

19. John Makeham, "Between Chen and Cai: Zhuangzi and the *Anales Wanderling at Ease in the Zhuangzi*, ed. Roger Ames (Albany: State University of York Press, 1998), 75–100, esp. 80.

20. The "Youzuo 宥坐" chapter of the *Xunzi*; see *Xunzi jiji 荀子集解* 2 (cf. John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994], 249).

21. Functionally, however, both these viewpoints have one thing in common: both assume that *ming* is something that cannot be known, and so it is effectively arbitrary. None of the early records indicate that sacrifice to *ming* results in knowledge of one's life span. Yan Yuan mistakenly predicted he would never leave Ke side, and Kongzi's shock at the death, for whatever reason, implies he had foreknowledge of Yan's impending death. Therefore, the belief in allotment, in either cosmological scheme, effectively functions therapeutically to prevent people from ascribing reasons for a person's death other than allotment itself.

22. Mu-chou Poo, "How to Steer through Life: Negotiating Fate in the *Book*," in *The Magnitude of Ming: Command, Allotment, and Fate in Chinese Culture*, ed. Christopher Lupke (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 107–123.

EIGHT

DEATH IN THE ZHUANGZI

Mind, Nature, and the Art of Forgetting

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It is no exaggeration to say that Zhuangzi, the fourth-century B.C.E. Chinese thinker, possessed one of the most distinctive voices of any writer in history and was one of those rare individuals whose radical, provocative vision causes us to reevaluate our most fundamental beliefs and values. Indeed, certain elements of his thought, especially those regarding death, test the limits of the recognizably human.

The book that bears his name is a challenging text filled with fantastic tales, parody, hyperbole, paradox, riddles, and humor.¹ Because Zhuangzi is a language skeptic and a perspectivist, he is often maddeningly difficult to pin down. But I believe that his playful slipperiness is driven by a fairly coherent—and often compelling—philosophical picture of the way human beings and the world are, and he presents, in light of these facts, the best way for us to live and die. Many stories within the text depict people facing their own imminent deaths or the deaths of loved ones; other characters muse about death and the proper attitude toward it. Coming to terms with change and mortality is a central aspect of Zhuangzi's vision, and examining the way in which the philosopher manages the issues of death, dying, and grief can illuminate his overall philosophy.

Because Zhuangzi is more of a storyteller than a systematic thinker, themes must often be teased out of his writing. Throughout the text, Zhuangzi seems to prescribe six positions regarding the way we should approach death: (1) avoid harm so that one can live out one's years;

(2) accept death—both one's own and that of others—with equanimity (one should accept all change); (3) embrace life and death as the essence of the cycle of nature; (4) see that there is no ultimate distinction between life and death and that they form a unity; (5) reject notions that the timing of death is significant and that there is such a thing as "premature death"; and (6) maintain a therapeutic skepticism with regard to the nature of death and post-death existence.

There are a number of apparent tensions that arise among these positions. For example, Zhuangzi advocates accepting death yet strives to avoid it; he denies that "premature death" is a problem yet praises those who "live out their years"; he emphasizes naturalness in his understanding of death yet features exemplars whose responses to death appear highly unnatural.

In this essay, I argue that these tensions can be reconciled, and I explore the ways in which Zhuangzi's various positions on death are related to one another. I take the approach that Zhuangzi's positions on death can be divided into two categories: (1) those that address the transformation of the mind and (2) those that focus on the manifestation of nature. I will examine the manner in which these dual aspects of Zhuangzi's thought are connected in the text, producing a coherent perspective on how to approach death that illuminates Zhuangzi's overall philosophy.

TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE MIND

Although I divide Zhuangzi's positions into those that address mind and those that address nature, I do not mean to imply any kind of ontological dualism in his thought. Furthermore, it would be more accurate to speak of "transformations of the heart-mind" in Zhuangzi, as he, like other Chinese thinkers of the time, does not draw firm distinctions between cognitive, affective, and volitional faculties. By "mind," I mean the ways in which human beings think and feel, the manner in which we understand the world and manage our emotions. Activities that Zhuangzi specifically addresses that would fall under this category include categorizing, conceptualizing, reasoning, planning, intending, judging, and valuing. Zhuangzi believes that human beings are distinct from other animals in that they often perform these activities in an unnatural way. While humans are in part natural beings, manifestations of the Dao (the "Way") as is all life, they also have tendencies that place them in opposition to the natural Dao.

Zhuangzi believes that most—if not all—human suffering is self-inflicted and that changing the manner in which we look at the world allows us to move "freely and easily" through the world. He recognizes that both the prospect of our own deaths and those of loved ones produce fear and grief, which lead to a great amount of avoidable human suffering. Through his writing itself, as well as recommended practices such as sitting in forgetful-

ness, the fasting of the mind, and immersion in skillful activity, Zhuangzi aims to bring about a new way of looking at and being in the world so as to free human beings from unskillful thinking and debilitating emotions.

Skepticism regarding Death

One of the most prominent themes encountered in the text, one that is explicitly applied on a number of occasions to the problem of facing death, is skepticism.² Zhuangzi applies his skepticism to language (i.e., skepticism about the ability of words to convey stable meaning, represent reality, etc.), senses (skepticism about the reliability of our senses and even our ability to know wakefulness from dreaming), and ethics (skepticism about our ability to know right from wrong). As Paul Kjellberg and Philip J. Ivanhoe have pointed out, Zhuangzi's skepticism is not debilitating; it is not like that of the ancient Greek skeptic Cratylus, who is reduced to complete dysfunction, paralyzed by not knowing since he cannot find any basis on which to act (or not act). Rather, it is therapeutic—it helps to break us of certain habits such as acting on the false certitudes of senses, language, and judgments (e.g., those regarding the badness of death).³ Zhuangzi applies his skepticism to our common assumptions about life and death: "How do I know that loving life is not a delusion? How do I know that in hating death I am not like a man who, having left home in his youth, has forgotten the way back? . . . How do I know that the dead do not wonder why they ever longed for life?" (W42-43).⁴

Zhuangzi's skepticism reminds us that we simply do not, and cannot, know what happens after death. He plays on our lack of knowledge by suggesting that, for all we know, death could be a far superior state. In a related passage, Zhuangzi imagines a skull imparting wisdom to the living: "When you're dead, there's no ruler above you and no subjects below you. . . . Not even the joys of being a south-facing king can surpass those of death" (170). Zhuangzi goes beyond emphasizing our inability to know what happens after death; after all, the unknown itself can be a cause of great fear.⁵ After reminding us not to assume that death brings about an unfortunate state, he muses that since death will bring about the end to the problems that plague us in life, it can be seen as a relief. Death is often characterized in the text as a rest following the frenzied activity of life or a relief from life's accumulated tensions and anxieties, as when Zhuangzi says, "The Great Clod burdens me with form, toils me through life, eases me in old age, rests me in death" (59). Zhuangzi's sagas think of life as "an obstinate wart or a dangling wen, of death as bursting the boil or letting the pus" (G89).

These passages, which seem in tension with both those that advocate living out one's years and those that undermine the very distinction between

life and death, appear to favor the world of the dead over that of the living. Mori Mikisaburo points out that due to passages such as these, Zhuangzi "was widely interpreted during the period of the Six Dynasties (222–589 CE) as a man who preached a philosophy of death."¹⁶ Such a reading focuses on a small group of passages at the expense of the many passages that "preach" a philosophy of life and those that posit the unity of life and death. The passages that suggest the possibility of death's superiority are expressions of Zhuangzi's skepticism, whereby he confronts us with thought-provoking possibilities in order to expose us to the limits of our knowledge and ease the anxieties produced by our minds. Zhuangzi's sages do not fling themselves at death; rather, they accept life and death equally, each as it comes. Zhuangzi is thus a philosophy of acceptance and ease, not one of rushing toward or embracing death. The inadequacy of the "embracing death" interpretation of Zhuangzi was recognized by Guo Xiang (d. 312 CE), who argued that "if Zhuangzi rejoiced in death and loathed life, how would he be able to say that life and death are equal? Since he posited life and death as being equal we must be content with life while living and be content with death when dead."¹⁷ The previous passages are examples of Zhuangzi's therapeutic skepticism, designed to show us why we should not worry about something we know nothing about, something that very well might be preferable to the toils of life.

Accepting Death and Going Along with Change

As we will see, Zhuangzi places a high value on life, praising those who live out their full life spans. This valuing of life exists alongside his philosophy of accepting death. These positions are reconciled by the fact that life itself, which is a manifestation of the natural Dao, is characterized by ongoing transformation, particularly in the case of life/death cycles. Zhuangzi believes that not only are these two positions not in tension, but that one who values life must accept death as an inseparable dimension of the life he values.

In both the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi*, the Dao—although it may be an "eternal" way (*chang dao* 常道)—is not a static way. Rather, it is a way of change, of ceaseless transformation. Zhuangzi vividly depicts the changing world: "Decay, growth, fullness and emptiness end and then begin again. . . . The life of things is a gallop, a headlong dash—with every movement they alter, with every moment they shift. What should you do and what should you not do? Everything will change of itself, that is certain!" (103).

Embracing change requires that one accept both one's own death and the deaths of loved ones. Zhuangzi addresses both themes in his writing.

One's Own Death

Given that the world is characterized by continuous change, how should one use one's mind? Zhuangzi advises us to "follow along" with change,

preserve equanimity, and make the mind "free-flowing." Zhuangzi's sages do not become attached to the status quo or some future ideal, and they are not driven by plans. Instead, they act in accordance with life's ongoing transformations and thus are able to wander freely and easily in the world:

Your master happened to come because it was his time, and he happened to leave because things follow along. If you are content with the time and willing to follow along, then grief and joy have no way to enter in. (W48-49)

Kongzi said, "Life and death, preservation and loss, failure and success, poverty and wealth. . . [day and night they alternate before us, but human knowledge is incapable of perceiving their source. Therefore, we should not let them disturb our equanimity, nor should we let them enter our numinous treasury. To make the mind placid and free-flowing without letting it be dissipated in gratification. . . [this is what I mean by wholeness of one's abilities." (47-48)

Zhuangzi observes that we experience continuous change in all aspects of our lives; the continuous play of emotions, from sadness to joy to anger, is part of what it is to be human. Emotions are natural, and we cannot—and should not—eliminate them entirely. However, we can nonetheless achieve equanimity within the flux of emotional and sensory experience. This way of being does not demand removing oneself from society or closing off one's senses, for it is achieved in the midst of activity; what Zhuangzi terms "tranquility in turmoil" (57; Watson's translation is "peace in strife"; *ying ning* 冥寧).

In such a state, one recognizes and experiences the ongoing transformations of the world, but one is not thrown by or caught up in them. One does not hold onto existing states, does not experience anxiety, and therefore does not exhaust oneself. Rather, one's mind can simply follow along, in a free-flowing way, the ongoing transformations. This produces inner calm and fluid responsiveness in the midst of change.

"Going along with" the transformation of things at its most radical involves accepting severe illness, mutilation, and death.⁸ Although humans in general try to avoid situations likely to lead to death, Zhuangzi's exemplars demonstrate the best way to respond to life-threatening developments when they do—as they inevitably will—occur. In one passage, Master Yu suddenly falls ill and becomes deformed yet remains "calm and unconcerned," expressing only wonder at the new shapes his body is taking. When asked if he resents these changes, he replies:

Why no, what would I resent? If the process continues, perhaps in time it'll transform my left arm into a rooster. In that case I'll keep

watch at night. . . . I received life because the time had come; I will lose it because the order of things passes on. Be content with this time and dwell in this order and then neither sorrow nor joy can touch you. . . . There are those who cannot free themselves because they are bound by things. (W/80-81; see also Mair 59 and 169)

How are we to describe what happens to Master Yu in this passage? One is tempted to say that he fell victim to a disfiguring disease, that he was ill and became deformed. Yet this passage suggests that these are mere designations, impositions upon the actual reality: Master Yu's body underwent transformations. He did not experience a "disease" and was not gripped with the fear that would follow from this designation. There is no pathos, no lamentation, and no resistance.

Zhuangzi's sages exemplify acceptance of death, but the word "acceptance" has many shades. Zhuangzi's sages accept not grudgingly but with equanimity and good humor. There is no sense that they would want things to be otherwise.⁹ If we are reconciled to continuous transformation in life, including the changes that our bodies undergo, we will be reconciled to death. A. C. Graham writes that "for Zhuangzi, the ultimate test is to be able to look directly at the fact of one's own physical decomposition without horror, to accept one's dissolution as part of the universal process of transformation."¹⁰ The acceptance of death, Zhuangzi shows us, depends upon our acceptance of the continuous transformations that we undergo moment by moment.¹¹

The Deaths of Others

Grief plays a prominent role in Confucian texts. Confucian thinkers insist that it is a natural human response to feel profound sadness at the death of a loved one. For these philosophers, we mourn because we love. How one grieves reflects both the nature of the relationship to the deceased and one's own character.

Zhuangzi's perspective is profoundly different. For Zhuangzi, grief and sadness only show that one's mind is still prey to emotional storms that disturb equanimity and make true freedom impossible. He thus praises Mengsun Cai for abjuring grief, even over the loss of his mother:

When Mengsun Cai's mother died . . . he did not grieve in his heart. . . . In his case, though something may startle his body, it won't injure his mind. . . . Mengsun alone has awoken. . . . What's more, we go around telling each other, I do this, I do that—but

how do we know that this "I" we talk about has any "I" to it? . . . Be content to go along and forget about change and then you can enter the mysterious oneness of Heaven. (W/85)

Zhuangzi draws an explicit connection between change and the lack of any stable identity or "I." Those who go along with change rather than attempting to arrest it through the creation of selves or stable identities experience the deaths of others with acceptance and tranquility. For Mengsun Cai, his mother's death was simply one more moment in the ongoing process of change. Rather than holding onto her, he can let go and therefore suffers no emotional pain. His mind cannot be injured because he has awakened to the nature of transience and its corollary, the absence of any enduring, substantial "self" or "I."¹² In such a state, Mengsun Cai simply "goes along" without grieving or lamentation.

Zhuangzi illustrates this point with a dramatic deathbed scene: "Suddenly, Master Lai grew ill. Gasping and wheezing, he lay at the point of death. His wife and children gathered round in a circle and began to cry. Master Li, who had come to ask how he was, said, 'Shoo! Get back! Don't disturb the process of change! (81)'" The wife and children of the dying man respond in a way that Confucians would argue is perfectly natural—they cry.¹³ Master Li's response seems particularly callous, as it denies the loved ones their final chance to be with the dying man. Yet Master Li clearly cares about the dying Master Lai; after all, he was at his bedside. His response can be seen as arising out of concern for Master Lai during his dying experience. Master Lai is going through a process of change, a process to which he must yield. His family, unable to accept this transformation, cries; they are unable to let go with equanimity and therefore will be a disruptive element in Master Lai's death.

Zhuangzi uses a funeral setting to further illustrate the previous point:

Master Sang Hu died. Before he was buried, Kongzi heard about it and sent Zigong to assist at the funeral. When Zigong arrived, he found one of Master Sang Hu's friends composing a tune and the other strumming on a lute. The song they sang together went like this: "Hey-ho, Sang-hui! Hey-ho, Sang-hui! You've returned to your true condition [or form], but we go on being human, O!" . . . Zigong returned and asked Kongzi, "What men are these? The decencies of conduct are nothing to them; they treat the very bones of their bodies as outside them. They sing with the corpse right there at their feet and not a change in the look on their faces. I have no words to name them. What men are these?" "They are the sort that

wander outside of the guidelines," said Kongzi, "I am the sort that wanders within the guidelines. . . . How should such men as that know death from life, before from after? . . . [They are] self-forgetful right down to the liver and the gall."¹⁴ (G89, with modifications)

The Confucian Zigong is one for whom the response of grief and the expression of that grief in ritually appropriate forms are fundamentally human acts. The two men's singing in the presence of the corpse provokes Zigong's criticism; the music is an explicit affront to propriety. We can imagine the shocked, bewildered tone in Zigong's question, "What men are these?" The presence of the corpse seems to demand a measure of solemnity.

Zigong, baffled by the actions of the supposed mourners, asks Kongzi what kind of people they are. Kongzi, in his response, refers to two types of "wandering" (you 遊)—wandering within the *fang* 方 and outside the *fang*. There are at least two possible ways to understand *fang* here. The character can refer to a region or area; it can also refer to a prescription or plan for something. The reference in the passage can be to wandering within or outside either "the realm/domain/world" (Mair, Watson) or "the guidelines/structure" (Graham). Thus, there are a number of interpretive possibilities. The latter translation would suggest that the men are outside the bounds of the social structure, of normative behavior, while Kongzi operates within the structure. The former could mean, with a more "transcendent" reading, that they are moved by forces other than the worldly. The passage suggests that the men are able to move beyond conventional understandings of and approaches to life and death. They forget convention and (or perhaps, *because*) they forget themselves.

Kongzi humbly describes himself as one "sentenced by *tian* 天"; his heavenly endowment, his nature, is that of someone who lives in accordance with "the guidelines." Yet the portrayal of Confucians here is not critical. They, too, "wander," and wandering is an activity praised throughout the Inner Chapters. There are, however, different forms of wandering.¹⁵ The ideal, for Zhuangzi, is *xiao yao you* 逍遙遊, "free and easy wandering" or "rambling without a destination," suggesting a kind of freedom and ease. The character *you* (wander) is also applied to Kongzi, but the implication is that his ease can only be experienced within the bounds of proper, ritually prescribed behavior. The highest type of wandering, for Zhuangzi, refers to a freedom that goes beyond the limits of socially proper form, including death rituals.

A famous passage in the Outer Chapters describes Zhuangzi's response to the death of his own wife, to whom he was married for quite some time and with whom he raised children. His friend Huizi finds him pounding on a tub and singing, which Huizi finds disturbing. He asks Zhuangzi if that isn't going too far, and Zhuangzi replies:

"You're wrong. When she first died, do you think I didn't grieve like anyone else? But I looked back to her beginning and the time before she was born. Not only the time before she was born, but the time before she had a body. Not only the time before she had a body, but the time before she had a spirit. In the midst of the jumble of wonder and mystery a change took place and she had a spirit. Another change and she had a body. Another change and she was born. Another change and she's dead. It's just like the progression of the four seasons, spring, summer, fall, winter. Now she's going to lie down peacefully in a vast room. If I were to follow after her bawling and sobbing, it would show that I don't understand anything about fate. So I stopped." (W/113)

As with the Inner Chapters passages, we see an emphasis on the need to accord with change, to accept the transformation of death just as one accepts all of the transformations that produce life. In the aftermath of the death, Zhuangzi employs a larger, "cosmic" perspective that sees the coming to be and the passing away of his wife as manifestations of a larger, ongoing process of coming together and dissolution. It is the fate of everything that takes form to once again change into other forms. Resisting or lamenting any transformation, Zhuangzi tells us, indicates a lack of understanding.¹⁶

There is another element present here in addition to accepting change and death—a reference to life and death as *natural* processes analogous to the changing of the seasons. It is not merely that the process of dying is seen as another transformation in an endless series of changes, but that it is part of an organic process. In fact, the cycle of life and death is the fundamental natural process. Thus, accepting death is not only a matter of accepting change but of according with nature. Zhuangzi's sages recognize that we are beings created and sustained by natural processes and thus must yield to all natural transformations. The same forces that have brought one into being will lead, inevitably, to one's death. Accepting and affirming life requires the same attitude toward death.

In Zhuangzi's response, however, we discover a revealing tension in his thought. He replies to Huizi's critique, saying, "When she first died, do you think I didn't grieve like anyone else?" He then discusses the transformations of the cosmos that brought her into being and now dissolve her. However, we can imagine the voice of the objecting Confucian: "Look back at your initial reaction. You grieved like everyone else. Isn't such a response at your initial reaction? Didn't you have to employ your mind to, as it were, *think* yourself out of the response? For one who lauds spontaneity as an ideal, you have neglected and overridden your own spontaneous responses, the natural operations of your own being." David Nivison argues that if Zhuangzi had taken further steps in his thought process, "he would have thought his way

to the Confucian Dao.¹⁷ A Confucian would argue that if Zhuangzi could see expressing or experiencing grief as natural and fitting rather than based on a misunderstanding of the nature of things or mere conformity with what others do, he would have seen that the ritual expressions of grief are beautiful, for these cultural expressions are "recognized as an aspect of the dao-process just as much as the process of individual life and death."¹⁸ For Confucians, grief is natural.¹⁹ For Zhuangzi, as we have seen, prolonged grief is the result of tendencies of the mind that produce disturbance and reveal a misunderstanding about the nature of things and an inability to accept change.

No Life and Death—Experiencing Unity

In addition to the approach of going along with change, the *Zhuangzi* is filled with passages that suggest a related way to come to terms with death, to undermine the notion that there even is a duality of "life" and "death." Zhuangzi calls into question the very concepts of beginning/ending and before/after. By deconstructing the temporal distinctions that underlie our conceptions of an absolute beginning (birth) and an absolute ending (death), Zhuangzi points to a realm of no birth and no death; instead, he suggests that there is simply an ongoing series of transformations.

Zhuangzi argues that absolute boundaries do not exist in nature. We mistakenly think they exist because we misunderstand how language works, for example thinking that a word such as "birth" or "death" has stabilizing and points to an absolute distinction. However, Zhuangzi explains, "The Way has never known boundaries" (W39).

Because the Dao has no absolute boundaries or divisions, the sage does not work with absolute distinctions. The sage does not overlay the conceptions of past and future over his experience of the ongoing flux of time. He recognizes that "past," "present," and "future" are simply mental constructions: "Envisioning uniqueness, he could eliminate past and present. Eliminating past and present, he could enter the realm of lifelessness and deathlessness" (57). In each moment, experienced just as it is without reference to past or future, one enters into a realm of "no dying, no being born" (*bu si bu sheng* 不死不生). Elsewhere, we see that the sage knows "nothing of precedence and sequence" (*bu zhi qian hou* 不知前後) (340).

The experience of the sage, then, is one of unity rather than division. There is the unity of life and death, and also the notion of unity with all things, which is why Zhuangzi's vision is sometimes described as "mystical." Since Zhuangzi's unity is with the Dao and the natural world rather than with a deity or transcendent force, it has been called "nature mysticism."

There are different possible interpretations of what "unity" or "oneness" mean. Generally, throughout the *Zhuangzi*, these terms can best be

understood as meaning nonseparation or by using Zhuangzi's notion of *wu jing* 無境 (no-boundary). Whereas each being is unique, none is separate from the others; all are connected to the whole, the Dao, in which all things are harmonized and unified. This does not mean that they are all identical, but rather that they all form "one body" with one another.²⁰ Absolute boundaries, categorical separations, are created only in the human mind through concepts (e.g., opposites). Zhuangzi both deconstructs these binary oppositions and gives examples of sages who experience unity (that is, nonseparation) with all other things:

The spiritual man is of such integrity that he mingles with the myriad things and becomes one with them (7).

Forget all relationships and things; join in the great commonality of boundlessness (99).

Thus, the sage realizes that life and death are interdependent aspects that are united within the Dao.

No "Premature" Death

An implication of this recognition of unity is that "premature death," or indeed any "untimely" death, is merely a construction based on a particular temporality—that is, narrative temporality—which produces a "desirable" and "undesirable" time to die. In the realm of no-boundary, there is no ultimately good or bad time to die, no early or late, no premature or timely death. The entire notion of "a life" or "a life span" is a creation of the mind (which, as we will see, employs narrative temporality in forging this creation): "Forget how many years there are in a lifespan. . . . If you ramble in the realm of no-boundary, you will reside in the realm of no-boundary" (23).

When we say someone "lived a long time" or "lived a short time," we are using our minds to carve out and fix a portion of time and label it "long" or "short." Once the sage sees past this tendency and is able to accept all transformations as they come, there is no conception of dying at the "wrong time" unless the death is due to human stupidity, in which case it is always the wrong time, no matter how old the person is. As long as the death is the result of natural transformations, there can be no "right" or "wrong" time to die.²¹ This is an instance where Zhuangzi's thought differs dramatically from Kongzi's. For Kongzi, the death of a young person on the path of self-cultivation is fundamentally tragic. For Zhuangzi, the timing of death is irrelevant. The sage readily accepts death whenever it comes and makes no judgments:

The sage delights in early death, he delights in old age. (W77)

Although one may have a long life or a premature death, there's not much difference between them. One might say that it is only a matter of moments. (217; see also 104)

The profound differences between the Confucian and Zhuangzi notions of "premature death" are due to their differing conceptions of temporality. The Confucian notion of temporality sees the human life in terms of narratives. A life unfolds in stages, which are marked by rites of passage (e.g., the "capping ceremony," marriage, the sixtieth birthday). There are roles, duties, and virtues appropriate to the different stages of life. The narrative conception is the framework against which Confucian notions of cultivation are developed.

For Confucians, if death is seen as something to be legitimately feared, it is not because of any existential terror but rather because it represents potential premature end to the narrative (and thus the loss of any possibility for further self-cultivation and development) and a loss of all possible goods. This is why Kongzi says of his beloved disciple, Yan Hui, who died at a young age, "I watched him making progress, but I did not see him realize his capacity to the full. What a pity!"²²

We can contrast the Confucian "narrative" picture with Zhuangzi's understanding of temporality. According to Zhuangzi, all narratives are based on constructions given to us by society—for example, about the appropriate time to do certain things, about which roles should be occupied when, about what constitutes successful performance, and so on. For Zhuangzi, however, these are overlays constructed on top of, and often obstructing, what is actually there: a ceaseless flow of life that can be experienced in its immediacy at any time. Without a narrative conception, there can be no sense of a life being cut short before the goals are reached or the story is completed. Given that life consists not of stages of development but rather moment-by-moment transformation, the best way to live does not involve cultivation or development; rather, Zhuangzi tells us to just "ride along with things" and let ourselves "wander" rather than progress on a well-formulated path.

DEATH AND NATURE

Nature in the Zhuangzi

The Zhuangzi's perspectivism and unsystematic approach, combined with the syncretic nature of the text, mean that convincing cases can be made for multiple readings and interpretations. Some themes in the text, though

prominent and compelling, have been neglected at times in the interpretations of contemporary scholars. In an article that surveys various interpretations of the Inner Chapters, Bryan Van Norden shows the range of ways in which the text can be understood. These include an "ideal observer view of ethics," "ethical relativism," "union mysticism," "intra-worldly mysticism," and "skepticism."²³ Many of these describe important aspects of the text. However, a conspicuously absent theme is the significance of nature in the text. This is surprising given that the text is filled with natural imagery, including birds and numerous other animals, trees, bodies of water, and so on.

Not only is the role of nature neglected in some recent scholarship, but a number of scholars go out of their way to argue that, for Zhuangzi, nature is exactly what human beings should not be concerned about.²⁴ This leads to occasional tensions and contradictions within their interpretations. For example, Graham writes, "Zhuangzi is interested not in man's nature but in his Potency," yet elsewhere he writes, "When ceasing to analyze, simply attending and responding, our behavior belongs with the birth, growth, decay and death of the body among the spontaneous processes generated by Heaven. We are then doing, without knowing how we do it, what Heaven destines for us."²⁵ Yet what can this process of birth, growth, decay, and death—the "spontaneous processes" that guide our bodies—refer to other than nature? Graham's acknowledgment here of what guides the actions of a sage calls into question his interpretation that emphasizes "possession" and "transcendence."

I have argued that Zhuangzi aims to undermine Confucian conceptions of self and self-cultivation and thus offers a type of "no-self" picture. I suggest that what guides human beings when the conception of self and all related categories no longer motivate action is *nature*.²⁶ Unlike the Confucian thinkers Mengzi and Xunzi, Zhuangzi is not explicitly involved with the debate over *xing* 性 (human nature). In fact, this term never occurs in the Inner Chapters. He did not, as the Confucians did, focus on *human* nature, on describing the characteristics of our species. His notion of nature can be found at two levels, one on each side of "species": on the one hand, he emphasizes the unique nature of each living thing; on the other, he talks about nature as that which creates, harmonizes, and connects all life—"Nature" in the larger sense. So, he does not speak so much of human nature except to point out how we tend, as a species, to put ourselves in a state of disharmony from the Dao that leads to all kinds of suffering. While he lauds individual human beings, he does not give much praise to the species as a whole.

Although Zhuangzi does not use the character *xing*, he uses other terminology to describe what we mean by "nature": (1) *tian* 天—though often translated as "Heaven," it is for Zhuangzi not an intervening personal heaven, but rather the impersonal, amoral source of *tianli* 天理 (the patterns

found in the natural world), thus better translated as "Nature"; (2) *zi ran* 自然—that which is "so of itself," the spontaneous movements associated with nonintentional action; (3) *qi suo shou* 其所受—"that which is received" and (4) *gu ran* 固然—what is "given," the "inherent structure" of things. Related terms include *ming* 命 (what is "fated" or "destined") and *wu wei* 无为 (effortless or nonintentional action).

Although Zhuangzi's conception of nature is difficult to pin down, by surveying the semantic field we can get an overall sense of what he means and what matters to him. These terms all point to the notion of a given endowment, what we receive from *tian*. Generally speaking, what is "natural" for Zhuangzi is the set of spontaneous inclinations, tendencies, desires, preferences, and capacities with which each being is born. It is clear from the text that Zhuangzi believes different beings to have different "natures"—he often contrasts the natural tendencies, likes, and dislikes of different beings. For example, "Creatures differ because they have different likes and dislikes. Therefore, the former sages never required the same ability from all creatures or made them do the same thing" (116). The unique nature of each being should be respected and allowed to manifest itself.²⁷

Thus, when we can free ourselves from the domination by "self," what occurs is the manifestation of our nature. Whereas Mengzi's picture is "self-realization of nature," and Xunzi's "self as reformation of nature," Zhuangzi's vision is of the manifestation of nature through forgetting the self. When all things can simply express their natures, they are "harmonized within the framework of nature (*he zhi yi tian* 和之以天)" (23).

Avoiding Harm, Living Out One's Years, and Nurturing Life

One of the prominent themes with regard to death is avoiding harm and "living out one's [natural] years" (*jin nian* 盡年, *zhong qi tianmian* 終其天年), or "fulfilling one's allotment [or fate]" (*ming* 命).²⁸ Such notions are grounded in the belief that we must accord with our natural endowment which includes a particular life span.

The Inner Chapters' portrayals of sages and exemplars show that living well involves avoiding harm, living simply, and living out one's natural endowment of years. For example, Zhuangzi praises a disfigured man who made his way through the world by doing odd jobs and, because of his "defects," avoided conscription and thus the danger of war. Zhuangzi explains that "Though his body was scattered, it was sufficient to enable him to support himself and to live out the years allotted to him by heaven" (40).²⁹

In light of subsequent developments regarding longevity and immortality in Daoist religious traditions, it bears noting that in this and related passages there is little if any concern for longevity in the sense of an excep-

tionally long life. Rather, the text emphasizes living out the years one is given and not cutting one's life unnecessarily short in pursuit of wealth or power. Life—not longevity—is the priority, and valuing life need not mean valuing longevity, although these two values often accompany each other (particularly in certain forms of religious Daoism and in popular Chinese religion, which prominently features a god of longevity). Keeping in mind the distinction between these values softens the tension between Zhuangzi's emphasis on "living out one's years" and his refusal to consider the death of a young person "tragic," as we saw previously.

Zhuangzi's preference for the simpler, safer life leads him to advocate staying out of harm's way. A memorable story portrays Zhuangzi's refusing to accept a government position. When offered a high government position by two officials, Zhuangzi replied:

"I have heard that in Chu there is a sacred tortoise that has already been dead for three thousand years. The king stores it in his ancestral temple inside of a hamper wrapped with cloth. Do you think this tortoise would rather be dead and have its bones preserved as objects of veneration or be alive and dragging its tail through the mud?"

"It would rather be alive and dragging its tail through the mud," said the two officials.

"Begone!" said Zhuangzi. "I'd rather be dragging my tail in the mud." (164)³⁰

All living beings naturally value life. Human beings alone, however, get seduced by what Zhuangzi considers unnatural desires, desires produced by the conceptualizing, discriminating mind (e.g., wealth, status, power, fame) rather than by one's nature. Zhuangzi prefers a simple, carefree life rather than one that involves risk in pursuit of gain. He advises, "Do not be a corpse for fame, do not be a storehouse of schemes" (70).

Zhuangzi believes that people are allotted a certain number of years, although they can die unnecessarily before that time is up.³¹ In some passages, Zhuangzi suggests that not only do sages or "spiritual people" avoid this fate, but that they go beyond this and achieve a certain kind of invulnerability to harm. "Worldly strife leads to chaos. Why should the spiritual person exhaust himself with the affairs of all under heaven? Nothing can harm the spiritual person. He would not be drowned in a flood that surges to heaven, nor would he be burned in a fierce drought that melts minerals and scorches the hills" (7). Here, Zhuangzi dramatically portrays a person who simply cannot be harmed. The theme of the perfected person protected against all of the possible threats and travails of the world recurs throughout the text. While some people (e.g., later Daoists, alchemists) have read these

as literal descriptions of a superhuman body, Zhuangzi, an expert employer of hyperbole and fantastic imagery to make a point, seems to hold more simply that one lives more smoothly, and is less likely to come to harm, if one lives in accordance with the natural Dao rather than going against its grain in pursuit of unnatural, "ego-based" goals and desires. The safety of the perfect person might not point to any superhuman powers at all. In fact, Zhuangzi elsewhere suggests that it is not that the sage can survive, and therefore takes lightly, the threat of fire or water, but rather that the sage skillfully avoids putting herself in situations in which she would be burned or drowned:

She who is clear about contingency will not harm herself with things. She who has ultimate integrity will neither be burned by fire nor drowned in water, will neither be harmed by cold and heat nor injured by bird and beast. This does not mean that she belittles these things, but rather that she examines where she will be safe or in danger. She is tranquil in misfortune or in fortune; she is careful about her comings and goings, so that nothing can harm her. (158)

Zhuangzi's portrayals of remarkable people who cannot be harmed intimate that those who live in accordance with the Dao know how to stay out of harm's way; they align themselves with the natural flow. Action that emerges from this way of being—action that is natural and spontaneous—is *wuwei*, a term that can be understood to mean "effortless action."³² It is action that expresses our nature and thus is the expression of the natural Dao itself. When one lives this way, one enjoys well-being: "The ultimate joy is to keep the person alive, and only through nonaction do we come close to maintaining ultimate joy" (168).

Different locutions are used throughout the text to illustrate the "goal"—"preserving one's essence," "keeping whole," and so on. This goal is illustrated in a series of passages involving trees that illustrate the "usefulness of uselessness" (*wu yong zhi yong* 無用之用). The fundamental insight is that useful trees are cut down and destroyed; trees that are not useful for human exploitation are left to grow and live in peace. "Cinnamon can be eaten, therefore the trees that yield it are chopped down. Varnish can be used, therefore the trees that produce it are hacked. Everybody knows the usefulness of usefulness, but nobody knows the usefulness of uselessness" (41).³³ Zhuangzi's refusing political service addresses the same point: it is dangerous to make oneself available for "use" and exploitation by others. If one can make oneself useless, then one will live out one's natural life span. This need not mean becoming a recluse, for the way of living advocated

by Zhuangzi is available to people anywhere (although it is, perhaps, more difficult in some places than in others).

The text sometimes moves beyond the focus on taking care of one's own life to taking care of life in general. The sage not only avoids harming life but also *nurtures* life (*yang sheng* 養生), both her own and others'. More accurately, she allows the Dao to nurture and harmonize life.³⁴ Zhuangzi frequently avers a concern with not harming, or nurturing, life and sometimes explicitly links the treatment of other beings and one's own well-being: "By concentrating his spirit, [the spiritual person] can protect creatures from sickness and plague and make the harvest plentiful" (W27).³⁵

There is a single life-affirming way, and one who accords with it harms neither one's own life nor the lives of others. This is not the kind of "interventionist" benevolence seen in Confucian texts (which leads Confucians to government service); Zhuangzi believes that, in general, the best way to let things flourish is to do no harm to them, allowing the Dao to take care of things.

Natural Cycles of Life and Death

The passage describing Zhuangzi's own deathbed scene which I discuss later, as well as the passage dealing with the death of Zhuangzi's wife discussed earlier, highlight an awareness of nature's cycles and our connection with the larger natural world. In the latter passage, Zhuangzi likens the transformations of his wife coming into and out of being with seasonal cycles. The theme of cyclicity is found throughout the text: "Over and over turns the seamless cycle of beginning and ending" (60–61); "Dissolution and generation, fullness and emptiness—whatever ends has a beginning" (158). As we accept the passing from one season to the next, Zhuangzi implies, so we must accept the life and death of a human being.³⁶

Seen in this context, death is understood as a completely natural phenomenon, a fundamental aspect of the Dao: "Life and death are destined. Their constant alternation, like that of day and night, is due to heaven [or natural]" (53). Zhuangzi reminds us that "the myriad things all come out from the wellsprings [of nature] and all reenter the wellsprings" (173).

Earlier, we saw Zhuangzi's emphasis on accepting change, on the need to go along with whatever transformations arise.³⁷ Now, we see an emphasis on accepting the cycles of nature, of seeing the life and death of an individual as fitting into the larger patterns of the Dao. The latter approach suggests that the kind of change is significant, and that the treatment of natural deaths will differ from that of unnatural deaths. This is why there is no contradiction between Zhuangzi's ideal of living out one's natural life and avoiding harm on the one hand, and his emphasis on accepting disease and

death as simply continuing transformations on the other. It is only *natural* deaths that are to be accepted, not those that are brought about by ambition or greed, which are the products of the mind's unnatural tendencies.³⁸

The changes that arise in our bodies, those that are due to nature, "that which creates things" (*zao wu zhe* 造物者), are viewed quite differently from those that might be wrought by the executioner's ax. Zhuangzi exemplars welcome the natural and avoid the unnatural. The notion of *wuwei* involves acting when there is nothing else one can do, when one cannot but act; one should only die when one cannot but die.

Many of the death-related themes encountered in the Inner Chapters appear in Zhuangzi's own deathbed story, including the significance of nature, the acceptance of death, and the questioning of traditional norms and values:

When Zhuangzi was on the verge of death, his disciples indicated that they wished to give him a sumptuous burial. Zhuangzi said, "I shall have heaven and earth for my inner and outer coffins, the sun and moon for my paired jades, the stars and constellations for my round and irregular pearls, and the myriad things for my mortuary gifts. Won't the preparations for my burial be quite adequate? What could be added to them?"

"We are afraid that the crows and the kites will eat you, master," said the disciples.

Zhuangzi said, "Above, I'd be eaten by the crows and the kites; below, I'd be eaten by mole crickets and ants. Why show your partiality by snatching me away from those and giving me to these?" (332)

Zhuangzi's disciples are driven by a desire to give him a lavish send-off, but Zhuangzi playfully mocks those who put so much emphasis on proper burial accoutrements—the coffin of a certain thickness, jade, and pearls. For these Zhuangzi substitutes all that surrounds him in the natural world; he will be adorned by heaven and earth, the sun and moon, and the stars. Zhuangzi focuses on the natural world and the heavens rather than on the human beings around him. Humans are grouped, along with all other things, as the "myriad creatures." Zhuangzi does not emphasize ties to other people (he does not, as Kongzi did on his own deathbed, mention the importance of being surrounded by friends or disciples); rather, he emphasizes fitting into the natural world and the cosmos in a larger sense.³⁹

By asking "What could you add?" Zhuangzi points to the enduring and pervasive human problem: the desire to meddle with things, to adorn and improve, a desire that is not merely unnecessary but often harmful. There is

complete, peaceful acceptance of natural death. For Zhuangzi, quite unlike the Confucians, dying needs no cultural embellishment.

Finally, we see Zhuangzi noting the arbitrary nature of the distinctions that human beings make. Perhaps alluding to Mengzi's claim that the desire to bury is one that is natural and arises from our sense of love and reverence, Zhuangzi shows that this is just discriminating against one group of animals in favor of another.⁴⁰

MIND AND NATURE: THE COHERENCE OF ZHUANGZI'S VISION

Having seen that Zhuangzi's positions on death can be divided into two categories, we will now explore the relationship between them and examine the extent to which the tensions between them can be reconciled. One way to understand these two categories is by describing Zhuangzi's undermining of our usual ways of using our minds as his "negative project" and the resulting way of life, Zhuangzi's recommended way of living in accordance with nature, as his "positive project." In order to remove obstructions to the Dao, the mind must be transformed; in passages addressing contemplative techniques, skillful activity, forgetting, and momentary temporality, Zhuangzi shows us the mind and subjective experience of the sage. In regard to death, we see sages who do not grieve, who respond to their own impending death with acceptance and good humor, who experience the unity of life and death. When the transformation of the mind has occurred, the result is the manifestation of nature, which Zhuangzi illustrates through passages on spontaneous action, simple living, harmonizing with nature, and living out one's years.

No-Self

Zhuangzi shows that the self is one of the primary obstacles that must be removed in order for harmonization with the Dao to be possible. The characters often associated with what we might translate as "self" (from which come what we might call "ego-centered interests") in the Zhuangzi include *ji* 己 and *wo* 我. According to Zhuangzi, when a person does not have a "self" to defend or build up, he cannot be injured by others' criticisms, judgments, or insults, and he cannot be moved by flattery or greed: "The whole world could praise Song Rongzi and it wouldn't make him exult himself; the whole world could condemn him and it wouldn't make him mope. . . . Therefore I say, the Perfect Man has no self (*zhi ren wu ji* 至人無己); the Holy Man has no merit; the Sage has no fame (*wu ming* 無名) [literally, no name] (WZ6). Zhuangzi describes a sage as one who has "abandoned knowledge and rejected self (*qu ji 去己*)" (340).⁴¹ In addition to being immune from

insults, one is also freed from the fear of death. If we recognize that we have no enduring self, we have nothing to lose when we die and thus nothing to fear from death.

The "self" is something that is constructed by the mind; when all of the concepts and categories used by the mind to label and identify ourselves are gone, the mind itself is clear, "like a mirror." In such a state, there is no place for the "self" to reside. How can we rid ourselves of these remarkably ingrained habits of the mind, the concepts and categories that we have internalized over a lifetime? There are different ways in which this can happen. First, one can do it through being exposed, as a listener or reader, to language skillfully designed to move one in certain ways. This is where we find Zhuangzi the magnificent storyteller and master of deconstructive language.⁴²

Zhuangzi also alludes to practices that allow for the forgetting of self—meditative techniques and skillful absorption. The former involves techniques, such as "sitting in forgetfulness" (*zuo wang* 坐望) and "the fasting of the mind" (*xin zhai* 心齋), through which we let these mental patterns fall away.⁴³ When one engages in the "fasting of the mind," one's very "identity" dissolves. The result, as Yan Hui puts it, is that "there is no more *Hui*" (W54).

Zhuangzi's way, then, is a way of *forgetting*. Zhuangzi observes: "First forget themselves in the rivers and lakes; people forget themselves in the art of the Way" (61; see also 48–49). Forgetting in the midst of these practices means that the mirrorlike mind is without the concepts, categories, and achievement-based motivations that society gives us. As one moves through the world, the ability to forget (which does not mean flout or reject) means that one does not identify with and is not bound by social norms and roles which allows one to either skillfully use or playfully subvert them, thus attaining freedom within the world. Zhuangzi advises, "Forget things, forget heaven, and be called a forgetter of self. The man who has forgotten self may be said to have entered heaven."⁴⁴

The contemplative practices and skillful activity described in the text can best be understood with the "momentary model"—when one is able to experience the world as a continuous flow of moment-by-moment transformations, all notions of achievement (including "self," the ultimate Confucian achievement) disappear.⁴⁵ As the self depends on narrative, Zhuangzi's undermining of narrative temporality with momentary temporality ("no before or after") has the effect of "deconstructing" the self.⁴⁶

Tian and Ren

A crucial question remains—after we "abandon self," what motivates our action? Since much of our motivation, desires, hopes, and actions arise out of our conceptions of "self" (the whole notion of acquisition, of what

"mine," is based on this, as are fame, wealth, success, status, etc.), on what basis do we act after the whole notion of self is dissolved? After we "forget" concepts and categories, what is left?

It is in answering this question—What is left to guide our actions?—that interpreters of Zhuangzi often differ. While scholars often describe Zhuangzi's "negative," undermining project in similar ways, they vary greatly in their understanding of the "positive project." Scholars such as A. C. Graham, Benjamin Schwartz, and Lee Yearley suggest that Zhuangzi's sages are moved by "transcendent drives." Yearley argues that when "transcendent *qi* energy" is activated, the sage "will be moved by transcendent drives. He will reach a state where Heaven rather than he is the agent."⁴⁷ Schwartz focuses on "mysterious powers" that allow for "self-transcendence," enabling the sage to achieve a "higher gnosis."⁴⁸ Graham also ends up with a "transcendence" model: "[T]he sage's motions derive not from himself as man but from Heaven working through him."⁴⁹

It is difficult to see where the metaphysical sense of transcendence can be located in a text that lacks the dualism of, say, Platonic or Christian thought.⁵⁰ It seems, however, that some scholars take the character *tian* 天, which they translate as "Heaven," to reflect some radically "other," transcendent force that "infuses" or "possesses" one. This reading appears to emerge from a particular understanding of a pair of contrasting terms that Zhuangzi frequently employs: *tian* and *ren* 人 (human). By examining the distinction between these terms, we can better understand Zhuangzi's approach to death and dying and illuminate the relationship between mind and nature in the text.

For scholars advancing a "transcendence model," it seems that this contrast between *tian* and *ren* shows that the "heavenly" is outside the bounds of the "human," leading to a model of transcendent forces. I believe that the transcendence model is based on a misreading; for what Zhuangzi is pointing to is the difference between *tian*—what we get from Heaven, thus what is natural—and *ren*—the uniquely human, nonnatural tendency of our minds to distort or block the expression of nature. Zhuangzi explains what is meant by *tian* and what is meant by *ren*:

Horses and oxen have four feet—that is what I mean by *tian*. Putting a halter on the horse's head, piercing the ox's nose—this is what I mean by *ren*. So I say: do not let what is *ren* wipe out what is *tian*; do not let what is purposeful wipe out what is fated; do not let (the desire for) gain lead you after fame. Be cautious, guard it, and do not lose it—that is what I mean by returning to the True. (W104)

How can the natural characteristics of a horse be seen as the products of possession by transcendent drives? If, as Zhuangzi says, "*tian*'s engenderment

causes things to be unique" (27), it seems immanent, not transcendent. The goal is to accord with our given natures, something that other animals do effortlessly (which is why they are so often exemplars in the text); humans find it difficult. Thus, Zhuangzi says, "He who develops *tian* benefits life; he who develops *ren* injures life" (W120). For this reason, I believe that it is more accurate (or at least less misleading) to translate *tian* as "nature" rather than "heaven" throughout most of the text.⁵¹

The realm of *ren* is the realm of the discriminating, conceptualizing mind. Although humans may be tempted to constantly use this mind to meddle with natural processes, Zhuangzi's exemplars avoid this problem. "The true man of old knew neither fondness for life nor aversion to death and casually he came. . . . This is what is meant by not detracting from the Way with the mind, not assisting *tian* with *ren*" (52).⁵²

The numerous stories of craftsmen illustrate the ideal of following one's nature, but at the same time they problematize the very idea that nature (*tian*) can ever be separate from the strictly human (*ren*). Zhuangzi might have employed more farming and agricultural metaphors as Mencius did (although even in the case of agriculture, human effort transforms the natural world), but he worked primarily with craftsmanship metaphors of the kind seen in Xunzi. These craftsmen are working on and shaping "natural world." For Zhuangzi, however, the perfected person would be able to do this in such a way that the human "effort" is not an effort at all—an example of *wuwei*, the expression of nonintentional action and thus manifestation of nature. Therefore, there is no imposition on nature rather than a harmonization of the nature of the craftsman with the nature of the object being worked on. Cook Ding "goes along with the natural make-up of the ox (W47); Woodcarver Qing "examines the Heavenly nature of trees." This way, he is able to "match up *tian* with *tian*"—his nature with the tree's nature (W127).

It is easy to see why many scholars have applied a "transcendental model" of interpretation to the dichotomy of *tian* and *ren*. The meaning of *ren* is "human being" or "person"; something that is "other than" it would seem, must be transcendent, outside the bounds of the human that is, "heavenly." If one reads *tian* as "nature," as I do, then it seems as if Zhuangzi is saying that the "human" is other than the "natural" which leads to a problem: If we are natural beings, why aren't we "natural" all of the time? Why isn't my mind, for example, a natural entity (as Mengzi argues it is)? How can we act other than naturally? Zhuangzi seems to imply that when we are simply a manifestation of Dao following what is *tian* rather than *ren*, in a sense we are no longer human. Zhuangzi explicitly claims that one can—and should—be without the "essentials" of the human being" (*ren qing* 人^其): "[judging 'that's it, that's not' is what I mean by the 'essentials of a human being.' What I mean by being without

the essentials is that the human being does not inwardly wound his person by likes and dislikes, that he constantly goes by the spontaneous and does not add anything to the process of life" (G82). Whereas the sage is given a particular "human" form by nature, and will therefore always look human and will have certain tendencies given his body and senses, he will lack what most people (certainly Confucians) deem essentially human, such as a mind that makes moral judgments and applies categorical distinctions to the world.

While many of the passages in the *Zhuangzi* emphasize *tian* over *ren*, there are other passages that suggest that the human task is to be able to create the proper balance between them. Zhuangzi gives examples of such a balance:

In being one, he was acting as a companion of *tian*. In not being one, he was acting as a companion of *ren*. When *ren* and *tian* do not defeat each other, then we may be said to have the True Man. (W76)

To know the actions of *tian* and to know the actions of *ren*, that's the ultimate! He who knows the actions of *tian* will live in accordance with *tian*. He who knows the actions of *ren* can nourish what is unknown to his intellect with what is known to his intellect. Thus he can live out the years allotted to him by *tian* and not die midway. This is the height of knowledge. (51)

The first passage illustrates the human paradox. Insofar as we are natural beings, we are not separated from the rest of the natural world. This "no-boundary" situation is what is meant by "being one." And yet, as human beings, we live among other human beings, as well as the distinctions they create and the categories they use. Thus, if we are to fit properly into the human world, we must use our "essentially human" capacities. Given that the sage's actions are "born of nature" (*tian er sheng ye* 天而生也), what role is there left for the distinctly human? Zhuangzi says that the sage uses *ren* to "nourish what is unknown to his intellect." What we do without "knowing" or "understanding" is what our nature guides us to do. What Zhuangzi seems to mean here, then, is that in order to accord with our nature in a world of human beings, we must assist our nature with the tool of our minds. Zhuangzi is clear on what aspects of our minds we should not use:

If we follow our prejudices and take them as a guide, who will not have such a guide? . . . If one claims that right and wrong exist before they are established in the mind, that is like saying one sets out for Yue today but arrived there yesterday. To do so is to make something out of nothing. (14)

"This" and "that" are mutually dependent; right and wrong are also mutually dependent. For this reason, the sage does not subscribe to [the view of absolute opposites] but sees things in the light of nature, accepting "this" for what it is. (15)

According to Zhuangzi, human beings should not rely on the categorizing or judging functions of the mind and should not be guided primarily by concepts or discursive reason. What aspect of our mind *should* we use? For Zhuangzi, the mind is useful insofar as it functions practically. We are reminded of the example of Cook Ding's "sizing things up" before moving on with his carving. The skillful butcher only follows along the natural patterns of the animal, but butchering itself is an activity in the human realm; it involving the use of human-created tools, human customers with their particular demands, and so on. There will be practical problems that present themselves. While the mind will not be concerned with praise or blame, or what it is to be a "good butcher," it will be concerned with which knife to use for which cut of meat. Whereas, for Zhuangzi, the mind should not be the controller or governor of the person, it certainly does have a role to play. That role is primarily practical and creative—it sees options, works out solutions, entertains possibilities—all under the guidance of *qi* and in accordance with *tian*.

The result of this combination—following one's nature and supporting it with the skillful use of, but not complete identification with, the human realm of distinctions—is that one lives out one's years. The number of years one is given lies in the realm of *tian*, but inattention to and ignorance of the realm of *ren* can lead to one's being cut down midway.⁵³ Insofar as harmonious living often requires Zhuangzian sages to make their way through human society (without ever being truly invested in it or taking it too seriously), they must make skillful use of *ren*.

Because the sage is never fully invested in concepts, categories, and distinctions, he can play with them and, as Zhuangzi delights in illustrating, subvert them. Ultimately, *ren*-based distinctions are only employed instrumentally, to help the sage make his way through the world smoothly and avoid trouble. The direction of the sage's wandering, however, is set by the movements of *tian*: "How insignificant and small is that part of [the sage] which belongs to *ren*! How grand and great is his singular identification with *tian*!" (49).

The Problem of Grief: Emotions, Naturalness, and Spontaneity

The *tian/ren* distinction can be applied to the realm of emotions. Spontaneity for Zhuangzi does not mean, as it does for some, following the guidance of passions in the absence of the control of the rational mind. While Zhuang-

shares with the Romantics the critique of the discriminating, rational mind, he is also suspicious of the waves of powerful emotions that so often carry people away.⁵⁴

I would argue that the key distinction in understanding which emotions and desires Zhuangzi approves of and which he worries about can be captured by the *tian/ren* distinction. As pointed out earlier, Zhuangzi believes that each thing's nature gives it certain likes and dislikes. Our nature will spontaneously lead us in certain directions if we follow it, and the continuous rising and falling of emotions is simply part of our nature:

One who attends to one's own mind and who is not easily diverted by sorrow and joy, realizing their inevitability and accepting them as if they were destiny, has attained the ultimate of integrity. (34)

Joy, anger, grief, delight, worry, regret, fickleness, inflexibility, modesty, willfulness, candor, insolence—music from empty holes, springing up in dampness, day and night replacing each other before us, no one knows where they sprout from. Let it be! Let it be! [It is enough that] morning and evening we have them, and they are the means by which we live. (W32–33)

These passages demonstrate that for Zhuangzi, grief (or sadness, *ai* 哀) is an emotion that we recognize as an inevitable part of who we are. He is not saying that we must rid ourselves of all emotions. Rather, we must be able to let them pass without holding onto them so that we can maintain equanimity. Zhuangzi could thus experience the welling up of grief following the death of his wife, and by just "letting it be," not holding onto it or providing fuel for it (by, e.g., "following after her weeping and moaning"), allow it to quickly pass so that he can see her life and death in a greater perspective.

Although we should accept natural emotions, it is the case that many of our emotions and desires are products of (or strongly influenced by) "self" and not "nature"—these are harmful and can actually work against satisfying our natural desires.⁵⁵ A poem in "Autumn Floods" reads, "Do not destroy the heavenly [or natural] with the human; do not destroy destiny with intentionality" (159). We are given a nature that provides the basic direction of our spontaneous predilections, including emotions. We stifle or act against this at great risk to ourselves. We do not consciously strive to be who we are; we yield to it. It is not, as with the achievement of selfhood in Confucian thought, a type of "self-mastery"—in fact, there is not even self-conscious control involved. There are frequent illustrations of this point in the text. For example, a millipede cannot even explain how he coordinates his numerous feet. He replies, "Now, I just move by my natural inner

workings but don't know why it is so" (159). Emotions, therefore, must emerge from our nature and not from our mental categories. Zhuangzi calls this "not detracting from the Way with the mind, not assisting [nature] with the human" (52).

We can now make sense of some of Zhuangzi's passages dealing with emotions in the Inner Chapters. In chapter 3 we meet a man who was the friend of Old Longears, who had recently died. He speaks critically of those who put on a show of crying, who in their hearts "wished not to cry but cried anyway." Of this forced emotion, which is based not on genuine feeling but on the desire to put on a show for others, the man says, "This is to flee from nature while redoubling human emotion, thus forgetting what we have received from nature. This was what the ancients called 'the punishment of fleeing from nature'" (28). Elsewhere, Zhuangzi states, "If you are impelled by the human, it is easy to be false; if you are impelled by nature it is hard to be false" (33).⁵⁶

The result is that while one is not emotionless, one cannot be "thrown" by emotions. Emotions cannot "take one over," for they are not "multiplied" or "magnified" (*bei* 倍) by *ren*. This explains how Zhuangzi can feel grief but is then able to quickly move beyond it. There is a level of equanimity that cannot be shaken, for one simply accepts the comings and goings of emotions. Regarding the death of another, a natural emotion—even when it is an emotion such as grief or sadness—should be accepted but not "multiplied"; by forgetting self, those forces that artificially magnify certain emotions, make them intransigent, or prevent them from dissipating, are dissolved. The emotion is unable to disturb one's equanimity and quickly passes.

Differing Temporalities Revised

Having explored the relationship of "self" and "nature," we can now turn our attention to how the two different pictures of temporality in Zhuangzi are related. On the one side is the "momentary" model, which is connected with continuous transformation and the "forgetting" of temporal categories (e.g., past and present) in the midst of skillful absorption; on the other the "natural patterns" model, which is connected with an emphasis on the cyclic expression of nature. While these may be in tension, there is a sense in which we must employ both notions to understand how nature really unfolds. The natural world, at one and the same time, is characterized by both patterns *and* continuous change; by the regular and the surprising by gradual, predictable growth and decline, and explosive, discontinuous disruptions. Although we can recognize patterns, close attention reveals that things never repeat themselves in exactly the same manner.⁵⁷ One way to understand the presence of both models in the text, then, is that they are both needed to describe the movements of nature.

At the same time, Zhuangzi draws on one or the other at particular times for soteriological purposes. The picture would look something like this: Zhuangzi believes that we human beings must rid ourselves of the mental tendencies that obstruct our natures. Since these blockages are in the realm of self (and related concepts and categories), they are grounded in an "achievement-oriented" narrative temporality. In order to dissolve this, we must "forget" and "fast." This can be done through contemplative practices or skillful activity that opens us up to the "momentary" dimension of existence.

As we have seen, what emerges when "self"—and other categories, narratives, and conceptual schemes—no longer act as obstructions is the spontaneous manifestation of nature. Essentially, the present-focused momentary experience allows for the unobstructed expression of nature. Pure sensory, embodied experience is our link to the momentary model; the birth, growth, and death of the body can be understood through the natural-cycles model. The former is connected with the theme of accepting dying as simply one more transformation, the latter with accepting life and death as natural cycles.⁵⁸

CONCLUSION

We have seen that Zhuangzi's positions on death fall into two categories: those that address the operation of the mind (equanimity and acceptance, momentary awareness, recognizing the unity of life and death, forgetting, therapeutic skepticism) and those that focus on nature (living out one's natural endowment of years, life and death as a natural cycle, following one's nature through *ziran* [spontaneous action]). The connection between the two categories can be understood as follows: When one clears the mind of obstructions (the realm of *ren*), then one's nature can manifest itself (the realm of *tian*). The less the mind gets in the way, the more natural one is, which brings one into accordance with the Dao and leads to *wuwei* (effortless action). This transformation is achieved through the art of forgetting, which is made possible by contemplative practices and skillful absorption.

The way of understanding Zhuangzi presented in this essay can help to resolve a tension on which Van Norden has commented: "Puzzlingly, while parts of the Inner Chapters seem to advocate relativism or skepticism, other sections seem to advocate a kind of objectivism."⁵⁹ In addition to drawing on the abundant evidence of Zhuangzi's skepticism and relativism, Van Norden points out areas of the text where Zhuangzi may be advocating objectivism, such as Cook Ding's following "the way things inherently are." The *tian/ren* distinction can account for both dimensions of Zhuangzi's thought. Zhuangzi's skepticism and relativism are applied to the realm of *ren*—the humanly created sphere of concepts, judgments, and language. Their perspectival origins and the inherent limits of any linguistic

construction mean that we must avoid the error of objectivism *vis-à-vis* *lan-guage and its products*.⁶⁰ But where Zhuangzi sounds "objectivist" is when he is referring to a nonlinguistic realm, that of *tian* and *dao*: that is, what we have received, our natural endowment. There is a way things are; there is a way to be. This way just cannot be captured in language and ritual forms. Skepticism and relativism with regard to linguistic concepts and categories produces an objectivism at the nonlinguistic level of nature.

Humans are uniquely capable of getting in the way of this process in their pursuit of wealth and power, in their emphasis on *ren* over *tian*. In so doing, we bring about our own, often unnatural, death; we also cling to our lives and those of our loved ones and are unable to let go at the end. This brings about unnecessary anxiety and suffering. Ironically, we both fear death and hasten it. Zhuangzi aims at avoiding both of these problems. When we can free ourselves from domination by the conceptualizing, categorizing mind, what occurs is the manifestation of our nature, which, through the operation of the *Dao*, is "harmonized (with all things) within the framework of nature." We can then live our lives and die our deaths effortlessly and with equanimity.

NOTES

1. There is debate over which parts of the text are the product of the historical Zhuangzi (369?-286? BCE), who is generally considered a "Daoist." No matter how the current thirty-three-chapter edition of the *Zhuangzi* was written and assembled, it achieved its present form (edited and with commentary by Guo Xiang somewhere in the fourth century CE. So, the text has been around in that form, and continuously influential in myriad ways, for about seventeen centuries. The parts of the text generally considered to most reliably reflect Zhuangzi's views are known as the "Inner Chapters" (chaps. 1-7). The passages to which I give greatest weight in this essay are the Inner Chapters and those other chapters with points of view that reflect those of the Inner Chapters. For a discussion of my approach to the *Zhuangzi*, see Mark Berkson, "Death and the Self in Ancient Chinese Thought: A Comparative Perspective" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1999), xxii-xxv.

2. Zhuangzi's radical skepticism is exemplified in a humorous and provocative passage in chapter 2, "On the Equality of Things" (see pp. 20-21 of Victor Mair's translation of the *Zhuangzi*).

3. See Paul Kjellberg, "Sextus Empiricus, Zhuangzi, and Xunzi on 'Why Be Skeptical?'" in *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi*, ed. Paul Kjellberg and P. J. Ivanhoe (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 1-25; P. J. Ivanhoe, "Skepticism, Skill, and the Ineffable Tao," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61.4 (1993): 639-654. For an analysis of skeptical methods in the *Zhuangzi*, see Lisa Raphals, "Skeptical Strategies in the Zhuangzi and Theaetetus," in Kjellberg and Ivanhoe, *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi*, 26-49.

4. Unless otherwise noted, all page numbers given for the *Zhuangzi* refer to Victor Mair's translation (Zhuangzi, *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu*, trans. Victor Mair [New York: Bantam Books, 1994]). When A. C. Graham's translation (Zhuangzi, *Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters*, trans. A. C. Graham [Boston: Unwin Paperbacks, 1989]) is used, a "G" will precede the page number; if Burton Watson's translation (Zhuangzi, *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Watson [New York: Columbia University Press, 1964]) is used, a "W" will precede the page number. I strive to use the translations that are most accurate and best reflect the spirit of the original Chinese for each passage. For the sake of consistency, all Chinese terms are presented in pinyin romanization, even when the original translation uses Wade-Giles.

5. I am indebted to P. J. Ivanhoe for this point.

6. Mori Mikisaburo, "Chuang Tzu and Buddhism," *The Eastern Buddhist* 5.2 (October 1972): 50.

7. Quoted in Mikisaburo, "Chuang Tzu and Buddhism," 50.

8. Some passages feature crippled sages who are able to accept the loss of limbs. See, e.g., Zhuangzi, 43.

9. It is well known that acceptance is the final stage of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's five-stage process of coming to terms with death. However, acceptance as she describes it is quite different from what we encounter in Zhuangzi: "Acceptance should not be mistaken for a happy stage. It is almost void of feelings. It is as if the pain had gone, the struggle is over, and there comes a time for 'the final rest before the long journey' as one patient phrased it. . . . [The patient] wishes to be left alone or at least not stirred up by news and problems of the outside world" (Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* [New York: Macmillan, 1969], 113). Kübler-Ross's acceptance is akin to resignation or surrender, which is quite different from the humor and wonder seen in Zhuangzi's exemplars.

10. A. C. Graham, *Dispersers of the Dao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1989), 203.

11. Mark Freeman captures this sentiment: "Could it be that our conviction in our own unity as selves is a defense against our disunity, or a way of grieving over that part of us that dies each and every day?" ("Self as Narrative: The Place of Life History in Studying the Life Span," in *The Self: Definitional and Methodological Issues*, ed. Thomas Birnhaupt and Richard Lipka [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992], 16)

12. For a discussion of the Zhuangzian conception of "no-self," see Mark Berkson, "Conceptions of Self/No-Self and Modes of Connection: Comparative Sociological Structures in Classical Chinese Thought," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33.2 (2005): 293-331.

13. Anthropological evidence would seem to support the claim that crying is a natural, universal response to death. The most commonly described and observed behavior among bereaved persons is crying. In a survey of anthropological studies, in seventy-two out of seventy-three cultures, crying played a role in bereavement (in most cultures it was rated as "frequent" or "very frequent"). Given the near universality of crying, the only culture in which crying was not regularly observed, that of the Balinese, warrants closer attention. See Paul Rosenblatt, R. Patricia

- Walsh, and Douglas Jackson, *Grief and Mourning in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York: HRAF Press, 1976), 16ff.
14. This translation is slightly modified using Mair's choices for certain terms.
 15. See Lee Yearley, "Taoist Wandering and the Adventure of Religious Ethics," William James Lecture, *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 24:2 (1995), 11-15.
 16. See section V of Amy Oberling's contribution to this volume.
 17. David Nivison, "Hsun Tzu and Chuang Tzu," in *Chinese Texts and Philosophical Contexts*, ed. Henry Rosemont (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1991), 139.
 18. Nivison, "Hsun Tzu and Chuang Tzu," 139.
 19. For Mengzi, the ritual forms of mourning that express grief are natural as well, whereas for Xunzi they are artificial; for both, they are profoundly important.
 20. Additional metaphors used throughout the text include life and death being "disciples of each other" and constituting "a single cord"; see 46, 212, and 233.
 21. This sentiment is echoed by Cicero, who wrote, "Let us get rid of such old wives' tales as the one that tells us it is tragic to die before one's time. What time is that, I would like to know? Nature is the one who has granted us the loan of our lives, without setting any schedule for repayment. What has one to complain of if she calls in the loan when she will?" (Peter Potter, *All About Death* [New Canaan, Conn.: William Mulvey, 1988], 231). A contrary view is captured in the words of Zoe Akins, who observes in a Confucian fashion, "Nothing seems so tragic to one who is old as the death of one who is young, and this alone proves that life is a good thing" (Potter, *All About Death*, 227).
 22. *Analects* 9.21. See Kongzi, *Confucius: The Analects*, trans. D. C. Lau (New York: Penguin, 1979).
 23. Bryan Van Norden, "Competing Interpretations of the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*," *Philosophy East and West* 46:2 (April 1994).
 24. See, e.g., Lee Yearley, "Zhuangzi's Understanding of Skillfulness and the Ultimate Spiritual State," in Kjellberg and Ivanhoe, *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi*, 155, 175.
 25. Graham, *Disputers of the Dao*, 193, 196.
 26. This line of interpretation perhaps originates with Guo Xiang, whose interpretation places an emphasis on *wuwei*, *ziran*, and *xinyi*. He argues that *xinyi* represents the nature of particular things; each thing has a particular set of needs, capacities, abilities, and a way it should live. In light of this, each being should simply accord with its nature; doing so is acting "so of itself," or *ziran* (spontaneously). When one allows one's spontaneous inclinations to unfold, one's actions can be described as *wuwei*. Guo goes on to argue that *zhi* (intelligence) leads us away from our nature. Intelligence cannot figure out how we should live and only gets in the way. I have been influenced by a contemporary version of this picture, given by P. J. Ivanhoe, "Was Zhuangzi a Relativist?" in Kjellberg and Ivanhoe, *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi*, 196-214.
 27. See, e.g., Zhuangzi, 159, 171.
 28. This aspect of Zhuangzi's thought may reflect the influence of the philosopher Yang Zhu. Graham speculates that Zhuangzi might have been a member of the School of Yang Zhu at one time. Graham describes Yang Zhu as "the first important Chinese thinker who developed a philosophy for the individual disinclined to join

in the struggle for wealth and power" (*The Book of Lieh-tzu: A Classic of Tao* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1990], 135).

29. See also Zhuangzi, 23, 26.
30. See also Zhuangzi, 332. We can see that Zhuangzi values life and would never jeopardize it in order to undertake government service. This distinguishes him in a crucial way from any Confucian. All of the Confucian thinkers speak of the importance of political service, which, they understand, may lead to death. For this reason, courage is an important virtue in the Confucian tradition and conspicuously absent in the work of Zhuangzi. The virtue of courage requires risk; in its highest form, it means risking one's life for the sake of a good. Mengzi said, "A man of valor never forgets that he may forfeit his head" (3B1; see Mencius, trans. D. C. Lau [New York: Penguin, 1970]). For Zhuangzi (and Yang Zhu), there is no higher good than life, thus no good is worth sacrificing life for. However, nothing in this philosophy necessarily leads to callous egoism. The high value placed on one's life does not mean that one will not help another person, as long as doing so does not constitute mortal risk.
31. Mengzi, like Zhuangzi, counsels people to avoid dying before their properly fated time: "[O]ne accepts willingly only what is one's proper destiny. That is why he who understands destiny does not stand under a wall on the verge of collapse" (7A2).
32. For an in-depth discussion of *wuwei*, see Edward Slingerland, *Effortless Action: Wu-Wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
33. See also Zhuangzi, 9, 39, 191.
34. This means that Zhuangzi's way is a way of not harming, which is why Ivanhoe's choice of "benign" to describe Zhuangzi ethically is a sound one ("Skepticism, Skill and the Ineffable Tao"). There would be a problem with using the term "benevolent" (obviously in its strictly Confucian sense, but even in a wider sense) because there does not seem to be much evidence in the text that Zhuangzi believes people would naturally seek to help one another. The notion of "nurturing life," however, suggests that using a term stronger than "benign" might be justified.
35. See also Zhuangzi, 96, 222.
36. The "momentary temporality" that refers to going along with moment-by-moment transformations (no precedence or sequence, before or after), discussed previously, and the "natural cycles" temporality described here, are not in principle incompatible, but there are tensions between them. These will be addressed in the following.
37. In its most extreme form, this is where we find the "radical Zhuangzi" who would be able, in Lee Yearley's picture, to move quickly and effortlessly from shock and grief to an aesthetic appreciation of mangled bones and branches following the death of his wife by a falling tree. See Yearley, "The Perfected Person in the Radical Zhuangzi," in Mair, *Experimental Essays on Chuang-tzu*, 125-139.
38. Practically speaking, although it is easy to recognize that a death due to execution resulting from political ambition is unnatural for Zhuangzi, it is difficult to determine which diseases result from choices a person makes and which arise "naturally" within the body. Presumably, living in accordance with the Dao will prevent unnatural deaths. The author of one of the Miscellaneous Chapters elaborates on

this point: "He who is heedless of his nature . . . will find his nature choked with needs and rushes. . . . [G]radually they eradicate our natures until we erupt in festering pus that breaks out everywhere from tumors and ulcers" (260).

39. It is instructive to contrast Zhuangzi's deathbed story with Kongzi's, which is found in *Anlezh* 9.12. See Ivanhoe's contribution to this volume.

40. See Mengzi 3A5.

41. Zhuangzi's no-self position is not identical with other no-self positions, such as the one found in the Buddhist tradition. Just as there is a range of understandings of "self," there is also a variety of conceptions of "no-self." Elsewhere, I have argued that conceptions of no-self differ because they are advanced in opposition to differing conceptions of self. Whereas Buddhist no-self doctrine denies the existence of the *atman*, Zhuangzian no-self is opposed to the Confucian conception of self (and related notions such as self-cultivation). While important differences exist between these no-self positions, there are also shared features (e.g., an emphasis on transformation and impermanence) that play a part in the Zhuangzian influence on East Asian Buddhism. This Zhuangzian picture influenced the shape that Buddhist "no-self" took in China—the detached awareness that South Asian Buddhism shared with other Indian contemplative traditions was combined with the expression of nature found in Zhuangzi's thought. In a sense, a new kind of "no-self" emerged in East Asian Buddhism. See Berks, "Conceptions of Self/No-Self and Modes Connection." At times, the picture of Zhuangzi presented in this essay seems to share features with Chan Buddhism. This need not be seen as the result of reading Chan into Zhuangzi. Rather, it results from the fact that the Zhuangzian perspective constitutes a major component of Chan.

42. This is the approach that Robert Allinson emphasizes, pointing out that the *Zhuangzi* itself is designed to bring about transformation in the reader. See Allinson, *Chuang-Tzu for Spiritual Transformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

43. There is much debate around the issue of whether there are contemplative or meditative practices in the *Zhuangzi*. I believe that while the text gives no systematic instructions on any such practices, Zhuangzi assumes and alludes to them. The clearest example is sitting in forgetfulness. For an argument that early Daoist communities were involved with this sort of contemplative exercise, see Harold D. Roth, "Psychology and Self-Cultivation in Early Taoistic Thought," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 51.2 (1991): 599–650. Judith Berling, in describing Woodcarver Qing's forgetting of praise, patronage, etc., writes, "He cannot simply say 'I will no longer think of these things.' Changing ingrained habits of mind requires disciplined fasting" (Berling, "Self and Whole in Chuang Tzu," in *Individualism and Holism Studies in Confucian and Taoist Values*, ed. Donald Munro [Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan], 113). Schwartz, who gives a number of examples of what he calls "trancelike mystic experiences," comments on the notion of "fasting of the mind" (where one waits "in emptiness" and follows the *qi*): "The procedure recommended seems to involve precisely the kind of 'emptying of mind' or all consciousness of the determinate we find in so much literature on 'meditation' techniques. Yan Hui, it would appear, is eminently prepared for these instructions" (Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985], 218). Michael Saso has written about the "meditative use of

the *Zhuangzi* among contemporary Daoists on Taiwan" ("The *Chuang-Tzu Nei-P'i-tan*: A Taoist Meditation," in Mair, *Experimental Essays on Chuang-tzu*, 141).

44. Zhuangzi, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, trans. Burton Watson [New York: Columbia University Press, 1964], 133. This can be contrasted with the many important roles that memory plays for Confucians. See Berks, "Death and the Self in Ancient Chinese Thought," 283–290.

45. Some scholars have argued that in the skill stories, Zhuangzi shows sages who are absorbed in the "flow state," a nondual awareness often experienced in the midst of skillful activity, such as a musical or athletic performance. Both Chris Jochim and P. J. Ivanhoe develop this theme. The idea of "flow" originates with the work of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (*Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* [New York: HarperCollins, 1990]). This idea bears resemblance to Abraham Maslow's notion of "peak experience." See Ivanhoe, "Skepticism, Skill, and the Ineffable Tao; Chris Jochim, "Just Say 'No' to No-Self in Zhuangzi," in *Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi*, ed. Roger Ames (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 35–74.

46. Mark Freeman writes, "Alongside the attempt to question the orderliness of the process of development, therefore, the very idea of self—as integrated, consistent, and enduring identity—is rendered suspect" ("Self as Narrative," 16).

47. Yearley, "Zhuangzi's Understanding of Skillfulness and the Ultimate Spiritual State," 162.

48. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, 234.

49. Graham, *Disputers of the Dao*, 193.

50. There are other ways to use the notion of "transcendence" that might apply more accurately to Zhuangzi. For example, one could argue that the perfected person is able to transcend conventional categories and language (he is no longer bound by them, no longer sees the world through them). But there is no need to see such a person as motivated or infused by a force that lies completely beyond him. My objection, then, is not to the word "transcendence" per se, but to forms of transcendence that require a strong metaphysical dualism.

51. Zhuangzi's treatment of *tan* had a profound influence on Xunzi. Xunzi's understanding of heaven as an impersonal force, unresponsive to human wishes, which can be seen in the movements of the natural world and the cosmos, is very close to Zhuangzi's view. This understanding is far closer to what we in the modern West mean by "nature" than the word "heaven," which partakes too much of the dualistic metaphysics of Christianity and can therefore suggest a notion of "transcendence."

52. See also Zhangzi, 251.

53. This point is illustrated in Zhuangzi's "conversion story" (196–197). Being able to move smoothly through the world requires a certain mastery of practical problems and a working knowledge of categories, concepts, and rules. This is what Zhuangzi's master meant when he advised Zhuangzi, "When in a place where certain customs prevail, follow the rules of that place" (197).

54. See A. C. Graham, "Taoist Spontaneity and the Dichotomy of 'is' and 'Ought,'" in Mair, *Experimental Essays on Chuang-tzu*, 3–23.

55. The term "natural emotions" (*xing qing*) is used in the Outer Chapters (see, e.g., Zhuangzi, 150). This distinction is also found, I believe, in the *Dao De Jing*, which states that the sage is "for the belly, not for the eye" (chap. 12). Certain appetites, such as hunger, are natural; if undistorted, hunger can be satisfied with

simple food and has natural limits—after a certain point, we are full. Other forms of desire—e.g., lust for power, wealth, or status—are products of socialization and have no natural limit. The greedy are never satisfied, even with enormous wealth. This is why following natural desires leads to satisfaction and contentment, while being led by human-created desires leads to anxiety and suffering.

56. See Zhuangzi, 321 for a discussion of “true” vs. “forced” emotion.

57. This understanding of nature is beautifully described by David Abram, who writes, “The patterns on the stream’s surface as it ripples over the rocks, or on the bark of an elm tree, or in a cluster of weeds, are all composed of repetitive figures that never exactly repeat themselves, of iterated shapes to which our senses may attune themselves even while the gradual drift and metamorphosis of those shapes draws our awareness in unexpected and unpredictable directions” (*The Spell of the Sensuous* [New York: Vintage Books, 1996], 64).

58. The body plays a central role in both temporalities. The awareness of sensuous, embodied experience links us to the momentary dimension of existence: our natural bodily rhythms are manifestations of nature (they are given us by *tian*) and thus link us with the natural cycles model. My understanding of Zhuangzi is in stark contrast with that of scholars such as Lao Siguang and Judith Berling, who have an explicit or implicit dualism between “spirit” and “body” and argue that Zhuangzi has a notion of a “true self” that is separate from the body. Lao writes: “The self does not take the physical form as its ‘own body.’ . . . The self is a subject transcending the (material) series of events; thus, life and death of the physical form ‘cannot change the self’” (quoted in Jochim, “[Just Say ‘No’ to No-Self in Zhuangzi, 41]. Berling writes that “spirit is that core of consciousness not tied down by the physical self” (“Self and Whole in Chuang Tzu,” 112). However, she also writes: “The openness of the Daoist is not openness to the pressures of society, but to what comes naturally from living” (“Self and Whole in Chuang Tzu,” 116). Natural living is, if it is anything, embodied, physical living. It makes sense, then, that the term Zhuangzi uses to describe that aspect of the person that should be “cultivated” (修), “preserved” (保 保), and “nourished” (yang 養) is *shen* 身, which frequently refers simply to the “body.” This is a point made by Jochim, who observes that for Zhuangzi “it is almost always a bad idea to lose or forget one’s *shen*, and the same goes for putting it in danger or taking it lightly” (“[Just Say ‘No’ to No-Self in Zhuangzi,” 47). Our bodies are what we receive from *tian*; it is through embodied experience freed from the control of the judging (“good” and “bad”), categorizing mind that we can accord with the Dao.

59. Van Norden, “Competing Interpretations of the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*,” 8.

60. See Mark Berison, “Language: The Guest of Reality,” in Kjellberg and Ivanhoe, *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi*, 97–126.

NINE

SAGES, THE PAST, AND THE DEAD

Death in the *Huainanzi*

Michael Puett

Early China was a haunted world. Ghosts were pervasive and dangerous, and the living regularly performed sacrifices in an attempt to control or mollify the dead. Often, the sacrifices were insufficient.

Within this context, the *Huainanzi* offers a unique and powerful argument concerning death. The focus of the discussion here will be the text’s presentation of sages—how they deal with death and teach nonages to handle the same. I will focus on chapters 7 and chapter 13, and between these two we will get a fascinating glimpse of some of the complexities concerning visions of death in early China.

To ground this analysis, I will begin with a brief discussion of views about death during the Warring States and Western Han periods.

DOMESTICATING THE DEAD: VIEWS OF DEATH IN EARLY CHINA

In early China, the body of a living human was believed to contain several elements, including different souls and energies. Some of these energies were believed to be of heavenly origin; others were from the earth. At death, the former would float up to their ultimate abode in the skies while the latter would remain on or enter into the earth.¹

In many of the texts from the Warring States and Han periods, the elements from the heavens were the spirits (*shen*) and *hun* souls, whereas the elements from the earth included the bones, flesh, and *po* souls.²

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