



---

Competing Interpretations of the Inner Chapters of the "Zhuangzi"

Author(s): Bryan W. Van Norden

Source: *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Apr., 1996), pp. 247-268

Published by: [University of Hawai'i Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1399405>

Accessed: 20-04-2015 17:58 UTC

#### REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

[http://www.jstor.org/stable/1399405?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1399405?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents)

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of Hawai'i Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Philosophy East and West*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# COMPETING INTERPRETATIONS OF THE INNER CHAPTERS OF THE *ZHUANGZI*

Bryan W. Van Norden

To stop making footprints is easy, to walk without touching the ground is hard.  
Zhuangzi

Assistant Professor at  
Vassar College

The Way lies in what is near, but people seek it in what is distant. One's task  
lies in what is easy, but people seek it in what is hard.

Mencius

The *Zhuangzi* is a protean text. Even if we limit ourselves to a discussion of the Inner Chapters, we find that just when we think we have understood the text, a new passage calls into question our previous interpretation. Consequently, it is not surprising that the *Zhuangzi* acts almost like a Rorschach test: different interpreters see different things in it, and what they see there often reveals more about their own preoccupations than about the *Zhuangzi* itself. A. C. Graham reads Zhuangzi as presenting a sort of ideal-observer view of ethics.<sup>1</sup> Chad Hansen has depicted Zhuangzi as an ethical relativist, who would be at home with contemporary analytic philosophers like Gilbert Harman.<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Schwartz and Lee Yearley both think that Zhuangzi is a mystic—but very different kinds of mystic. Schwartz regards Zhuangzi as being very similar to Jewish, Christian, and Islamic mystics, in advocating union with a transcendent entity.<sup>3</sup> Yearley, in contrast, takes Zhuangzi to be an “intra-worldly” mystic, who advocates detached contemplation of each moment of experience.<sup>4</sup> And most recently, Paul Kjellberg and Lisa Raphals have stressed the similarities between the thought of Zhuangzi and both Platonic and Hellenistic skepticism.<sup>5</sup>

莊子

Some will find this state of affairs unsurprising. It has become almost an article of faith in some circles that every text has an infinite number of (equally defensible) possible interpretations.<sup>6</sup> However, the problem is not so much that the Inner Chapters can consistently be read in a variety of different ways. Rather, the problem is that whatever the merits of various interpretations in making sense of portions of the text, *none* of them seems to do justice to the text as a whole. I submit that this is due, in part, to the fact that there are theoretical tensions within the Inner Chapters that seem hard, *prima facie*, to reconcile. Now, there are a variety of ways of accounting for tensions or apparent contradictions in a text. There may be interpolations in the text by other authors.<sup>7</sup> Alternatively, various portions of the text may represent different stages in one author's intellectual development (as in Montaigne's *Essays*). I do not mean to rule out these possibilities a priori. However, it seems worthwhile to attempt to reconcile apparent contradictions before we start making efforts to explain why they are there.

Philosophy East & West  
Volume 46, Number 2  
April 1996  
247–268

© 1996  
by University of  
Hawai'i Press

Obviously we cannot examine every conceptually possible interpretation of the text. We cannot, even in the space of one brief essay, examine every major interpretation that has actually been proposed. I shall consider here a handful of interpretations of the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, drawn from Western philosophic categories. The first section of this essay is devoted to explaining these categories, and showing how portions of the Inner Chapters seem to defend each type of view. The second section of this essay is a detailed analysis of the opening of the *Zhuangzi*. In the third and final section, I propose an interpretation that, I hope, succeeds in reconciling the tensions I have identified in the Inner Chapters.<sup>8</sup>

### Distinctions and Tensions

*Skepticism*, as a philosophic position, is the doctrine that one cannot have knowledge. One can be a general skeptic, who claims that one cannot have knowledge of anything. Alternatively, one can be skeptical only about certain kinds of knowledge. An agnostic, for example, is a skeptic who holds that one cannot know whether there is a god. But an agnostic may admit there are many *other* topics about which one *can* have knowledge. Ethical or moral skepticism, finally, holds that we do not have knowledge of ethical truths (whether or not there *are* any moral truths).<sup>9</sup>

*Ethical relativism*, as I shall use the term here, is either the doctrine that ethical propositions are true or false only relative to some point of view, or the doctrine that all ethical words or terms are relative or relational terms.<sup>10</sup> Consider an analogy. The word "taller" is a relative term. Someone can be *taller* only in relation to someone else. If someone asked simply, "Is George taller?" the natural response would be "What do you mean? Is George taller than *who*?" Similarly, ethical relativists hold that it makes no sense to ask "Is adultery immoral?" for instance, without specifying some point of view relative to which adultery is or is not immoral. The different kinds of ethical relativism are distinguished according to *what* point of view it is that ethical words or propositions are taken to be relative to. For example, one might hold that ethical propositions are true or false relative to the point of view of each *individual person*. Alternatively, one might hold that they are true or false relative to the views of each *culture* or *society*.

An ethical view is *particularist* to the extent to which it holds that ethical truths are very specific and context sensitive. An ethical view is antiparticularist, or *generalist*, to the extent to which it holds that ethical truths are very general and context independent. Hence, the terms "particularism" and "generalism" mark locations along a spectrum from most general to most particular. A certain ethical view may be particularist in comparison with another view that is closer to the generalist

end of the spectrum, yet generalist in comparison with a view closer to the particularist end of the spectrum.<sup>11</sup>

I shall use the term *objectivism* to refer to the joint denial of ethical skepticism and ethical relativism. In other words, the ethical objectivist holds that ethical truths *are* knowable, and are *not* relative to the points of view of different individuals or cultures.<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that objectivism does *not* claim that you or I or anyone else is ethically infallible. Objectivism is perfectly consistent with the view that we frequently are in error about ethical issues, and would profit from examining and reexamining our ethical beliefs. Indeed, my anecdotal impression is that, among contemporary philosophers, almost all the ethical objectivists are fallibilists, who encourage us to learn from others and from ongoing philosophic argumentation. Objectivism is also consistent with any and all degrees of particularism. Aristotle is a nice example of a philosopher who is an objectivist but who is also a particularist. He thinks that what is right or wrong in a given context depends very much on the particular details of the situation. Indeed, wisdom (or *phronēsis*), according to Aristotle, is the ability (not reducible to following general rules) to discern what is appropriate in a particular context. But Aristotle also thinks that there is an objective difference between what is right or wrong, noble or ignoble, in a particular situation, which does not depend upon what any given individual or culture thinks about that situation.<sup>13</sup>

Let's illustrate these distinctions with some concrete examples. Consider several ways one might react to the assertion, "Killing humans is wrong." If one says "We do not know whether killing is wrong," that is an expression of skepticism. In contrast, one is expressing one sort of relativism if one says "Whether killing is wrong depends upon whose opinion we're appealing to. If you think killing is wrong, then killing *is* wrong from your perspective, but if someone else thinks killing is right, then it *is* right from her perspective." Finally, if one says, "Killing humans is always wrong, regardless of the situation," one is taking a generalist stance, while if one says, "Whether killing is wrong depends upon the situation," then one is expressing particularism.

Despite the fact that they are frequently conflated, skepticism, relativism, and particularism are logically independent. None of them entails, or is logically entailed by, any of the others. Indeed, some of them are logically inconsistent with one another. Ethical skepticism, for example, is inconsistent with the view that ethical truths are relative to each individual person's point of view, because it cannot be true both that certain ethical facts are dependent upon my own opinions (relativism) and that I know no ethical truths (skepticism). For if the statement "Murder is wrong" is true (relative to me) just in case I believe murder is wrong, then I *do* know an ethical truth, since I know what I believe about murder.<sup>14</sup>

Bryan W. Van Norden

Particularism and relativism are *not* logically inconsistent, but they *are* logically independent. In other words, you *can* consistently be both a particularist and a relativist, but you do not *have* to be a particularist if you are a relativist, and you do not *have* to be a relativist if you are a particularist.

One can easily find passages from the Inner Chapters that seem most naturally read as instances of ethical skepticism, or of ethical relativism, or of particularism. Let's look at examples of each.

王倪

*Skepticism.* In the exchange between "Gaptooth" and Wang Ni, it seems natural to assume that Zhuangzi is using the latter to express his own skepticism:

"Do you know what all things agree in affirming?"

"How would I know that?"

"Do you know what you do not know?"

"How would I know that?"

"Then does no thing know anything?"

"How would I know that? ... As I see it, the sprouts of benevolence and righteousness,<sup>15</sup> the paths of 'That's it, that's not,' are inextricably confused. How would I know how to discriminate them?"<sup>16</sup>

Other notable skeptical arguments in the Inner Chapters include the story of Lady Li and the famous Butterfly Dream passage.<sup>17</sup>

齊物論  
是非  
彼

*Relativism.* Several passages in the *Qi wu lun* suggest that even the most fundamental terms in disputation, "that's it" (*shi*) and "that's not" (*fei*) are relative terms, just like the demonstrative pronouns "this" (*shi*) and "that" (*bi*):

How can a Way be walked and not exist? How can words exist and not be allowable? The Way is hidden by small accomplishments, words are hidden by foliage and flowers. Hence we have the "That's it, that's not" of Confucians and Mohists, by which they affirm the other's denial and deny the other's affirmation. If you wish to affirm what they deny and deny what they affirm, the best means is Illumination. No thing is not "that," no thing is not "this." ...<sup>18</sup>

"This" is also "that," "that" is also "this." There there is "That's it, that's not" [from one point of view], here there is "That's it, that's not" [from another point of view]. Are there really "This" and "That"? Or really no "This" and "That"? ... Therefore I say: "The best means is Illumination." ...<sup>19</sup>

Is it allowable? It is allowable. Is it unallowable? It is unallowable. A way is made by people walking on it; things are so because they are called so. How is it so? It is so by being so. How is it not so? It is not so by not being so. A thing inherently has a respect in which it is so; a thing inherently has a respect in which it is allowable. No thing is not so, no thing is unallowable.<sup>20</sup>

Philosophy East & West      What is Zhuangzi's point here? Consider an analogy. Say you are on the other side of the room from me, and there is a lectern immediately in

front of me. I shall refer to the lectern as “this lectern,” while you refer to it as “that lectern.” If you and I got into a heated dispute, in which I insisted that it was *really* “this lectern,” while you insisted that it was *really* “that lectern,” it would be obvious to others that this was a purely verbal disagreement.<sup>21</sup> Relative to me, it is “this lectern,” relative to you, it is “that lectern.” Likewise, Zhuangzi seems to be saying, whether something is beautiful or hideous, benevolent or unbenevolent, or righteous or unrighteous depends on one’s perspective. For Confucians, having greater concern for one’s own relatives than for total strangers is benevolent; for Mohists, it is unbenevolent.<sup>22</sup>

The evaluative terms Zhuangzi focuses on are amenable to this kind of analysis, since, when used in the sense of “to approve of” and “to disapprove of,” *shi* and *fei* refer to attitudes particular individuals (or groups of individuals) have toward certain things. Although the grammatical subject is often implicit in Chinese, there must be an individual or group who “approves of” X, or “disapproves of” Y. Consequently, *shi* and *fei* (when used in this sense) are certainly relative terms.<sup>23</sup>

*Objectivism.* It is puzzling that while parts of the Inner Chapters seem to advocate relativism or skepticism, other sections seem to advocate a kind of objectivism. Thus, in *Ren jian shi*, Confucius (often used in *Zhuangzi* as a mouthpiece for Daoist ideas) offers the following surprisingly orthodox advice:

人間世

In the world, there are two great restrictions. One of them is destiny, the other is righteousness. Children loving their parents is destiny. This cannot be loosened from their hearts. Ministers serving their lords is righteousness. There is nowhere one can go where they are not their lords. There is no escape from these between Heaven and Earth: they are called the great restrictions.<sup>24</sup>

Consider also the famous story of Cook Ding, whose skillful dismembering of an ox serves as a model for “nurturing life.”<sup>25</sup> Zhuangzi’s account does not seem to express any skepticism or doubt about Ding’s success or his skill. Furthermore, the appropriateness of his carving is not described as being relative to the perspective of individuals or of society. Rather, he “relies upon the natural structure” of the ox,<sup>26</sup> and “follows the way things inherently are.”<sup>27</sup>

*Particularism.* When Huizi did not know how to make use of a huge gourd that he had received as a gift, Zhuangzi told him the story of the man who had a secret salve that prevented one’s hands from chapping. The man used the salve to help him make a pittance bleaching silk. A stranger bought the formula for the salve from him for a hundred pieces of gold, but then used it to enable the sailors under his command to win a naval battle, and was rewarded with a fief.<sup>28</sup> The moral of the story is

惠子

Bryan W. Van Norden

presumably that the value something has depends on the situation in which it is used. And this is a kind of particularism.

Zhuangzi's particularism generates problems of its own, however. For in being a particularist, Zhuangzi does not differ from contemporary Confucians like Mencius.<sup>29</sup> This raises the suspicion that Zhuangzi has some special reason for stressing particularism in the way that he does.

### A Passage

Now let us turn to a specific portion of the text in the *Zhuangzi*, the opening of the Inner Chapters, and see whether we can consistently read it in the light of any of the philosophic categories we have explained.

鯤  
里  
鵬

In the Northern Darkness there is a fish. Its name is "Kun." The size of the Kun, we do not know how many thousands of *li* it is. It transforms and becomes a bird. Its name is "Peng." The back of the Peng, we do not know how many thousands of *li* it is. When it beats its wings and flies off, its wings are like clouds hanging from the sky. This bird, when the tides change, sets off for the Southern Darkness. The Southern Darkness is the pond of Heaven.<sup>30</sup>

The likely effect of this passage on the reader is a combination of awe and disorientation. We are first struck by the mysterious image of the "Northern Darkness," and then our sense of proportion is assaulted by the grotesquely huge fish called the "Kun."<sup>31</sup> Before we have a chance to assimilate this image, we are told of the fantastic transformation of the Kun fish into the mammoth Peng bird. The author dwells on this image, giving us a chance to catch our breath, with a majestic description of the Peng's wings filling the sky like clouds. But once again we are disoriented when this huge bird's migration takes it to the Southern Darkness, which is large enough to be home to the Peng, but is merely a pond from the perspective of Heaven.

The text seems clearly to be trying to shake the reader out of her normal ways of thinking. But to what end? Are we being disoriented to leave us in a skeptical state, doubting everything we think we know? The reference to "darkness," and the skepticism about the size of both the Kun and the Peng suggest this reading. But "transformation" is a term frequently used in descriptions of sages. Perhaps the Kun and the Peng represent some higher level of awareness. We need additional textual evidence, however, before we can have confidence in either interpretation.

齊諧

The *Qi xie* is a record of wonders. The words of the *Xie* say, "When the Peng travels to the Southern Darkness, the water is stirred for three thousand *li*. It mounts the whirlwind and rises ninety-thousand *li*, leaving with the sixth month gale." Images in the clouds, bits of dust, living things blown about by the wind, the azure of the sky—is that its true color? Or is that because it is distant and lacks a limit? When it looks down, all appears like this.<sup>32</sup>

Philosophy East & West

Whether the *Qi xie* is a book or a person, it is obviously being treated as an “authority” of some kind. So Burton Watson is probably correct in suggesting that Zhuangzi “is poking fun at the philosophers of other schools who cite ancient texts to prove their assertions.”<sup>33</sup> When, later in the text, we find Confucius being used as Zhuangzi’s mouthpiece, there is implicit a similar skepticism about our knowledge of the ancients. Already by this point in Chinese history, there was considerable disagreement in both the Confucian and Mohist schools about what the true teachings of their respective masters were.<sup>34</sup> Although both Confucius and Mencius had stressed the need to read the classical texts critically,<sup>35</sup> Zhuangzi is possibly the first thinker in the Chinese tradition to suggest that we have no way of being sure what the ancient sages thought.

Skepticism is also suggested by the other parts of this passage. We make distinctions among things in reality—horse or ox, right or wrong. But is this any more objective than seeing images in clouds or dust? Do we know what the true color of the sky is, or do we only know what it looks like to us?

Furthermore, when water accumulates, if it is not deep, then it will not have the strength to support a big boat. If you pour a cup of water into a depression on the floor, then bits of grass will be boats in it. But place the cup in it and it will stick. This is because the water is shallow and the boat is big. When wind accumulates, if it is not deep, then it will not have the strength to support big wings. Hence, when [the bird] is ninety-thousand *li* [high], when the wind is underneath it, only then does it beat the wind. Its back shouldering the blue sky, nothing hindering it, only then does it set off for the south.<sup>36</sup>

This passage is the first to clearly suggest particularism. Can things float on water? It depends upon the particular situation. A particular object may float on one particular body of water but not on another. Thus, the Peng bird flies in the way that is appropriate to it.

The cicada and the dove laugh at him, saying, “We suddenly rise up and fly, bump into the elm or sandalwood tree and stop. Sometimes we don’t even make it and simply drop to the ground. Why go up ninety-thousand miles and [head] south?”<sup>37</sup>

One of the issues that will be crucial for understanding this piece of text is deciding what our attitude should be toward the cicada, dove, and (later) the quail. There are presumably two possibilities. Either the cicada and the dove are justified in laughing at the Peng, or they are not. From what Zhuangzi writes later in the text, it seems clear that he finds fault with them for laughing at the Peng. Assuming, then, that they are not justified in laughing at the Peng, there are at least two different allegorical possibilities. First, it may be that the *only* failing of the cicada and the dove is that they find the Peng ridiculous. On this interpretation, the fact that the two creatures fly so low and so clumsily does not represent a

Bryan W. Van Norden



failing or a weakness. Given the kinds of creatures they are, flying in this way is appropriate for them (just as flying at ninety-thousand *li* is appropriate for the Peng).<sup>38</sup> The second allegorical possibility is that the low and inept flight of the cicada and the dove represents the lack of cultivation and skill of uncultivated individuals who laugh at sages and their achievements. On this reading, the small creatures are to be faulted, not only for laughing at the Peng, but for the limitations that prevent them soaring like the Peng. This last interpretation reminds one of the lines from chapter 41 (Wang Bi numbering) of the *Dao de jing*:

When the inferior man hears the Way,  
he laughs at it loudly.  
If he did not laugh,  
it would not be fit to be the Way.<sup>39</sup>

It might seem unfair to blame the cicada and the dove for not flying like the Peng. After all, they are not *capable* of flying in that way. But recall that the Kun was not capable of flying like the Peng, either—until its “transformation.”

Note, finally, that the introduction of an external perspective on the Peng’s flight, that of the cicada and the dove, gives Zhuangzi a natural opportunity to introduce a discussion of relativism, if that is his point. But nothing in his description suggests relativism.

The passage continues:

If one goes to the nearby woods, one can [take] three meals and return with one’s belly still full. If one goes a hundred *li*, one spends a night grinding grain. If one goes a thousand *li*, one collects grain for three months. What do those two varmints know! Little understanding does not come up to big understanding. A few years do not come up to many years. How do we know that this is so? The morning mushroom does not know the dawn. The cricket does not know spring and autumn. This is what is meant by “a few years.” To the south of Chu there is the Ming Ling, which regards five hundred years as one spring, and five hundred years as one autumn. In the far off past there was the great Chun, which regarded eight thousand years as one spring, and eight thousand years as one autumn. This is what is meant by “many years.” But Peng Zu is nowadays especially known for his longevity, and the multitudes emulate him. Is this not pathetic?<sup>40</sup>

In discussing how the amount of food required varies with the length of the journey, Zhuangzi seems merely to be making a particularist point that is consistent with the first interpretation above—that the cicada and the dove fly in the way that is appropriate for them. But from the point at which he asks “What do those two varmints know!” Zhuangzi seems to be contrasting small, narrow, limited perspectives with greater, broader, more encompassing perspectives.<sup>41</sup> This seems most naturally read as suggesting the second interpretation: the “varmint” are not in the wrong

only for laughing at the Peng. In addition, because of the narrow perspective that leads them to ridicule the Peng, they lead narrow lives. This reading is also suggested by some of the criticisms leveled at others elsewhere in the text:

A blind person cannot appreciate the sight of beautiful patterns; a deaf person cannot appreciate the sound of bells and drums. And is there blindness and deafness only of the body?! The understanding has them too.<sup>42</sup>

Zhuangzi now returns to the story of the Kun and the Peng. This suggests that Zhuangzi thought the reader would profit from reviewing the story after having read the intervening text.

Tang's questions of Ji are like this: In the barren north there is a dark ocean, which is the pond of Heaven. There is a fish there. Its breadth is several thousand *li*. There is no one who knows its girth. Its name is "Kun." There is a bird there. Its name is "Peng." Its back is like Mount Tai. Its wings are like clouds hanging from the sky. It mounts the whirlwind twister and rises ninety-thousand *li*. It breaks through the clouds and mist, shoulders the blue sky, and only then does it set off for the South and head to the Southern Darkness.

The little quail laughs at him, saying, "Where does he think he's going? I jump and rise up, but come down, not going more than a few yards, midst the bushes. This is the acme of flight! And where does he think he's going?" This is the distinction between small and great. Hence, one whose wisdom can do well in one office, whose conduct is good enough for one village, whose virtue suits one ruler, who proves oneself in one state—they too look upon themselves like this.<sup>43</sup>

Most of the differences between this version of the story and the previous one may serve only to maintain the liveliness of the narrative and avoid monotony.<sup>44</sup> The closing of this section is new and important, however. We are told explicitly to compare the quail (and presumably also the cicada and the dove) to those whose talent suits them for small achievements, and who cannot see the point (or perhaps even the possibility) of greater achievements.

The description of the quail, in conjunction with what follows, apparently gives us a hierarchy of stages along the road to sagehood:

Yet Song Rongzi would smile at them. Moreover, were the whole world to praise him, he would not be encouraged; were the whole world to condemn him, he would not be discouraged. He was unwavering in the distinction between internal and external. He distinguished the boundary between glory and disgrace. But that was all. He was one who was not anxious about [the things of] the world, but there was still ground he left unturned. Now, Liezi went riding the wind. Gracefully fine it was. Only after ten and five days did he return. The former, in regard to the highest good fortune, was not anxious. The latter, although he avoided walking, still had something he relied upon. If he had only ridden the true course of Heaven and Earth, and mounted the

宋榮子

列子

Bryan W. Van Norden

氣 changes of the six *qi*, so as to wander the limitless, then what would he have had to rely upon! Hence it is said, "The highest person has no self. The daemonic person has no achievement. The sagely person has no fame."<sup>45</sup>

We have, then, four levels. (1) The lowest level is that of the cicada, dove, quail, and others whose talents suit them only for minor achievements, but who scoff at the life of the sage. (2) The next level is exemplified by Song Rongzi, who was indifferent to the praise and blame of the world as well as the common distinctions between glory and disgrace.<sup>46</sup> (3) Still higher is Liezi, whose actions seem magical. The only limitation he has is that there is something that he "relied upon." (4) Finally, the description of the sage (symbolized by the Peng), is ecstatic, but lacks much content. However, we do know that the sage does not "rely upon" anything (not even the "magic" that Liezi uses), and that she has no "self," "achievement," or "fame."

Now that we have looked at the opening of the *Zhuangzi* in some detail, how well do relativism, particularism, and skepticism do in making sense of it? It seems hard to maintain a relativist reading of the passage. Relativism would hold that what the cicada, dove, and quail thought was true was true, from their perspective. But Zhuangzi's point seems clearly to be that the views of those "varmints" are simply mistaken. Perhaps the only error of the cicada, dove, and quail is their failure to recognize that their own perspective on the world is not privileged; there are other perspectives on the world that are just as "allowable" as their own. However, recognition that one's own perspective is not privileged does *not* entail that one should not or cannot judge others. The cicada, dove, and quail are *not* violating relativism by ridiculing the Peng, because relative to their perspective the Peng *is* ridiculous.

The unfavorable comparison of the "varmints" to the Peng and the spiritual hierarchy at the end of the passage seem to require an objectivist reading. At least, I cannot see how else to make sense of them. But this leaves us with a serious problem. For, as we saw, parts of the Inner Chapters suggest relativism, and other parts suggest skepticism. How are we to reconcile these with the seemingly objectivist passages?

#### A Proposed Synthesis

In order to see our way out of this tangle, I think we need to get a clearer idea of what Zhuangzi's "positive project" is. In other words, what is the "highest person," "sage," or "daemonic person" like? Consider the passage in *Ren jian shi*, in which Confucius tells Yan Hui to "fast" his heart:

顏回

"Do not listen with your ears, but listen with your heart. Do not listen with your heart, but listen with the *qi*. Listening stops at the ears. The heart stops at

Philosophy East & West

what matches it. The *qi* is empty and waits upon things. The Way alone accumulates emptiness.<sup>47</sup> Emptiness is the fasting of the heart."

Yan Hui said, "When I had not yet begun to receive your guidance, I was definitely Hui. Now that I have received your guidance, there has never been a Hui. Can this be called emptiness?"

The master said, "Exactly!"<sup>48</sup>

This passage presents a hierarchy of sources of guidance. We might seek guidance from (1) what our ears hear (that is, from words or doctrines), (2) from our heart, or (3) from the *qi*. Zhuangzi advises us to avoid listening to either doctrines or our heart. Instead, we should fast or empty our heart, so that we can be guided by the *qi*. When we succeed in doing so, we will (like Yan Hui) experience a loss of our sense of being an individual self.<sup>49</sup>

It is not often noticed that this passage closely parallels *Mengzi* 2A2, in which Mencius says:

Gaozi said, "What you do not get from doctrines (*yan*), do not seek for in your heart. What you do not get from your heart, do not seek for in the *qi*." "What you do not get from your heart, do not seek for in the *qi*," is allowable. "What you do not get from doctrines, do not seek for in your heart," is unallowable.<sup>50</sup>

告子 言

Here we have the same hierarchy of doctrines, heart, and *qi*, but with a very different evaluation.<sup>51</sup> Mencius agrees with Zhuangzi (and both disagree with Gaozi) in holding that doctrines are not to be regarded as the ultimate source of moral guidance.<sup>52</sup> However, Mencius disagrees with Zhuangzi, in that he advocates cultivating, rather than fasting, the impulses of the heart, and holds that the *qi* is not a source of moral guidance.

What is the consequence of fasting, as opposed to cultivating, the heart? Recall that the heart is the seat of evaluative judgments, including (as Mencius stresses) *shi* and *fei*, "approval" and "disapproval."<sup>53</sup> Recall, further, that it is specifically "approval" and "disapproval" that Zhuangzi regards as relative terms in *Qi wu lun*. Consequently, fasting the heart will lead to a de-emphasis of that sort of relative ethical judgment. That is, the sage will be less inclined to make judgments of approval and disapproval, and will regard those judgments as less important. Does this mean that the sage's life will be aimless and desultory? No, because Zhuangzi thinks there is another source of guidance besides the heart. The sage will be guided by the impersonal *qi*.

Achieving the state in which one is guided by the *qi* is very difficult because (as Mencius' doctrine of the four sprouts emphasizes) humans naturally and spontaneously make evaluative judgments. Indeed, part of the attraction of Mencian thought is that it appeals to what seem (to many of us, at least) to be our pre-reflective, commonsense ethical

Bryan W. Van Norden

明

convictions, including compassion toward suffering creatures,<sup>54</sup> greater concern for friends and relatives than for complete strangers,<sup>55</sup> and shame at being treated with contempt.<sup>56</sup> Consequently, Zhuangzi will have to get the average person to stop listening to common sense, as it is embodied both in what most people say (“do not listen with your ears”) and in the convictions of one’s heart (“do not listen with your heart”), before she can achieve “Illumination” (*ming*). I think Zhuangzi saw that skeptical arguments can play an important role in achieving this goal.

How? Remember that there are a variety of different kinds of skepticism, and a variety of uses to which skeptical arguments can be put. Plato, for example, used the technique of Socratic questioning to induce doubt, but only as a means of making the mind receptive to real knowledge. Descartes tried to doubt everything, but he did so as a means to finding an “Archimedean point” of certainty from which he could reconstruct genuine knowledge. In general, we might use the term *therapeutic skepticism* to refer to the use of skeptical arguments to clear away previous convictions in order to make one more receptive to different convictions. Zhuangzi, I submit, is a therapeutic skeptic. He uses skeptical arguments to make us doubt many of our commonsense beliefs. But his goal is not merely to leave us in a state of doubt; his goal is to use doubt to make us more receptive to different convictions. He disorients us so that he can reorient us. Or, to use his own vocabulary, Zhuangzi employs therapeutic skepticism as a way of making the heart “empty,” so that one can successfully “listen with the *qi*.”

The importance of overcoming limited, commonsense views is also suggested by the opening of the Inner Chapters. The cicada, dove, and quail, relying on their common sense, ridicule the majestic and miraculous Peng, and Zhuangzi condemns them for it. Furthermore, the spiritual hierarchy at the end of the passage represents greater and greater separation from common sense. Song Rongzi is praised for rejecting conventional views about honor and disgrace, and the magical behavior of Liezi and the highest sage defies common sense.

大宗師

But if Zhuangzi wants us to go beyond common sense, what about the orthodox advice concerning the “great restrictions” he has Confucius offer in *Ren jian shi*?<sup>57</sup> There are a number of strategies for integrating these comments with the anticonventionalism of other parts of the *Zhuangzi*. I shall examine only three of them. It may be that (1) Confucius’ discussion of the “great restrictions” represents merely a stage along the road to complete sagehood that will later be surpassed. This reading gains support from the fact that in other passages Confucius is represented as being inferior to other sages, as in the *Da zong shi*, where he comments that certain sages “are such as wander beyond the realm, while I am such as wander within the realm.”<sup>58</sup> Alternatively, Lee Yearley has proposed that (2) there are two distinct visions of sagehood

Philosophy East & West

within the *Zhuangzi*: the radical and the conventional.<sup>59</sup> The view that everyone is bound by the “great restrictions” might be part of a domesticated, exoteric Daoist vision, while the view that the sage completely ceases to make ethical judgments is part of a more extreme, esoteric vision. Finally, it may be that (3) according to Zhuangzi, the highest sage *does* continue to make ethical judgments. However, she makes them in awareness of their relativity, and is primarily guided by the promptings of the *qi*. (After all, Zhuangzi has Confucius advise us to “fast” the heart, not to “starve” it.) This reading is suggested by Watson’s interpretation of a passage from *Qi wu lun*:

Therefore the sage . . . too recognizes a “this,” but a “this” which is also “that,” a “that” which is also “this.” His “that” has both a right and a wrong in it; his “this” too has both a right and a wrong in it.<sup>60</sup>

Also suggestive of the third interpretation is Zhuangzi’s comment that “Outside the six directions the sage exists but does not categorize. Within the six directions, the sage categorizes but does not debate.”<sup>61</sup>

My tentative suggestion (made with full awareness of the difficulty of achieving certainty on so subtle a point) is that the highest sage does *not* make evaluative judgments at all. Several passages suggest this. For example, Zhuangzi writes that “The true persons of old did not know to delight in life. They did not know to hate death. . . . This is called not hurting the Way with the heart.”<sup>62</sup> Similarly, when Yan Hui tells Confucius that he has become “identical with the great universal,” Confucius comments, “If you are identical with it, then you are without fondnesses.”<sup>63</sup>

If the highest sage does not make evaluative judgments, this leaves us with the first and second interpretations. It may be that both are true to a certain extent. I suspect that Zhuangzi thought that true “Illumination” consisted in not making evaluative judgments at all. However, Zhuangzi, despite all his fancies, was, like almost all early Chinese philosophers, interested in providing practical advice that people could actually follow. Recognizing that few could achieve and consistently maintain the emptiness of heart he thought ideal, he held out the lesser ideal of the sage who lives within the restrictions of conventional moral judgments, while recognizing that these judgments are not expressions of the Will of Heaven.

We are now in a position to see how Zhuangzi’s particularism differs from that of his contemporaries. Zhuangzi, I submit, stresses particularism for two reasons. First, it is important for us to recognize that the sage acts differently, not because she is foolish, but because her goals are different from those of ordinary people. Different goals make different actions appropriate. There is no perfectly general rule for how people should behave independently of their ends. Second, by stressing flexible responsiveness to particular contexts, Zhuangzi encourages us to think in creative and nontraditional ways. This frees the mind to see the value of

Bryan W. Van Norden

the Daoist way of life. One who has achieved the intellectual flexibility to recognize that a gourd (although normally used as a ladle) can (if big enough) also serve as a boat has also achieved the flexibility to see the value in things at which the many laugh.<sup>64</sup>

### Summary and Conclusion

Zhuangzi's sage rejects almost all of the judgments and convictions that characterize conventional common sense. Consequently, before one can achieve the Illumination characteristic of the sage, one must be made to doubt many of one's ordinary convictions, including the belief that death is a great loss, and that earthly fame and success are great goods. Zhuangzi employs a sort of therapeutic skepticism to help instill doubt about these convictions. Also helpful in walking the path toward Illumination is Zhuangzi's stress on particularism, which gets us used to seeing old things in new ways.

天志  
天命  
Part of achieving Illumination is coming to see that conventional ethical judgments are not an expression of "Heaven's intent" (*Tian zhi*) or "Heaven's decree" (*Tian ming*), but are merely a kind of self-assertion. These judgments, being mere expressions of preference, are relative. Instead of clinging to these expressions of preference, the sage empties her heart, and is guided by the impersonal *qi*, which flows through all things. When she does so, her mind becomes like a placid pool, which mirrors what is before it. And like Cook Ding, she "follows the way things inherently are," as opposed to the way her heart would like things to be, and thereby manifests amazing skillfulness.

The Inner Chapters raise deep and difficult issues about human life. They deserve careful and detailed critical treatment that I cannot give them here. However, I would like, in closing, at least to sketch some of the philosophic issues raised by Zhuang Zhou. What does the life of Zhuangzi's sage have to recommend it? Two features stand out. The sage manifests almost miraculous skillfulness, and she is, in a sense, impervious to injury.

无爲  
有爲  
Zhuangzi is right to draw our attention to the beauty and efficiency of *wu wei* (inaction).<sup>65</sup> This is something that has been either ignored or denigrated by most Western philosophers, in favor of *you wei*. Nonetheless, our popular culture places high value on certain forms of *wu wei*. Thus, crowds marvel at the basketball player who is "in the zone" or "unconscious." As important and impressive as *wu wei* is, however, one wonders whether such activity can really be the paradigm for one's life as a whole. Especially in a society as complicated and rapidly changing as our own, it seems that *you wei* activity will have to predominate. After all, even the top athletes turn to *you wei* when renegotiating their contracts.

Philosophy East & West  
In what way is Zhuangzi's sage impervious to harm? Sometimes (as in the opening of the Inner Chapters) Zhuangzi describes the sage in

terms that suggest she has magical powers. However, it is at least possible to read these descriptions allegorically.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, given what Zhuangzi tells us about the sage, we can see that she does not need the assistance of magic to be impervious. If one lacks a self, and lacks the preferences and commitments that are definitive of a self, then there is no self to be injured or to suffer loss. Students of Western philosophy will recognize Zhuangzi's sage as someone who is attempting to escape what Martha Nussbaum has called "the fragility of goodness." It seems that goodness is fragile because luck is required in order successfully to lead a flourishing life.<sup>67</sup> In the West, various thinkers (most notably Platonists and Stoics) have thought it was possible to escape the need for such luck, by living a life in accordance with reason. From this perspective, what is striking about Zhuangzi's sage is that she, too, attempts to escape the fragility of goodness, but she does so without any emphasis on reason.

Now, there is undeniably something attractive about escaping "that monster, Fortune . . . [who] pretends to be friendly to those she intends to cheat, and disappoints those she unexpectedly leaves with intolerable sorrow."<sup>68</sup> But doing so has its costs, and it is far from clear whether the price is worth paying. What good, after all, is it if "I" achieve invulnerability, at the cost of eliminating all the commitments that made this "I" what it was? At this point we begin to see more clearly, I think, the choice that Mencius and Zhuangzi represent within Chinese thought. Zhuangzi asks us to transform ourselves, so that, like the Peng, we can fly high above ordinary human life. Even though we continue to exist and act within human society, we will not share the beliefs and commitments of ordinary humans. We will "walk without touching the ground."<sup>69</sup> In contrast, Mencius offers us a life rich in commitments and, consequently, vulnerability: "Determined scholars do not forget they may end up in a ditch; courageous scholars do not forget they may lose their heads" (*Mengzi* 3B1, 5B7). And although Mencius tells us to cultivate ourselves, this cultivation will strengthen, rather than uproot, our natural instincts and inclinations:

The Way lies in what is near, but people seek it in what is distant. One's task lies in what is easy, but people seek it in what is difficult. If everyone would treat their kin as kin should be treated, and treat their elders as elders should be treated, the world would be at peace.<sup>70</sup>

## NOTES

I am indebted to P. J. Ivanhoe, Paul Kjellberg, Eric Schwitzgebel, and two anonymous referees for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

Bryan W. Van Norden



- 1 – A. C. Graham, “Taoist Spontaneity and the Dichotomy of ‘Is’ and ‘Ought,’” in Victor Mair, ed., *Experimental Essays on Chuang-tzu* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983), pp. 3–23. For criticisms of ideal observer theories similar to Graham’s, see Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 83–92. For criticisms directed specifically at Graham’s version, see Yukio Kachi’s comments, and Graham’s response, in *Philosophy East and West* 40 (3) (July 1990): 389–398 and 399, respectively. See also Herbert Fingarette, “Reason, Spontaneity, and the *Li*—A Confucian Critique of Graham’s Solution to the Problem of Fact and Value”; Henry Rosemont, “Who Chooses?”; and Graham’s responses to these papers, in Henry Rosemont, ed., *Chinese Texts and Philosophical Contexts* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1991), pp. 209–225, 227–263, and 297–321, respectively.
- 2 – Chad Hansen, “A *Tao* of *Tao* in Chuang-tzu,” in Mair, *Experimental Essays on Chuang-tzu*, pp. 24–55. Hansen presents a different interpretation of Zhuangzi in *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), chap. 8. See my review of this book in *Ethics* 105 (2) (January 1995): 433–435. For Harman’s views, see note 10 below.
- 3 – Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1985), pp. 192–194, 215–237.
- 4 – Lee Yearley, “The Perfected Person in the Radical Chuang-tzu,” in Mair, *Experimental Essays on Chuang-tzu*, pp. 125–139. For a critical discussion of these and other interpretations of the *Zhuangzi*, see Paul Kjellberg, “Zhuangzi and Skepticism” (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1993). A series of new and challenging interpretations of the *Zhuangzi* is forthcoming in Paul Kjellberg and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds., *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism and Ethics in the Zhuangzi* (Albany, New York, SUNY Press, 1996).
- 5 – Paul Kjellberg, “Skepticism, Truth, and the Good Life: A Comparison of Zhuangzi and Sextus Empiricus,” *Philosophy East and West* 44 (1) (January 1994): 111–133; Lisa Raphals, “Skeptical Strategies in the *Zhuangzi* and *Theaetetus*,” *Philosophy East and West* 44 (3) (July 1994): 501–526.
- 6 – I assume in this essay that even if there is no one correct interpretation of a text like the *Inner Chapters*, there are (in some sense which is not purely subjective) better and worse interpretations. For criticisms of some of the more extreme alternative views, see John M. Ellis, *Against Deconstruction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), and Umberto Eco et al., *Interpretation and Over-interpretation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

- 7 – Philological analyses of the *Zhuangzi* suggest that the Inner Chapters, at least, are by one author. See A. C. Graham, “How Much of *Chuang-tzŭ* Did Chuang-tzŭ Write?” in his *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), pp. 283–321, and Harold Roth, “Who Compiled the *Chuang Tzu*?” in Rosemont, *Chinese Texts*, pp. 79–128.
- 8 – My interpretation is very similar to that advanced by P. J. Ivanhoe, in “Zhuangzi on Skepticism, Skill and the Ineffable *Dao*,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61 (4) (Winter 1993): 101–116. In addition, my understanding of “therapeutic skepticism” (see above, “A Proposed Synthesis”) has been influenced by Raphals’ notion of “method skepticism” (“Skeptical Strategies in the *Zhuangzi* and *Theaetetus*”).
- 9 – J. L. Mackie uses the term “moral scepticism [sic]” to refer to moral antirealism, the view that there are no objective moral facts or properties (see his *Ethics* [New York: Penguin Books, 1977], pp. 15–17). However, this is a nonstandard use. On this point, see David O. Brink, “Moral Realism and the Sceptical Arguments from Disagreement and Queerness,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 62 (2) (June 1984): 111–112.
- 10 – This is not the only way in which the phrase is used. What I am calling “ethical relativism” is very close to what Gilbert Harman has labeled “moral judgment relativism.” See his “What Is Moral Relativism?” in A. I. Goldman and J. Kim, eds., *Values and Morals* (Boston: D. Reidel, 1978), pp. 143–161. For another typology of kinds of relativism, see David Wong, “Relativism,” in Peter Singer, ed., *A Companion to Ethics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, 1991), pp. 442–450.
- 11 – For a discussion and defense of particularism, see Jonathan Dancy, “Ethical Particularism and Morally Relevant Properties,” *Mind* 92 (1983): 530–547. I use the term “particularism” more broadly than Dancy, to cover both what he calls “particularism” and what he would call “pluralism.”
- 12 – The term “Objectivism” is also used to describe the philosophy of Ayn Rand. I am *not* using the term in that sense, however.
- 13 – Martha Nussbaum is the contemporary philosopher who has done the most to explicate and defend these aspects of Aristotle’s thought. See, e.g., her *The Fragility of Goodness* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), esp. pp. 298–306, and *Love’s Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), esp. pp. 54–105. See also the seminal essay by David Wiggins, “Deliberation and Practical Reason,” in A. O. Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aris-*

Bryan W. Van Norden

*tote's Ethics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 221–240.

14 – Strictly speaking, ethical skepticism would be consistent with individual relativism given one assumption: one cannot *know* what one's own beliefs are. However, while it is true that we may have some subconscious beliefs that we do not know we have, it seems very implausible to suggest that we cannot know *any* of our own ethical beliefs.

15 – This is almost certainly a criticism of Mencius, who refers to “the sprout of benevolence” and “the sprout of righteousness” in *Mengzi* 2A6.

孟子

16 – Translations are my own, although I have relied heavily on Burton Watson, *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), and A. C. Graham, *Chuang-Tzŭ: The Inner Chapters* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1981). For comparative purposes, I shall provide references to the corresponding passages in these translations, and in the Harvard-Yenching concordance to the *Zhuangzi*: Graham, *Inner Chapters*, p. 58; Watson, *Basic Writings*, pp. 40–41; HY 6/2/64–65, 70. I have also made use of the commentary in Guo Qingfan, ed., *Zhuangzi jishi* (Taipei: Huazheng Shuju, 1987), and the commentary and translations in Huang Jinhong, *Zhuangzi duben* (Taipei: Sanmin Shuju, 1974).

郭慶藩，莊子集釋

黃錦鉉，莊子讀本

17 – For the former, see Graham, *Inner Chapters*, pp. 59–60; Watson, *Basic Writings*, pp. 42–43; HY 6/2/79–81. For the latter, see Graham, *Inner Chapters*, p. 61; Watson, *Basic Writings*, p. 45; HY 7/2/94–96. The fact that the term “transformation” (*hua*) is common to both the Butterfly Dream story and the description of the Peng (see above, “A Passage”) suggests that the point of the former is not purely skeptical. Zhuang Zhou's “transformation” may also represent the transformation into sagehood.

化

18 – Graham, *Inner Chapters*, p. 52; Watson, *Basic Writings*, p. 34; HY 4/2/25–27.

19 – Graham, *Inner Chapters*, p. 53; Watson, *Basic Writings*, p. 35; HY 4/2/29–31.

20 – Graham, *Inner Chapters*, p. 53; Watson, *Basic Writings*, pp. 35–36; HY 4/2/33–34.

21 – Compare the monkeys Zhuangzi describes later in the *Qi wu lun*, who are furious when they are given three nuts in the morning and four in the evening, but are content when given four in the morning and three in the evening (Graham, *Inner Chapters*, p. 54; Watson, *Basic Writings*, p. 36; HY 5/2/38–39).

Philosophy East & West

- 22 – On this issue, see David Wong, “Universalism vs. Love with Distinctions,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 16 (3/4) (September/December 1989): 251–272.
- 23 – Logicians would express this by saying that *shi* and *fei* are (like “taller than”) “two-place predicates.” Of course, Zhuangzi has given us no evidence that *all* evaluative terms must be two-place predicates, nor has he shown that there are no objective facts.
- 24 – Graham, *Inner Chapters*, p. 70; Watson, *Basic Writings*, p. 56; HY 10/4/39–41.
- 25 – HY 8/3/12.
- 26 – HY 7/3/6: *yi hu tian li*.
- 27 – HY 7/3/7: *yin qi gu ran*. The mirroring metaphors of the Inner Chapters also seem to be most naturally read in an objectivist fashion; see HY 13/5/9–10, 17–18.
- 28 – Graham, *Inner Chapters*, pp. 46–47; Watson, *Basic Writings*, pp. 28–29; HY 2/1/35–42.
- 29 – See, e.g., *Mengzi* 4A17, 4B29, 4B31, 5B1.
- 30 – Graham, *Inner Chapters*, p. 43; Watson, *Basic Writings*, p. 23; HY 1/1/1–2.
- 31 – Further disorientation is provided by a pun, since *kun* can mean baby fish or fish eggs.
- 32 – Graham, *Inner Chapters*, p. 43; Watson, *Basic Writings*, p. 23; HY 1/1/3–5.
- 33 – Watson, *Basic Writings*, p. 23 n. 3.
- 34 – According to Hanfeizi, there were eight competing Confucian sects by his time, and the Mohist school broke into three competing sects after the death of Mozi. (For the reference to Hanfeizi, see Burton Watson, trans., *Han Fei Tzu: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), p. 118. On the Mohist schism, see A. C. Graham, *Divisions in Early Mohism Reflected in the Core Chapters of Mo-tzu* (Singapore: Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1985))
- 35 – See *Mengzi* 5A4, 7B3, and *Analects* 2:23, 3:9, 9:15, 15:26 (sectioning as in the Harvard-Yenching text).
- 36 – Graham, *Inner Chapters*, p. 43; Watson, *Basic Writings*, pp. 23–24; HY 1/1/5–8.
- 37 – Graham, *Inner Chapters*, pp. 43–44; Watson, *Basic Writings*, p. 24; HY 1/1/8–9.
- 38 – Of course, this is the interpretation favored by Guo Xiang.

依乎天理

因其固然

韓非子

郭象

Bryan W. Van Norden

- 39 – Victor Mair, trans., *Tao Te Ching* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), p. 7.
- 40 – Graham, *Inner Chapters*, p. 44; Watson, *Basic Writings*, p. 24; *HY* 1/1/9–13.
- 之二蟲 41 – The reference to “those two varmints” (*zhi er chong*) seems most naturally read as a reference to the cicada and the dove, although Guo Xiang (incredibly, I think) takes it to be a reference to the cicada and the Peng bird. But surely, if Zhuangzi had wished to refer to the Peng bird as well he would have referred to “those three varmints.”
- 秋水 42 – Watson, *Basic Writings*, p. 27; Graham, *Inner Chapters*, p. 46; *HY* 2/1/30–31. Compare also the story in *Qiu shui* (Watson, *Basic Writings*, pp. 107–108; *HY* 45/17/69–75) of the well-frog who has not heard of the ocean.
- 43 – Graham, *Inner Chapters*, p. 44; Watson, *Basic Writings*, pp. 24–25; *HY* 1/1/13–17.
- 44 – Kjellberg discusses the possibility (suggested by Guo Xiang) that the dove and the quail represent two different kinds of failure: the dove envies the flight of the Peng, while the quail criticizes it. Instead, each (according to Guo Xiang) should be satisfied with the sort of flight that is appropriate to it, and neither envy nor criticize others. See Kjellberg, “Zhuangzi and Skepticism,” p. 13 n. 5.
- 45 – Graham, *Inner Chapters*, pp. 44–45; Watson, *Basic Writings*, pp. 25–26; *HY* 2/1/18–22.
- 46 – For more on Song Rongzi, see Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 1 : 148–153.
- 47 – Guo Xiang and Watson understand this line as meaning “The Way accumulates in emptiness.”
- 48 – Graham, *Inner Chapters*, pp. 68–69; Watson, *Basic Writings*, p. 54; *HY* 9/4/26–29.
- 49 – Compare Zhuangzi’s observation that “The highest person has no self” (see above, ref. note 45).
- 50 – One philosopher who has drawn attention to the parallel between this passage and the *Ren jian shi* passage is David S. Nivison, to whose work I am deeply indebted. See his “Philosophical Voluntarism in Fourth Century China,” in David S. Nivison, *Investigations in Chinese Philosophy* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, forthcoming).

- 51 – The related hierarchy of doctrines, intention (*zhi*), and *qi* is found in the *Zuo zhuan*, Duke Zhao, year 9. See James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, *The Ch'un Ts'ew with The Tso Chuen* (Taipei: SMC Publishing, 1991), p. 626, 2d col. (English); p. 624, leftmost line (Chinese). 左傳
- 52 – Of course, this agreement is rather thin. While Mencius thinks our heart is the ultimate source of moral guidance, he also thinks the doctrines of the sages have a moral importance that Zhuangzi would never allow them (cf. *Mengzi* 4A1).
- 53 – See, e.g., *Mengzi* 2A6, 6A6.
- 54 – See, e.g., *Mengzi* 1A7, 2A6.
- 55 – See, e.g., *Mengzi* 3A5, 4B24, 7A45.
- 56 – See, e.g., *Mengzi* 6A10, 7B31.
- 57 – See above, “Distinctions and Tensions” under “Objectivism.”
- 58 – Graham, *Inner Chapters*, p. 89; Watson, *Basic Writings*, p. 83; *HY* 18/6/66–67.
- 59 – Yearley, “The Perfected Person.” In contrast to the view I examine here, Yearley seems to hold that the Inner Chapters consistently present the radical vision, while only later portions of the *Zhuangzi* (esp. chap. 17, the *Qiu shui*), consistently develop the conventional vision.
- 60 – Translation by Watson, *Basic Writings*, p. 35. Compare Graham, *Inner Chapters*, pp. 52–53 (note that Graham divides the text differently), and *HY* 4/2/29–30.
- 61 – Graham, *Inner Chapters*, p. 57; Watson, *Basic Writings*, p. 39; *HY* 5/2/56–57.
- 62 – Graham, *Inner Chapters*, p. 85; Watson, *Basic Writings*, p. 74; *HY* 15/6/7–9.
- 63 – Graham, *Inner Chapters*, p. 92; Watson, *Basic Writings*, p. 87; *HY* 19/6/92–93. Of the two passages I cite above as possible evidence for the third interpretation, the first need not be interpreted in the way Watson recommends (compare my translation above, “Distinctions and Tensions” under “Relativism”). The second passage is consistent with the possibility that the highest sages will avoid allowing themselves to be drawn “within the six directions.” Consequently, how we interpret these passages will depend upon what other portions of the Inner Chapters suggest about the nature of the sage.
- 64 – This understanding of the importance of particularism for Zhuangzi was suggested by my student Gwen Parker (in conversation).

Bryan W. Van Norden

- 65 – This phrase occurs only three times in the Inner Chapters: *HY* 3/1/47, 16/6/29, and 18/6/70. Kjellberg suggests that the common view that “inaction” is a central part of Zhuangzi’s thought is due largely to the historical influence of Guo Xiang’s commentary (Kjellberg, “Zhuangzi and Skepticism,” p. 29). However, I think that Guo Xiang may be correct in holding that “inaction” is illustrated throughout the Inner Chapters (as in the discussion of Cook Ding), even when the phrase *wu wei* is not used.
- 66 – Compare the discussion of this point in Watson, *Basic Writings*, p. 7.
- 67 – See Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, esp. chap. 1. By “goodness” here I mean whatever is necessary to live a flourishing, worthwhile life. A related notion in contemporary discussions is “moral luck,” which refers to the good fortune required for *moral* value, as opposed to the luck required for leading a worthwhile life overall. See Bernard Williams, “Moral Luck,” in his *Moral Luck* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 20–39, and Thomas Nagel, “Moral Luck,” in his *Mortal Questions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 24–38.
- 68 – Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Richard Green (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 21.
- 69 – Graham, *Inner Chapters*, p. 69; Watson, *Basic Writings*, p. 54; *HY* 9/4/30.
- 70 – *Mengzi* 4A11.