

Article

The Zhuangist Primitivist Attitude Towards Technology: Further Questions for Thinking about Technological Orientation

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Abstract: As early as the year 2004, a challenge has been issued for Filipinos to respond philosophically towards technology. Briefly, the challenge is to move out from the state of ambivalent orientation in technology. Such an orientation is a sorry state of tension between the views of technology as alienating humans and technology as advancing ourselves. Technology alienates humans, thereby creating dangerous technophobes. Technology uplifts and advances humans, thereby creating over-tolerant technophiles. In this paper, we offer two further issues or questions for consideration in thinking about orientation in or stance about technology. We do this in the light of the Zhuangzi's Primitivist attitude towards technology. The Primitivist is one of the five authorial voices identified in the Zhuangzi. The Zhuangzi is a Chinese philosophical classic named after Zhuang Zhou or Zhuangzi (399?-295? B.C.E.). Fundamentally, we suggest that the Primitivist attitude of resistance towards technology might be said to highlight the point that effects of technology to *xing* 性 (nature; human nature), thus to individual self, and the natural environment are important considerations in thinking about stance regarding technology. We hold that a reflection on technological orientation would on the whole benefit from a recognition and consideration of two more issues.

Keywords: The Zhuangzi, Zhuangist primitivism, philosophy of technology, technological orientation

A challenge to have a philosophical response towards technology among Filipinos has been issued as early as 2004.¹ It is the challenge to move out from the state of ambivalent orientation in technology. The state is one of the tensions between the views of technology as alienating and technology as advancing us humans. The challenge is to resolve the tension, given such considerations as: (i) technological interface, (ii) politics of artifacts, (iii) technological design, and (iv) ideology of technology. In this paper, we wish to offer further concerns or issues about an orientation in technology. We do this in the light of the insights from *Zhuangzi's* Primitivist attitude towards technology. The Primitivist is one of the five authorial voices in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子.² Fundamentally, we suggest that the Primitivist attitude might be said to highlight the point that effects of technology to *xing* 性 (nature; human nature), thus to individual self, and the natural environment are important considerations in thinking about one's stance regarding technology.

There is a challenge for people to move out from an ambivalent orientation to technology, which is a sorry state of tension between the views of technology *as alienating humans* and technology *as advancing ourselves*. It is not the challenge of taking the anti-technology view of Theodore Kaczynski, the Unabomber.³ Kaczynski's view could be used to stimulate thinking about technology in our midst. This is the case, given a third 'technological orientation,' that of *ambivalence*. Technological ambivalence is the seeming ineluctable upshot condition due to undesirable consequences ensued by the orientations of technology *as alienation* and technology *as progress*.⁴ In alienating humans, technology has created dangerous technophobes.⁵ In uplifting and advancing us, technology has created over-tolerant technophiles.⁶ Such an ambivalence is seen in the thinking composed both of

¹ See Orlando Ali M. Mandane, Jr., "Towards a Filipino Orientation in Technology," in *Ad Veritatem*, 3 (2004), 427–444.

² The *Zhuangzi* is a Chinese classic named after Zhuangzi, or Zhuang Zhou 莊周 (399? – 295? B.C.E.). The classic's extant version is composed of 33 chapters. Although only the first seven chapters (called *neipian* 內篇 or 'inner chapters') of the text are said to have been written by Zhuangzi and are said to contain the earliest sections of the extant compilation, it is not to be denied that the classic is a compilation of texts written by many authors from different time periods. The other voices are: the historical Zhuangzi, Zhuangzi's later followers, Yangist, and Syncretist. See Harold Roth, "Zhuangzi," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/zhuangzi/>>.

³ See Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), "Famous Cases and Criminals: The Unabomber," <<https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/unabomber>>.

⁴ See Mandane, Jr., "Towards a Filipino Orientation in Technology," 438–439.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 438.

⁶ *Ibid.*

themes of *Down with technology!* and *Hurrah for technology!*. One example is one's thinking that (i) developing atomic bombs is not right and (ii) that guns are necessary.⁷ According to the example, the thinking manifests the theoretical tension between agreeing with technology and doing away with it because one who thinks atomic bomb development should not be done believes that such a technology ought to be stopped and one who believes that guns are a necessity believes that such a tool and its development should be continued. The problem appears to be how the tension might be resolved. This seems clear in the question: "amid our technological ambivalence what shall be the basis for clarifying our orientations?"⁸ This question points to identification of issues that point to a basis.

The issues are as follows: (i) technological interface, (ii) politics of artifacts, (iii) technological design, and (iv) ideology of technology. The issue of technological interface is the consideration of the kinds of interaction humans have and would have with technology.⁹ The point appears that with the diverse forms of engagement, those technologies needing 'rather full engagements' should be zeroed in on. That is the case, since 'more of us' (i.e., more time and attention) is required. The politics of artifacts issue is the question of whether one has considered the intent of the creation of a technology in terms of its effects on humans in general or a group of people in particular.¹⁰ The idea seems that if a technology deserves our attention, it must be the case that it respects (human) rights or at least it caters to the needs of the many. The issue of technological design is the question of whether one has considered and respected the context of a technology.¹¹ There are technologies designed to meet only the needs or conditions of a particular place; if in the adoption of that technology its context is not considered, there will certainly be consequences (for the ecosystem). The idea then is to be aware of design, with the ultimate aim of careful and considered adoption. Finally, the issue of ideology of technology is the question of whether one has considered a system or systems of thinking and values that a technology brings along with it.¹² The point is, in one's consideration of having an *un-*ambivalent philosophical view about technology, to be watchful of and critical towards these systems.

The challenge is real and important because to have the orientations of dangerous (terrorist-like) technophobia and over-tolerant technophilia is

⁷ *Ibid.*, 439.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 440.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 441.

not desirable. It seems possible to strike a balance between alienation and progress and yet not produce these very extreme views. The balance might be achieved by a conscientious consideration of the issues identified and maybe including two further issues offered in this paper in the light of insights from an ancient attitude towards technology or industrial society or civilization (culture).

The first part of the paper discusses the challenge to move out from the state of ambivalence. The second part discusses the Zhuangist Primitivist attitude towards technology and explores the ancient view and concludes that the view or attitude seemingly resembles the view of *technology as alienation*. And the third part of the paper discusses insights that seem to be offered by the ancient attitude. These insights are further questions or issues for thinking about a philosophical response towards technology.

The Zhuangist Primitivist Attitude Towards Technology

Before discussing the attitude towards technology of the so-called 'primitivist' author(s) in the *Zhuangzi*, an important point concerning the label must be noted here. It is true that the label 'Primitivist' (writer) is by the sinologist and philosopher Angus C. Graham (1919-1991),¹³ and that there is such a writer is a hypothesis. It is a hypothesis, however, that is not without a basis; Graham's labels are based on the work of Chinese scholars including Guan Feng 關鋒 (1918-2005).¹⁴ There appears no need for such a label for sections in the *Zhuangzi* text which convey criticisms of, among others, the Confucian school. Accordingly, it might be the case that what can be said is only that *sections of the Zhuangzi appear to convey resistance towards technology*. However, just as Frank Saunders Jr., in his paper "Primitivism in the *Zhuangzi*: An Introduction,"¹⁵ we adopt Graham's label here for the sake of convention. Given that the received *Zhuangzi*'s thirty-three chapters are classified differently by other scholars such as Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢 and Christopher Rand,¹⁶ Graham's identified strains are not canonical, but they

¹³ See A. C. Graham, *Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001), 197–217.

¹⁴ See Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1985), 216 and Steve Coutinho, "Zhuangzi," in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <<https://iep.utm.edu/zhuangzi-chuang-tzu-chinese-philosopher/>>.

¹⁵ See Frank Saunders Jr., "Primitivism in the *Zhuangzi*: An Introduction," in *Philosophy Compass*, 15 (2020), e12700, <<https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12700>>. See specifically endnote no. 1, where Saunders states his adoption and his reasons for doing so.

¹⁶ See Liu Xiaogan, *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters*, trans. William E. Savage (University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 1994); Christopher Rand, "Chuang Tzu: Text and

are recognized in *Zhuangzi* scholarship and are helpful (like the other classifications) in making sense of the thinker Zhuangzi and the *Zhuangzi* text as a whole.

A. C. Graham is known for the view that the Primitivist author of the *Zhuangzi* holds the view that technology is to be rejected. In *Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters*, his translation of the *neipian* and many sections of the classic, he relates a passage in chapter 12, “Tiandi” 天地 (“Heaven and Earth”), a passage which is seemingly strong about *Down with technology!*,¹⁷ to the Primitivist writings in the classic.¹⁸ The Primitivist is one of the five authorial voices in the classic. One of the voices is called ‘primitivist’, in that the text sections appear to convey *primitivism*, understood as the commitment to ideals from a time before what is called civilization. It is chapter 80 of the *Daodejing* 道德經 which is considered as the *locus classicus* of the view.¹⁹ The chapter idealizes a state or condition before civilization, conveying a stance against historical change. This gives the idea that Primitivism is essentially an interpretation of history. Primitivist thinking resists any suggestion of modification of or addition to the described ideal (past) state. That Primitivist thinking in the *Daodejing* is an interpretation of historical change has been discussed by Roger Ames.²⁰ In *The Art of Rulership: A Study of Ancient Chinese Political Thought*, he presents the philosophies of history of Confucian, Daoist, and Legalist (*fajia*) traditions to determine the philosophical orientation of the text under examination in the research work. The text is the “Zhushuxun” 主術訓 chapter of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子. Ames’s study reveals that the *Huainanzi* represents Confucian, Daoist, Legalist (*fajia*) and syncretic philosophies of history and “Zhushuxun” represents a combination of Daoist and Confucian interpretations. It is the Daoist tradition that is viewed as hinting at the Primitivist view.

Ames discusses the philosophies of history of these traditions because to him there is good evidence that a philosopher’s interpretation of history conveys their questions and philosophical goals.²¹ The goal of the Daoist-Primitivist thinker is anarchic and anti-progressivist in character.

Substance,” in *Journal of Chinese Religions*, 11 (1983), 5–58, <<https://doi.org/10.1179/073776983805308330>>; see also Coutinho, “Zhuangzi,” (section 2).

¹⁷ Graham uses these very words. See Graham, *Chuang Tzu*, 185.

¹⁸ See *Ibid.*

¹⁹ See Randall Peerenboom, “Beyond Naturalism: A Reconstruction of Daoist Environmental Ethics,” in *Environmental Philosophy in Asian Traditions of Thought*, ed. by J. Baird Callicott and John McRae (New York: SUNY Press, [1991] 2014), 159.

²⁰ See Roger Ames, *The Art of Rulership: A Study of Ancient Chinese Political Thought* (New York: SUNY Press, 1994), 1.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

There is a view by A. C. Graham that early post-Qin dynasty Primitivism is linked to anarchism.²² Primitivism as anarchic coincides with the view of Primitivism as reversion to a utopian past. Primitivism is antipathetic towards any addition to or modification of existing states of affairs, of the ideal state and age. Ames labels this historical stance as *regressive*. Consequently, it might be said that Primitivism's guiding principle is retention of the ideal state in antiquity. To him, chapter 80 of the *Daodejing* describes the Daoist utopia that is different from that of the Confucian tradition.²³ He identifies three notable features in its description. One, the state is small (in size and population), connoting weakness and vulnerability. (That this feature connotes these, according to him, could mean that the writer challenges Eastern Zhou thinking esteeming strength and power).²⁴ Two, it is a lifestyle that would make its people render modern technology (for convenience and military defense) useless that is conveyed, rather than raw primitivism. Three, the state is anarchic, in that it is non-authoritarian and that it directs the people to detachment from conventions or culture.²⁵ In this discussion, Primitivist thinking is anti-progressive. This position could be explained by the fact that Primitivism is equated just to the "paradise-lost" theme.²⁶ Derk Bodde (1909-2003), a sinologist, talks about Daoism as an expression of the theme. To him, the Daoists do not have a mythological explanation for the "fall" from the utopian era; he writes: "it is simply, for them, the inexorable concomitant of the rise of human civilization."²⁷ It is clear in Ames's work that historical change is to be resisted because it is intrusive towards the natural condition.

The "Tiandi" passage is a story about a certain Zigong's (子貢) realization concerning persons of *quande* 全德 (complete virtue), that in such persons' *xin* 心 (heart-mind) "results, profit, tricks to make things go,

²² See A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao* (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1989), 306. Qin dynasty inclusive dates are 221-206 B.C.E..

²³ See Ames, *Art of Rulership*, 6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 7-8. According to Roger Ames and David Hall, this interpretation is not exhaustive. They offer two other interpretations: militaristic and about virtues of living locally. See Roger Ames and David Hall, *Daodejing: A Philosophical Interpretation* (New York: Ballantine, 2003), 202-203.

²⁶ See Norman Girardot, "Chaotic 'Order' (*hun-tun*) and Benevolent 'Disorder' (*luan*) in the 'Chuang Tzu,'" in *Philosophy East and West*, 28 (1978), 299; Norman Girardot, *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism: The Theme of Chaos (Huntun)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 69; Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China (Volume 2: History of Scientific Thought)* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 99-115.

²⁷ Derk Bodde, "Myths of Ancient China," in *Mythologies of the Ancient World*, ed. by Samuel Noah Kramer (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), 393-394.

cunning”²⁸ (*gong li ji qiao* 功利機巧) are nowhere found. That is realized by Zigong from responses of the gardener to whom, upon seeing that he (the gardener) might be better off using a shadoof rather than pitching water by getting it through climbing down a well, Zigong brought up the idea of such an implement. In that the gardener’s view towards the recommendation is derision due to his un-named teacher’s teaching that the existence of machines (*ji* 機) leads to having a spirit (*shen* 神) that is unsettled (which is a state that *dao* 道 does not support), Zigong realizes that the gardener is one who cares not at all about praise and blame of the world (天下之非譽) for these bring no diminishment nor gain (無益損焉) to a person of complete *de* (virtue); the gardener is one such person. The passage is about a criticism of technology because the gardener rejects the recommendation of using shadoofs. A shadoof is a contrivance or technology because Zigong’s premise of implementing the tool is for further gain or maximum gain. Zigong expresses that the shadoof “can water a hundred fields, demanding very little effort and producing excellent results.”²⁹ Since the gardener knows shadoofs, his not using it is a choice on his part. His choice is based on a concern for not disrupting simple life, since, in the gardener’s own words, disrupted “pure simplicity” (純白),³⁰ again, leads to having an unsettled spirit (*shen* 神). The rejection of the recommendation is related to Zhuangist Primitivism because of the view expressed by Kongzi in the passage, in the following words:

He is a follower and practitioner of the tradition of the House of Hun-t’u... He perceives the oneness of everything, does not know about duality in it; he orders it as inward, does not order it as outward. Someone who by illumination enters into simplicity, by Doing Nothing reverts to the unhewn, who identifies himself with his nature and protects his daemon, as roams among the vulgar, is he really so astonishing to you? In any case, when it comes to the tradition of the House of Hun-t’u, how would you and I be adequate to understand it?³¹

To A. C. Graham, according to this, the gardener is a follower of Hundun 渾沌. Emperor Hundun is the character in the final passage of

²⁸ Graham, *Chuang Tzu*, 187.

²⁹ Zhuang Zi, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, trans. by Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 134.

³⁰ “Pure simplicity” is James Legge’s translation. See James Legge, *The Texts of Taoism* (Part 1) (New York: Dover, [1891] 1962), 320.

³¹ Graham, *Chuang Tzu*, 209.

“Yingdiwang” 應帝王, chapter seven of the *Zhuangzi* and who died because Shu 儵 and Hu 忽 bored openings (seven in number, for seven days) on him. Shu and Hu did that because they believed their act to be a repayment of Hundun’s generosity (he treated them kindly) and because each human being has seven holes for seeing, hearing, eating, and breathing. The idea is that the tradition of the House of Hundun is believed by the gardener to be about *wuwei* (Doing Nothing), about simplicity, the unhewn, according to Kongzi. Graham understands Hundun as the emperor who “represents the primal blob out of which the myriad things have not yet begun to divide.”³² In other words, Kongzi’s words are saying that the gardener is a practitioner of Primitivist thinking (in that Hundun represents a condition untainted by civilization).³³ The idea is that the gardener rejects Zigong’s suggestion because, as stated, *ji* 機 (machine) or technology makes the spirit un-fixed or unsettled (i.e. without rest),³⁴ a consequence of spoiled “pure simplicity.” That that is the case appears to account for Zigong’s realization; in the passage Zigong says that the gardener’s “purity” is “vast and unimpaired” (沕乎淳備哉).³⁵

Graham points out that the Zhuangist Primitivist author’s criticisms are not principally on technology or *ji* 機 (machine): the “criticisms centre not on practically useful devices but on moralism, ritualism, logical disputation, arts and luxuries.”³⁶ That this is pointed out might imply that there is no clear view about or attitude towards technology in the Primitivist authorial voice or that it cannot be said that the author does have a significant stance on the matter. It may be contended, however, that the author has a clear attitude on the matter and is worth considering. There are two reasons for this. One, there are points in the chapters categorized by him (A. C. Graham) as ‘primitivist’ which convey clearly the idea that *ji* 機 (machine) or technology necessarily does not have a place in a pristine world. Two, the theme *Down with technology!* in the “Tiandi” passage on Zigong’s realization seems to appear

³² *Ibid.*, 186.

³³ In that the last point of Kongzi appears to regard the gardener as having achieved a feat he could not possibly achieve, the view that Kongzi is criticizing is only one possible view. (This is a point we owe to Wai Wai Chiu.) Some scholars have understood the first statement of Kongzi’s words as saying that the gardener is a “bogus practitioner” of Hundun, suggesting criticism. The translation “bogus practitioner” is Burton Watson’s (see Zhuang Zi, *Complete Works*, 136). A. C. Graham is of the view that the gardener employed the *shu* 術 (strategy) of Hundun, as stated. See Graham, *Chuang Tzu*, 186.

³⁴ “Knowing no rest” is Burton Watson’s translation. See Zhuang Zi, *Complete Works*, 134.

³⁵ “Vast and complete is his purity” is Victor Mair’s translation. See Victor Mair, *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1994), 112.

³⁶ Graham, *Chuang Tzu*, 186.

in the Primitivist chapters, thereby suggesting a connection, which in turn implies that the *resistance towards ji* 機 (machine) or technology is an idea related to Primitivism. Each of these is discussed here.

No place for technology

There is textual evidence for the idea that, in “Mati” 馬蹄 (Chapter 9, “Horses’ Hooves”), what is criticized is moralism, ritualism, and arts. In the chapter, Bo Le 伯樂, the potter and the carpenter are likened to the sages. The author’s point appears to mean that the sages are to be seen as bearers of some knowledge of the past, or of (ancient) culture. It is a suggestion of the primitivists to regard “at least some cultural ends and standards with suspicion.”³⁷ The ‘cultural ends and standards’ here coincide with knowledge of (ancient) culture. In “Mati”’s mention of Bo Le, the author is concerned not entirely with what Bo Le has done to the “true nature” of the horses.³⁸ The writer is concerned with the deaths, given that it is written, “the horses that died before he finished were more than half.”³⁹ The problem seems to be that not many would have died if it were not for Bo Le’s doctrines. Might it be suggested that Bo Le’s techniques kill horses’ *xing* 性? The view of the author about what the potter and the carpenter do to clay and wood is that it is not the nature of these materials to be subjected to what the artisans have in mind. The section ends with lumping Bo Le and these artisans together to say disappointedly that they have been well regarded by many generations. They were regarded as models. Given this, the final point is that what Bo Le and the artisans did is what those who manage the kingdom did. If the expert artisans have subjected the materials to what they have in mind to these *materials’* detriment, the rulers have subjected their states to what they believe is correct, resulting in their constituents’ destruction or their losing of their primitive simplicity.

This view that the author of “Mati” is concerned about the killing of *xing* and losing of primitive simplicity is corroborated by the view that it is social order that is the guiding concern in the passage. The view is by Frank Saunders Jr.,⁴⁰ who understands the primitivists to be criticizing the way (*dao*)

³⁷ Frank Saunders Jr., “Primitivism in the *Zhuangzi*: An Introduction,” in *Philosophy Compass*, 15 (2020) e12700. <<https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12700>>.

³⁸ See Graham, *Chuang Tzu*, 204.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ See Frank Saunders Jr., “Xunzi and the Primitivists on Natural Spontaneity (*xing* 性) and Coercion,” in *Asian Philosophy*, 27 (2017), 210–226, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09552367.2017.1348930>>; See also section 4 of Saunders, “Primitivism in the *Zhuangzi*.”

of the Confucian Xunzi 荀子 (c. 310-220 B.C.E.), pointing out that the primitivists held what would have been the time's common-sensical view. Xunzi's suggestion of violating (people's) *xing* does not square with the intuition that such violation would cause harm to *xing*. On Saunders' account, the use of Bo Le indicates concern for the harm inflicted upon by the imposition of ways for social order, one of which might be Xunzi's. In chapter 12 of the *Xunzi*, as indicated by Saunders, Bo Le is put side by side with *junzi* 君子 (gentleman; paradigmatic person): 'And so Bo Le could not be deceived concerning horses, nor can the gentleman be deceived concerning people. This is the Way of a King with Clarity/Illumination (*ming* 明).'⁴¹ To Saunders, the idea is that just as the gentleman knows the people, so does Bo Le knows horses, and since the gentleman's knowledge of the people relates fundamentally to governing them, Bo Le's knowledge of horses relates fundamentally to governing horses. Accordingly, for Saunders, the use of Bo Le in the chapter appears to single out Xunzi, pointing out that Xunzi's way (*dao*) harms *xing*. Bo Le's doctrines for ordering are a failure because they harmed the animals. It is clear in the "Mati" that it is the doctrines of Bo Le, artisans and rulers which caused the destruction of *xing* and disintegration of 'purity.'

There appears to be an assumption that the sages, who are very likely to be Confucians, had direct connection with the rulers of the world who, like the artisans, had brought destruction to their subjects. The view is that the sages possess views about what is best for the people. The sages are portrayed to have the belief that *ren* 仁 (benevolence), *yi* 義 (righteousness), *yue* 樂 (music) and *li* 禮 (ritual or behavioral propriety) are extremely important. It seems also clear that the concepts are contrasted with what is natural and the unhewn. To the author, the sages' view is that it is necessary to discard Daoistic notions in order to put in Confucian ideals. To him, it is not necessary to put up these ideals. According to him, the sages bring with them notions that are not to be added to humanity's basic nature. They bring with them notions that would *make* humanity *useful* according to their cultural view – for libation vessels would not be made if the unhewn block is not disturbed or damaged.⁴² These notions would damage humanity's basic, natural nature, just as the unhewn block is damaged by doctrines. These notions or concepts may be thought of as deriving from knowledge from (ancient) culture. The notions are properly included in 'cultural artifices'.⁴³ 'Cultural artifices' is a label used by Frank Saunders Jr. That the notions or concepts may be thought

⁴¹ Saunders, "Xunzi and the Primitivists," 217.

⁴² See Graham, *Chuang Tzu*, 202.

⁴³ See Saunders, "Primitivism in the *Zhuangzi*."

of as coming from (ancient) culture is derived from the idea in *Lunyu* 論語 (the *Analects*) 3.14. On the face of it, the passage conveys the idea that Confucius revered Western Zhou culture and all succeeding decisions ought to be patterned after Zhou.⁴⁴ By saying that it is the error of the sages to have damaged the natural and unhewn, the author views these notions as, at the least, superfluous. There is no need for them.

The point in this chapter that there is no place for technology is clear in the contrast made between the Confucian concepts of *ren*, *yi*, *yue*, and *li* with what is natural and the unhewn. That the author views the notions as, at the least, superfluous, together with the derision of what the artisans offered, also conveys that there is no place for technology in the “uncarved simplicity” in the environment and in humans.⁴⁵

In “Pianmu” 駢拇 (Chapter 8, “Webbed Toes”), that (1) *ren* (benevolence) and *yi* (righteousness) do not belong to the essentials of humanity (*renjing* 人情), and that (2) *ren* (benevolence) and *yi* (righteousness) injure nature (*xing* 性) and do not go with the fine man and, together with an allusion to *yue* (music) and *li* (ritual or behavioral propriety) as nothing but unreasonable punctiliousness, tacitly point to the idea that the Confucian sages are the subject of the author’s criticism. This is also supported by the author’s seeming awareness of the analogy between the artisans and the rulers or sages, if not an elaboration on the point. That the carpenter’s instruments’ purpose diminishes or is against one’s nature (*xing*) is stated in tandem with the point about *yue* (music) and *li* (ritual or behavioral propriety). These points seem to conclude that (Confucian) cultural artifices are unnecessary, just as a sixth finger or webbed toes are “superfluous to [one’s] powers.”⁴⁶

The view that (Confucian) cultural (ancient) knowledge brought by the sages are to be rejected is clear in what Hagop Sarkissian calls the ‘darker side of Primitivism’.⁴⁷ The author of “Quque” 祛箴 (Chapter 10, “Rifling Trunks”) recommends exterminating the sages: the effect of which is the disappearance of great robbers. The recommendation is in light of the

⁴⁴ An alternative translation, though, by Robert Eno, points out that Confucius’s final statement is the idea that it is Confucius’s view that following Zhou is not choosing “to accord with Zhou culture” but following Zhou in the sense that Zhou is taken as the guide to supersede Zhou itself. See Robert Eno, trans., *The Analects Confucius: An Online Teaching Translation* (2015), 11, <[https://chinatxt.sitehost.iu.edu/Analects_of_Confucius_\(Eno-2015\).pdf](https://chinatxt.sitehost.iu.edu/Analects_of_Confucius_(Eno-2015).pdf)>.

⁴⁵ “Uncarved simplicity” is Burton Watson’s translation of 素樸. See Zhuang Zi, *Complete Works*, 105.

⁴⁶ Graham, *Chuang Tzu*, 201.

⁴⁷ See Hagop Sarkissian, “The Darker Side of Daoist Primitivism,” in *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 37 (2010), 312–329, <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6253.2010.01585.x>>.

author's view that the sages are merely packing up treasures for the great thief. The great thief is the giant thief put by the writer as one whose existence is imagined by common people as could not have been. The idea seems to be that sagely wisdom comes to nothing once a great thief comes along. It comes to nothing because "sagely laws" cover up the great robber's 'thieving self' — "without the Way of the sage Robber Chih would not walk."⁴⁸ That these sages refer to Confucian sages seems suggested by mention of the institution of *ren* (benevolence) and *yi* (righteousness). Extermination of the sages results in disappearance of great robbers because it is said that the emergence of great robbers is concomitant with the birth of a sage. According to the author, sages are thriving and they must die in order to stop these robbers. The rejection of (Confucian) cultural artifices is more pronounced in the author's view that the state of Qi is like someone who packed treasures for the great thief. It does this because the analogy appears to say that Qi should not have packed 'valuables'. The state, described as if the idealized state in chapter 80 of the *Daodejing*, 'packed' sagely wisdom by instituting "ancestral shrines and altars to the soil and the grain" or by organizing "provinces, districts, cities, villages, hamlets."⁴⁹ Graham's translation alludes to the point that what all this is doing is taking the (ancient) sages as models.⁵⁰ The author implies that Qi should not have done that because it is simply gathering a package for the great robber to pick up. Could it be said that he is saying that ancient sagely wisdom ought not to be acquired because it could just be used to cover up immorality? It is suggested here that that is the case.

In this chapter, that there is no place for technology is clear in the idea that *ren* and *yi* do not belong to the essentials of humanity (*renjing*). This may be thought as similar to the point in "Mati" that the Confucian notions are seen as superfluous. Accordingly, the idea also conveys that there is no place for technology in the "uncarved simplicity" in the environment and in humans.

The "Tiandi" passage and the Primitivist chapters

The passage in "Tiandi" on Zigong's realization includes a section that appears to link the passage to the Primitivist chapters. This section is the gardener's words that purport to portray who the followers of Kongzi are according to the author of the passage:

⁴⁸ Graham, *Chuang Tzu*, 208.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁵⁰ See *Ibid.*

... you must be one of those who broaden their learning in order to ape the sages, heaping absurd nonsense on the crowd, plucking the strings and singing sad songs all by yourself in hopes of buying fame in the world! You would do best to forget your spirit and breath, break up your body and limbs - then you might be able to get somewhere. You don't even know how to look after your own body - how do you have any time to think about looking after the world[?]⁵¹

According to these words, Confucius's followers are stiff and are not self-aware (or unable to govern oneself, *shen zhi buneng zhi* 身之不能治). They are stiff or rigid because their concentration is "putting the world in order" (*zhi tianxia* 治天下) and yet is construed as about promoting themselves or having a name for themselves. They are not self-aware or unable to govern oneself because they are too focused on learning, moralizing, and on rituals. In that the gardener's words contain the criticism of the followers as too focused on learning, as "mak[ing] themselves so learned to get to be like the sages" (博學以擬聖), the passage appears to echo condemnation of *haozhi* 好知 (fondness of knowledge) in the Primitivist chapters.

Haozhi is a compound which is prominent in the Primitivist chapters, given that it appears once in "Mati" and four times in "Quqie". In "Mati," *haozhi* is put as the result of the sages' teaching of the Confucian ideals. It is in the "Quqie" where *haozhi* is condemned. In "Quqie," *haozhi* is an act which brought about utter confusion (in the world). *Zhi* appears to refer to knowledge relating to concoction of 'traps' (schemes) in language and disputation. These traps appear to be not dissimilar to *ji* 機 (machine) which the gardener in the "Tiandi" passage rejects. *Ji* 機, for example, is translated by A. C. Graham as "contrivance."⁵² What is *haozhi* 好知 (fondness of knowledge) according to "Quqie"? It first appears in the statement: "This then is the fault of the ruler's lust for knowledge."⁵³ The point's context is one in which the people of the Primitivist utopian state have become fond of learning from "a worthy man".⁵⁴ It appears that the ruler of the state encouraged learning from a sage, resulting in the people's abandonment of their abode in favor of learning. Burton Watson regards the historical phenomenon of the rulers' need for 'scholars' as possibly clear

⁵¹ Zhuang Zi, *Complete Works*, 135.

⁵² See Graham, *Chuang Tzu*, 186.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁵⁴ Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 88; Zhuang Zi, *Complete Works*, 112.

exemplification of a ruler's *haozhi*;⁵⁵ the men of *zhi* 知 (knowledge) were deemed necessary to boost their state's 'charisma.' Accordingly, it appears it is Watson's belief that the people left their hometown as they went after the 'scholars', the worthy (賢 *xian*), who had not congregated in the people's state. It might be suggested that 'the worthy person' is a sage. In the Mohist tradition, "the worthy" are also well regarded given the doctrine of 'elevating the worthy' (*shangxian* 尚賢). It seems correct then that *haozhi* means fondness for *sagely* wisdom. If this is correct, then there indeed is a link between "Mati" and that passage in "Tiandi". The "Tiandi" passage criticism of the Confucians is that they "make themselves so learned to get to be like the sages" (博學以擬聖), which is what *haozhi* means according to "Mati."

The pair of characters "好知" appears in only one pre-Qin text, other than the *Zhuangzi*.⁵⁶ In the *Analects*, it is in 17.8. Its appearance in the *Zhuangzi* chapter "Zaiyou" 在宥 (Chapter 11) is probably unrelated because it is found not in the introductory part of the chapter classed as Primitivist by A. C. Graham. But in it, like in "Mati", 好知 appears as action that has been done. 好知 (*haozhi*) appears with 天下 (*tianxia*) before it. The characters appear as part of the writer's description of the decline of the world (天下衰矣). It says "all under Heaven" has come to "be fond of knowledge" (好知). It seems that the decline is described to set the scene of the entrance of the 'sages', the Confucians and the Mohists, who proposed solutions (their doctrines) to the socio-political tumult. This part of the chapter expresses the 'darker side' of Primitivism: extermination of the sages, as pointed out and discussed by Hagop Sarkissian.⁵⁷ Although this section is not the introductory essay of the chapter, which A. C. Graham claims to have been written also by the Primitivist writer, it is interesting that wiping out sagacity and its harmonizing effect in the empire appears in this passage.

In *Analects* 17.8, 好知 is presented to point out the vice that goes with 知. *Zhi* 知 (knowledge) is one of the six *yan* 言 (words; teachings), along with *ren* 仁 (benevolence), *xin* 信 (trustworthiness), *zhi* 直 (uprightness), *yong* 勇 (courage) and *gang* 剛 (resoluteness).⁵⁸ The vice that goes with 知 is *dang* 蕩 (unruliness), if fondness of it is not coupled with fondness of *xue* 學 (learning). The passage's primary message seems to be that *xue* (learning) is most important. One may have or pursue any of the "six teachings", yet if she does

⁵⁵ See Zhuang Zi, *Complete Works*, 112, note 12.

⁵⁶ The following is a link to the result of search performed on 23 February 2018 through the Chinese Text Project: <https://ctext.org/pre-qin-and-han?searchu=%E5%A5%BD%E7%9F%A5>.

⁵⁷ See Sarkissian, "Darker Side of Primitivism".

⁵⁸ See Edward Slingerland, *Confucius: The Essential Analects* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 49.

not pursue *xue* (learning) as well, all is in vain. So, 好知 is nothing without 好學. An important question here is what the meaning of 知 is, as is what the meaning of 學 in the passage is. 知 has been translated as “knowledge”, “wisdom”, “awareness” and “understanding.” In the *Mencius*, it is one of the four ‘sprouts of virtue’ (*siduan* 四端), although 智 (*zhi*) is used, which is interchangeable with 知. Scholars’ view about its meaning in the *Mencius* (as one of the sprouts) is that it is directly connected to the first two sprouts, *ren* 仁 (compassion; benevolence) and *yi* 義 (righteousness). The view is that 知 has to do with morality; it is likely to be sense or recognition of what is right action. Benjamin Schwartz says that in the context of *siduan*, “it seemed to be basically a knowledge tied to moral judgment.”⁵⁹ Bryan Van Norden says that as one of Mencius’s “four innate ethical dispositions,” “wisdom involves an understanding of and commitment to the other virtues, especially benevolence and righteousness.”⁶⁰ According to these words of Van Norden, not only is the virtue *awareness* of these virtues, but is also *sense with built-in preference given to them*. So, if the meaning of 知 is sense or awareness of morality, then, according to *Analects* 17.8, fondness of knowledge of morality (without fondness of *xue*) leads to “unruliness”. It seems that *xue* 學 (learning) (of) what is proper behavior (*li* 禮) is what regulates awareness of what is correct or right. In the *Xunzi*, it is *li* 禮 that is regarded as the aim and culmination of *xue* 學: “...learning comes to ritual and then stops, for this is called the ultimate point in pursuit of the Way and virtue.”⁶¹ It seems 17.8’s message is that awareness (*zhi* 知) is not sufficient for propriety or proper order and there ought to be study.

If *zhi* means ‘moral sense’ and *haozhi* means fondness for ‘moral sense or awareness’, the meaning appears to coincide with the meaning in the Primitivist condemnation of it. *Haozhi* in “Quqie” is fondness for sagely wisdom and sagely wisdom is about *dao* 道, (the) way to live. It might then be concluded here that the *zhi* and *haozhi* condemned by the Primitivist is the *zhi* and *haozhi* in *Analects* 17.8. But this calls for further investigation. Here, the conclusion is that, in that the condemnation of *haozhi* in the Primitivist chapters is possibly connected with the “Tiandi” passage expressing resistance towards technology, the *Down with technology!* theme is rather remarkable in the Primitivist chapters.

⁵⁹ Schwartz, *World of Thought*, 287.

⁶⁰ Bryan Van Norden, “Mencius,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2017 Edition), <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mencius/#2>>.

⁶¹ Eric L. Hutton, *Xunzi: The Complete Text* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 5.

Given that there are points in the chapters categorized by A. C. Graham as primitivist, which clearly convey the idea that *ji* 機 (machine) or technology necessarily does not have a place in a pristine world, and that “Tiandi” passage’s resistance to technology seems to appear in the Primitivist chapters, it is our conclusion that the clear resistance to technology expressed in the “Tiandi” passage is also expressed in a number of Primitivist chapters. This resistance shows that the Primitivist author held a view that may be viewed as anti-technology. The Primitivist writer’s resistance is not unlike that orientation because it is technophobic or is about technology as alienation.

Further Questions

The point that the Primitivist writer’s resistance is not unlike the anti-technology orientation (because such rejection or resistance resembles the technophobic or technology-as-alienation orientation) can be seen as raising more questions or issues for thinking about a philosophical response towards technology. In other words, in addition to identified issues that point to a basis for orientation in technology, the Primitivist writer’s attitude of resistance raises further issues for consideration. This is due to its peculiarity. The attitude is peculiar because of its seeming concerns, viz., concern for self and concern for the environment. We suggest that the issues raised by the attitude are ones relating to self-preservation and the environment.

Before discussing these issues, we would like to point out an important qualification. Given the “Tiandi” passage as a basis, the technology that the Zhuangist Primitivist has in mind here is one that has to do with not losing what is essential. In the “Tiandi” passage, as already pointed out, the gardener’s choice is based on the concern for not disrupting simple life, since disrupted “pure simplicity” leads to having an unsettled *shen* 神 (spirit), and since it appears that the gardener’s response answers Zigong’s reason for implementing the tool, that is, maximizing gain. Maximizing gain is diametrically opposed to “pure simplicity” or a simple life. It appears that the gardener despises greater gain or profit. Accordingly, to the gardener, technology is essential only to the point that it does not make one lose what is essential in living simply. It is in this light that the Zhuangist Primitivist’s resistance to technology should be seen.

In the “Tiandi” passage, Zigong’s realization seems to clearly point out that the reason for the gardener’s rejection relates to his “purity”, which is “vast and unimpaired”. That suggests self-preservation or -protection. In “Mati”, one major concern is that the cultural artifices would damage humanity’s basic, natural nature. That the recommended norm, based on

xing, is not on how to avoid harming one's nature but on "how to live and flourish according to *xing*," as pointed out by Frank Saunders Jr., means that the chapter indeed has the idea of self-preservation.⁶² *Xing* (性) is "nature," which is a translation that points out the uniqueness of each individual entity, thus the entity's 'self' or 'selfhood.' According to Christoph Harbsmeier, the translation does so because it "captures well the fact that every thing only has one *hsing* 'nature,' whereas we would say it has many properties."⁶³ In "Pianmu," there is the idea that a place for technology does not exist in the "uncarved simplicity" in the environment and in humans. Here, we find the point relating to the natural environment, which is treated like human self. That to the primitivists "[environments] contribute to flourishing by providing enough sustenance for people, and not damaging them through coercive manipulation or indoctrination"⁶⁴ implies that environment refers not only to the social environment or milieu but primarily to the natural environment. We get sustenance from the natural environment, from Mother Nature. Accordingly, to be added to the questions relating to technological interface, politics of artifacts, technological design, and ideology of technology are the questions: (i) of whether the technology in question obliterates the self or whether it promotes or preserves it, and (ii) of whether the technology in question obliterates the environment or whether it promotes or preserves the natural environment or world.

It may be said here that given the Zhuangist Primitivist twin concern for self and for (natural) environment, the Primitivist view of self is an "integral or integrated self." The view of integrated self is self as necessarily connected with its environment. This is also the Daoist view of the self as "contextualised self," as discussed by Karyn Lai.⁶⁵ An implication of such a view is that self and environment may not be separated. They truly are twin concerns.

Concern for self-preservation or -protection in consideration of technological orientation may be redundant, in that, after all, it is we humans who are primarily affected by technology. Perhaps, though, the idea is only that such a concern or issue ought to be highlighted. It ought to be highlighted, because it could be imagined that a technology may in the future be out of control and would end humanity. One such 'technology' is artificial

⁶² See Saunders, "Primitivism in the *Zhuangzi*," (section 4).

⁶³ Christoph Harbsmeier, *Language and Logic in Traditional China*, Vol. 7, Part 1 of *Science and Civilization in China* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 236.

⁶⁴ Saunders, "Xunzi and the Primitivists," 219.

⁶⁵ See Karyn Lai, *Learning from Chinese Philosophies: Ethics of Interdependent and Contextualised Self* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006), Chapter 2.

intelligence (AI), as has been conjectured.⁶⁶ Concern for the environment in consideration of technological orientation may be not unlike the issue of technological design, in that the issue is about context. Consequences for the ecosystem are considered in thinking about technological design. The issue of environment coming from the Primitivist, though, is rather more like the concern that we have about destruction of Mother Nature due to anthropocentrism. It is not to be denied that Mother Nature has “uncarved simplicity,” and to the primitivists, environment refers not only to the social environment or milieu but also primarily to the natural environment. Subsequently, the issue of environment according to this brings to the fore the question of whether a certain technology does or does not destroy the environment. Primitivism advocates a simple living and having a simple, pure environment. The aim of the Primitivists is to have the natural order retained, and, to them, any technology or instrument (*ji*, machine) ought to be checked against whether such disrupts that order.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have proposed that in the consideration of which orientation in technology to hold, two further issues to consider are *self* or *self-preservation* and *natural environment*. These come from the Zhuangist Primitivist attitude towards technology. The Zhuangist Primitivist attitude is resistance towards technology. That rejection of a certain *ji* or technology in “Tiandi” is not unconnected with the *Zhuangzi* Primitivist texts means that the Primitivist writer likely held the attitude of resistance. In the first part of this paper, we discussed the challenge. In the second part, we elucidated the Zhuangist Primitivist attitude towards technology, exploring an ancient attitude and drawing a parallel between the attitude and view of technology as alienation. And in the final part, we discussed the insights or issues which seem offered by the Zhuangist Primitivist. It may be that a number of us have moved out from a condition of ambivalence since 2004. Be that as it may, it is rather undeniable that reflection on technological orientation would benefit from recognition and consideration of two more issues.⁶⁷

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⁶⁶ See Rory Cellan-Jones, “Stephen Hawking warns artificial intelligence could end mankind,” in *BBC News* (2 December 2014), <<https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-30290540>>.

⁶⁷ We thank Wai Wai Chiu and Peter Yih Jiun Wong for comments on a draft on the section on *Zhuangzi* Primitivism.

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