

Of Fish and Men: Species Difference and the Strangeness of Being Human in *Zhuangzi*

By Franklin Perkins

Many things are wonderful-terrible, but none is more wonderful-terrible so than human beings.

Sophocles, *Antigone*¹

天生百物，人爲貴。

Heaven generates the hundreds of things, and human beings are most precious.

Collected Sayings I²

先者有善，有治，無亂。有人焉有不善，亂出於人。

At first there is good, there is order, and there is no chaos. When there are people, there is what is not good. Chaos comes out from people.

Constancy First³

HUMAN BEINGS ARE STRANGE. WHILE ELABORATED AND THEORIZED IN AS many different ways as there are different cultures and times, there is no getting around this basic fact, that we are peculiar animals. Our very diversity attests to it. The opening lines of the first choral ode of the *Antigone* express this strangeness in its ambiguity—to say that human beings are the most *deinon* is to say that we are most wondrous or awesome, but the wonder or awe of *deinon* arises not only from what is great but also what is monstrous, strange or terrifying.⁴ That this sense of our terrible strangeness is not just *Greek* but *human* is suggested by the other lines, both taken from bamboo strips buried around 300 BCE and discovered in China in the 1990s. The first most likely is Confucian (*Ru* 儒). The preciousness of human beings lies in our explicit attachment to familial and social life, as well as in our ability to make distinctions and organize the world.⁵ The second line is more Daoist.⁶ Nature spontaneously follows a sustainable order of growth, change and alternation. Only human beings disrupt this, through the imposition of categories and names

Franklin Perkins is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Chair of the Chinese Studies Committee at DePaul University. His original training was in Early Modern European Philosophy and he is the author of Leibniz and China: A Commerce of Light (Cambridge University Press, 2004), and Leibniz: A Guide for the Perplexed (Continuum Press, 2007). His current research interests are in Chinese Philosophy and the attempt to do philosophy in a world context. Perkins has spent four years in China, most recently as a Fulbright Researcher at Peking University (2006-2007). He is currently completing a book on the intersections of the problem of evil and the status of the human in Classical Chinese Philosophy.

and the production of artificial desires. Together, these two passages contain the same ambiguity as the *Antigone*, that human beings are wondrously great and wondrously terrible. Across cultures, our strangeness often appears as a sense of alienation from the world around us. Neither god nor beast, we live *in* nature but are not fully *of* it. Heidegger brings out this sense of alienation, in discussing *deinon* as *unheimlich*, (“uncanny”), playing on the sense of “*heim*” as “home” to indicate a feeling of being not-at-home while in one’s home.⁷ This common sense of being not entirely at home in the world is best illustrated by myths that link the origins of human beings or human culture to the divine. One of the more beautiful philosophical expressions of such myths is Plato’s *Phaedrus*, where Socrates explains the “divine madness” of love and philosophy as following from our vague recollections of the divine, which our immortal soul glimpsed before losing its wings and drooping down to settle into an earthly body.⁸ Nietzsche puts a more specific and pessimistic twist on this intuition:

The best and highest in which humanity can participate is obtained through sacrilege, and its consequences must be taken up—that whole flood of sufferings and sorrows which the offended heavens visit upon that upwardly striving noble race of mankind.

He calls this conflict in which the human beings take and suffer from the divine, a problem that stands “like a boulder at the gate of every culture.”⁹

Such myths are remarkably absent in Classical Chinese thought, where the originators of human civilization are exceptionally talented human beings, the sages.¹⁰ This contrast already shows that while there may be something transcultural about our feeling of strangeness, it can be theorized in ways so different as to appear incommensurable and even mutually unrecognizable. On a general level useful for orientation, we can say that if the strangeness of human beings lies in our appearing both natural and super-natural, European and Chinese philosophers split on which side they take as fundamental. The tendency of European philosophers to take other-worldly difference as their basis appears already in the *Phaedrus* and is heightened under Christian influence. Human actions follow from a free will, radically different from the causal laws determining everything else in nature. Because we have souls that are not of this world, human beings are immortal, while everything else in nature changes and decays. Human beings have reason, which grants us unique access to eternal and necessary truths. The list could go on, but the root is that human beings are made in the image of a radically transcendent God. With such a view, the uniqueness of human beings is just what we would expect; the problems come in explaining our place in nature. Topics on that side of human experience—embodiment, emotion, human fragility, even family—tend to be ignored. The most profound philosophical problems lie in reconciling two kinds of reality—free will and natural causality, mind and body, reason and emotion, creation and evolution.

Such *problems of reconciliation* do not arise in Classical Chinese philosophy, where human strangeness is theorized through an assumed continuity with nature. While the divine, *tian* 天, customarily translated as “heaven,” exhibits anthropomorphic characteristics in some texts, it is never outside the world, and over time it becomes more and more identified with the basic order of nature

itself. All things/events take shape within broad patterns of change, mostly cyclical, and all are composed of the same stuff, *qi* 氣 (vital force or energy). Human beings may be most valuable or most problematic, but they are just part of nature, one of the “ten-thousand things” (*wanwu* 萬物). As we might expect, Chinese philosophers emphasize those very aspects of our naturalness neglected in Europe—embodiment, emotion, human fragility, family. They take for granted that human actions and human history are explained in the same way as any other natural change. The difficulties—more often blindspots than explicit problems—lie in explaining how we differ from other things, the fact that we use words, act deliberately, go against the sustainable natural order, generate massive wars, and so on, issues which have been quite easy for a European philosophers to explain.

This general contrast suggests an easy model for cultural exchange or comparative philosophy, in which we take the strengths of one tradition to fill in the gaps of the other. In particular, it seems fitting to turn to Chinese philosophy now, as global warming and mass species extinctions have prompted the European tradition to take our place in nature more seriously. Leibniz projects a similar model for the exchange of complementary strengths, calling it a “commerce of light” to go along with the “commerce of goods” then growing between Europe and China.¹¹ The result, he says, will be “as if a European steeple were placed on a pyramid of Egypt.”¹² The absurdity of Leibniz’s image reveals the limits of such an approach, which misses the ways in which concepts and theories are embedded in contexts, systems, and lines of problematization. One can rarely break off a piece here and insert it over there, putting the steeple on top of the pyramid. More dangerously, such an orientation tends to simplify Chinese philosophy in two ways, making Chinese thought merely the reverse image of European thought, and taking Chinese philosophy as overly harmonious and coherent, as if philosophy in China were somehow not constructed primarily around *problems*. These words of caution are not meant to devalue comparative philosophy. The goal of this paper is to use a comparative approach to illuminate blindspots on both sides, but rather than seek Chinese answers to European problems, it seeks to clarify the problems by showing how they take form when approached from the opposite direction. More specifically, the focus of this paper is on the complexities that arise when one attempts to think through human strangeness from the fundamental assumption that human beings are part of nature. To avoid over generalizing, this paper will focus on one text, the classical Daoist text known as the *Zhuangzi*.¹³

The *Zhuangzi* is one of the earliest and most thorough attempts to think through human beings as just another of the ten-thousand things. This deflation of human importance is meant to disrupt our commitments to rigid and narrow perspectives and labels, allowing us to liberate our experience so as to reach *xiaoyaoyou* 逍遙遊 (“carefree wandering,” “wandering far and unfettered,” or “going rambling without a destination”).¹⁴ Among the strategies the *Zhuangzi* uses to induce this flexibility is the equalizing of human beings and other animals, as in a famous dialogue which concludes:

猿獼狙以為雌，麋與鹿交，鰍與魚游。毛嬙麗姬，人之所美也；魚見之深入，鳥見之高飛，麋鹿見之決驟，四者孰知天下之正色哉？

Monkeys take gibbons as partners, bucks exchange with does, loaches play [*you* 游] with

fish. Mao Qiang and Lady Li are what people consider beautiful, but if fish saw them they would enter the depths, if birds saw them they would fly high, and if deer saw them they would dash away. Of these four, which knows the world's correct beauty?¹⁵

The *Zhuangzi* uses dozens of species, from ducks to cranes, butterflies to praying mantis, millipedes to the mythical unipede, but in these comparisons, fish are most prominent, appearing in around thirty passages.¹⁶ This paper will examine three ways in which fish are discussed in the *Zhuangzi*: first, how fish illuminate the limitations of any perspective; second, how fish illustrate (positively and negatively) what it means to be at home in a setting; and third, how the relationship between fish and humans addresses the possibility and challenges of communication across different perspectives. The role of fish will provide a concrete thread leading through the broader question of how the *Zhuangzi* presents human beings as both like and unlike other animals.

First, why fish? On one level, fish stand out because of their association with water, which commonly represented the *dao* 道 (the way).¹⁷ The *Dao De Jing* says:

上善如水。水善利萬物而不爭，居眾人之所惡，故幾於道矣。

The highest good is like water. Water is good at benefiting the ten thousand things and it does not contend, residing in what the masses of people dislike. Thus it is close to the way.¹⁸

Water has generative powers, like the way. It works without struggle and by going toward what is low and obscure; it is weak and soft, but “nothing is better at overcoming what is hard and strong.”¹⁹ This association with water is built into key concepts, as the terms for pure (*qing* 清), deep (*shen* 深), profound (*yuan* 淵), and the overflowing power (*fan* 汎) of the *dao*, all are metaphorical extensions from qualities of water (reflecting in their use of the water radical: 氵). One tradition, like Thales, took water as the basic material of the universe, as in another excavated text called “The Great Oneness Gives Birth to Water” (*Taiyi Sheng Shui* 太一生水), in which the “Great Oneness” generates water, which then assists it in generating heaven and earth.²⁰ The importance of water runs through Confucian texts as well, as Mengzi praises the great sage Yu for enacting flood control not by imposing his will but by following “the way of the water” and doing what required “no work” (*wushi* 無事); in another passage, Mengzi describes the immense power of his vital energy (*qi*) as “floodlike” (*haoran* 浩然).²¹ Given these associations, the profound relationship between fish and water naturally suggests itself as a metaphor for our relationship to the way. Even so, in the *Zhuangzi*, this connection between fish and water remains largely in the background. The immediate importance of fish lies in the assumption that fish have a world and that this world is radically different from our own. In one sense, fish become symbols of radical alterity: “Fish residing in water live but human beings residing in water die.”²² When we say that someone is “swimming with the fishes,” we mean they are dead. At the same time, in so far as fish are thought to have a world or a perspective, they have a status equal to that of human beings, whose own world or perspective has no privileged place in nature. In this sense, fish represent an equality or evenness across the most radical difference.

We can now turn to the particular ways in which the *Zhuangzi* uses fish. Most fundamentally, appeals to fish illuminate the constraints of our worldview in contrast to nature (*tian* 天) itself. Just as fish forget water, we forget the air we breathe, taking our orientation and values as absolute. Pointing out that fish do the same thing but in an inverted world draws our attention to the limits of perspectives.²³ This function appears clearly enough in the quotation above on standards of beauty, which occurs in a dialogue between “Gaptooth” and Wang Ni. The dialogue begins with a series of skeptical claims in which Wang Ni denies knowing what all things affirm in common, denies knowing that he does not know, and then denies knowing that nothing can be known. He then describes disagreements between different animals, beginning with what it means to be at home (monkeys live in trees, fish in the water), moving to different tastes, and then to erotic beauty. The passage concludes with a more radical point:

自我觀之，仁義之端，是非之塗，樊然殽亂，吾惡能知其辯！

From where I see it, the sprouts of benevolence and rightness and the pathways of right and wrong are all mixed up and chaotic. How could I know their distinctions?²⁴

The use of *duan* 端 (sprout, beginning) echoes the language of Mengzi, who lists four natural and spontaneous emotions as the “sprouts” of the virtues; one of those sprouts is the tendency to label things as so or not-so, *shi* 是 or *fei* 非, here translated as “right or wrong,” but with a broad sense of affirmation and negation. When Wang Ni is then asked if sagely people at least know the standards of benefit (*li* 利) and harm (*hai* 害), two key terms for the Mohists, he scoffs that sagely people are not even concerned about life and death. This conclusion reveals the dialogue’s deeper purpose, to show that human standards, particularly the ethical standards of the Confucians and Mohists, are mere impositions on nature with no objective status and no privilege over the standards of other animals.²⁵

The limitations of perspective appear in a different way in the fish story that begins the text:

北冥有魚，其名為鯤。鯤之大，不知其幾千里也。化而為鳥，其名為鵬。鵬之背，不知其幾千里也；怒而飛，其翼若垂天之雲。[. . .] 蜩與學鳩笑之曰：「我決起而飛，槍榆枋而止，時則不至而控於地而已矣，奚以這九萬里而南為？」

The North Sea has a fish, whose name is “Minnow.” Minnow is large, no one knows how many thousands of miles. It transforms and becomes a bird, whose name is Peng. Peng’s back, no one knows how many thousands of miles it is. It rouses itself and flies up, its wings like clouds on the sides of the heavens. . . . The cicada and the fledgling dove laugh at it, saying, “With determination we rise up and fly, stopping when we land in an elm or a sandalwood tree. Sometimes we don’t reach it and just tumble back to the ground. What is this using ninety thousand miles and going south?”²⁶

Different things have different needs and conditions, and our perspectives and judgments always reflect these limits. From the little perspective of the cicada and the dove, the giant Peng looks ridiculous. The implication is that our judgments of others are similarly flawed, and the cicada is explicitly compared to people who brag of their political influence. It is worth noting that the cicada and the dove only make fun of the giant creature after it transforms into a bird and flies through their world. Its initial condition as a fish represents a more radical alterity, utterly

inaccessible, a point suggested by naming this giant fish “Minnow” (*kun* 鯪).²⁷

While these passages emphasize difference, they work on the assumption that fish have perspectives, desires, and homes just as we do. This point is crucial, because one could easily take the radical otherness of fish to indicate that they have no world at all, reinforcing rather than undermining human superiority. The analogy between fish and human beings underlies the second way that fish are used in the *Zhuangzi*, which is to illustrate what it means to be at home in a perspective or environment. One passage begins:

泉涸，魚相與處於陸，相响以濕，相濡以沫，不如相忘於江湖。與其譽堯而非桀也，不如兩忘而化其道。

When the springs dry up, the fish reside together on land, spitting to moisten each other, but this is not as good as their forgetting each other in rivers and lakes. Praising Yao and condemning Jie is not as good as forgetting both and transforming in the way.²⁸

Confucius explains:

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。』

Fish go together in water, people go together in the way. For those who go together in water, dig a pond and they will be nourished. For those who go together in the way, have no work and life will stabilize. Thus it is said, fish forget each other in rivers and lakes, people forget each other in the arts of the way.²⁹

The natural ease and forgetting of fish is held up as a model for human beings. Efforts to moralize the world by praising the sage Yao and condemning the evil Jie violate this natural ease and destabilize life. The *Dao De Jing* presents similar critiques of morality:

故大道廢，安有仁義，六親不和，有孝慈，邦家昏亂，有正臣。

Thus when the great way is abandoned, there is benevolence and rightness. When the six relations are not in harmony, there is filial piety and kindness. When the state is in chaos, there are correct ministers.³⁰

At best, such moralizing efforts are signs of a disordered age, the actions of landed fish desperately spitting to stay alive. At worst, this moralizing itself causes disorder by rejecting our natural being in the world in favor of rigid categories of right and wrong, almost always enforced through violence and coercion.

This contrast between fish as natural and human beings as disruptive sometimes appears in practical advice for individuals, as one passage says that, if put on land, a fish as large as a boat can be tortured by the smallest of ants, because it has lost its place. People who enter the human world of political struggle bring harm on themselves in similar fashion.³¹ The same practical orientation appears on a grander scale as well:

鉤餌罟罾筴之知多，則魚亂於水矣；[.]知詐漸毒、頡滑堅白、解垢同異之變多，則俗惑於辯矣。

When there is much knowledge of hooks, baits, nets, and traps, the fish are disrupted in the waters. . . . When there is much knowing deception and subtle poisoning, slipperiness of “hard” and “white” and breaking up of “same” and “different,” then customs are confused by disputation.³²

Human beings disrupt their own environment in just the same way as they disrupt the environments of fish and other animals. The passage goes on to describe the systematic dislocation of the sustainable natural order:

故上悖日月之明，下爍山川之精，中墮四時之施，惴栗之蟲，肖翹之物，莫不失其性。甚矣夫好知之亂天下也！

Thus, they rebel against the illuminating brightness of the sun and moon above, scorch the refined essence of the mountains and rivers below, and overturn the orderly progression of the four seasons in between. From little wriggling insects and the tiniest flying creatures, there are none that do not lose their natures. Deep, indeed, is the chaos brought to the world by the love of knowing!³³

While it probably sounded far-fetched in the third century BCE, the disruption of the seasons eerily points toward global warming, just as animals losing their natures (*xing* 性) points to genetic manipulation.

In these passages, the natural life of fish contrasts the friction caused by the deliberate struggles of the greedy and the moralizing. The imperative is to *be like the fish*, pointing toward an ideal of smoothness and ease modeled on the spontaneity of nature. But the fact that this is an imperative, an *ought* rather than an *is*, already reveals the strangeness of human beings, and explains why the “Constancy First” text would lament that “Chaos comes out from people.” In the *Zhuangzi* passage, the cause of this disruption is the “love of knowing” (*haozhi* 好知), which here could only mean the love of some set of categories and labels. Our exceptional ability to cause destruction and disorder lies in our ability to know, and thus to construct a world of deliberate striving and artificial desires. As the *Dao De Jing* says,

不尚賢，使民不爭；不貴難得之貨，使民不為盜；不見可欲，使民心不亂。

Do not honor the worthy and the people will not contend; do not value goods that are difficult to obtain and the people will not become robbers; do not exhibit the desirable and the hearts of the people will not be in chaos.³⁴

Our deliberateness, artificiality, and striving—which would be easily explained by free will or original sin—raise profound difficulties in the more naturalistic context of Daoist thought.

A view of human distinctiveness as simply bad dominates the *Dao De Jing* and related chapters of the *Zhuangzi*.³⁵ Other chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, though, present a more radical view of human potential. Thus in some passages, fish illustrate the dangers of being at home in any limited perspective or element, best shown by the desperation of fish out of water. In these cases, fish are analogous to most human beings, but different from sagely people, who develop a flexibility that allows for free and easy wandering. Sometimes the text points out practical advantages of flexibility. One passage notes that fish are afraid of pelicans but not afraid of nets. The point is that if we remain absorbed in a single view or become too confident in our knowledge, we miss dangers from unexpected directions.³⁶ For the most part, though, the *Zhuangzi* makes a more radical claim about the ability to wander freely anywhere. This point has already appeared implicitly in the passage criticizing moralizing appeals to Yao, which says that fish forget

themselves in *water* but that human beings forget themselves in the *way*. This difference is expanded in another passage on being at home in water, which uses water bugs rather than fish:

草食之獸，不疾易藪；水生之蟲，不疾易水。行小變而不失其大常也，喜怒哀樂不入於胸次。夫天下也者，萬物之所一也。得其所一而同焉，則四支百體將為塵垢，而死生終始將為晝夜，而莫之能滑，而況得喪禍福之所介乎！

Grass eating animals are not distressed by a change in pasture; bugs that live in water are not distressed by changing the water. They go through small changes but do not lose the greater constancy, so pleasure and anger, sorrow and joy do not enter into their breasts. Now the world is what makes the myriad things one. Attain that which makes them one and unite with it, and then the four limbs and hundred bones become like dust and dirt, and life and death, beginning and end, become like night and day, so that none can cause disruption.³⁷

In distinguishing small changes from greater constancy, the passage divides what animals accept and what must cause distress. Applied to us, we would expect to hear that human beings are not troubled by moves within their element, perhaps small villages (for the *Dao De Jing*) or family (for the Confucians). Instead, human beings can take the world itself as their element, remaining undisturbed wherever they go. Guo Xiang puts it simply: “Death and life also are small changes.”³⁸ But other animals do *not* take life and death as small changes, as we see in the fish who spit on each other to stay alive. Thus while fish (and almost all human beings) are limited to a proper environment, sages can become at home anywhere: even death may be a return to a long forgotten home, as Zhuangzi points out.³⁹ While the animal struggle to stay alive could be described as spontaneous and natural, sagely people take up a different relationship to nature.⁴⁰ They “take heaven and earth as their palace and the ten-thousand things as their treasury [而況官天地，府萬物];” unlike the fisherman who tries hold onto his boat by hiding in a gully, sagely people become invulnerable to loss because they “hide the world in the world [藏天下於天下].”⁴¹

A full explanation of how such flexibility is possible would go too far into the *Zhuangzi's* accounts of language, knowledge, and the heart (*xin* 心, heart/mind), but it is rooted in three points. First, emotions and desires are inseparable from labels. It is only when we label something as valuable that we are saddened by its loss, which is why the *Dao De Jing* warns against elevating the worthy and valuing things that are hard to get. The most generic of these labels are *shi* and *fei*, so and not-so or right and wrong. Second, human beings view the world in a wide variety of ways. In fact, differences between species often stand for differences among human beings. That is the fuller context for the claim that fish live in water while human beings die:

魚處水而生，人處水而死。彼必相與異，其好惡故異也。故先聖不一其能，不同其事。Fish in water live but human beings in water die. Those which differ from each other have loves and hates that are different. Thus the first sages did not take abilities as one and did not make duties the same.⁴²

Aside from differences in customs and practices, the *Zhuangzi* presents various odd characters to show that almost any perspective is possible, such as the sage Wang

Tai who saw losing his foot as like shaking off some dust.⁴³ Finally, perspectives change and form through experience. The formation of a fixed perspective is discussed in terms of a “completed” or “formed” heart (*chengxin* 成心):

夫隨其成心而師之，誰獨且無師乎？奚必知代而心自取者有之？愚者與有焉！未成乎心而有是非，是今日適越而昔至也。

If we follow a completed heart and make it our authority, who alone is without an authority? How would it be only those who know the alternations and whose hearts affirm themselves that have them? The foolish would also have them! Not yet completed in the heart but having right and wrong—this is like leaving for Yue today and arriving there yesterday.⁴⁴

The term “*cheng*” 成 usually has the positive sense of forming or completing something successfully, but in the *Zhuangzi* it has a sense of rigidity and limitation, as in the famous line: “a way is formed/completed through walking it.”⁴⁵ This use of *cheng* has two aspects: it emphasizes the contingency involved in how the heart (or a path) takes form, and it shows that once such a form has been taken, creativity, flexibility, and potentiality are lost. According to this passage, the labels of right and wrong, which structure our desires and emotions and lead us into contention, only follow once a heart has been “completed,” locked into some fixed point of view. Sagely people avoid or undo this fixation of the heart and thus can go along with whatever happens. This process is called the “fasting of the heart” (*xinzhai* 心齋).⁴⁶

We can now turn to the third way in which fish are used in the *Zhuangzi*, which is to address the problem of understanding across perspectives. Several passages suggest that perspectives would be incommensurable and mutually unintelligible. The cicada and the little dove have no chance of understanding the giant bird Peng, because their realm of experience is so much more limited. The best they could do would be to not judge. A passage in the chapter on “evening things out” explains the problem, claiming that if you and I argue, there is no one who can settle the dispute, because they would have to do so from a certain perspective. If their perspective is the same as yours, they will agree with you; if the same as mine, they will agree with me; if different from us both, they will disagree with both. This problem is rooted in the fact that even when we are together (*ju* 俱), we cannot know or understand each other (*xiangzhi* 相知).⁴⁷ The *Zhuangzi* may assume that those with differently completed hearts cannot really understand each other, but the possibility of overcoming the limits of perspective suggests this is not the whole story. The very concept of “incommensurability” depends on having a fixed scale for measuring, but sagely people have the ability to shift scales in order to fit different circumstances.

The interaction between fish and humans takes two forms, pointing toward two ways of addressing the problem of communication. The most prominent is fishing. In a famous passage, the king of the powerful state of Chu sends two messengers to request that Zhuangzi take over his government.⁴⁸ They find Zhuangzi fishing and he tells them of a sacred turtle whose shell has been revered in the courts for millennia. Would that turtle rather be honored like that, or alive dragging its tail in the mud? Of course it would rather be alive in the mud, and Zhuangzi responds that he also would prefer to remain in the mud.

While fishing may simply represent leisure, Zhuangzi is presented in a liminal position.⁴⁹ He literally turns his back on the human world, refusing to look up at the messengers, and instead faces something other, dangling a hook hoping for a response. Fishing as openness to something other appears elsewhere as well, as in a passage that describes a fisherman who stood on a mountain by the sea, using a giant hook with twenty oxen as bait. He waited day after day for a year, until finally he caught a fish so large it fed the world. The passage comments that if he had shuffled off to a drainage ditch, he would only have caught carp. While this passage points out the practical advantages of “thinking big,” the person fishing in the ditch is compared to those who take themselves seriously because of their political involvements.⁵⁰ Turning toward the vast ocean and waiting for a giant fish symbolizes openness to what is outside the categories of the human world, even if it is motivated by the ultimate goal of benefiting humanity. One passage explicitly connects fishing to communication:

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！

A fish-trap is for fish; once you get the fish you forget the trap. A snare is for rabbits; once you get the rabbit you forget the snare. Words are for intentions; once you get the intention you forget the words. Where can I get a person who forgets words, so that I can have a word with him?⁵¹

The use of fishing as a metaphor for communication across perspectives or worlds shows a profound awareness of the difficulty of the problem. On the one hand, we can do no more than remain open and wait for some response, for a bite. We cannot coerce someone into communication; we must lure them in. On the other hand, that waiting still takes a particular form from out of our own concerns—the hook or trap. If so, then there is an unavoidable tension between our genuine desire for openness and the fact that this openness must project from our perspective in some specific form. One possibility is that we do our best to forget the trap as soon as we make that initial connection, as Zhuangzi suggests. A more radical possibility appears in another passage, where the greatest fisherman is said to not even use a hook:

非持其釣有釣者也，常釣也

As one who did not insist his fishing have a hook, he was always fishing.⁵²

King Wen recognized this fisherman as a sage and put him in charge of the state. Because he did nothing, factions and struggles eventually ceased and everyone came to form one community. When King Wen began speaking of conquering the world, though, the fisherman wandered away.

A different approach appears in a dialogue between Zhuangzi and his friend Huizi, a philosopher of the time famous for his paradoxes:

莊子與惠子遊於濠梁之上。莊子曰：「儻魚出遊從容，是魚之樂也。」惠子曰：「子非魚，安知魚之樂？」莊子曰：「子非我，安知我不知魚之樂？」惠子曰：「我非子，固不知子矣；子固非魚也，子之不知魚之樂，全矣！」莊子曰：「請循其本。子曰『汝安知魚樂』云者，既已知吾知之而問我。我知之濠上也。」

Zhuangzi and Huizi wandered (*you* 遊) on the bridge above the River Hao. Zhuangzi said, “The minnows come out and swim (*you* 遊) freely — this is the joy of fish.” Huizi

said, "You are not a fish. How do you know the joy of fish?" Zhuangzi said, "You are not me. How do you know I do not know the joy of fish?" Huizi said, "I am not you, so I surely do not know you. You surely are not a fish, so you do not know the joy of fish. That is the whole thing!" Zhuangzi said, "Please follow it back to the beginning. You said, 'How do you know the joy of fish?' and so on. So you already knew I knew it and then asked me. I know it above the Hao River."⁵³

Zhuangzi takes the gap between human beings and fish to be the same in kind as the gap between himself and his best friend Huizi. Thus either some understanding between human beings and fish is possible, or there is no understanding at all. In fact, Huizi's claim that since he is not Zhuangzi he does not know (*buzhi* 不知) him echoes the claim that disputes cannot be settled because we cannot know each other (*buneng xiang zhi* 不能相知). Thus Huizi affirms the position of incommensurability. Zhuangzi, though, does not back away from his claim that the fish are joyful. The difficulty is in how this understanding is possible. Zhuangzi's response, that he knows it by his location on the bridge, seems to be simply a clever play on the fact that the Chinese for "how," *an* 安, can also mean "where," but one clue to the basis for Zhuangzi's knowledge lies in the way the passage plays on another term *you*, 遊, translated as "wandering" in the ideal of "free and easy wandering," but extending to a sense of ease and play, as in a passage in which "Cloud General" comes across a sage named "Vast Ignorance," who is slapping his butt and hopping like a bird.⁵⁴ When asked what he is doing, Vast Ignorance replies: *you*. The term *you* 遊 is nearly identical to the term for swimming, *you* 游. The first has the "walk" (辵) radical and the second has the radical for water (氵), but in practice, the two were often interchangeable.⁵⁵ In the happy fish passage, Zhuangzi and Huizi are said to *you* 遊, wander (or swim, or play), onto the bridge, just as the fish below are said to *you* 遊, to wander (or swim, or play), in the water. On one level, then, Zhuangzi might be saying that although we can never see the world as a fish, or even as our best friend, we can know when something is at ease in its environment, swimming, wandering, or playing, just as one does not need to be a fish in order to recognize their distress out of water.

On another level, Zhuangzi may see communication as possible because he, Huizi, and the fish all "wander," "play," or "swim" together in the same situation. This is why he knows it by being *there*, above the river.⁵⁶ For such communication, though, one must give up the limits of their narrow perspectives. Otherwise, we end up like the dove laughing at Peng or the philosophers arguing endlessly from different perspectives. This connection between swimming and wandering comes up in a passage that violates the basic alterity between fish and humans—the fact that in water, human beings die. The passage begins with Confucius contemplating a river with rapids so violent that even fish cannot enter. He sees a man go into the water and rushes to rescue him, but the man emerges on his own, singing happily. Confucius asks in awe if the swimmer has a way, a *dao*, that allows him to tread the water like this. The swimmer responds:

亡，吾無道。吾始乎故，長乎性，成乎命。與齊俱入，與汨偕出，從水之道而不為私焉。此吾所以蹈之也。

No, I have no *dao*. I begin in what is originary, grow in my nature, and take form by

fate. I go in together with the center of the whirlpools and come out as companion to the surging torrent. I follow along with the way of the water and do not impose my own interests on it. This is how I do my treading.⁵⁷

The passage uses two terms emphasizing togetherness and companionship, *ju* 俱 and *xie* 偕. The term translated as “companion to,” *xie*, appears in an ancient poem from the *Books of Odes*, “The Wife Says the Rooster Crows,”

宣言飲酒、與子偕老。
琴瑟在御、莫不靜好。
When they are ready, we will drink,
And I will grow old together (*xie*) with you.
With your lute in hand,
All will be quiet and good.⁵⁸

The term *ju* has a similar meaning and has appeared earlier, in the passage which says that if you, I, and another person are together (*ju*), we still cannot settle a dispute, because we cannot know each other. The swimmer does not attempt to dispute or convey his ideas. On the contrary, he is able to achieve this community or communion with the rushing water because he gives up any personal imposition (*si* 私). He has no way of his own, so he can follow along with the way of the water. This is what allows him to be at home in the most foreign environment. Ironically, the verb used to describe the man in the water is literally to “tread” or “step” (*dao* 蹈), a character containing the symbol for a foot (足), while it is only once the man emerges from the water that he is then said to *you* 游, to swim (or wander, or play) along its bank. While the issue of communication is not raised explicitly, one who has broken free of constraining views is able to wander or swim in anyone’s world, even one as radically different as that of a fish.

The contrast between fishing and wandering in companionship as models of communication may be addressed on a more technical level by the idea of the fasting of the heart, which appears in the following advice:

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
Make your resolve one. Do not listen with your ears but listen with your heart. Do not listen with your heart but listen with *qi* [氣, vital force]. Hearing stops at the ears, the heart stops at symbols [*fu* 符]. *Qi* is empty and awaits things. Only the way gathers emptiness. Emptiness is the fasting of the heart!⁵⁹

The origin of *fu* 符 (symbols or tallies) is in a system for guaranteeing the authenticity of commands. It refers to a piece of bamboo that would be split into two and then given to two parties; the authenticity of a command from one party could then be recognized if the two pieces fit together. Saying that the heart is limited to *fu*, then, is saying that what we can recognize is always limited by our own preconceptions and wishes.⁶⁰ The limits of *fu* resemble the limits of the hook or trap, the concrete expectation or goal that provides limits no matter how open we seek to be. The alternative is to become empty of expectations, labels, or goals, and simply respond to the moment, here conceptualized as relying on the movements of *qi*, the energy or vital force animating all things. This reliance on emptiness

and *qi* may sound like mysticism at best and nonsense at worst; in either case, it hardly satisfies as a philosophical answer to the problem of communication across perspectives. To see what the *Zhuangzi* is getting at, though, we must set aside any concept of communication as transferring ideas from one mind to another and instead focus on something more like cooperation or community. Consider the “communication” involved when two people dance or play together on a sports team. These require an attunement and subtlety of response that could never be captured on a conceptual or linguistic level—consider the limits of explaining to someone how they should move to pass the ball through two defenders, or to spin gracefully. This kind of communication or communing is impossible if one acts only when they think, or if one imposes their own interest on the other. It requires something much like what the swimmer describes: giving up one’s own way and following the way of the other so as to become his or her companion. Thus while seeing the world like a fish is as implausible as seeing the world like a bat, cooperation through engagement in a common situation is less implausible. Certainly many people claim to achieve this kind of understanding with their pets, and with their friends.

I began by noting that the *Zhuangzi* is one of the most consistent attempts to think through human beings as just another animal. Ironically, this attempt ends up revealing human beings as quite different. This emergence of human uniqueness should not be surprising if my initial claim about the strangeness of human beings was correct, but what is striking is the form this uniqueness takes, particularly when contrasted to its common forms in European philosophy. In Europe, the exceptional nature of human beings lies in some combination of the status of our moral principles and our knowledge. At a minimum, we are unique in recognizing and being subject to morality; frequently, our morality is seen as an objective part of the universe itself. Similarly, human beings are exceptional in our ability to attain abstract, universal, or necessary truths; other animals at best have a kind of empirical know-how and, more often, have no knowledge at all. These marks of human uniqueness appear not just where we would expect, in highly anthropocentric thinkers like Augustine or Kant, but also in philosophers who, like *Zhuangzi*, emphasize our position as parts of nature. For example, Spinoza launches a devastating attack on the conception of human beings in nature as “a dominion within a dominion [*imperium in imperio*],” rejecting those who would explain human actions as something “outside of nature,” but ultimately only human beings have the possibility of achieving adequate knowledge, which in turn enables us “to live from the leadership of reason [*ex ductu rationis vivunt*],” and even to attain a kind of immortality.⁶¹ For a more contemporary example, while Peter Singer argues against claims that we are more valuable than other animals, he also claims that we are uniquely subject to morality, which follows from our greater capacity to know.⁶²

In the more naturalistic context of early Chinese philosophy, the status of human knowledge and ethics is reversed. First, the ways in which fish respond to the world and seek their own survival are seen as the same in kind as what human beings consider knowledge and ethics. This assumption is common among other classical Chinese philosophers, as Mengzi argues that human beings must have a distinct nature (*xing* 性) precisely because every species has a distinct nature.

Thus Mengzi claims that organic order (*li* 理) and rightness (*yi* 義) please our hearts in the same way that roasted meats please our mouths, and that what pleases the mouth varies by species.⁶³ While our concerned relationships in the world are more complex and self-aware (and thus for the Confucians, we are more precious), all animals have them in their own way. Here again we see the priority of continuity with nature. For Zhuangzi, what makes human beings exceptional is that we can recognize that our knowledge and ethics have no more validity than that of any other species. One immediate result is that human uniqueness does entail claims that human beings are more valuable.

This recognition naturally lessens our sense of self-importance and our attachments to the world. More radically, the awareness and flexibility of human beings empties the human of any fixed content.⁶⁴ One passage makes this point explicitly in claiming that sagely people no longer have fixed human emotions:

既受食於天，又惡用人！有人之形，無人之情。有人之形，故群於人，無人之情，故是非不得於身。眇乎小哉，所以屬於人也！警乎大哉，獨成其天！

Since they receive food from heaven, what use are humans! They have human form but do not have essential human feeling [*qing* 情]. Having human form, they flock with humans. Not having essential human feelings, judgments of right and wrong do not reach to their selves.

Zhuangzi's friend Huizi then challenges him:

惠子曰：「既謂之人，惡得無情？」莊子曰：「是非吾所謂情也。吾所謂無情者，言人之不以好惡內傷其身，常因自然而不益生也。」

Huizi said, "Since you call them human, how can they not have *qing*?" Zhuangzi said, "'Right' and 'wrong' are what I call *qing*. What I call having no *qing* refers to people not letting loves and hates inside to harm their persons, constantly relying on spontaneity and not adding to life."⁶⁵

The term *qing* 情 in general means the essential or genuine reactions of a thing; in human beings, it refers to emotions. *Qing* is closely connected to the term for human nature, *xing*, where *xing* represents characteristic ways of reacting and *qing* are the reactions themselves. Thus the claim that sagely people lack human *qing* is really a claim that human beings need not be constrained by a fixed nature. In this, we contrast other animals. The flexibility of human emotions and desires follows from the flexibility in how we label things, how way apply *shi* and *fei* (right and wrong, or so and not-so). This flexibility usually has bad results, as it allows us to label trivial things as valuable, thus making them a source of contention and discontent. The same flexibility, though, allows sagely people to affirm whatever happens, becoming free of negative emotions. This is not letting likes and dislikes harm us, and it results in spontaneity, not adding to life, and wandering free and easy.

Paradoxically, what makes human beings exceptional is our freedom from being human: we can have human form without essential human emotions. This context explains why the Confucian philosopher Xunzi would say that Zhuangzi knew heaven but did not know the human, since for Zhuangzi being human entails no fixed limits. Xunzi says that this blindness toward the human led Zhuangzi to only emphasize going along with things (*yin* 因).⁶⁶ This emptying the human of

any fixed content—this “fasting of the heart”—does not lead to exiting the concrete world for some mystical unity with a transcendent heaven. Rather, awareness of nature/heaven provides a pivot within our singular experience, allowing shifts in how we label the concrete world around us. Ultimately, this flexibility allows us to affirm nature, not as the abstract oneness of all things but in its singularity in any moment.⁶⁷ The passage that best illustrates this flexibility is the famous story of Zhuangzi’s reaction to the death of his wife. In that situation, he first feels sorrow, a kind of *qing* or feeling, then considers the broader context of nature, and finally ends up feeling joy, singing and banging on a tub.⁶⁸ In the possibility of such a shift, one sees a kind of freedom that may be uniquely human, but far from placing any ethical burden upon us, this freedom is a freedom from fixed ethical imperatives, claims of knowledge, or even set desires. In the *Zhuangzi*, this freedom not only allows us to recognize our insignificance in the world but also to accept it. Ironically, the possibility of accepting our status as merely another animal in nature may be what makes us most human, and most exceptional.⁶⁹ φ

Notes

¹ Peter Meineck and Paul Woodruff, trans., *Sophocles: Theban Plays* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2003), stanzas 332-334, page 62. Translation is slightly modified from the “word-for-word” translation they give in a footnote.

² Liu Zhao 劉釗, *Guodian Chujuan Jiaoshi* 《郭店楚簡校釋》 (Fujian Renmin Chubanshe, 2003), strip 18. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

³ Cao Feng 曹峰, *Shanghai Chujuan Sixiang Yanjiu* 《上海楚簡思想研究》 (Taipei: Wanjuanlou, 2006), strip 8.

⁴ Martha Nussbaum writes of *deinon*: “Most generally, it is used of that which inspires awe or wonder. But in different contexts it can be used of the dazzling brilliance of the human intellect, of the monstrosity of an evil, of the terrible power of fate. That which is *deinon* is somehow strange, out of place; its strangeness and its capacity to inspire awe are intimately connected” (*The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 52). This complex sense of *deinon* usually forces translators to use more than one word. The more literary translation of Meineck and Woodruff is: “Many wonders, many terrors, / But none more wonderful than the human race / Or more dangerous” (16). Similarly, Robert Fagle translates *deinon* as “numberless wonders, terrible wonders” (*Sophocles: The Three Theban Plays* (New York: Penguin, 1984), 76).

⁵ Mengzi 3A4 says that people were like animals until they were taught proper social relationships. (References to Mengzi are to *Mengzi Zheng Yi* 《孟子正義》, edited by Jiao Xun 焦循 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1987), cited by chapter, part A or B, and passage). In *Xunzi* 5.9, human beings are said to be distinct from (and able to eat) other bipeds because we can make distinctions, but the following passage explains social roles as the main kind distinction. (References to *Xunzi* are to *Xunzi Jishi* 《荀子集釋》, edited by Li Disheng 李滌生 (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1979), but are cited according to the divisions in John Knoblock, trans., *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, 3 vols (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988, 1990, 1994)).

⁶ The emphasis on distinct “schools” in Warring States China is misleading, and the category of “Daoism” only arose later. The texts excavated from the end of the 4th century further blur the lines, and neither of the texts referenced here can be easily categorized. See the discussion of these issues in Mark Czikszentmihalyi, *Material Virtue: Ethics and the Body in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 10, 15-32, and Edward Slingerland, “The Problem of Moral Spontaneity in the Guodian Corpus,” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, 7:3, 239-240. Nonetheless, the claim that human beings are most precious is typical of the Confucians, and the view of human beings as most disruptive appears more in texts labeled as Daoist.

⁷Heidegger explains: "It is only for this reason that the un-homely [*das Un-heimische*] can, as a consequence, also be 'uncanny' in the sense of something that has an alienating or 'frightening' effect that gives rise to anxiety" (Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* translated by William McNeill and Julia Davis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 71; also 63-64).

⁸The theme runs throughout Socrates' "Second Speech." Plato, *Phaedrus*, translated by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1995).

⁹Both quotations are from section nine of *The Birth of Tragedy* (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke in Drei Bänden*, volume I (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1954), 59).

¹⁰The divine is not absent, as *tian* 天 or *Shang Di* 上帝 were thought to reward virtue and thus explain the success of the sages. There may have been early origin myths involving gods, but even if so, it is striking that they had no significance for the philosophers of the classical period.

¹¹Leibniz uses the phrase "commerce of light" in a letter from 1697 to the Jesuit Antoine Verjus, who was a supervisor of the Jesuit mission in China (*Leibniz Korrespondiert mit China*, edited by Rita Widmaier (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1990), 55). For the claim the China and Europe have complementary strengths, see Leibniz's "Preface to the *Novissima Sinica*," also written in 1697 (*Writings on China*, translated by Daniel Cook and Henry Rosemont (Chicago: Open Court, 1994)).

¹²"Preface to the *Novissima Sinica*," section 7; Cook and Rosemont, 49. The phrase describes the Chinese Emperor Kangxi's combination of Chinese and European knowledge. For an analysis of Leibniz's views of China and approach to comparative philosophy, see Franklin Perkins, *Leibniz and China: A Commerce of Light* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹³Everyone agrees that the *Zhuangzi* is an anthology, but it is common to take the first seven "inner" chapters as representing a coherent view identified with the historical Zhuangzi, who lived in the 4th century BCE. There is little evidence for this position, though, and the inner chapters clearly present multiple positions, some more radical than others. Here, I simply pursue one of the more radical lines, without insisting it is the only one in the inner chapters. In short, I follow Lee Yearley's hope to avoid the problem of authorship by talking about "tendencies or motifs or strands in the *Zhuangzi*" ("The Perfected Person in the Radical Chuang-tzu," in *Experimental Essays on Chuang-Tzu*, edited by Victor Mair (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1983), 125). When referring to "*Zhuangzi*" as a person, I mean only the character of that name who occasionally appears in the text. The same applies to "Confucius" and "Hui Shi," who should be taken as characters in the *Zhuangzi*.

¹⁴The phrase is the title of the first chapter. The first translation is from Victor Mair, *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parable of Chuang Tzu* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994). The second is from Brook Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings, with Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2009). The third is from A. C. Graham, *Chuang-Tzu: The Inner Chapters* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2001).

¹⁵*Zhuangzi* ch. 2; Mair 20-21. References to the *Zhuangzi* are based on the text in *Zhuangzi Jishi* 《莊子集釋》, edited by Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1978). For reference, I have also cited the pages numbers in Mair's translation.

¹⁶In addition, there are a number of references to fishermen. For a study of these, see Kirill Ole Thompson, "What Is the Reason of Failure or Success? The Fisherman's Song Goes Deep into the River: Fishermen in the *Zhuangzi*," in *Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi*, Edited by Roger Ames (Albany: SUNY, 1998), 15-34.

¹⁷Thompson, 16-19, discusses this point in more detail in relation to the importance of fishing.

¹⁸*Dao De Jing* 8. References to the *Dao De Jing* are to the Mawangdui version unless otherwise noted, as published in Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢, *Laozi Gujin* 《老子古今》 (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2006), vol. I, cited by chapter.

¹⁹*Dao De Jing* 78.

²⁰Liu Zhao, 42. For a translation of this text, see Robert Henricks, trans., *Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching: A Translation of Startling New Documents Found at Guodian* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 123-29.

²¹Mengzi, 6B11, 4B26, and 2A2, respectively. For an excellent examination of water metaphors in classical Chinese thought, see Sarah Allan, *The Way of Water and the Sprouts of Virtue* (Albany: SUNY, 1997).

²²*Zhuangzi* ch. 18; Mair 171-72.

²³David Wong nicely explains this function of appeals to nature in the *Zhuangzi* in "Identifying with Nature in Early Daoism," *The Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 36:4 (2009): 568-84.

²⁴*Zhuangzi* ch. 2; Mair 20-21.

²⁵There must be something natural about the connection between skepticism and the elevation of other animals. Sextus Empiricus gives an almost identical argument, first describing differences in taste between animals, and then concluding that we cannot know which is correct, "For we cannot ourselves judge between our own impressions and those of the other animals, since we ourselves are involved in the dispute and are, therefore, rather in need of a judge than competent to pass judgment ourselves" (*Outlines of Pyrrhonian Skepticism*, translated by R.G. Bury (Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press (Loeb Library), 1933), Book I, section 59). For a comparison between Zhuangzi and Sextus Empiricus, see Paul Kjellberg, "Sextus Empiricus, Zhuangzi, and Xunzi on 'Why be Skeptical?'," in *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi*, edited by Paul Kjellberg and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Albany: SUNY, 1996), 1-25. David Hume also emphasizes the similarity between human and animal reasoning, in the chapter "Of the Reason of Animals," in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.

²⁶*Zhuangzi* ch. 1; Mair, 3-4.

²⁷Brook Ziporyn has a good discussion of the meanings of both names, bringing out the association of their phonetic elements with companionship: Kun 鯤 combines "fish" (*yu* 魚) and "older brother" (*kun* 昆); Peng 鵬 combines "bird" (*niao* 鳥) with "friend" (*peng* 朋) (Ziporyn, 3).

²⁸*Zhuangzi* ch. 6; Mair, 53.

²⁹*Zhuangzi* ch. 6; Mair, 61.

³⁰*Dao De Jing*, chapter 18. I have here followed the Guodian version of the chapter, in Liu Xiaogan.

³¹*Zhuangzi* ch. 23; Mair 226-27.

³²*Zhuangzi* ch. 10; Mair, 88-89. 'Hard' and 'white' and 'same' and 'different' were all common terms of dispute among philosophers and analysts of language. Hard and white refer to the problem of the relationship between the hardness and the whiteness of a white stone.

³³*Zhuangzi* ch. 10; Mair, 89. While the point of the passage is clear, the specific terms are difficult to work out. Compare the translations in Mair, 88-89, Ziporyn, 65-66, and Graham, 209-210.

³⁴*Dao De Jing*, chapter 3.

³⁵Chapters 8-10 of the *Zhuangzi* in particular seem to develop the philosophy of the *Dao De Jing* and are commonly labeled as the "Primitivist" chapters, following a suggestion by A.C. Graham.

³⁶*Zhuangzi* ch. 26; Mair 274.

³⁷*Zhuangzi* ch. 21; Mair, 202.

³⁸Guo Qingfan, 715.

³⁹*Zhuangzi* ch. 2; Mair, 22.

⁴⁰Most commentators ignore this disanalogy. For example, Steve Coutinho relies on the analogy with animal tastes to argue for natural human standards (*Zhuangzi and Early Chinese Philosophy: Vagueness, Transformation and Paradox* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 62-67). Thompson only mentions fish as a model for the sage (Thompson, 19). One exception is Lee Yearley, who contrasts instinctive drives with "transcendent" drives, writing: "unlike certain other Daoists (some of whose ideas appear in the *Zhuangzi*), Zhuangzi's spiritual fulfillment does not consist in the childlike gratification of 'natural' or instinctive dispositional drives. Rather he wants people to be animated by transcendent drives" ("*Zhuangzi's Understanding of Skillfulness and the Ultimate Spiritual State*," in *Essays on Skepticism*, 155).

⁴¹*Zhuangzi* ch. 5; Mair, 43-44; *Zhuangzi* ch. 6; Mair, 55.

⁴²*Zhuangzi* ch. 18; Mair, 172.

⁴³*Zhuangzi*, ch. 5; Mair, 43.

⁴⁴*Zhuangzi* ch. 2; Mair, 14.

⁴⁵*Zhuangzi* ch. 2; Mair, 16. For the various senses of *cheng*, see the glossary in Ziporyn, 213.

⁴⁶*Zhuangzi*, ch. 4; Mair, 32. This concept is discussed below.

⁴⁷*Zhuangzi* ch. 2; Mair, 23.

⁴⁸*Zhuangzi* ch. 17; Mair, 164.

⁴⁹Thompson also emphasizes that Zhuangzi is in a pivotal position, as "the halfway point

between sagehood and nonsagehood" (Thompson, 22).

⁵⁰ Zhuangzi ch. 26; Mair, 270.

⁵¹ Zhuangzi ch. 26; Mair, 276-77.

⁵² Zhuangzi ch. 21; Mair, 205. The passage is extremely dense and difficult to translate, partly because *diao* 釣, can be the verb "to fish" or the noun "fishhook." I follow Mair in distinguishing the two meanings, but the original sounds more paradoxical and could be translated as "did not insist that his fishing having fishing." Graham translates it as: "he was not someone fishing-rod in hand fishing for something" (Graham, 140). In any case, the point is not so much about the hook but not having any set goal.

⁵³ Zhuangzi ch. 17; Mair 165.

⁵⁴ Zhuangzi ch. 11; Mair, 97.

⁵⁵ The *Zhuangzi* contains many examples of *you* 游, to swim, being used to for wandering on land. The relationship between the two characters has been further blurred because the "simplified" writing system used now in mainland China has eliminated 遊, using only 游 for both characters.

⁵⁶ Roger Ames takes the main point of the story as: "knowledge is always proximate, situational, participatory, and interpretative" ("Knowing in the *Zhuangzi*: 'From Here, on the Bridge, of the River Hao,'" in *Wandering at Ease*, 220). Ames argues that because of their mutual interconnection, what is happy in the story is not so much the fish as situation itself (Ames, 221).

⁵⁷ Zhuangzi ch. 19; Mair, 182.

⁵⁸ *Shi Jing*, Mao # 184, translation modified from that of James Legge in *The Chinese Classics*, volume 4 (1894). In contemporary Chinese, one still has the phrase, "white heads growing older together" (*baitou xielao* 白头偕老).

⁵⁹ Zhuangzi, ch. 4; Mair, 32.

⁶⁰ Thus Ziporyn translates it: "The mind is halted at whatever verifies its preconceptions" (Ziporyn, 26).

⁶¹ For opposition to the conception of human beings as outside of nature, see *Ethics*, Part I, Appendix. Part II, Propositions 38-47 describe adequate knowledge. Although Spinoza does not say *only* human beings have it, he does consistently specify that such knowledge belongs to human beings (for example, Part II, Proposition 38, Corollary, "Hence it follows that there are certain ideas or notions *common to all human beings*," emphasis added). Part IV, Proposition 35 discusses living under the leadership of reason. Part V, Proposition 23 says that the mind is not entirely destroyed with the body, but something of it is eternal. References are based on *Spinoza Opera*, vol. II, edited by Carl Gebhardt, Heidelberg 1925.

⁶² Singer writes, "The point, of course, is that nonhuman animals are not capable of considering alternatives, or of reflecting morally on the rights and wrongs of killing for food; they just do it. [. . .] Every reader of this book, on the other hand, is capable of making a moral choice on this matter. We cannot evade our responsibility for our choice by imitating the actions of beings who are incapable of making this kind of choice" (*Animal Liberation: The Definitive Classic of the Animal Movement* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 224-225).

⁶³ Mengzi 6A7.

⁶⁴ The status of the human is one of the key questions dividing commentators. Examples emphasizing human limits are Philip J. Ivanhoe and Steve Coutinho. Ivanhoe argues that the perspective of heaven serves only a therapeutic value, claiming, "We are not to abandon our individual roles but we must play them in light of an understanding of the greater natural patterns" ("Was Zhuangzi a Relativist?" in *Essays on Skepticism*, 201). Coutinho holds basically the same position, saying that the non-human perspective "should remain at the level of theoretical appreciation" (Coutinho, 165). The best representatives of readings more on the side of leaving the human are Robert Eno ("Cook Ding's Dao and the Limits of Philosophy," in *Essays on Skepticism*, 127-151) and Lee Yearley ("The Perfected Person in the Radical Chuang-tzu," 125-139). Yearley argues against taming the *Zhuangzi* into a "pragmatic approach" that would have us live fairly normal lives with just a bit more tolerance and skepticism, although he emphasizes that there are multiple voices in the *Zhuangzi*. My own interpretation is closest to that of Yearley.

⁶⁵ Zhuangzi ch. 5; Mair, 49.

⁶⁶ Xunzi, 21.5.

⁶⁷In seeing the conflict between our labels and appreciating the world as it is, the *Zhuangzi* has some analogies with what Nietzsche says about morality: "For, facing morality (especially Christian, unconditional, morality), life must constantly and inevitably be wrong, because life is something essentially amoral; in the end, crushed under the heaviness of contempt and the eternal No, life feels unworthy of desire and in itself worthless" ("Attempt at a Self-Criticism," section 5; Nietzsche 1954, vol I, 151).

⁶⁸*Zhuangzi* ch. 18; Mair, 169.

⁶⁹This paper benefitted from discussions of earlier versions presented at the annual meeting of the International Association for Environmental Philosophy and at the inaugural Henan Daoist Salon. I am grateful to the participants and to Zhu Tiejun for sponsoring the latter conference. I am also grateful for suggestions from my colleague H. Peter Steeves, and for the careful editing of Max Wong.