道也。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 21 “*tianzifang* 田子方.” See Guo Qingfan, 718.

redeeming characteristics of humanity, the *Zhuangzi* in turn criticized as misguided. Indeed, the text went so far as to say that any form of self-cultivation whose principals were founded upon the centrality of the human heart-mind would do nothing but lead people astray from the path of Dao. In light of the fact that benevolence (*ren* 仁) and righteousness (*yi* 義) are morally inspired forms of engaging the world, their being forgotten can thus be regarded as equivalent to the *Zhuangzi*'s first, ontic stage of forgetfulness.

Whereas the cultivation of *ren* and *yi* were appropriated by the Ruists as ideals whose normative value is essential for a stable and harmonious society, the *Zhuangzi*'s mockery was not a sign of vindictiveness but an attempt to point out the inadequacy of cultivating such human-centric values over those found in the natural world. That which is natural is derived from Dao, and so to cultivate the natural can only lead to further naturalness whilst bringing us closer to its source. In order to do this, we must let go of the artificial that keeps us from the One and embrace the unity of oneness that traces itself back to Dao. Thus, when Yan Hui stated he has forgotten *ren*, *yi*, and *li* 禮 (ritual), he was in fact relinquishing what inwardly defined him as a practitioner of the socio-ethical code constituting his Ruist upbringing. To forget said beliefs would not ensure his successful attainment of spiritual freedom however. To do that, he must continue with his endeavors and learn how to forget his body as well.

Despite his apparent progress in forgetting things, Yan Hui had yet to forget his body. Translating the forgetting of one's body into Confucian terms, the *Zhuangzi* wrote that Yan must abandon his use of ritual propriety and music. Ritual and music (*li* 禮 and *yue* 樂) were without doubt two of the central pillars of early Chinese civilization and saw their incorporation into Ruist doctrine at the time of said school's inception. As the principle means by which one outwardly expresses oneself, ritual and music were not only internally standardized, they were also outwardly conformist in nature. Those who follow ritual etiquette or engage in musical performance were not only bound by the rules of their activity, they were at the same time bound to those acting as spectators. This type of inward fusing with outwardly conformist behavior was far from natural and was severely frowned upon by *Zhuangzi*. How one behaves, he argued, should not be the subject of an overarching body of rules; rather, it ought to be spontaneous and in harmony with the self-so

nature of the person involved.⁴⁰ Only when this occurs will one be able to forget one's body and proceed to the next level of forgetting.

With self and body now forgotten, Yan Hui had at last reached the culminating stage of his quest for utter self-forgetfulness. Sitting in forgetfulness is an intriguing metaphor given that Yan had already dismissed any epistemic and phenomenological awareness of his presence of being. To what, then, was Zhuangzi hinting with the phrase *zuowang*? Yan's answer that he had simply united with Dao seems simplistic and inadequate. Is it not obvious from the previous two stages of forgetting that he had discarded his body and dismissed his conscious mind? Therefore, it would be more than reasonable to declare that sitting in forgetfulness is but the culmination of the first two stages of forgetting and nothing else, but surely there is more to it than that?

In his commentary to the passage referring to Yan Hui's final reply to Confucius, Cheng Xuanying made this observation:

The Great Penetrator resembles the great Dao. Dao can penetrate and give birth to the myriad things, thus it is called Dao the Great Penetrator. What is external is then separate from bodily form—a false emptiness—and this explains discarding one's limbs. What is internal is then discarding the pursuit of what the mind knows, to abruptly have no knowledge, and this explains dismissing intelligence. Since one is like withered wood and dead ash, one mysteriously joins with the great Dao. Making his progress in this way is called sitting in forgetfulness.⁴¹

大通，猶大道也。道能通生萬物，故謂道為大通也。外則離析於形體，虛假，此解墮肢體也。內則除去心識，惘然無知，此解黜聰明也。既而枯木死灰，冥同大道，如此之益，謂之坐忘也。

What we hear with our ears and see with our eyes are but traces of things. Knowing they are merely traces we can thus forget them. This is why we are able to dismiss our four limbs. If, however, we are to discard our intellect and purge ourselves of selfhood and rational mind, we must not only forget the traces of the myriad things but also 'that which leaves the trace' (*suoyi ji* 所以迹). The many occurrences of forgetting spread throughout the *Zhuangzi* all point to this central idea of

⁴⁰ See for example the tale in chapter 18 when Zhuangzi's wife died, he banged on a drum singing.

⁴¹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 6 "dazongshi 大宗師." See Guo Qingfan, 285.

sitting in forgetfulness. Furthermore, all exemplars of sagacity also point to and are embodiments of Yan Hui's accomplishment.

What is interesting to note is that those figures that have already completed their return to the One are social outcasts, or suffer from a physical ailment, while those who are in the midst of mastering this skill are disciples of Confucius, or Confucius himself. Zhuangzi's attacks on the Ruists were, therefore, hermeneutic and practical at the same time. Sitting in forgetfulness thus became a course of action whose directive was to force people to partake in a double awakening—a great awakening (*dajue* 大覺)—the first in terms of their defense of human finitude and the limitations of human knowledge, the second being the breaking down of humanity's hesitancy to view things from the point of view of the infinite vastness of Dao and its endless potentiality for change.

Our awakening to Dao from within the cocoon of human reality does not fail to secure our transcendence though; on the contrary, sitting in forgetfulness succeeds in much the same way as things trace their origins back to the One. The experience of Yan Hui, while marvelous in its own right, was neither transcendental nor mystical, for he engaged himself from within himself so as to forget himself. There was no union with a higher source, no sense of enlightenment or privilege because of it; rather, Yan engaged himself in a form of self-reductionism insofar as with each successive stage of forgetting, he lost that one aspect of human autonomy preventing his return to the One. We may think of it in this way: each time Yan forgot himself he darkened his self, becoming ever more mysterious and sage-like. As the dark is the mysterious, still quietude of nothingness from which everything emerges and returns, Yan must in turn make himself mirror those characteristics if he was to have any hope of transforming into one who was inwardly dark whilst outwardly luminous. This is what separates Yan as a prospective sage from the prognosticating shaman. The shaman engages in flights of spiritual fancy so as to join the gods and spirits of the dead while the sage exists in a realm where there is no distinguishing between the spirits of the dead and those of the living.

For Yan Hui to return to the One he must, as a final measure, sit and become dark through the act of forgetfulness. Sitting on the ground, Yan breathes with his heels and loses himself to the great clod. Embracing the earth as if it were an arm or a leg, he breathes the breath of the earth, becoming one with it. As the great clod is already united with the oneness of things, Yan's losing

himself to it such that his limbs became no more important to him than the earth upon which he sat, symbolized the totality of his physical forgetting. No part of his body holds preference over any other just as the earth does not favor one of its compositional elements over any other. The clod's ecosystem serves as a reflection of his own physiology in a manner not dissimilar to how butcher Ding inserted himself into the ox in order to undo it. All the relationships, variables, cycles, and mutations of the world's ecosystem are now clear to him but he does not use this clarity to conquer or manipulate it, for he recognizes it as the self-so way of Dao.

All of this informs Yan Hui as to the phenomenology of sitting in forgetfulness; it does not inform him as to the onto-cosmological side of doing so. To uncover that aspect, we must analyze the process involved in such sitting, one whose entailment is not immediately apparent from either the passage quoted above describing Yan Hui, or the commentaries appended to it. Indeed, while the phrase *zuowang* occurred in chapter six of the *Zhuangzi*, the concept describing the process involved in such sitting—fasting of mind (*xinzhai* 心齋)—took place much earlier in chapter four. Thus, while we are clear about the three stages of forgetting that culminated in fasting of the mind, what exactly such fasting entailed remains unknown. The goal of the next section is to address this issue by solving the mystery of how one mentally fasts whilst engaged in sitting in forgetfulness.

5.4 A Prelude to Spiritual Freedom: Fasting of the Mind

Abstinence from food is such a commonplace understanding of what it is means to fast that we take it for granted, but what of abstinence of the mind? It is indeed a queer turn of phrase, so much so that the term *xinzhai* appears in only one passage of the text.⁴² Perhaps a more appropriate rendition of this phrase would be 'composing the mind' as one can easily misconstrue Daoist fasting with the Buddhist idea of discarding or denying the mind. Although composing one's mind

⁴² The character *zhai* also appears in the story of bell-maker Qing in chapter 19, but it does so without the *xin* element, thereby changing the meaning from 'fasting of mind' to 'composing oneself.' The text reads: "When I am preparing to make a bell, I do not let it wear out my energy, but compose myself in order to still my mind." 「臣將為鑪，未嘗敢以耗氣也，必齋以靜心。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 19 "*dasheng* 達生." See Guo Qingfan, 658-659.

more accurately describes the preparation involved for one's return to Dao, it lacks the austerity of fasting hence I follow the conventional translation as fasting of mind. Here, then, is the passage wherein this perplexing phrase occurs:

Yan Hui asked: What is fasting of mind? Confucius answered: Concentrate your will and dismiss all distracting thoughts. Do not listen with your ears but with your mind. Do not listen with your mind but with *qi*. Let your listening stop with the ears, and let your mind stop with what is appropriate. *Qi* is an emptiness that awaits the appearance of things. Dao gathers where there is emptiness and such emptiness is fasting of mind.⁴³

顏回曰：敢問心齋。仲尼曰：若一志，無聽之以耳而聽之以心，無聽之以心而聽之以氣！聽止於耳，心止於符。氣也者，虛而待物者也。唯道集虛。虛者，心齋也。

Sitting in forgetfulness is thus a fasting of mind so as to make Dao one's place of abode. When we speak of housing Dao we are not referring to a consciously deliberate intervention but, to use the words of Wang Pang, "concentrate the will and the mind will determinately consider things clearly and with quiet emptiness in order to reach where Dao gathers itself."⁴⁴ Wang went on to say:

In the midst of this emptiness, Dao gathers and there is no use for external knowledge, only internal virtue. Thus it is said, one does not listen with the ears but with the mind. As the mind has obtained it then later *qi* will obtain it. Thus it is said, one does not listen with the mind but with *qi*.⁴⁵

夫中既空虛，而道集非由外知而由於內得也，故曰無聽之耳而聽之心。心既得之，則然後以氣而得之也，故曰無聽之以心而聽之以氣。

Composing the mind is just that—a reorganization—and not an ascetic attempt at enlightenment. Through recomposing the priorities of mind and spirit, the conscious mind that we so desperately cling to for guidance in our daily lives is moved from the forefront of our attention to the rear. It is thus cloistered so as to bring about quietude and stillness, emptiness and a sense of non-presumptuousness. In other words, if we are to allow Dao to gather within the confines of our mind, our mind must then mimic those conditions where Dao gathers elsewhere—still and empty

⁴³ *Zhuangzi* ch. 4 "renjianshi 人間世." See Guo Qingfan, 147-148; Chai 2008: 135-136 [translation revised].

⁴⁴ 「志一，則心鑑定而思慮澄，廓然空虛而至道自集也。」 See *Siku Quanshu*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

nothingness. Only when our mind changes into a non-mind can it act as a receptacle for Dao. Having become an empty space into which Dao enters, our mind gives itself over to *qi*. In discarding our mind we must find a substitute by which we can continue to function as human beings and this substitute is the *qi* of Dao. As we are now one with Dao, our *qi* has of its own accord transformed into that of Dao, a *qi* shared with the myriad things of the world. We are thus able to listen with this breath as if we were listening with the ears of Dao; we are able to see with it as if seeing through the eyes of Dao. Being one with Dao, we are indubitably indistinguishable from it. Dao and my former self have thus been spliced together to such a degree that I am no longer myself—I have lost myself through forgetfulness.

Of all the commentaries to the *Zhuangzi* still extant, when it comes to the passage on the fasting of mind, none is more illuminating than that by Lin Yidu, quoted here in its entirety:

To fast is to treasure emptiness of mind. If the mind still contains beings, to use it for the act of fasting will be difficult indeed! To fast for the sake of ease is negligent and inappropriate given the sheer vastness of heaven. Listening with the ears is considered the proper way to listen; listening with the mind is considered the reverse of listening; and listening with *qi* is not to listen at all. Proper listening is done with the ears and thus to exhaust the principle of things. Reverse listening is done with *qi* and exhausts the fulfillment of one's nature. Not listening at all uses emptiness to achieve one's ultimate fate. To listen with the ears and stop there is not like doing so with the mind; as the mind has its differentiations, there must be division and then agreement before they can combine. When intention reaches *qi* then there is no more listening for emptiness is to await things and nothing more. It is because of this that Dao gathers itself and fasting of mind has its marvelous use. When the *Liezi* said: "The body combines with the mind, the mind combines with *qi*, and *qi* combines with the spirits [of deities]," it is essentially this meaning. Yanzi⁴⁶ already knew this and so said: "Before Hui obtained it." When Confucius let him fast his mind starting with the fact that he was Hui, having obtained a use for fasting of mind, then there was no 'I.' Confucius again said that although you have already reached emptiness, it is like entering the land of action where only names are able to move the mind. If the mind resembles the *guan* and *yue*,⁴⁷ it emptily awaits a

⁴⁶ This is another name for Yan Hui.

⁴⁷ The *guan* 管 is an ancient Chinese wind instrument made of bamboo and had six holes along its length. The *yue* 籥 is an ancient Chinese flute.

breath. When one enters it calls out but when none enter it stops. How can such a thing contain the mind? Allowing the myriad things to exit and enter, there is no door; they hand themselves over to the self-governance of the world and there is no harm in this. Embracing the One as one's dwelling, if unable to obtain it, one must first stop and then arise in response to things. Residing in the principle of things and not having any of one's own is to fulfill one's destiny. To fulfill the principle of one's nature and destiny, no matter what one does, it will not be in accordance with heaven. To act on behalf of men, it is easy to use the untrue; to act on behalf of heaven, it is hard to act untruly. That wings fly and knowledge knows, such metaphors tell us that Yanzi must reside in ultimate emptiness, a place where things transform. Looking at his previous condition and understanding empty nothingness is to know the mind. Where whiteness is born Dao gathers and this is what we call self-so. If one abandons determinate spirits then temples will come to a stop; if they cannot stop, then the body will sit while the spirit gallops. As for what can be determined, the ears and eyes do not necessarily have to be external and the mind's will does not have to be internal. Thus, the difficult has its considerations and courses of action, and not fording the breath of the world, ghosts and spirits will come to dwell, yet this does not speak for human beings.⁴⁸

齋，貴虛心，若心猶存有，則其為齋也難矣！以齋為易而忽之者，嗚天不宜。聽之以耳，正聽也；聽之以心，反聽也；聽之以氣，無聽也。正聽以耳，將以窮理；反聽以神，將以盡性；無聽以虛，將以至命也。聽止於耳，不若於心；心有分別，符則分而有合；意至於氣，則無所復聽，虛以待物而已。道由此而集，心齋之妙用也。《列子》云：體合於心，心合於氣，氣合於神，與此義同。顏子既悟，乃曰：回未得。仲尼使之心齋，實自有回；既得使心齋之後，未始有回，則無我矣。夫子又語以汝雖已至虛，若入於有為之地，當不動心於名可也。心如管籥，虛以待氣，氣入則鳴，不入則止，何嘗容心於其間哉？任萬物之出入，無門者也；付天下之自治，無毒者也。抱一自居，不得已而後起以應物，寓其理於物而不自有，則盡矣。盡性命之理而有為者，其為莫非天也。為人使易以偽，為天使則為偽也難矣，翼飛、知知以喻顏子必有至虛之宅，方能化物。瞻彼前境，了然空虛，以喻心也。生白則道集之謂性，舍神定則吉祥來止；不能止者，形坐而神馳矣。夫能定者，耳目非必在外；心志非又在內。故雖有思有為，而無涉世之息，鬼神將來舍，而況於人乎。

Dao gathers in emptiness for emptiness is the meontological medium of Dao. Lin Yidu's reference to the mind as analogous to a wind instrument is both insightful and inspirational. It is certainly a comment that shows influence from Zhuangzi's own story of the wind blowing through tree

⁴⁸ See *Zhonghua Daozang*, volume 14, 64.

hollows.⁴⁹ However, here we are discussing the mechanism of the mind and not the relativity of language. Putting aside these minor differences, the idea at work is essentially the same. The mind can be thought of like a flute and its purpose is inherent in its design. However, the potential that lies dormant within it cannot be realized without the proper ‘wind.’ Place a flute in the hands of a child and what follows will be anything but musical; place it in the hands of an amateur musician and things improve remarkably. It takes the hands of master, however, for the remarkable to become extraordinary. Whereas the child and amateur know how to blow into it to produce sound, only the master has enough insight to know the benefit of silence. Such silence is the link that binds a master of an instrument to the nothingness of Dao.

The silence that allows sound to rise up and interact with those already in play is only possible if said silence is recognized to begin with. When Lin Yidu said the mind was like a flute, he was reflecting Zhuangzi’s idea that to use one’s mind to manage the affairs of the world only yielded hollowness; it would be better to practice the arts of Dao. That which comes from Dao shines forth only in a clearing of empty tranquility; it is a clearing that shines forth with the bright illumination of mutual clarity. Such brightness is described as being pure and white because no other color can accept change without retaining part of that change itself. White noise is thus the sound of emptiness, a sound whose harmony with all other sounds is complete and unalterable; it is, in other words, the sound of oneness. The time when the flute falls silent is the time when it can be said to be in a natural state of emptiness. No longer used for the will of men, the silent flute forgets itself, returning to equanimity with Dao.

In silence the hollows of the tree await the wind—the *qi* of the earth. The flute likewise awaits its own form of wind—the *qi* of man. There is no presence of mind here, only still emptiness. As the flute has the inherent ability to return to emptiness and hence the One, Lin has adopted it as a metaphor for the existential state of being to which humanity ought to strive. Sitting in forgetfulness is thus the clearing of one’s mind to make way for the pure whiteness of Dao. It does not involve the deliberate blocking out of memories or the mind as a whole; rather, it is a posture through which the mind gives way to non-mind and the body gives way to non-presence of being.

⁴⁹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 2 “*qiwulun* 齊物論.” See Guo Qingfan, 46; Chai 2008: 68.

As spiritual essence points to the *qi* of Dao, listening with *qi* instead of our ears is to engage the things of the world not through the filter of individuality that is human hearing, but the holistic ear of the One. In listening with the ears of man we hear things but when we listen with our *qi*, what is heard is the togetherness of the myriad things as they pass through their cycles of change and transformation. Thus, sitting in forgetfulness is to sit in emptiness so as to make the oneness of things one's place of dwelling. Such dwelling in the oneness of things is thus on par with the process of return, the primary difference being it is a temporary dwelling marked by our ability to return from such returning in the form of a reconstituted presence of being. It is as if we could suddenly shrug off our temporally grounded corporality—as a molting cicada shrugs off its skin—leaving our authentic selves unhindered to interact with the myriad things of the world.

The ability of the sage to enter into and return from dwelling in the nothingness of the One is a vital component of the *Zhuangzi*'s cosmology. As we are not dealing with a spiritual being but Dao, any attempt to twist Dao into being such an entity comes across as unduly naïve. Although *Zhuangzi* would have believed in the spirituality of the subtle, his belief would not have amounted to religiosity. How could it? Given that Dao not only creates things but enables the potentiality of their creation, it is hard to see how his philosophy can be interpreted as mystical or hinting at mysticism. *Zhuangzi* was well aware of the fact that our eyes and ears root themselves in experiential knowledge but he was also well aware that this form of knowledge was inauthentic.

The *Zhuangzi* construed those memories that constantly badger our minds and haunt our actions as but the chaff and dregs of a time whose passage should not be relived or taken as authoritative. Embracing the oneness of things has taught us as much, as has the praxis of usefully being useless. Sitting in forgetfulness factors into the equation in that forgetting the disparate traits of the myriad things of the world we ourselves become forgotten, and having forgotten the notion of self, we can hence forget our bodies. Out of the praxis of non-self and non-presence of being, a quiescent and empty spirit comes to bear, the culmination of which is cosmological freedom. It is for this reason that the *Zhuangzi* reserved sitting in forgetfulness as the final measure wherein man learns to forgo his self-assumed place in the world so as to return to the root that is ontological nothingness: “Thus,

in nourishing the will one can forget his body, in nourishing the body one can forget profit, and in arriving at Dao one can forget his heart-mind.”⁵⁰

5.5 Conclusion

The present chapter has been a continuation of our previous discussion on the praxis of uselessness. Having gained insight into the usefulness of being useless, our analysis shifted to how one can become engaged in the forgetting of things, the relational self, and one’s body and mind. Despite their differences in approach, both methods succeeded in their intended goal—an unequivocal freedom of being stemming from the return to the oneness of ontological nothingness. Freedom in Dao is freedom that lets things be; in letting things be as they are, Dao ensures they will live out their allotted years in a manner most attuned to their way of existence. Heidegger also managed to glean such insight, saying: “Letting beings be, which is an attuning, a bringing into accord prevails throughout and anticipates all the open comportment that flourishes in it.”⁵¹ For Zhuangzi, Dao lets-be for the benefit of the entire universe; Heidegger, on the other hand, directed his letting-be towards the being of man. In light of Dao being tied to its own inner nothingness, the freedom it affords those who return to it is both spiritual and cosmological. How we can escape what Heidegger called our being-towards-death is the subject of our next chapter, one that will show us all that a living freedom has to offer while at the same time, putting us on the path towards the highest state of freedom possible—the freedom to wander carefree in Dao.

⁵⁰ 「故養志者忘形，養形者忘利，致道者忘心矣。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 28 “*rangwang* 讓王.” See Guo Qingfan, 977.

⁵¹ Heidegger 1993: 129.

CHAPTER 6

The Meontological Freedom of Dao

The authentic person uses his mind like a mirror; neither moving nor receiving, it reflects things without retaining them.

—*Zhuangzi*

Amongst the many concepts that have made their way into the development of philosophical discourse, freedom is without doubt one of the more contentious. The tendency of modern society to associate it with autonomy and individualism has only contributed to the idea that freedom must be viewed as the overcoming of a challenge whose threat endangers the subject's very existence, especially when it relates to the mind.¹ Indeed, the contemporary world has framed the question of freedom in such a way that it has become one of the most fundamental issues to face humanity. While this may appear an insurmountable challenge, the notion that personal freedom stands in opposition to forces of restraint or constraint, be they from other individuals, the state, or more recently, technology, the fact remains that such issues never plagued the intellectuals of ancient China. For the *Zhuangzi*, freedom existed in only one guise—the cosmological.

The challenge we face is how to tackle the *Zhuangzi*'s concept of freedom when the term for it, at least in the modern Chinese sense of *ziyou* 自由 did not exist.² What we have instead are inferences to freedom as an ideal whose basis lies not in the workings of man but heaven. To this end, the *Zhuangzi* formulated three heavenly principles in order to formulate a cosmological understanding

¹ A typical example of this can be seen in Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind* where he stated that: "The substance of mind is freedom, i.e., the absence of dependence on an Other, the relating of self to self...freedom of mind or spirit is not merely an absence of dependence on an Other won outside of the Other, but won in it; it attains actuality not by fleeing from the Other but by overcoming it...but in its immediacy, mind is free only implicitly, in principle or potentially, not yet in actuality; actual freedom does not therefore belong to mind in its immediacy but has to be brought into being by mind's own activity." See Hegel 2003: 15-16.

² One might argue that the term *zaiyou* 在宥 is equivalent to freedom, however, the word *you*, translated as 'forgive,' 'pardon,' 'indulge' only appears twice in the chapter named after it (chapter 11) and once in chapter 33 (*tianxia* 天下). In other words, *zaiyou* might be construed to mean a state of leisure or indulgence but it cannot be extrapolated to embody the entirety of the *Zhuangzi*'s theory of freedom.

of freedom wherein Dao is the pinnacle: ‘heavenly differentiation’ (*tianni* 天倪), ‘heavenly measure’ (*tianjun* 天均), and ‘heavenly harmony’ (*tianhe* 天和). Defining freedom along these lines not only allowed the *Zhuangzi* to break free of any dependency on human ontology, it enabled the possibility for a universally applicable freedom wherein the world no longer played a role in the grounding or establishment of social and ethical norms. The result was that all things now shared in a singular form of freedom, leaving them open to spontaneously engage and transform with one another. To be free, therefore, no longer meant to be free from something but to embark on a journey of forgetfulness such that one comes to embrace and unite with Dao cosmologically. Out of this embracing harmony ensued and when harmony pervaded all corners of the universe, the sage could wander carefree. This chapter thus explores the *Zhuangzi*’s uniquely meontological theory of freedom by showing how the above triad of heavenly principles equalizes all beings via the non-discriminatory non-mind of Dao and through embracing nothingness, equalizes them to such an extent that its perfection becomes epitomized by the spiritual ideal of uninhibited roaming.

6.1 Seeking a New Definition of Freedom: the Cosmological

Contemporary theories of freedom would have us believe it is an expression of one’s emancipation or that it represents a transcendental bliss bestowed upon us by a higher spiritual authority. Invariably, however, such definitions fall back on the dichotomies of body and mind, mind and spirit, or otherwise resort to dualisms and moral platitudes. Use of such techniques might be justifiable in many of the world’s religious-ethical traditions but for the *Zhuangzi*, the problem-set was wholly dissimilar.

Let us take the idea of the body for starters. If freedom grounds itself in the autonomy of the body, how we delimit our bodies becomes a matter of central importance. This is quite straightforward when the body and mind are inseparable properties of being but in the case of the *Zhuangzi*, they are seen as distinctly separate aspects of human existence. To be more explicit, the term *shen* 身 refers to the physical body of a person and *ji* 己 to their empirical self. To which of these should freedom point? The matter becomes even more complex when we take into consideration the *qi* constituting one’s spiritual essence, let alone those components that can be used to further refine

what one means by self—one's nature (*xing* 性), one's emotional composure (*qing* 情), one's spirit (*shen* 神), and one's physical form (*xing* 形). It would seem, then, that defining the *Zhuangzi*'s idea of freedom according to typically Western understandings of it would fail quite spectacularly given the multifarious ways in which we can frame the question: to what does freedom pertain?

Indeed, whether we frame the question of the corporeal presence of our being in terms of body and/or self, such framing more often than not comes back to the idea that being is the core essence of one's nature. Here, however, we run into a new question, one that asks what, if anything, is the crux of freedom?³ Given these initial musings, if we are to develop a comprehensive theory of what freedom entails for the *Zhuangzi*, we face not only questions surrounding its applicability but the additional challenge of coming to terms with what this notion inherently means.

When we speak of being free, are we saying something substantive or are we in fact saying nothing at all? *Zhuangzi* posed such a question very early on in his text because if we wish to ask a serious question such as the nature of freedom, we must be sure of our motives:

Speaking is not simply the blowing of wind. Words have something to say, but what they intend to say cannot be determined. Since what words have to say is uncertain, then, do they really say something? Or do words say nothing at all? Is speech any different from a young chick's call? Is there any distinguishing between them, or is there none?⁴

夫言非吹也，言者有言，其所言者特未定也。果有言邪？其未嘗有言邪？其以為異於鷦音，亦有辯乎，其無辯乎？

To speak of freedom is to assume that the act of being free is one in response to some particular event, be it causal or otherwise. The resultant granting or denial of freedom is then studied for indications as to whether or not it was predetermined or somehow coerced. Due to these degrees of

³ For Sartre, answering this question proved impossible in that he was unable to: "Describe a freedom which would be common to both the Other and myself...[because] it is freedom which is the foundation of all essences by surpassing the world toward his own possibilities." See Sartre 1992: 566. Similarly, Jean-Luc Nancy argued that: "The question of freedom begins neither with man, nor with god...it begins with the being of a world whose existence is itself the thing-in-itself." See Nancy, 19. Nancy went on to cite Heidegger as yet further support: "The essence of freedom only comes into view if we seek it as the ground of the possibility of Dasein, as something prior even to being and time." See Heidegger 2008: 94.

⁴ *Zhuangzi* ch. 2 "qiwulun 齊物論." See Guo Qingfan, 63; Chai 2008: 79.

condition, we can postulate that ontological freedom is as a measure of choice—a choosing whose essence can be traced back to the condition of a thing’s inherent being.⁵ To think of freedom in such terms, in options and matters pertaining to the will, is to see freedom from the perspective of man and not that of heaven. Even if we were to elevate ontological freedom to the realm of the spiritual by tethering the condition of a being’s ontological presence of being to the successful union with ghosts and spirits, this promoting would still fail to relay the full import of cosmological freedom, never mind the meontological. The problem, it would seem, is how to dispel the cloud of nihilism that hangs over our desire to transcend our imminent passing so that ontological liberty can be had. Nothingness, if we are to follow this line of reasoning, does not bestow upon us the freedom we so very much crave; rather, in the words of Sartre, it condemns us to be free. But must this be the case?

Sartre wrote that we are condemned to be to free in that when the “for-itself wishes to hide its own nothingness from itself and to incorporate the in-itself as its true mode of being, it is trying also to hide its freedom from itself.”⁶ For Zhuangzi, the nothingness of Dao is, as we have seen, neither nihilatory nor deterministic. It is not, as Sartre believed, that which causes human reality to arise of its own doing because if freedom, as the nothingness lying at the heart of the for-itself, were only to emerge out of the transcendent suppression of nothingness, it would still remain a conditioned freedom as its roots lie in the ontic-ontological dichotomy of man. The freedom that Dao offers us is unconditional and requires no transcendental act. It can be like this because the freedom associated with Dao, in being meontological, does not have us seek out the obliteration of our own being but incites us to relegate the being of man as but a trait of our existence rather than as its true center.

Freedom of the holistic kind seen in the *Zhuangzi* is thus one whose dependency on the reality of humanity’s onto-phenomenological existence has been smashed and will of mind discarded. For Zhuangzi, freedom is not limited to the human realm but applies to the cosmogony of the myriad

⁵ Heidegger postulated that: “Because freedom is not an object of theoretical apprehending but is instead an object of philosophizing, this can mean nothing other than the fact that freedom only is and can only be in the setting-free. The sole, adequate relation to freedom in man is the self-freeing of freedom in man.” See Heidegger 1997{a}: 178.

⁶ Sartre 1992: 567. Sartre went on to explain why we must hide freedom from ourselves so as to gain it as owing to the fact that “freedom is the escape from an engagement in being; it is the nihilation of a being which it is.” See *Ibid.*, 625.

things in their entirety.⁷ Reality, and our ability to define it, lost any viability when we learned to ontically forget things. While human reality may very well be genuine and of factual value, it does not approach the ultimate reality of Dao. As it is thought of as being reality on all known levels of existence and beyond, Dao is in fact the non-reality of reality and its non-presence makes the presence of the real appear authentic. And yet its authenticity is one that lies within the creative negativity of primal nothingness.⁸

In order to better elucidate the relationship between freedom and nothingness, what we require is a more salient vocabulary.⁹ Any choice of words taken from outside the *Zhuangzi*, however, will prove insufficient in conveying the sublime beauty of its call to let go of our body, mind, and self. Resembling the account of sitting in forgetfulness given by Yan Hui to Confucius, the passage under discussion here is not speaking to the process of attaining freedom but what it means to be free. Bodiless, the genuine person of the *Zhuangzi* does not nullify his own ontic presence but envelops it in the luminosity of oneness shared by the myriad things. Mindless, the sage forgets the world of being and so undergoes an awakening of an existential nature. What remains is thus no different from the state of which Yan Hui spoke—a spirit whose ties to the corporeal world of humanity are no longer present for it has relinquished itself to the constancy of ontological nothingness. To relinquish one's ontological self to the meontological realm of Dao is thus to become still and soulless; it is, in other words, a sign that one's return to the One has come to an

⁷ This, of course, stands in stark contrast to Kant's view that freedom, in its cosmological sense, is but a transcendental idea: "Freedom, in its practical sense, is the independence of our will from coercion through impulses of sensibility. Our will is...[free] for sensible impulses do not necessitate its action, but there is in human beings a faculty of self-determination, independent of the necessitation through sensible impulses." See Kant 2007: 464 (§a534; §b562).

⁸ Sartre, on the other hand, claimed: "Human-reality is free because it is not enough. It is free because it is perpetually wrenched away from itself and because it has been separated by nothingness from what it is and from what it will be...man is free because he is not himself but presence to himself. The being which is what it is cannot be free. Freedom is precisely the nothingness which is made-to-be at the heart of man and which forces human-reality to make itself instead of to be." See Sartre 1992: 568.

⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy declared that we ought to let freedom exist for itself for: "Freedom perhaps designates nothing more and nothing less than existence itself." See Nancy, 13-14. Nancy's phrase of 'letting freedom exist for itself' is an almost exact reduplication of Heidegger's earlier assertion that 'freedom reveals itself as letting being be.' See Heidegger 1993: 125. Indeed, in *Being and Time* Heidegger noted: "Angst reveals in Dasein its being toward... being free for the freedom of choosing and grasping itself." See Heidegger 1996: 176.

end. Freedom for the *Zhuangzi* is hence the act of letting-go and letting-be in such a way that one no longer engages in pursuing the nature of being but defers to being's self-arising in lieu of Dao.

From the above, we can declare that Zhuangzi understood freedom as neither a form of causality nor a symbolic representation of the pivot from whence the truth of existence emerges.¹⁰ Indeed, when Heidegger wrote that the nature of freedom is more primordial than man, his words do nothing if not convey his passion for a being-centric metaphysics in which the givenness of being is always presumed to dominate nonbeing. Being's engagement with itself is a dominating one, for what it reveals—what it opens itself up to—is its own inherent nature. This nature is none other than the disclosedness of being and because being discloses the truth of its own essence, the act of disclosure is taken as freedom:

The essence of truth reveals itself as freedom. The latter is *eksistent*, disclosive letting beings be. Every more of open comportment flourishes in letting beings be and in each case is comportment to this or that being. As engagement in the disclosure of being as a whole as such, freedom has already attuned all comportment to being as a whole.¹¹

The search to uncover the truth of being, to unveil the truth of its existence to itself, occurs in the act of letting-be. This letting-be, however, substitutes the being of our living present with that of the towardness of death. The finality of our presence of being instills in us the desire to flee the confines of our own corporeal form and to do this we bestow upon our spirit a sense of infinitude. This propensity to frame freedom in terms of the everlasting will of humanity and the spiritual omnipotence of ghosts and spirits such that we have the means at hand to overcome and conquer the finitude of our own temporal existence, forever enslaves such theories to the narrow tract of man's own ontology.

¹⁰ It was Kant who wrote that freedom is regarded as a form of causality—as a law—but Heidegger challenged this saying: “The essence of freedom is originally not connected with the will or even with the causality of human willing.” See Kant 2002: 87-89 (§66-67); see also Heidegger 1993: 330. Elsewhere, Heidegger wrote: “Freedom is not some particular thing among and alongside other things, but is superordinate and governing in relation to the whole. But if we are seeking out freedom as the ground of the possibility of existence, then freedom must itself, in its essence, be more primordial than man.” See Heidegger 2008: 94.

¹¹ Heidegger 1993: 128.

All is not lost however and our search for a vocabulary salient enough to lift freedom out of the dust and dregs of being and into the magnanimous light of Dao might at last be at hand. In the passage quoted below, Heidegger not only appeared to be consciously mimicking the *Daodejing*, he went so far as to draw upon the Daoist metaphor of mystery. This casts freedom in a wholly new vein and as a result, is the closest approximation of the meontological language of Daoism. He wrote:

Freedom governs the free space in the sense of the cleared, which is to say, the revealed. To the occurrence of revealing, of truth, freedom stands in the closest and most intimate kinship. All revealing belongs within a harboring and a concealing. But that which frees—the mystery—is concealed and always concealing itself. All revealing comes out of the free, goes into the free, and brings into the free. The freedom of the free consists neither in unfettered arbitrariness nor in the constraint of mere laws. Freedom is that which conceals in a way that opens to light, in whose clearing shimmers the veil that hides the essential occurrence of all truth and lets the veil appear as what veils. Freedom is the realm of the destining that at any given time starts a revealing on its way.¹²

In speaking of the mystery that frees but remains concealed and conceals itself, was Heidegger not referring to Dao? In describing freedom as that which shines a bright light on a veiled inner essence, was he again not describing Dao? There is documented evidence supporting a connection between Heidegger's reading of the *Daodejing* and his own later-period writings,¹³ yet the fault we are still able to find, even under such influence, is Heidegger's insistence on the primacy of being over nonbeing and the former's association with the idea of truth. In speaking of the revealing as coming out of, returning to, and bringing into the open that which is free, Heidegger could not rid himself of his own intellectual tradition. He was trapped due to his presupposition that a difference exists between the free and not-free. More fundamentally, the assumption that freedom only pertains to the human guise of being rather than all beings, and that the mysterious delivers things that are already free, would appear irrational to Zhuangzi. If we are to speak of freedom as tied to Dao, we cannot refer to it in terms of the free and not-free, for if Dao were one but not the other,

¹² Heidegger 1993: 330.

¹³ See for example, Reinhard May, *Heidegger's Hidden Sources: East Asian Influences on His Work*. Graham Parkes, trans. London: Routledge, 1996.

this would imply that one form of freedom operates exclusive of the other. To be free thus involves letting-go of freedom such that the idea of it vanishes completely. For the *Zhuangzi*, freedom in Dao is a cosmological harmonization of things through which one partakes in a carefree wandering that is neither hindered or tainted by concerns over what it means ‘to be free.’ There is, therefore, no such thing as individual freedom; rather, freedom presents itself as an existential awakening incipient in all things.

6.2 The Heavenly Principles of Cosmological Freedom

In light of our conclusion that freedom results from an existential awakening of such magnitude that it harmonizes all things on a cosmological level, the question that now needs to be asked is how does it arise? If we recall at the start of this chapter our mentioning of the fact that the *Zhuangzi* developed three heavenly principles to symbolize the cosmological freedom—differentiation, measure, and harmony—constituting the natural laws of the universe, we can now argue that said principles ensure that all beings are permanently free in their togetherness. There is, as a result, no need for an individual to escape from this holistic oneness in order to exert its unique individuality. This is because from the vantage point of Dao, all things are unique yet one; from the vantage point of Dao, all things are free in and of themselves, yet this freedom is not a barrier placed before them but is a reflection of their rootedness in nothingness. Since the *Zhuangzi* located freedom in the meontology of Dao, as opposed to the being of man, freedom is not a condition one is born with, earned, and loses, but is the authentic condition of reality taken as a prospective whole. If one wishes to speak in terms of the free and not free, one must instead speak in terms of the degree to which a thing is harmonious with Dao. Freedom is thus a constancy whose measure lacks any form of gradation. It cannot be otherwise, for if freedom is to be emblematic of a perpetual Dao, it too must exist in perpetuity; if freedom is to coincide with the constancy of nothingness, it too must be constant. There are, however, degrees of harmony and it is to this first heavenly principle that we now turn:

What is called harmonizing things with heavenly differentiation? It is said that affirming and not affirming are the same, the so and not-so are the same. If the so is really so, then, as it is clearly

different from not-so, there is no need to differentiate them. If affirmation is really affirmation, then, as it is clearly different from not affirming, there is no need to differentiate them. The transformation of [the Wind] into sound is a mutual dependency, while also being one that is not mutually dependent. Harmonize them with heavenly differentiation, allow them to mutually clarify each other, and in this way you can complete your allotted years. Forget about years and standards; stop and only take the infinite as your end and you shall dwell in the infinite.¹⁴

何謂和之以天倪？曰：是不是，然不然。是若果是也，則是之異乎不是也亦無辯；然若果然也，則然之異乎不然也亦無辯。化聲之相待，若其不相待。和之以天倪，因之以曼衍，所以窮年也。忘年忘義，振於無竟，故寓諸無竟。

Freedom is to harmonize things with Dao and harmonizing things with Dao is to let them be. This letting-be is not taken in an ontological sense but according to heaven's distinguishing things. The term *tianni* 天倪 as understood by Guo Xiang means 'natural distribution' (*ziran zhi fen ye* 自然之分也) in which affirmation and non-affirmation, so and not-so, self and other, all become validated and indistinguishable. It is this indistinguishability of things that Zhuangzi took as symbolizing the differentiating virtue of heaven. What is more, it is carried out not in a theological capacity but in the sense of one's nature or what is natural. Cheng Xuanying reflected this in his commentary, adding that as right and wrong lack an overseer (*shifei wu zhu* 是非無主), debating them would be nonsensical.¹⁵ What is not absurd is the original generosity of Dao—the idea that Dao bestows all things with life, nurtures them to old age, and welcomes their return at the end of their life, all without direction or influence, without any benefit to itself—and that all natural laws derive from it. The natural is thus synonymous with heaven and the heavenly is synonymous with Dao. All three can hence be said to act in concert as the differentiation of heaven, one lacking any form of difference.

The non-differentiation of heaven can thus be taken to be the means by which the sage engages the myriad things of the world in that it alone acts as equalizing measurement of things' virtue. Indeed, the equality of which we speak also lends itself to heavenly measure, the second of Zhuangzi's principles of cosmic freedom. To view heavenly measuring as equivalent to an absolute measuring

¹⁴ *Zhuangzi* ch. 2 “*qi wulun* 齊物論.” See Guo Qingfan, 108; Chai 2008: 103-104 [translation revised].

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

of things—as a form of equalizing—would imply that heaven is the one doing the equalizing when in fact things equalize themselves in harmonic accord with Dao. In knowing the world, the incipience of Dao’s measure in nature discards all notions of non-commensurability and exclusivity. Due to man being a causal creature—we live through the doing of our actions—the way in which we come to possess an understanding of things directly conflicts with the principle of heavenly differentiation. Our tendency to dichotomize the world, to relegate things to their various classes of good and bad, right and wrong, is destructive not only to our own self-cultivation but to the coherence of the myriad things populating the world as well. This is why Zhuangzi wrote that “due to human discourse, demarcations arise...the sage contains his within his breast while common men flaunt theirs to show one another.”¹⁶ Thus, ordinary men engage in discourse using the differentiations of men rather than that of heaven, which is no different from using a horse to show that a horse is not a horse.¹⁷ It would be better to use a non-horse to show wherein two horses differ, which is to say that which is ultimately free has always been so (i.e., the non-horse), it simply does not hold itself to standards of what is free or not.

To conduct one’s life by flaunting one’s knowledge through displays of ‘this’ and ‘that,’ ‘is’ and ‘is-not,’ ‘right’ and ‘wrong,’ is to distance oneself from the freedom awaiting us on the other side of forgetfulness. The way to overcome such epistemological relativism is to make way for nothingness by creating a clearing in our constitution that is free of our relational self, enabling us to complete our return to the One.¹⁸ Sitting in forgetfulness while engaged in fasting of the mind allows the clearing of nothingness that is the measure of heaven to take hold. To wander in the realm of carefree bliss is thus to encounter the spontaneous self-transformation of things emblematic of the natural world. Such transformative power of self is not to be misconstrued for

¹⁶ 「為是而有畛也……聖人懷之，眾人辯之以相示也。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 2 “*qiwulun* 齊物論.” See Guo Qingfan, 83; Chai 2008: 87 [translation revised].

¹⁷ Zhuangzi’s reference to horses occurs in chapter 2 of the text and points to the treatise “White Horse is not a Horse” 〈白馬非馬〉 by the logician Gongsun Long 公孫龍. In fact, Zhuangzi turned Gongsun’s arguments on their head to demonstrate the irrelevancy of his sophistry. See Guo Qingfan, 66; Chai 2008: 80.

¹⁸ We must remind ourselves once again of the difference between Daoist nothingness and that characteristic of the Western tradition, of which Hegel was a typical example: “In its highest form of explication nothingness would be freedom. But this highest form is negativity insofar as it inwardly deepens itself to its highest intensity; and in this way it is itself affirmation—indeed absolute affirmation.” See Hegel 1991: 140 (§87).

human determination; rather, the myriad things change according to their self-so nature bestowed upon them by Dao, a nature that is at once harmonious with all other things whilst containing unique characteristics of its own. The progressive profundity of our forgetfulness as we approach the realm of nothingness demarcating our reception into the One is thus a necessary measure if we are to engage the world according to the measure of heaven.

The principle of heavenly differentiation can hence be seen as a mysterious blending of the many into one; it is an oneness that is at once harmonious yet creational. Recognizing that life and death are but natural transformations, one can forget temporality. Recognizing that right and wrong are no different from the wind blowing through the hollows of a tree, one can forget discriminations. Accepting that words and images can be forgotten, once one obtains their meaning, one can return to a state of naturalness and forget propriety. Returning to naturalness, one at the same time becomes spontaneous and through such spontaneity, one experiences the ultimate reality of Dao.

And yet if the myriad things of the world avail themselves of Dao via the virtue of heavenly differentiation, as a form of distinction it itself needs to give way to something higher, and that principle is known as heavenly measure (*tianjun* 天均):

If no goblet words [of mine] came forth each day, harmonizing things through heavenly differentiation, how could I have managed this long! The myriad things all have the same seed, and use their different forms to alternate with one another. Their start and end form a ring of which none can grasp its principle. This is known as heavenly measure. Heavenly measure is thus heavenly differentiation.¹⁹

非卮言日出，和以天倪，孰得其久！萬物皆種也，以不同形相禪，始卒若環，莫得其倫，是謂天均。天均者天倪也。

Despite the above passage ending with the statement that the measure of heaven is no different from heavenly differentiation, they are in fact different. In order to uncover this difference we need to first examine the sentences leading up to the above passage:

¹⁹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 27 “yuyan 寓言.” See Guo Qingfan, 950.

With these goblet words [of mine] that come forth each day, things are harmonized through heavenly differentiation and I can complete my allotted years. When nothing is said then there is equality, but my speaking of it is not equal, hence my speaking and the original equality are not equal. Thus it is said use no words. If one speaks without words, then in speaking one's entire life, one will not have said anything. If one doesn't speak one's entire life, this doesn't mean one has not spoken.²⁰

卮言日出，和以天倪，因以曼衍，所以窮年。不言則齊，齊與言不齊，言與齊不齊也，故曰無言。言無言，終身言，未嘗不言；終身不言，未嘗不言。

The character *qi* 齊 ('to be equal'), not to be confused with *zhai* 齋 ('to fast'), should be familiar to us as it is contained in the title of chapter two of the *Zhuangzi*. Leaving aside the debate as to how one should translate the chapter title—as “on the equality of discourses” or “on equalizing discourses”²¹—we can make a case that in the present context both *qi* 齊 and the *jun* 均 of *tianjun* 天均 are best understood in the sense of equalizing measures rather than absolute equality.²² Hence when the above passage states that the measure and differentiation of heaven are identical, it would be erroneous of us to translate *jun* as the verb ‘to equalize’ as this would imply that heaven actively participates in and influences the ontological condition of things. To equalize is to take upon oneself determinate measures—assessing for the purpose of demotion or promotion—actions that are not within the purview of Dao. Dao as a shadow heaven takes no-thing upon itself; it mingles and responds to things through non-deliberate engagement so as to reflect back onto them the spontaneous self-so-ness of their encounter. Any hierarchies deemed to exist in Nature are thus the result of the imaginative musings of mankind. If Dao were to embark on a mission of equalization, the resultant choice of what to equalize would lead to an unnatural state of affairs. In other words, it would be introducing a nihilatory element into the world from which the being of certain beings becomes suppressed at the cost of the onto-cosmological freedom of others. This is neither heavenly measuring nor freedom in Dao.

²⁰ *Zhuangzi* ch. 27 “yuyan 寓言.” See Guo Qingfan, 949.

²¹ For more on this interpretive debate see Chai 2008: 65.

²² Burton Watson translated *qi* 齊 as equality and used the phrase ‘heavenly equalizer’ for *tianjun*. See Watson, 305.

Heavenly harmony (*tianhe* 天和), the third principle comprising Zhuangzi's concept of freedom, is the mechanism by which the measure of heaven carries itself forward. It is the outcome of the act of letting-be through forgetfulness:

...forgetting other men, they are taken to be men of heaven...they are so because they have joined with heavenly harmony. If one who is enraged has no rage then his rage is in fact not rage at all. If one who acts takes no action then his acting is not action at all. If one desires quiescence then one must level-out one's vital force. If one desires to be spiritual then one must put the mind in order. These are courses of action. In wishing to be so then one must go along with that which cannot be grasped, and those things that are ungraspable belong to the way of the sage.²³

……忘人，因以為天人矣……唯同乎天和者為然。出怒不怒，則怒出於不怒矣；出為無為，則為出於無為矣。欲靜則平氣，欲神則順心，有為也。欲當則緣於不得已，不得已之類，聖人之道。

From the above passage we can see that heavenly equality is to recognize that, on a fundamental level, all things partake in a singular cosmic circling of being whose center and outlying regions belong to the letting-be of Dao. Empty, still, and quiet, primal nothingness permits things to engage in self-reflection and self-cultivation for the purpose of recognizing that in their grounding they are all one. Sharing in the oneness of existence, the myriad things lose the need for a transcendental experience for at their meontological core, there is nothing present to transcend. They are imbued with the harmonious equality of Dao through and through, an imbue ment whose source is the living seed of nothingness. Gathering and pooling as they do, their endless changes and transformations trace themselves back to their root in the One whose principle is the dark mystery of Dao.

The unknowability of Dao precludes it from being grasped by human cognition and if our cognitive ability is rendered null and void, of what use are words? To attempt to speak of Dao one must resort to non-words; to try and intuitively grasp its essence one must conjoin with it as one spiritual essence to another. Dao resembles a mirage of potentiality whose darkness hides it when we approach, and whose profundity mystifies it when we attempt to pin it down with words. This is why Zhuangzi developed the technique of goblet words—words whose use are but temporary

²³ *Zhuangzi* ch. 23 “*gengsangchu* 庚桑楚.” See Guo Qingfan, 815.

occurrences yet whose insight manages to touch the heart of every matter. We can thus pronounce that goblet words succeed where normal language fails due to their knack for letting-be.

Freedom as letting-be thus becomes much more than ontic constraint. It is a letting-be that lets the nothingness of being follow its natural evolution. Wherein the virtue of heavenly measure brings harmony to all things lies in its use of the non-mind of Dao. Using the non-mind of Dao, the lordship over right and wrong comes to pass, leaving things to their natural devices. Left to their own self-so-ness, the myriad things are thereby able to complete their allotted lifespan. Living out their years as Nature intended, years turn into non-years and life and death turn into an unbreakable circle of spontaneous self-transformation. This is the genuineness of their reality—what more can words add! Thus, the equanimity of the natural is a self-so equality that cannot be equalized through concepts such as right and wrong and must be relinquished in order to preserve the integrity of our existential experience of Dao:

Remove the compulsions of the will, unravel the wrongdoings of the mind, discard the tangles of virtue, and clear away the blockages to Dao. Honor and wealth, distinction and austerity, fame and profit; these six are the compulsions of the will. Appearance and demeanor, beauty and reason, manner and intention; these six are the false expressions of the mind. Vice and desire, joy and anger, grief and happiness; these six are the tangles of virtue. Turning away and taking in, adopting and offering, knowledge and skill, these six are the blockages to Dao. When these four conditions and their six causes no longer sway the breast, one will be upright. With uprightness one will be quiescent. With quiescence one will be illuminated. With illumination one will be empty. With emptiness one will refrain from taking action yet nothing will remain undone.²⁴

徹志之勃，解心之謬，去德之累，達道之塞。貴富顯嚴名利六者，勃志也。容動色理氣意六者，謬心也。惡欲喜怒哀樂六者，累德也。去就取與知能六者，塞道也。此四六者不盪胸中則正，正則靜，靜則明，明則虛，虛則無為而無不為也。

Heavenly differentiation, measuring, and harmony are hence three principles whose togetherness constitutes the *Zhuangzi*'s envisioning of cosmic freedom. Their cohesion and complementariness belies the common belief that freedom stems from man alone. Indeed, in *Zhuangzi*'s formulation

²⁴ *Zhuangzi* ch. 23 “*gengsangchu* 庚桑楚.” See Guo Qingfan, 810.

the human element fails to even factor into the equation; if anything, it is a hindrance in need of eradication.²⁵

Freedom *qua* nothingness thus symbolizes one's successful entrance to the fold of Dao. It is the ultimate reward for overcoming the limitations of our own humanity rather than being an implicit requirement of it. To be free is to live via the praxis of self-forgetting, speaking without words, and engaging things through mutual self-reflection and co-existence. In the act of letting-be, one disengages oneself from vain pursuits of material and intellectual profit, thus reflecting what is natural while pursuing the art of spontaneous living. This is the epitome of Daoist freedom. It is a modeling after the cycles and principles of Nature, of coming to realize that many of the perils faced in the course of human temporality are self-induced. If we can simply let-be those things that drive a wedge between the world and us then our lives can be lived without fear of being cut short.

Freedom, in other words, is simplicity and silence amidst a surrounding chaos. For those who are able to reach this ultimate realm of reality, no harm can befall them. Changing with the times as the seasons change with theirs, one who is free in Dao harms none and is harmed by none. In this state of perfect unity, all dichotomies vanish, leaving only the seed of nothingness from which the sprout of being grows and is nurtured. If we cultivate the idea that nothingness is not a static state of non-existence but a dynamic, self-perpetuating milieu of potentiality, we shall no longer have reason to fear it and can wander throughout the universe carefree, experiencing things as Dao experiences them. Before we can put wandering in freedom into practice, however, we must first understand what it means to be harmonious with things and how such harmony not only focusses our freedom, which is always contingent upon it, but how it nourishes our life.

Previously we examined how being useless led to life-prolongation and enrichment resulting in a form of phenomenological freedom, and how the various stages of forgetting served as a prelude to spiritual freedom, but harmony is without a doubt of even greater importance. Although the idea of

²⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy conveyed this idea with the sublimely poetic expression, 'freedom is the fulguration of nothingness' which can be traced to the following passage: "Freedom equals the self-deepening nothingness...freedom is itself nothingness, which does not negate itself properly speaking, but which, in a pre- or para-dialectical figure of the negation of negation, affirms itself by making itself intense...it concentrates it, accumulates the tension of the nothingness as nothingness...freedom is equal to nothingness surprised by its fulguration." See Nancy, 81-82.

heavenly harmony has been discussed to some degree already, if we wish to understand how harmony as a cosmological concept functions in its own right whilst one is experiencing freedom, further investigation is needed. Indeed, Zhuangzi's adoption of harmony as yet another representative principle of Dao was not accidental, especially given the role it plays in both uniting things whilst simultaneously cultivating them. This is crucial if we are to come to an understanding of how the sage can wander carefree to the four corners of the world, uniting the myriad things via heaven's measure, all the while displaying an appearance of simple mindedness and pristine virtue. Let us, then, turn to harmony and its relationship to nothingness.

6.3 Nothingness as Dao's Great Harmonizer

The key to successfully coming to terms with Daoist cosmogony is not to simply attribute it to a mysterious nothingness informing the universe but that nothingness is both the source of all things, as well as that which harmonizes and collects them into the One. In comparison, Western thinkers since the time of Plotinus have bestowed the task of universal harmony upon the One itself, but this immediately imposes limitations on it that have proven inescapable. We can witness the fatalism of the One in many guises but that of Rudolf Lotze is especially noteworthy:

Wherever the plastic materials are present, there the absolute One is likewise present; not as an idea that may be conceived, not as an inoperative class-type, not as a command passing between the elements of a group, or a wish without them, or an ideal above them; but as a real and potent essence present in the innermost life of each element. Nor is it, like divisible matter, distributed among them in different proportions. It manifests itself in each one in its totality, as the unity that embraces and determines them all, and in virtue of the consistent coherence of its entire plan, assigns to each of these dependent elements those activities that ensure the convergence of their operation to a definite end.²⁶

Lotze holds the spirit of the One to be present in all things, just like it is in Daoism, but this oneness that unites things is not fluidly symbiotic but absolute and interminable. In its manifesting sojourns, the Occidental One decries its presence to the world by declaring it is part of a plan whose singular

²⁶ Lotze, 405.

purpose is to preserve its self-integrity no matter the cost to things themselves. In other words, Lotze speaks of a One whose transmutation is carried out by inserting itself into the constitution of things' being and in so doing, alters the self-so nature of whatever it touches. The One, in touching the myriad things of the world, causes their definite ends to converge; this is an unnatural causing insofar as it is onto-centric in nature. However, in order to escape the cosmology between being and beings, there must be a level of authenticity that is even more primal, one that is not prone to the restrictions implied in a freedom conditioned on the relationship of one thing to another. What we are in search of is a meontological freedom whereby what touches things is not the One but nothingness, for, if we recall, the One of the *Zhuangzi* is but the collectivization of nonbeing and being and is thus not a thing in any traditional sense of the word.

For *Zhuangzi*, oneness is a metaphor for the cohesion things experience when following Dao; in following Dao, Dao lets them be. Dao, in its letting-be, gives room for nothingness to imbue itself throughout the universe, an imbuing that does not interfere in the pursuance of the life-path of things. Harmony is thus not just the letting-be of Dao but also the working of Dao through nothingness. Things work their way back to nothingness and in so doing preserve their integrity while enhancing their cultivation of Dao. In other words, the harmonization of things in oneness is not so much about reducing them to a singularity as it is about procuring a means to nullify destructive dichotomies in order to return to natural orders of balance. The *Zhuangzi* stated that:

The men of ancient times who followed Dao used quietude to cultivate knowledge. With knowledge in them they did not act on its behalf and this was called using knowledge to cultivate quietude. Knowledge and quietude thus took turns cultivating each other and harmony and order emerged from his own nature.²⁷

古之治道者，以恬養知；知生而無以知為也，謂之以知養恬。知與恬交相養，而和理出其性。

Natural order is perceived not in terms of hierarchy but balance. Balance, in turn, is seen not in terms of rectification and accommodation but equanimity and quiescence. Had the sages of old chosen to act according to the knowledge of the common man, such action would have led to strife and not harmony. That they acted in the spirit of heaven, the world knew only harmony and order.

²⁷ *Zhuangzi* ch. 16 “*shanxing* 繕性.” See Guo Qingfan, 548.

To compose oneself by sitting in forgetfulness was thus to transpose the inborn nature of Dao for one's own. Because the myriad things of the world order themselves along natural alignments of harmony, human knowledge falls by the wayside. Forgoing knowledge by fasting of the mind is thus to embrace the empty tranquility of nothingness as the inborn nature of the universe. It is here where freedom dwells and it is here where the sage returns and makes his abode. If we turn to other Daoist texts such as the *Huainanzi*, harmony is expressed using altogether different aphorisms.²⁸ Regardless of how they chose to illustrate the social climate of ancient times, the various texts of Daoism nevertheless agreed it was a state of still quietude, unperturbed by the vices of human knowledge. This abiding by the three principles of heaven was seen as one of perfect virtue, a time the *Zhuangzi* characterized as supreme unity (*zhiyi* 至一):

The men of ancient times lived in a time of chaos and darkness, yet within this world they were able to attain quiescence and indifference. During that time *yin* and *yang* were harmonious and still, ghosts and spirits were not troublesome, the four seasons held to their periods, the myriad things existed without harm, all living beings knew not of premature death, and while man had knowledge, he did not use it. This was called supreme unity. At that time no one acted for anything and there was constant spontaneity.²⁹

古之人，在混芒之中，與一世而得澹漠焉。當是時也，陰陽和靜，鬼神不擾，四時得節，萬物不傷，群生不夭，人雖有知，無所用之，此之謂至一。當是時也，莫之為而常自然。

Once again we are presented with the idea that harmony will prevail in the world so long as humanity does not use knowledge to induce change or affect the natural balance between things. Forgetting one's place amongst things, the men of ancient times only thought of themselves as one being amongst a myriad of beings. Engaging the world with playful innocence, purposeful action

²⁸ Take, for example, the following passage from the *fanlun* 汎論 chapter: "In the *qi* of heaven and earth, nothing is greater than harmony. As for harmony, it blends *yin* and *yang*, divides day and night, and gives birth to things. In spring there is birth, in autumn completion, and it is in birth and completion that things necessarily obtain the essence of harmony." 「天地之氣莫大於和，和者，陰陽調，日夜分，而生物。春分而生，秋分而成，生之與成，必得和之精。」 See Zhang Shuangli, 1368; Major, 498. In his commentary to this passage, Gao You wrote: "As it is harmony, it thus gives birth to the myriad things." 「和，故能生萬物。」 As for that which is the essence of harmony, Gao declared it to be none other than *qi* 「精，氣」。 On a side note, a passage closely resembling this one occurs in the Shangren 上仁 chapter of the *Wenzi* 《文子》: 「和者，陰陽調，日夜分。故萬物春分而生，秋分而成。」 See Wang Liqi, 451.

²⁹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 16 "*shanxing* 繕性." See Guo Qingfan, 550-551.

remained unbeknownst to them and they lived spontaneously, mirroring Dao. This explains why wherever there is genuine spontaneity, supreme unity is also found. Indeed, harmony as perfect unity is predisposed to a state of primal oneness such that the interaction of beings reflects not upon their state of being but their inner nothingness. Such meontological harmony includes both the ontological nothingness of Dao and the ontic nothingness that results from fasting of the mind, not to mention sitting in forgetfulness. It should be noted that in terms of textual chronology, cosmological harmony has its precedent in the *Daodejing* where it is said: “The myriad things rely on *yin* and embrace *yang*, taking the void of *qi* as their harmony.”³⁰ With regards to said passage, Lin Xiyi took it to mean: “As for the creation of the myriad things, they embrace and rely upon the *qi* of *yin* and *yang*. Moving with the principle of the void and emptiness, they can achieve harmony.”³¹ We can hence argue that the early Daoist conceptualization of freedom was neither dependent on teleology of the will or involve the transcendence of one’s desires but was rooted in simply embracing the universal equanimity of Dao.

The presumed link between freedom and desire has proven to be a well-trodden theme in early Chinese thought, however, there remains an assumption that in linking the two terms, the element of necessity interlopes therein. The problem with creating a triad between freedom, necessity, and desire, whereby necessity’s bonding to desire is in need of overcoming if one wishes to attain freedom, is that it also recognizes desire as a conditioned necessity informing the authenticity of freedom, thereby becoming a precondition for its own arising.³² Zhuangzi, interestingly enough, took the stance that things lose their freedom only when they view themselves as being bound to each other. How they released themselves from this mutual binding was to renounce the presence of their empirical selves and to do that, they are required to harmonize with the oneness of Dao. To introduce the concept of necessity as a prerequisite is to misconstrue the spirit of the *Zhuangzi*’s

³⁰ 「萬物負陰而抱陽，沖氣以為和。」 *Daodejing* chapter 42. See Lou Yulie, 117.

³¹ 「萬物之生，皆抱負陰陽之氣，以沖虛之理行乎其間，所以為和也。」 See *Zhonghua Daozang*, volume 11: 261.

³² This point was also raised by Hegel who argued that: “The truth of necessity is thereby freedom, and the truth of substance is the Concept...The identity of the two things which appear as bound to one another in necessity, and which, for that reason, lose their independence, is at first only an inner identity that is not yet present to those who are subject to necessity. And from this point of view, freedom, too, is, initially, just the abstract freedom that can only be saved by renouncing what we immediately have and are...from this we can also gather how absurd it is to regard freedom and necessity as mutually exclusive.” See Hegel 1991: 232-233 (§158).

cosmological freedom—as a perfect unity with nothingness—because if transcending necessity were to directly result in freedom, it would imply that the grounding of one’s being lies with one’s self. This, in turn, would subsequently imply that the condition of one’s freedom is relative to the self-grounding one will experience through being, not the authentic un-grounding afforded by Dao. To authentically un-ground oneself in Dao—to take the meontological nature of Dao as one’s root—is to base one’s capacity for judgment in harmony and not in the notion of freedom. In harmonizing one’s knowledge of the world with the measure of heaven, one can thereupon view the world from the perspective of heavenly equality. Indeed, the *Zhuangzi* opens with a tale espousing precisely this argument—the great fish *kun* 鯤 transforming into the majestic bird *peng* 鵬.

When the cicada and turtledove later laugh at *peng* for needing to fly so high as it heads on its southern journey when they simply skip from branch to branch, *Zhuangzi* not only wanted us to bear in mind that all things, save for the sage, live in some form of conditioned freedom, but that the key to attaining genuine freedom on a cosmological scale is to stop thinking of it as such and regard it in terms of the harmony of things. Such harmony forms a collective presence whose purpose is to serve as a natural balance to the nothingness of Dao. He who thinks along these lines can be said to possess kingly virtue, an attribute that the text described as:

This is called the man of kingly virtue. He can see in darkness and hear in silence. Within such darkness, he alone can see dawn; within such silence, he alone can hear harmony. Therefore, although there are depths beyond depths, he is still able to discern things. Although there are spirits beyond spirits, he is still able to discern essences. Therefore, in his connection to the myriad things, he makes use of perfect nothingness to feed their needs. With the galloping of time he lodges in the large and small, the long and short, the near and far.³³

此謂王德之人。視乎冥冥，聽乎無聲。冥冥之中，獨見曉焉；無聲之中，獨聞和焉。故深之又深而能物焉，神之又神而能精焉；故其與萬物接也，至無而供其求，時騁而要其宿，大小，長短，脩遠。

In reading this passage, it is hard not to notice that one who possesses kingly virtue roams the world in perfect unity with it. His virtue unifies all things, as it is the virtue of heaven. Heavenly

³³ *Zhuangzi* ch. 12 “*tiandi* 天地.” See Guo Qingfan, 411.

virtue, therefore, serves as a manifestation of the three heavenly principles discussed earlier. Being inwardly sagacious while outwardly kingly, the person of perfect virtue knows no bounds when it comes to his wandering. He takes day to be night and night to be day, chaos to be harmony and harmony to be chaos. In this way, all differences resolve themselves leaving only their meontic root. Mystery after mystery, the one who practices perfect unity sees only the constancy of their meontological essence. As a result, he dwells in the imperceptible and roams in the immeasurable. In other words, he who uses kingly virtue as a means to fulfilling heavenly unity is the very personification of oneness with Dao.

But does this ability to personify the ultimate state of harmony also imply that the possessor of kingly virtue is free? Yes and no. Yes, in that only the sage or authentic person has accumulated enough of Dao's generosity to be adequately prepared to engage the world via forgetfulness and darkening of the conscious mind; no, in that anyone can be sagacious in their moral composition simply by adhering to the praxis of acting through non-doing, which is to engage things through letting-be. Forgetting and cultivating a mind that is dark thus serves two purposes: first, the act of forgetting keeps knowledge at arm's reach, preventing it from unduly influencing our discourse and lived-experience in the world; second, darkening the mind leads to still tranquility, a necessary trait if one is to observe the thread of oneness that mysteriously ties all things together. Thus, one realizes one's inherent freedom through forgetfulness and forgetfulness is the realization of still tranquility.

In a vain reminiscent of our previous discussion on time, rest comes to play an important role in the Daoist definition of freedom. Resting in knowledge rather than allowing it to dictate courses of pursuance provides one with the opportunity to reflect upon the state of affairs in the world and adjust one's participation accordingly. Without a mind that is quiet and empty of the desire for personal aggrandizement, knowledge will eventually destroy its receptivity to Dao's harmonizing essence. This state of simplicity, which the *Daodejing* called *pu* 樸,³⁴ takes as its grounding not the will of consciousness but the constant nothingness of Dao. In this way, the mind that is originary

³⁴ Further examples from the *Daodejing* include: chapter 15 「敦兮其若樸」; chapter 28: 「为天下谷，常德乃足，复归于朴」; chapter 32: 「道常无名，朴」; and chapter 37: 「化而欲作，吾将镇之以无名之朴，镇之以无名之朴，夫将不欲。」

and genuine is the mind that acts by inwardly composing itself through the letting-be of rest. In restful quiescence the mind unites with the One and letting-go of its self, transforms into the non-mind of Dao. As the sage is one with Dao, his mind enlightens others whilst remaining dark and mysterious. It is through his resting that all things return to a state of quiet equilibrium, one in which things mutually cultivate one another thereby ensuring their continued freedom and longevity. Herein is seen Zhuangzi's answer to the need for the mind to transcend its own nature of being³⁵ and which is taken up in the text's commentaries, of which two will be discussed.

Guo Xiang's analysis of Zhuangzi's solution to any mind-freedom dichotomy is to read quietude and knowledge as coming together to form a principle of things existing for themselves:

He who is calm and quiet will have knowledge that cannot be swayed; when one's knowledge is unswayable then one's nature cannot be lost. If one does not act on behalf of knowledge and believes it to be self-knowing, although he is aware of the myriad things around him, he remains quiet and self-assured. If one knows but does not act, then nothing will harm his quiescence; if in quietude one acts for oneself, then nothing can sway his knowledge. This can be called mutual cultivation. With these two engaged in mutual cultivation, then harmony and principle separate. How can I speak of others!³⁶

恬靜而後知不蕩，知不蕩而性不失也。夫無以知為而任其自知，則雖知周萬物而恬然自得也。知而非為，則無害於恬；恬而自為，則無傷於知；斯可謂交相養矣。二者交相養，則和理之分，豈出佗哉！

From the above passage it can be observed that harmony is the pivot to which the sage clings and the center from which Dao's essence emerges. To be in harmony with the myriad things is thus to possess the capacity to walk two paths at once. The leap from harmony to freedom can occur

³⁵ I am referring to traditional Kantian arguments from which Heidegger based his own theory that: "Human freedom now no longer means freedom as a property of man, but man as a possibility of freedom. Human freedom is the freedom that breaks through in man and takes him up unto itself, thus making man possible. If freedom is the ground of the possibility of existence, the root of being and time, and thus the ground of the possibility of understanding being in its whole breadth and fullness, then man, as grounded in his existence upon and in this freedom, is the site where beings in the whole become revealed, i.e., he is that particular being through which beings as such announce themselves." See Heidegger 2008: 94-95.

³⁶ *Zhuangzi* ch. 16 "*shanxing* 繕性." See Guo Qingfan, 548.

because harmony both blends with and takes into account the ontological nothingness inherent to all things. In other words, harmony with the world is but another way of saying one has harmonized with Dao. As for what performs this harmonizing act, it is not being but nothingness and each thing blends and morphs into the One because of it. Our emergence from and return to the primal nothingness of Dao marks the start and end of temporality, as we have already seen, but it also delimits the extent of our freedom. In contrast to Heidegger's argument,³⁷ freedom is not part of the human condition nor is it the "ground of the possibility of existence," for if it were, such freedom would fail to speak to the cosmogony of all things, limiting itself to the ontological realm of man. Freedom is thus the spontaneous potentiality found in nothingness, and in order to be aware of it, one must rid oneself of all trace of the discriminating mind and empirical self, leaving behind a blankness to which nothingness is drawn. The sage, in other words, is free not because of his existence in the world, which somehow gives him a sense of entitlement, but rather, he is free in that he has perfected the art of letting-be.

This is why Guo Xiang wrote that in spite of our possessing knowledge, we do not use it to engage the world. Having knowledge but choosing not to act upon it is to preserve the balance between things without disrupting the equanimity that brought such balance to the fore. If, on the other hand, one takes to action whilst practicing quietude of mind, doing so not for the purpose of profit or personal aggrandizement, such behavior will remain in accordance with the natural principle of things and leave the harmony of the world unperturbed. However, with one nourishing the other, forming a recursive cycle, how can we discern their underlying principle? For Guo Xiang, this principle evolved from a cosmology of Dao to a principle of self-so-ness (*ziran* 自然) inherent to things themselves. Indeed, Cheng Xuanying would also latch onto Zhuangzi's use of principle, though he would still tie it back to Dao and not make it a law unto itself as did Guo Xiang. Cheng wrote:

Calmness is tranquility. The sage of ancient times used Dao to govern his body and the nation. He, by necessity, used the model of tranquility to cultivate his knowledge of genuine reality, employing it so as to not sway what existed beyond him. With his natural disposition illuminated, knowledge

³⁷ See note 34 above.

was born. Knowing things mindlessly, he refrained from acting on its behalf. Having faith in his knowledge he proceeded but did not arrive at a course of action. This, then, is the knowledge of non-knowing, of knowing things without knowledge of them. Thus, in the end, one knows without trying to know and one does not try to not know; finally, one acts without trying to act and one does not try to not act, and yet use of this true knowledge is cultivated in quietude. If it were not like this, how could there be quietude! If one could not be calm and tranquil, then how could he give birth to true knowledge? Without true knowledge, how could he cause such calm tranquility? It is therefore calmness that results in knowledge and so there can be tranquility. Knowledge aids tranquility and so becomes true knowledge. Thus, knowledge is found in calmness, each one cultivating the other. Herein is the harmony of Dao, existing in the minds of men, the principle of naturalness, and is shown in heavenly nature. It exists in me and that is all. How can I speak of others!³⁸

恬，靜也。古者聖人以道治身治國者，必以恬靜之法養真實之知，使不蕩於外也。率性而照，知生者也；無心而知，無以知為也。任知而往，無用造為，斯則無知而知，知而無知，非知之而知者也。故終日知而未嘗知，亦未嘗不知，終日為而未嘗為，亦未嘗不為，仍以此真知養於恬靜。若不如此，何以恬乎！夫不能恬靜，則何以生彼真知？不有真知，何能致茲恬靜？是故恬由於知，所以能靜；知資於靜，所以獲真知。故知之與恬，交相養也。斯則中和之道，存乎寸心，自然之理，出乎天性，在我而已，豈關他哉！

Dao, being primordially empty and still, exudes a calm tranquility in all who follow. If the sage is to win over the ways of others, be it on a level of personal engagement or that of the state, he must employ ways that are in themselves still and quiet. He emulates the newborn child, completes things by non-doing, and speaks with non-words. Using the knowledge of non-knowledge, the sage thus appears dim and unknowing yet he is guided by Dao. His dimness is guided by the bright illumination of nothingness in such a way that the myriad things coalesce around him without knowing why. Their gathering is not the result of the sagacious wisdom of the genuine man but his simplicity and ability to act as a mirror of Dao. What he reflects, of course, is nothing and everything, the bright and the dark, the inner essence of things and their outer character. Insofar as the sage is in harmony with Dao, his moral framework becomes representative of the heavenly principles permeating the universe. Given that heavenly harmony is the third principle needed to complete the attainment of cosmological freedom, and in light of the fact that such harmony is

³⁸ *Zhuangzi* ch. 16 “*shanxing* 繕性.” See Guo Qingfan, 548-549.

partially enacted through the sage, harmony is as much about virtuosity as it is about mutual conjoining:

He who has an understanding of the virtue of heaven and earth may be called the Great Root or Great Ancestor, for he harmonizes with heaven. In dividing and promoting all under heaven, he harmonizes with man. Harmonizing with man is called the joy of man; harmonizing with heaven is called the joy of heaven.³⁹

夫明白於天地之德者，此之謂大本大宗，與天和者也；所以均調天下，與人和者也。與人和者，謂之人樂；與天和者，謂之天樂。

Rather than view freedom as an inalienable right that must be bestowed on the superior and petty man alike, Zhuangzi declared that freedom in Dao is based on one's cultivation of the heavenly principles under discussion. Understanding heavenly virtue is to know the root of all things while understanding worldly virtue is to be their ancestor. In this way, there is no distinguishing the being of the sage's humanity from the oneness of his non-presence for both his authentic and relational selves have conjoined in calling the Spirit Tower (*lingtai* 靈台) of Dao their abode. Perfecting his inner-nature to be in line with the virtue of heaven, the sage roams the universe and wanders to the four corners of the world, not to inculcate others in the arts of Dao, but to restore said arts to a world that lost them long ago.

The common man might be considered free on a secular level but he will never know the cosmological freedom enjoyed by the sage unless he goes through the steps outlined in this chapter and the one preceding it. All beings are free, irrespective of their station in life insofar as freedom flows from the bowels of nothingness. The question is how far freedom penetrates reality. To take things on the level of ordinary existence, as participating in a reality shaped and molded by epistemological norms, freedom will not extend beyond the shallowest of shallows. By availing ourselves of the life praxis espoused by Zhuangzi, however, humanity can not only penetrate the deepest depths of reality but the notion of reality altogether. Of course, forgoing such normative frameworks as reality and language does not imply divorcing ourselves from their use; rather, Zhuangzi's philosophy is about placing our trust and lives in the cosmological processes stemming

³⁹ *Zhuangzi* ch. 13 "tiandao 天道." See Guo Qingfan, 458.

from Dao instead of those institutions devised by man. Freedom, then, is not something that comes and goes but is persistently and perpetually accessible to beings the world over. So long as Dao remains unharmed, freedom is assured.

Where this assuredness originates is in the harmony of ontological nothingness. To be free is to return to the One, and returning to the One is to return to nothingness. Nothingness is the root of the One and being is its branches. We live our lives on the tips of those branches, never knowing where they might take us. Zhuangzi wished to awaken us from our complacency by repeatedly pointing out that we are but one being amongst a myriad of beings whose time is incomprehensibly small compared to the infinite non-time of Dao. Our bodies are but clods of earth lent to us by Dao and whose power is only as great as the ground upon which we stand when faced with a universe whose grounding is beyond groundedness. Ridding ourselves through forgetfulness of our continued attachment to names and designations is to hence look beyond their fleeting nature and be free of them.

The Great One's constancy is endless and in this endlessness freedom lurks for those willing to seek it out. Zhuangzi's preferred method of doing so was the act of wandering—one that may be literal or metaphorical. No matter the technique, wandering in the freedom of cosmic harmony with Dao is to wander carefree beyond the confines of temporal and spatial boundaries. It is a wandering that has neither beginning nor end but becomes a form of existential existence in its own right. In this mindless, groundless wandering, even reality itself experiences an uprooting such that no single instance of it can be said to belong to the one experiencing it. This transience cannot persist if it is rooted in a particular being, or the world of beings for that matter, which would affix it with a hint of permanence; indeed, the ephemerality of reality can only take its source in the perpetuity of nothingness. Only a quiescent, empty nothingness has the capacity to absorb and generate all potentialities and this is the dwelling place of Dao. Carefree wandering is thus the epitome of Zhuangzi's cosmological freedom and serves as a mark of the highest state of existence human beings can experience, short of returning to the One.

6.4 Carefree Wandering

Unlike the lack of a specific word to delimit the terminology of Zhuangzi's idea of freedom, when it comes to the idea of wandering, and doing so in a carefree manner, he already had a term at hand in the case of the former and invented one for the latter. The word *you* 遊, to wander or play, was used quite liberally in the *Zhuangzi*, and yet the term for a mind carefree in disposition (*xiaoyao* 逍遙) was used most sparingly. Given the great disparity in the occurrences of their usage, it is clear that *you* is the more mundane form of freedom while *xiaoyao* represents the supra-mundane. We shall thus examine the peculiar idea of carefree wandering so as to uncover how it embodies and conveys Zhuangzi's formulation of cosmological freedom. This will not only serve as a fitting end to the present chapter but nicely reflects the theme of this entire work—that Daoist cosmology is not based on hierarchically irreversible relationships but on symbiotically spontaneous creation realized through nothingness.

Wandering is an action or non-action whose non-deliberateness is seldom considered carefree or, for that matter, as being beneficial to one's condition. Carefree wandering is a sauntering in the unknown; it is a free-spirited meandering in nothingness. When we meander without knowing where we are headed or why, we return to a state of spontaneous equilibrium with our surroundings. To wander is thus to leave things undetermined such that our conscious will is blocked-off, allowing our instinctual dance with Dao to commence. Faced with this situation, the outcome of our wandering creates itself while never deviating from being in accordance with our inborn nature; to be otherwise would be unnatural and in conflict with the oneness of all things. This is why the sage outwardly lives his life in playful ignorance and carefree bliss of the pursuit of names and distinctions prized by the common man, whilst inwardly maintaining a constitution of quiet equanimity and mystery. Thus, to play for the pure joy of being playful is taken as being different from playing for the sake of attaining something; similarly, wandering in nothingness is not equal to wandering to pass time or avoid something. The sage epitomizes the former and the petty man the latter. Regarding the latter, the *Zhuangzi* criticized such persons as but 'remote practitioners of the arts of Mister Chaos.'

This unusual expression arises as part of the response given by Confucius to his disciple Zigong 子貢 upon recounting an encounter he had with a gardener in the state of Jin 晉. The response by Confucius went as follows:

He [the gardener] is a remote practitioner of the arts of Mister Chaos. [Zigong], you know one thing of him but not the other. We govern what is internal but not what is external. He who has bright clarity and can enter plainness, who returns to simplicity through non-doing, whose body and inborn nature embraces his spirit, and so wanders amidst the mundane world, meeting such a person, would you not have been taken aback? Regarding the arts of Mister Chaos, how are you and I qualified to know about them!⁴⁰

彼假脩渾沌氏之術者也；識其一，不知其二；治其內，而不治其外。夫明白入素，無為復樸，體性抱神，以遊世俗之間者，汝將固驚邪？且渾沌氏之術，予與汝何足以識之哉！

In order to understand why Zhuangzi had Confucius say such things we need to look at a passage much earlier in the text wherein Confucius said: “They are men who wander beyond boundaries; I, however, am one who wanders within boundaries.”⁴¹ To wander beyond the boundaries of men is to roam in Dao while he who roams within them merely wanders amongst men. This is the onto-cosmological distinction between common and carefree wandering. When we wander in the common sense of the word, we take our being as a receptacle from which other beings interact with us. This type of being-to-being encounter is not genuine, however, due to its forgoing of the complementary qualities of that which is naught. Carefree wandering is thus that which belongs to the naught of nothingness; it is a mindless, bodiless journeying in the empty quiescence of Dao and is why Zhuangzi, through the voice of Confucius, made such remarks.

In Zhuangzi’s eyes, Confucius was a man of the world and so could not escape his bondage to his relational self. Unable to forget the phenomenal world and discard his own body, he was bound to a purposive wandering that toiled and exhausted his spirit. This is what Zhuangzi was alluding to when he said that Confucius wanders within boundaries while he and other Daoists wander beyond

⁴⁰ *Zhuangzi* ch. 12 “*tiandi* 天地.” See Guo Qingfan, 438.

⁴¹ 「彼，游方之外者也，而丘，游方之內者也。」 *Zhuangzi* ch. 6 “*dazongshi* 大宗師.” See Guo Qingfan, 267; Chai 2008: 217.

them. He who practices the arts of Mister Chaos lives in simplicity; resting in non-doing, he thus experiences the complete marvelous potentiality of the universe. In smashing his body, his will surrenders itself to his inborn nature and with his inborn nature intact the essence of his former being attains spiritual freedom such that he wanders the world as one with Dao.

While Zhuangzi viewed Confucius as someone roaming throughout the plains of the earth in order to espouse his virtue-centric doctrines, such ideals nevertheless belong to the world of men, not heaven. Had he adhered to the principle of heavenly measure to ground his ethics, Confucius would have been able to break free of it and wander beyond its boundaries. In all of this, what is of importance is the element of nothingness. Man cannot wander in the boundless infinity of Dao until the realization dawns on him that the myriad things are rooted in nothingness, and owing to this creative negativity, he can cultivate the *qi* of Dao whilst honing his practice of being usefully useless. To nurture oneself in the arts of chaos is thus to master the art of fasting of the mind so as to return to the One insofar as in oneness things are whole, and wholeness leads to the actualization of perfect unity. Through his harmony with Dao the sage becomes free and freedom is the key to mastering life. Confucius may have mastered the virtuous ways of the human heart but he was a long ways from mastering its spirituality:

Confucius said: They are men who wander beyond boundaries; I, however, am one who wanders within boundaries...They see man's body as being the composition of different substances coming together in one form. They forget their liver and gall, their ears and eyes; over and over they end and they begin, not knowing head from tail. Peaceful and carefree they occupy themselves in what lies beyond the dust and dirt of the world, roaming carefree in the spirit of non-doing. How can they vex themselves with such practiced etiquette so as to impress the views of common men's ears and eyes!⁴²

孔子曰：彼，游方之外者也，而丘，游方之內者也……假於異物，托於同體；忘其肝膽，遺其耳目；反覆終始，不知端倪；芒然彷徨乎塵垢之外，逍遙乎無為之業。彼又惡能憤憤然為世俗之禮，以觀眾人之耳目哉！

⁴² *Zhuangzi* ch. 6 “*dazongshi* 大宗師.” See Guo Qingfan, 267-268; Chai 2008: 217. A similar tale also appears in the *dasheng* 達生 chapter of the *Zhuangzi*. See Guo Qingfan, 663.

For the common man, there would appear to be a clear delineation between things within the world and those external to it. If such were the case, Zhuangzi's theory of cosmological freedom would be beyond the reach of humanity for the simple reason that his theory of freedom is existentially grounded. Carefree wandering in freedom is not about transcending one plane of existence so as to enter another—our aimless roaming in nothingness forbids it—rather, to roam beyond the world of men is to meontologically extend ourselves such that we harmonize with Dao. Looked at in this way, there no longer exists any separation between the inner- and outer-world for they are one and the same. Herein lies the reason the *Zhuangzi* claimed that those who wander beyond the world of men forget their liver and gall, their ears and eyes, for in learning how to forget their bodies they must first stop viewing them as a collection of disparate parts. The liver and gall are no different from each other as they are from eyes and ears because they come from the same source in Dao.

The inevitable cycle of change experienced by things in the universe is yet another observation we can make regarding the above passage. Looking past the superficiality of our epistemologically driven reality is to take things for what they are. Things are not constant, however, as they undergo a myriad of transformations over the course of their lifetime. These minute changes come together to form large-scale changes which are in turn reflected in the alternation of life and death. To be caught up in the minutiae of transformation is to lose sight of what lies beyond—that change is infinite and part of what makes Dao so mysterious. Being immeasurable in nature, Dao lacks the facticity found in the being of man. Thus, when we speak of humanity's cosmological freedom in Dao, we are not declaring our being to be free; on the contrary, what makes us free is the harmony attained upon returning to our root. When the *xianren* mentioned in the text focus their attention on that which lies beyond the dust and dirt of the world, they use their knowledge of the arts of Dao to grasp the significance of things instead of merely seeing their surface patterns. Zhuangzi thus took jabs at Confucius for building an ethical system dependent on the practice of ritual and the inculcation of artificial norms. It was his fixation on the patterning of social conduct that prevented Confucius from living a life carefree and embodying simplicity. These two characteristics are essential for one seeking the kind of freedom spoken of in Daoist texts such the *Zhuangzi*.

Toiling their lives away in hardship and misery, the petty men of the world were neither free nor lived a life of quiet stillness. Had they accepted the fact that their fate lies with heaven, they would

not have struggled in futile resistance to the life changing transformations that Dao induces in them. Given this and the fact that human social norms are unable to bring about change to that which is unchangeable or beyond influence (i.e., Dao), the best course of action to pursue is to rest in non-doing. Resting in non-doing is to engage in letting-be; it is to embody the traits of nothingness wherein the spirit is free to aimlessly wander within the essence of Dao. Thus, the letting-be of non-doing is one of the highest ideals in all of Daoism and epitomizes Zhuangzi's idea of carefree wandering.

As non-doing is the epitome of the letting-be of carefree wandering, he who partakes in it can only be a sage, a person whose virtue is so perfect the *Zhuangzi* referred to him as the 'gatherer of authenticity' (*cai zhen* 采真):

The perfect man of old borrowed benevolence from Dao, took lodging in righteousness, wandered carefree in the wastelands, took his meals in the careless and simple fields, and strolled in the garden of no bestowal. Carefree, he engaged in non-doing; plain and simple, life for him was easy. In not bestowing anything, nothing emerged. In ancient times this was called the wandering of he who gathered authenticity.⁴³

古之至人，假道於仁，託宿於義，以游逍遙之墟，食於苟簡之田，立於不貸之圃。逍遙，無為也；苟簡，易養也；不貸，無出也。古者謂是采真之遊。

Non-doing is hence much more than the praxis of uselessness, it also pertains to distinguishing the authentic from the non-authentic. Zhuangzi's idea of authentic, however, was not formulated along lines of Western reason but shaped itself with the components of virtue—righteousness and benevolence. Thus, when we speak of Daoist virtue we are actually pointing to non-virtue. A paradox, perhaps, yet we have already delimited the non-virtue of Dao as being the heavenly principles of equality, measure, and harmony. When perfected, these aspects of heavenly virtue result in the subject's unadulterated freedom. The perfection of human virtue thus stands at the bottom of Zhuangzi's spiritual ladder and is followed by the virtues of heaven and Dao. The virtue of Dao, however, is the antithesis of heavenly virtue, for if the virtue of Dao were quantifiable it would no longer be that of Dao. In other words, all manifestations of virtue stem from the

⁴³ *Zhuangzi* ch. 14 "tianyuan 天運." See Guo Qingfan, 519.

nothingness of Dao's non-virtue hence Zhuangzi's meontological cosmogony begins and ends with nothingness.

Nothingness is the beginning of things, the realm wherein they attain freedom, and is that which welcomes their return to the One upon the moment of their expiration. We do not do things in nothingness, we can only do nothing. Non-doing, therefore, is a doing for the sake of nothing. To learn the art of *wuwei* one must unlearn what one has learned. Unlearning thus requires that we embody the traits of ontological nothingness (i.e., quietude, stillness, emptiness), and this can be accomplished through the non-doing of rest and by personifying uselessness. To be usefully useless is thus to harmonize with things and when things are harmonious, they mutually enrich one another. Enrichment via mutual non-doing is but one way heavenly virtue makes itself known in the world, and so the gatherer of authenticity does not seek out objective truth but looks to the virtue of heaven for guidance on how to respond in any given situation. Letting matters unfold via their own terms by practicing non-doing and uselessly engaging the world, the sage wanders the world untouched by debates over 'this' and 'that.' Only with an epistemological vision of non-knowledge can the gatherer of authenticity cultivate a carefree state of mind, and only when his phenomenal self becomes the non-self of nothingness can he engage in aimless wandering.

Wandering, uselessness, and an unbound mind are the principal characteristics of one who has found perfect unity with Dao. Those petty men whose mind toils over the artificiality of names and reality are men whose knowledge is blocked-up and whose virtue has been lost. Wherein their pettiness takes root is in their misguided quest to create a human ethics by seeking a solution for that to which no resolution is necessary. Humanity's attempt to hoard heavenly virtue does not result in freedom but in the trifling over what are essentially mutually complimentary opposites. Selfish hoarding does nothing to bring man closer to the root of his being, nor does it illuminate the error of his ways. Instead, what is needed is an ethics of letting-be, of returning to simplicity so as to fast our mind and forget the presence of our disingenuous selves.

All things undergo change, this is irrefutable. For the gatherer of authenticity, change represents authentic reality in that change is Dao's manifestation made real. However, Dao as the ultimate reality of the universe is not without its own authenticity, a non-authenticity that traces itself to ontological nothingness. This is why in rest the sage is able to notice all that passes him by. As he

composes his mind to reflect the empty quietude of nothingness, he pays no heed to the dusty ramblings of the world of men. Reduced to a non-essence that blends with Dao, the aimless wandering of the sage takes after Dao's own spontaneous drifting. Guided by the nonbeing of his authentic self—a selfless self—the sage glides from place to place without so much as a worry or care for its purpose. Selfless, mindless, and bodiless, the gatherer of authenticity embraces constant nothingness as the authentic non-truth of non-reality, as the genuine progenitor of being, and as the only plane of existence whereby he can live according to his self-so nature. Unbounded by laws and social stipulations, moral norms, and the vices of emotions and loyalty, Zhuangzi's sage enjoys a freedom unbeknownst to the rest of humanity.

Carefree wandering thus translates into an aimless spirit whose journeying knows no bounds. Adapting to each and every situation as easily as water circumvents an obstacle the sage relies on the freedom gained by the non-mind of Dao to traverse the universe. He traverses the universe not in a corporeal sense but by way of an inner-intuition that belongs to the oneness of things without possessing or being possessed by them. The myriad things cannot own this spiritual essence for it is that of Dao and as such is the non-essence of nothingness. Thus, carefree wandering is an expression of the freedom common to the entire universe insofar as it is the existential harmony inherent to *yin* and *yang*, nonbeing and being, heaven and earth. Existential harmony, in turn, is but the meontological rooting of things in Dao.

6.5 Conclusion

The incorporeal One is not a singular entity but an undifferentiated wholeness that is otherwise known as chaos. Chaos does not exist in time or space, thus the sage who returns to the One also returns to a time when wholeness prevailed in the universe. Dwelling in the tranquil silence of nothingness, the sage knows not of life and death, youth and old age, virtue and vice, for such knowledge would bar him access to the playground of Dao. He is free not from something, nor free to do something, but is free insofar as he no longer needs to be free. The freedom of non-freedom is thus more powerful than freedom because it is a self-forgetting of the need for a free self. Free selves cannot return to the One, nor can they enjoy the bliss of wandering in nothingness due to

their continual clinging to the concept of freedom. Carefree wandering is, therefore, a non-wandering in non-freedom; it is not an escape from one's self but a returning to the source of the non-self in Dao. The source that is not a source is also the essence that is a non-essence; this non-essence grants us the freedom to wander carefree in nothingness, to no longer regard ourselves as human beings but as a spark of creation whose time of coming and going is unknowable and unstoppable. To accept this fate is to be free of the chains of our own humanity, however hard we might try to deny or cloak them in words of prophecy or science.

Zhuangzi was thus attempting to open our minds to his unique cosmogonist vision. His goal was not to indoctrinate an ethics of the goodness or evilness of the human heart but to get us to stop thinking in such dichotomies. His call was for an experiential partaking in the everydayness of things; to bear witness to the joy and miracle of their mundaneness. The ontology of the sage is not directed towards his human quality; rather, the sage is a metaphor for one who lives in the natural world by living beyond it through an inner embracing of nothingness. Transcendence was not a term Zhuangzi used because there for him, nothing needs to be transcended when all is united in the oneness of Dao. Likewise, there can be no hint of nihilism in Daoist cosmology for things at their core are already inlaid with nothingness. From the naught, creation occurs, and with creation things naturally return to their root. Given that humanity did not devise such a process, why should we fear it? If we overcome this fear we can attain harmony, and with harmony comes peace of mind and preservation of body. This was Zhuangzi's message, one whose profoundness was beyond compare and remains as valid as ever.

CONCLUSION

Zhuangzi lived in a tumultuous time, one when social cohesion had fallen into disarray and people no longer turned to heaven for consolation or guidance. Amidst all of the hubbub and disillusionment over human virtue ethics, Zhuangzi's beckoning for a return to more naturally inclined principles rang through like a clap of thunder. The challenge that scholars face when trying to elucidate the *Zhuangzi's* cosmogony is that many of its themes are scattered throughout the text, making a coherent presentation difficult. This study, however, has brought these variegated issues together, showing that there indeed exists textual cohesion and consistency. In light of this, Zhuangzi's cosmology no longer presents itself as a collection of loosely related ideas but comes together to form an original and tightly coherent discourse. More specifically, this work has demonstrated that the three core concepts of Zhuangzi's cosmological doctrine—Dao, nothingness, and being—could be applied to other mediums of metaphysical discourse leading to a form of worldly ethics in its own right.

Our analysis began by identifying and justifying the cosmological framework of the *Zhuangzi*. These preliminary measures were necessary to fend off the imposition of any preconceptions due to the dominant nature of Western cosmogony. Having differentiated nothingness from nonbeing and these two from Dao, what remained to be done was to layer them in such a way that Dao's propensity for creation would remain undisturbed. This was achieved by locating nothingness prior to Dao while nonbeing and being were posterior. Given the ubiquitous appearance of nothingness, the next challenge was to preempt any claim that Zhuangzi's cosmology was inherently nihilistic. It was here that the positive aspect of nothingness came into play and was why we referred to it as ontological. Not only that, but there existed the need to separate the cosmological function of nothingness from its ontic appearance in the world of everyday things. The function of being in this triadic framework was of secondary importance. Indeed, Zhuangzi was not particularly interested in the ontological import of things and this was reflected cosmologically in his discussion of the One.

The *Zhuangzi*, taken as a whole, is a text devoted to espousing the holistic nature of the world and cosmos alike. In working out how Dao, nothingness, and being conjoin as the One without cancelling one another out proved to be the least challenging endeavor encountered thus far. By proposing that the One serve as a combination of nothingness and ontological being, the *Zhuangzi* safely combined them into an undifferentiated whole without fear that doing so would deny nothingness its meontological constancy, or that being would become dispersed and hence unable to give rise to ontic beings. In this way, Zhuangzi's extension of ontological traits to the universe at large, as opposed to limiting it to the realm of human beings, ensured that his cosmology would remain genuinely universal. Bringing all of these components together thus gave us a full picture from which to approach its more particular aspects and applications, such as the ways in which things profess to manifest themselves.

By saying that things manifest themselves out of the ether of nothingness, we were not declaring they have the propensity to self-procreate; rather, all things emerge from the One and exist in a state of oneness. The One from which all things arise in turn points to the inherent presence of Dao in them for it is the latter that animates and sustains the former. On this point, particular care was needed to avoid any inclination that Zhuangzi's idea of oneness was somehow reductionist or monistic. It proved to be neither for in saying that all things are One, Zhuangzi was making two claims: first, their unity came from having a single source in Dao and second, the time during which they were gathered as a collective was marked as one lacking in names and discriminations. Things were hence amorphous in an epistemological sense yet phenomenologically distinct. The result was a cosmology whose philosophical import stood out amongst its peers for its ingenuity whilst proving attractive to those who had a disdain for more human-centric models.

Over the course of the next two chapters, we delved into issues concerning the manifestation of ontic beings from the One and whether or not Dao, as the source of said things, could be ascribed temporal qualities. Employing the relational methodology of Thing-trace, our claim that things in their collectivity comprise the One while retaining their individual characteristics was lent further textual support. However, by focusing specifically on the Thing, we came to the realization that it was the Thing, as the genus of a particular chain of things, which actually dwelled in the One. Due to this discovery, the Thing became just as unknowable, ontologically, as the One.

As the ontic world of things is the only plane of reality to undergo the perceived experience of temporal change, the trace was but a mere reflection of that which is inherently atemporal and an extension of Dao. Given that Dao is beyond temporal and spatial quantification, we cannot speak of the Thing as having these traits for doing so would transform it into a transcendental when in fact it is already transcendent. What is more, although the trace assumed the role of pointing us towards the Thing, it was argued that such pointing was only carried out under the premise of a signified-signifier relationship. Not only was this relationship central to understanding how the Thing fit into the cosmological structure of the One, it highlighted the *Zhuangzi's* hermeneutic approach to the world in general.

In knowing that things are mirage-like representations of the Thing lying at the top of their chain of signification, the *Zhuangzi* decried our need to accumulate such objects, including certain types of knowledge, for it regarded the amassing of things as unnatural. To this end, what the text took as useful proved to be radically different from the typical social conventions of the time. Usefulness was thus held to the measure of long prolongation and any endeavor that led to the reduction of one's years or personal injury was discarded as useless. In other words, *Zhuangzi* took the concepts of useful and useless and flipped them upside down thereby creating the life praxis of useful uselessness. What is interesting to note is that this unorthodox way of viewing the world was modeled after naturally occurring examples such as the crippled man and the old, twisted tree. Additionally, the case of the clay vessel featured prominently in the discussion, not because said vessel held any particular material significance, but that its inner-void could be tied to the nothingness linking being to Dao.

Forgetting, the focus of the penultimate chapter of this study, served as a lead-in to the question of freedom, the topic of the chapter that followed. A theme whose importance for *Zhuangzi* cannot be stressed enough, forgetting was the application of the praxis of uselessness to the social realm of man. Not only was forgetfulness a prized characteristic of the sage, *Zhuangzi* extrapolated it the natural world at large in order to demonstrate how when things were comfortable with their station in life, they forget about such notions as competition, deceit, honor, and so forth. Forgetting such human vices required one to recall something else in their stead and for *Zhuangzi*, the only thing worthy of being recalled was Dao. Using the analogy of letting-be, what we learned was that on the

one hand, binding forgetfulness to memory and the mind proved futile insofar as true temporality can only be experienced through the non-doing of rest, while on the other hand, in order to attain freedom of a holistic nature, one must endure a series of encounters whereby the degree of forgetting becomes ever more cosmological in spirit.

Through letting-go of our attachment to names and other conventions it is best, Zhuangzi said, to forget them so as to harmonize with Dao. Once one has succeeded in joining Dao, freedom ensued. The challenge we faced when discussing Zhuangzi's idea of freedom stemmed from the fact that it was not held to be a one-to-one relationship. In other words, one could not claim oneself to be free from another thing; instead, one needed to think in terms of being free from one's relational self. Using the three principles of heaven was one way by which freedom could be attained but another went back to the process of progressive self-forgetting discussed in chapter four. It is fitting that this study should end with a chapter on freedom as it also reflects the meontological nature of the One and its dependence on Dao for sustenance. Indeed, Zhuangzi's formulation of freedom offered a unique vision of the sage's connection to the world and the universe at large. In taking the sage as an exemplar of what it means to be free, humanity was presented with a vision of freedom that still lay within its grasp in spite of its aloofness. All that was required was to let-go of the world. Said differently, believing in Dao meant one was free while following Dao set others free.

This dissertation, when taken as a whole, has brought together the various cosmological thoughts of the *Zhuangzi* into a single discourse. In doing so, it has not only presented his ideas on Dao, nothingness, and being in an accessible manner, it has brought to the fore many aspects of Daoist cosmogony that have been overlooked or remain unknown. By illustrating the multifarious themes of Zhuangzi's cosmological thought and the subtleties and profound richness of his arguments, we have not only seen the text in a new and awe-inspiring light, we have also come to appreciate the deft with which he crafted his arguments. The *Zhuangzi* is, after all, not just a work of philosophy but one of sublime poetry too.

Having said as much, there are implicit limitations to Zhuangzi's philosophy, a few of which we shall now discuss. Certainly the most noticeable pertains to the question of accessibility to Dao. Due to the finitude of human life, comprehending that which is perpetual and unknowable through conventional tools of knowledge is not for the faint of heart. Indeed, in reading the *Zhuangzi*, it

would appear that much of the text's arguments are directed towards the sage and not the ordinary persons of the world. This, of course, has more to do with Zhuangzi's writing style than anything else, and nowhere do we see him espousing an elitist attitude or engage in mockery of those who have suffered physical or social harm. If anything, Zhuangzi went to great lengths to use as his moral exemplars individuals that would have suffered even more extremely had they appeared in a Ruist, Legalist, or Mohist text.

Zhuangzi's satirizing of these three schools was not without its purpose but that is not so much a fault as a deliberate attempt to shock people out of their misplaced trust that any one of those schools of thought could lead to measurable improvement in the human condition. We saw how letting things be could bring about change, as could appearing useless and fasting one's mind, but again, these methods appear to be directed towards those who are in a social or economic position to pursue what are surely lengthy bouts of self-perfection and cultivation. They would most certainly appear unattractive to the peasant or unemployed scholar whose very survival depends on actively earning a wage! Does this imply that Zhuangzi was calling for the cessation of activity so as to practice meditation? No, because that would also be a form of purposeful activity. What Zhuangzi was actually striving for was a natural, purposeless action that no longer depended on discriminations or social norms as a means of measuring one's conduct.

One may go on and criticize Zhuangzi for being a relativist and skeptic but such faults fall beyond the scope of this dissertation. Indeed, the rather narrow scope of this work can itself be criticized for not offering a more comprehensive view of Zhuangzi's philosophical thought. While valid, the reasons for not doing so were given in the Introduction. To briefly recount them, we argued that presenting a comprehensive overview of Zhuangzi's thought would prove both unwieldy and philosophically ineffective. Rather than make such an attempt here, this work is but the first of a series of similarly in-depth studies. Since Daoism is first and foremost a school of cosmology, without a good grasp of the central themes of Dao, nothingness, and being, and how these in turn inform subsequent themes such as temporality, life praxis, and freedom, jumping straight into an analysis of Daoist ethics or epistemology would prove rather treacherous.

This is where my future endeavors come into play. As a follow-up to the present study, I ask why Daoism goes to such great lengths to speak of an unknowable, indescribable Dao only to entreat

our ridding of linguistic conventions so as to embrace our original human condition. Since Dao gives rise to all things yet is not itself a thing, how can human speech supersede its authority? This raises a further question as to the temporality of language and our need to revere figures of former times. Indeed, Daoism criticizes the words of former sage-kings but not necessarily their actions. So long as their conduct conforms to the naturalness of Dao they will be perpetually admired. In other words, said project is not about deconstructing language so as to overcome epistemological barriers but establishing a new paradigm for knowing the world and in doing so, learning about oneself. Realizing that epistemological misinterpretation results in erroneously understanding the natural harmony and processes of the world, the *Zhuangzi* espoused a doctrine of non-words that manifested itself in the form of virtue. In this way, knowing the virtue of others whilst cultivating one's own would lead to a stable and prosperous society.

With knowledge of the *Zhuangzi*'s use and understanding of language under foot, one could then proceed to direct one's attention to its ethics, especially as they are derived from the cosmological ideals of non-doing and naturalness. By taking the themes used in this dissertation and applying them to future works, not only will we be able to construct a more comprehensive picture of the philosophical tradition of Daoism, through our consistent reading of the *Zhuangzi*, we will at the same time be more qualified than ever to declare him the most intellectually significant thinker in ancient China.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

dao 道 – the Dao, progenitor of the myriad things

de 德 – virtue, power, creative power

ji 迹 – footprints, trace

qi 氣 – vital breath, spirit, essence

qi 齊 – be equal to

qi ou 其耦 – relational self

shengren 聖人 – sage

suoyi ji 所以迹 – that which leaves the trace

tian 天 – heaven

tianhe 天和 – heavenly harmony

tianjun 天均 – heavenly equilibrium

tianni 天倪 – heavenly measure

wang 忘 – to forget, forgetfulness

wu 無 – ontic nonbeing, ontological nothingness

wuwu 無無 – nonbeing of nothingness

wuwei 無爲 – non-doing, non-discriminating action

wuxin 無心 – no mindedness, mindlessness

xiaoyao 逍遙 – carefree wandering

xinzhai 心齋 – fasting of the mind

yi 一 – the One, oneness

you 有 – ontic being, ontological Being

you 游 – to wander

zhenren 真人 – authentic person, sage

ziran 自然 – Nature, naturalness, self-so-ness

zuowang 坐忘 – sitting in forgetfulness

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works in Chinese

- Chen Jingyuan 陳景元. *Nanhua Zhenjing Zhangju Yinyi* 《南華真經章句音義》 (On the Sounds and Meaning of the Chapters and Sentences of the *Zhuangzi*). See volume 13 of the *Zhonghua Daozang*.
- Chen Guying 陳鼓應. *Huangdi Sijing Jinzhu Jinyi* 《黃帝四經今注今譯》 (Modern Commentary and Annotations to the Four Classics of the Yellow Emperor). Taipei: Shangwu Yinshu Guan, 1995.
- Chu Boxiu 褚伯秀. *Nanhua Zhenjing Yihai Muwei* 《南華真經義海慕微》 (Admiring the Profound Sea of Meaning of the *Zhuangzi*). See volume 14 of the *Zhonghua Daozang*.
- Du Daojian 杜道堅. *Wenzi Zuanyi* 《文子續義》 (The Written Meaning of the *Wenzi*). See *Siku Quanshu*. For modern edition, see Wang Liqi 王利器.
- Fang Xuanling 房玄齡. *Guanzi* 《管子》 (The *Guanzi*). See *Siku Quanshu*. For modern edition, see Li Xiangfeng 黎翔鳳.
- Fang Yong 方勇. *Zhuangzi Xueshi* 《莊子學史》 (Historical Study of the *Zhuangzi*). Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 2008.
- Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, ed. *Zhuangzi Jishi* 《莊子集釋》 (Collected Annotations to the *Zhuangzi*). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1997.
- Guo Xiang 郭象, Cheng Xuanying 成玄英. *Nanhua Zhenjing Shu* 《南華真經注疏》 (Commentary and Annotations to the *Zhuangzi*). See volume 13 of the *Zhonghua Daozang*. For modern edition, see Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩.
- Heshang Gong 河上公. *Daode Zhenjing Zhu* 《道德真經註》 (A Commentary to the *Daodejing*). See volume 9 of the *Zhonghua Daozang*. Modern edition entitled *Laozi Daodejing Heshang Gong Zhangju* 《老子道德經河上公章句》. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1993.
- Hou Wailu 侯外廬. *Zhongguo Sixiang Tongshi* 《中國思想通史》 (A General Intellectual History of China). Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1995.

- Huang Shouqi 黃壽祺 et al., eds. *Zhouyi Shizhu* 《周易譯注》 (An Annotated Commentary to the *Zhouyi*). Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2009.
- Jiang Cheng 江澂. *Daode Zhenjing Shuyi* 《道德真經疏義》 (Annotations on the Meaning of the *Daodejing*). See volume 9 of the *Zhonghua Daozang*.
- Jiang Yu 江通. *Chongxu Zhide Zhenjing Jie* 《沖虛至德真經解》 (Explanations to the *Liezi*). See volume 15 of the *Zhonghua Daozang*.
- Kang Zhongqian 康中乾. *You Wu zhi Bian: Wei-Jin Xuanxue Benti Sixiang zai Jiedu* 《有無之辨：魏晉玄學本體思想再解讀》 (Discriminating between *you* and *wu*: the Metaphysical Thought of Wei-Jin Xuanxue Reconsidered). Beijing: Renmin Chuban She, 2003.
- Li Daoping 李道平, ed. *Zhouyi Jijie Zuanshu* 《周易集解纂疏》 (Collected Explanations and Compiled Annotations to the *Zhouyi*). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2006.
- Liu Wendian 劉文典. *Huainan Honglie Jijie* 《淮南鴻烈集解》 (Collected Explanations to the *Huainanzi*). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1989.
- . *Zhuangzi Bu Zheng* 《莊子補正》 (Corrections to the *Zhuangzi*). Hefei: Anhui Daxue Chuban She, 1999.
- Lou Yulie 樓宇烈, ed. *Wang Bi Jijiao Shi* 《王弼集校釋》 (Collective Examination of the Annotations of Wang Bi). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1999.
- Li Xiangfeng 黎翔鳳, ed. *Guanzi Jiaozhu* 《管子校注》 (Examination of the Commentaries to the *Guanzi*). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2006.
- Li Yao 李約. *Daode Zhenjing Xinzhuzhu* 《道德真經新注》 (A New Commentary to the *Daodejing*). See volume 9 of the *Zhonghua Daozang*.
- Lin Xiyi 林希逸. *Nanhua Zhenjing Kouyi* 《南華真經口義》 (Oral Significance of the *Zhuangzi*). See volume 13 of the *Zhonghua Daozang*. For modern edition, see Zhou Qicheng 周啓成.
- . *Chongxuzhide Zhenjing Yanzhai Kouyi* 《沖虛至德真經虞齋口義》 (Juan Zhai's Oral Significance of the *Liezi*). See volume 15 of the *Zhonghua Daozang*.

——. *Daode Zhenjing Kouyi* 《道德真經口義》 (Oral Significance of the *Daodejing*). See volume 11 of the *Zhonghua Daozang*.

Lü Huiqing 呂惠卿. *Zhuangzi Yi Jijiao* 《莊子義集校》 (Collective Examination of the Meaning of the *Zhuangzi*). Preserved in Chu Boxiu's 褚伯秀, *Nanhua Zhenjing Yihai Muwei* 《南華真經義海慕微》. For modern edition, see Tang Jun 湯君.

——. *Daode Zhenjing Zhuan* 《道德真經傳》 (A New Commentary to the *Daodejing*). See volume 10 of the *Zhonghua Daozang*.

Lu Deming 陸德明. *Zhuangzi Yinyi* 《莊子音義》 (On the Sounds and Meaning of the *Zhuangzi*). Preserved in his *Jingdian Shiwen* 《經典釋文》. See *Siku Quanshu*.

Lu Xisheng 陸希聲. *Daode Zhenjing Zhuan* 《道德真經傳》 (Commentary to the *Daodejing*). See volume 9 of the *Zhonghua Daozang*.

Ma Chengyuan 馬承源, ed. *Shanghai Bowuguan Cang Zhanguo Chuzhu Shu* 《上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書》 (Chu State Bamboo-slip Texts from the Warring States Period in the Collections of the Shanghai Museum), volume 3. Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chuban She, 2003.

Qian Xizuo 錢熙祚, ed. *Yinwenzi* 《尹文子》, volume 6 of *Zhuzi Jicheng* 《諸子集成》 (Collective Works of the Masters). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2006.

Shen Qingsong (Vincent) 沈清松. *Duibi, Waitui yu Jiaotan* 《對比、外推與交談》 (Contrast, Extrapolation, and Discourse). Taipei: Wunan Chuban Gongsì, 2002.

Siku Quanshu 《四庫全書》 (The Complete Library of the Four Treasuries). Electronic version (淵文閣四庫全書電子版).

Tang Jun 湯君, ed. *Zhuangzi Yi Jijiao* 《莊子義集校》 (A Collective Examination of the Meaning of the *Zhuangzi*). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2009.

Tang Yijie 湯一介. *Guo Xiang yu Wei-Jin Xuanxue* 《郭象與魏晉玄學》 (Guo Xiang and Wei-Jin Xuanxue). Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chuban She, 2000.

——, ed. *Wei-Jin Xuanxue Yanjiu* 《魏晉玄學研究》 (Research into Wei-Jin Xuanxue). Wuhan: Hubei Jiaoyu Chuban She, 2008.

Tang Yongtong 湯用彤. *Wei-Jin Xuanxue Lungao* 《魏晉玄學論稿》 (A Sketch of Wei-Jin

- Xuanxue). Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chuban She, 2005.
- Wang Bi 王弼. *Daode Zhenjing Zhu* 《道德真經註》 (Commentary to the *Daodejing*). See volume 9 of the *Zhonghua Daozang*. For modern edition, see Lou Yulie 樓宇烈.
- Wang Liqi 王利器, ed. *Wenzi Shuyi* 《文子疏義》 (Annotations on the Meaning of the *Wenzi*). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2009.
- Wang Pang 王雱. *Nanhua Zhenjing Xin Zhuan* 《南華真經新傳》 (A New Commentary to the *Zhuangzi*). See *Siku Quanshu*.
- Wang Shumin 王叔岷. *Zhuangzi Jiaoquan* 《莊子校詮》 (Complete Examination of the *Zhuangzi*). Taipei: Zhongyang Yanjiu Yuan Lishi Yuyan Yanjiusuo, 1999.
- Wang Xianqian 王先謙, ed. *Zhuangzi Jijie* 《莊子集解》 (Collected Explanations to the *Zhuangzi*). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1999.
- Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, ed. *Liezi Jishi* 《列子集釋》 (Collected Annotations to the *Liezi*). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2007.
- Zhang Shuangli 張雙棣, ed. *Huainanzi Jiaoshi* 《淮南子校釋》 (Examination of the Annotations to the *Huainanzi*). Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chuban She, 1997.
- Zhonghua Daozang* 《中華道藏》 (The Chinese Daoist Canon), 49 volumes. Beijing: Huaxia Chuban She, 2004.
- Zhou Qicheng 周啓成, ed. *Zhuangzi Yanzhai Kouyi Jiaozhu* 《莊子廡齋口義校註》 (Examination of the Oral Significance of Juan Zhai's Commentary to the *Zhuangzi*). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2009.

Works in English

- Allison, Robert. *Chuang-Tzu for Spiritual Transformation: An Analysis of the Inner Chapters*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1989.
- Ames, Roger, ed. *Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1998.

- Ames, Roger & David Hall, trans. *Daodejing: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2004.
- Augustine. *Confessions*. W. Watts, trans. 2 vols. London: Loeb Classical Library, 1912.
- Badiou, Alain. *Being & Event*. O. Feltham, trans. London: Continuum, 2007.
- . *Logics of Worlds*. A. Toscano, trans. London: Continuum, 2009.
- Bergson, Henri. *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*. M. Andison, trans. New York: Philosophical Library, 1946.
- . *Creative Evolution*. A. Mitchell, trans. New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1998.
- . *Matter & Memory*. N. Scott, trans. New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2004.
- Bohm, David. *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*. New York: Routledge, 1980.
- Catalano, Joseph. *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre's "Being and Nothingness."* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Chai, David. *Early Zhuangzi Commentaries: On the Sounds and Meanings of the Inner Chapters*. Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008.
- . "Musical Naturalism in the Thought of Ji Kang" *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, vol. 8.2 (2009): 151-171.
- . "Meontology in Early Xuanxue 玄學 Thought" *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 37.1 (2010): 91-102.
- Chan, Wing-Tsit. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963.
- Cunningham, Conor. *Genealogy of Nihilism: Philosophies of Nothing and the Difference of Theology*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Speech and Phenomena—and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*. D. Allison, trans. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.
- . *Of Grammatology*. G. Spivak, trans. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977.
- Dillon, M.C. *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997.

- Froese, Katrin. *Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Daoist Thought: Crossing Paths in-Between*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2006.
- Gadamer, H.G. *Truth and Method*. J. Weinsheimer, trans. London: Continuum, 2004.
- . *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. D. Linge, trans. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.
- Hansen, Chad. *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Hartman, Klaus. *Sartre's Ontology: A Study of Being and Nothingness in the Light of Hegel's Logic*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966.
- Hegel, G.W.F. *Science of Logic*. A. Miller, trans. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1969.
- . *Philosophy of Nature*. M. Petry, trans. 3 vols. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1970.
- . *Phenomenology of Spirit*. A. Miller, trans. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- . *Encyclopedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*. T. F. Geraets et al., trans. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1991.
- . *Philosophy of Mind: Part 3 of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. W. Wallace, trans. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Heidegger, Martin. *The Question of Being*. J. Wilde, trans. New Haven: College and University Publishers, 1958.
- . *On the Way to Language*. P. Hertz, trans. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
- . *The Question Concerning Technology and other Essays*. W. Lovitt, trans. New York: Harper & Row, 1977.
- . *History of the Concept of Time*. T. Kisiel, trans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.
- . *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. A. Hofstadter, trans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.
- . *Basic Writings*. D. Krell, ed. New York: Harper Collins, 1993.

- . *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. W. McNeill et al., trans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995{a}.
- . *Aristotle's Metaphysics $\theta 1-3$: On the Essence and Actuality of Force*. W. Brogan et al., trans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995{b}.
- . *Being and Time*. J. Stambaugh, trans. Albany: SUNY Press, 1996.
- . *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. R. Taft, trans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997{a}.
- . *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*. P. Emad, trans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997{b}.
- . *Ontology: the Hermeneutics of Facticity*. J. van Buren, trans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.
- . *Poetry, Language, Thought*. A. Hofstadter, trans. New York: Harper Perennial, 2001.
- . *Supplements: From the Earliest Essays to Being and Time and Beyond*. J. van Buren, ed. Albany: SUNY Press, 2003.
- . *What is Called Thinking?* J. Gray, trans. New York: Harper Perennial, 2004.
- . *The Essence of Human Freedom: An Introduction to Philosophy*. T. Sadler, trans. London: Continuum, 2008.
- Heine, Steven. *Existential and Ontological Dimensions of Time in Heidegger and Dogen*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1985.
- Henricks, Robert. *Laozi's Daodejing: A Translation of the Startling New Documents Found at Guodain*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.
- Houlgate, Stephen. *The Opening of Hegel's Logic: from Being to Infinity*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006.
- Husserl, Edmund. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, 3 vols. F. Kersten et al., trans. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983-1989.
- . *Logical Investigations*. 2 vols. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Kahn, Charles. *Essays on Being*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. W. Pluhar, trans. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1987.
- . *Critique of Pure Reason*. M. Weigelt, trans. London: Penguin Books, 2007.
- . *Critique of Practical Reason*. W. Pluhar, trans. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2002.
- Katrin Froese. *Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Daoist Thought: Crossing Paths In-between*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2006.
- Kjellberg, Paul et al., eds. *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1996.
- Lacan, Jacques. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (Book 7 of *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan*). D. Porter, trans. London: W.W. Norton & Co, 1997.
- . *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (Book 17 of *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan*). R. Grigg, trans. London: W.W. Norton & Co, 2007.
- Leibnitz, G.W. *Philosophical Works of Leibnitz*. G. Duncan, trans. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1908.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. A. Lingis, trans. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979.
- Lewis, Michael. *Heidegger beyond Deconstruction: On Nature*. London: Continuum, 2007.
- Lohmar, Dieter and Ichiro Yamaguchi, eds. *On Time—New Contributions to the Husserlian Phenomenology of Time*. New York: Springer, 2010.
- Lotze, Hermann. *Metaphysic in Three Books: Ontology, Cosmology, and Psychology*. B. Bosanquet, trans. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1887.
- Low, Douglas. *Merleau-Ponty's Last Vision: A Proposal for the Completion of the Visible and the Invisible*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000.
- Lowe, E. *Possibility of Metaphysics—Substance, Identity, and Time*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- . *Four-category Ontology: A Metaphysical Foundation for Natural Science*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

- Lowith, Karl. *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*. G. Steiner, trans. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- Lynn, Richard, trans. *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, 1999.
- Mair, Victor, ed. *Experimental Essays on Chuang-tzu*. Centre for Asian and Pacific Studies: University of Hawaii Press, 1983.
- Major, John et al., eds. *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
- Marion, J. *Reduction & Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*. T. Carlson, trans. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998.
- Marrati, Paola. *Genesis and Trace: Derrida Reading Husserl and Heidegger*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.
- McTaggart, J. *A Commentary on Hegel's Logic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Primacy of Perception*. J. Edie, trans. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964.
- . *The Visible and the Invisible*. A. Lingis, trans. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968.
- . *Phenomenology of Perception*. C. Smith, trans. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Michael Lafargue. *Tao and Method: A Reasoned Approach to the Tao Te Ching*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1994.
- Mou, Bo, ed. *History of Chinese Philosophy*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Munro, Donald, ed. *Individualism and Holism: Studies in Confucian and Daoist Values*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985.
- Mure, G.R. *A Study of Hegel's Logic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Experience of Freedom*. B. McDonald, trans. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993.
- Pluth, Ed. *Signifiers and Acts: Freedom in Lacan's Theory of the Subject*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007.

- Priest, Stephen. *Merleau-Ponty*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *The Course of Recognition*. David Pellauer, trans. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.
- . *Memory, History, Forgetting*. K. Blarney, trans. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006.
- Roth, Harold. *Original Tao: Inward Training and the Foundations of Taoist Mysticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*. H. Barnes, trans. New York: Washington Square Press, 1992.
- . *Truth and Existence*. A. van den Hoven, trans. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- . *Existentialism is a Humanism*. C. Macomber, trans. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.
- Shang Geling. *Liberation as Affirmation: The Religiosity of Zhuangzi and Nietzsche*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2006.
- Shen Qingsong (Vincent). *Confucianism, Taoism and Constructive Realism*. Vienna: Vienna University Press, 1994.
- . “Inter-religious Dialogue Between Buddhism and Christianity Conceived with Strangification and Contrast” in *Movement of Constructive Realism*. T. Slunecko, ed. Wien: Wilhelm Braumtillet, 1997.
- Sherover, Charles, ed. *Human Experience of Time—the Development of its Philosophic Meaning*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001.
- Slingerland, Edward. *Wuwei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Smajs, Josef. *Evolutionary Ontology: Reclaiming the Value of Nature by Transforming Culture*. New York: Rodopi, 2008.
- Vaught, Carl. *Access to God in Augustine's Confessions: Books X-XIII*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2005.
- Wagner, Rudolf. *A Chinese Reading of the Daodejing: Wang Bi's Commentary on the Laozi with Critical Text and Translation*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2003.

- . *Language, Ontology, and Political Philosophy in China: Wang Bi's Scholarly Exploration of the Dark*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2003.
- Wang Youru. *Linguistic Strategies in Daoist Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism: the Other Way of Speaking*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- , ed. *Deconstruction and the Ethical in Asian Thought*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Watson, Burton, trans. *The Complete Works of Chuang-tzu*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1968.
- Whitehead, Alfred North. *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1929.
- Wong, David B. *Natural Moralities: A Defense of Pluralistic Relativism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Wood, David. *Deconstruction of Time*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001.
- Ziporyn, Brook. *Penumbra Unbound: The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2003.