



■ CHAPTER FIVE ■

ZHUANGZI

Introduction

Little is known of Zhuangzi 莊子 beyond what we can gather from the book named after him. Much of the book, however, is unapologetically fictional, so the stories it tells about him provide us more insight into his persona than into the historical facts of his life. We know from external sources that his friend Huizi served in the court of King Hui of Liang (390–319 B.C.E.), which places Zhuangzi in the end of the fourth century B.C.E. The version of the text we have was assembled around 300 C.E. and is widely agreed to be the work of multiple authors. Though some passages seem to have been written by Zhuangzi, the book must initially have been compiled by his students and then supplemented by later contributors and editors. The following selections are drawn primarily from what scholars generally recognize as the earliest portions of the text, which were either written or inspired by Zhuangzi himself.

Zhuangzi has a huge vocabulary, draws freely from history and mythology, and is equally at home writing poetry, logical analyses, dialogue, and narrative. His references to Kongzi, Laozi, and the Mohists demonstrate that he was familiar with their ideas, though the absence of quotations leaves uncertain whether he had access to the same texts we do. Huizi, who argued against the possibility of distinguishing one thing from another, is known to have debated one of Mengzi's students. So Zhuangzi must at least have heard about Mengzi's ideas, though he never mentions him by name.

Zhuangzi does not present his ideas systematically or define his central terms. But he regularly speaks of *tian* 天, "Heaven," as the highest ideal for all things. He contrasts *tian*, which could also be translated as "nature," to *ren* 人, "people," or "humanity." The human, for Zhuangzi, includes everything from concrete activities that interfere with nature, such as the muti-

lation of criminals, to abstract ideas, such as *shifei* 是非, “right and wrong,” that people project onto the world. Zhuangzi also speaks of *dao* 道, “the Way,” which encompasses both the Way the world is and the way for people to live in it. Though he believes there is a way, he is skeptical of our ability to learn much about it through words or thinking. In fact, he attacks thinking in order to make room, instead, for experience and intuition. Sometimes his attacks are direct, with arguments illustrating the limitations of language, sometimes indirect, with strange stories having no obvious moral or hero. Rather than delivering a message, the *Zhuangzi* seems to go out of its way to defy understanding. In this sense, though the stories are often fantastic, the book is meant to offer a realistic lesson in the uselessness of trying to figure out life. Thinking and talking have a place: Zhuangzi does a lot of both of them. The challenge is to harmonize thinking and talking with the other, incomprehensible aspects life.

In the second century B.C.E., the historian Sima Qian classified Zhuangzi as a founding member of the Daoist school, rather than as a Confucian or a Mohist. This is an oversimplification. There was no “Daoist school” in his time, and, as readers will soon see, he would have resisted any classification of this sort. He knew and thought a lot about the other philosophers presented in this book, particularly Kongzi. But his relationships to them were too complex to be summarized as simple agreement or disagreement. The influence of these other thinkers on Zhuangzi and the implications of his arguments for their ideas are complex and difficult questions that readers will have to sort out for themselves, with the help of some of the secondary literature that is listed following the translation.

Chapter One: Wandering Round and About

In the northern darkness there is a fish named Minnow. No one knows how many thousand *li* around he is. He transforms himself into a bird named Breeze.¹ No one knows how many thousand *li* across she is. She ruffles and flies, and her wings are like clouds hanging from Heaven. As the seas turn, she thinks to migrate to the southern darkness. The southern darkness is Heaven’s pool.²

¹The exact meaning of the bird’s name is unclear, but it was pronounced similarly to the word for wind.

²The word translated as “Heaven” also means both sky and Nature.

The *Tales of Qi*³ records wonders. It says, “In her migration to the southern darkness, Breeze flaps along the water for three thousand *li*, spirals up on a whirlwind to ninety thousand *li*, and goes six months at a stretch.”

Horse-shaped clouds, motes of dust, living things blowing breath at each other—is the blue-green of Heaven its proper color or just its being so endlessly far away? It looks just the same to her gazing down from above.

If water isn’t deep it can’t support big boats. Spill a cup of water on the floor and crumbs will be its boats. But put the cup there and it will stick—because the water is too shallow and the boat too big. If wind isn’t deep it can’t support big wings. This is why Breeze rises ninety thousand *li* with the wind there beneath her. Only then can she rest on the wind, carrying blue Heaven on her back, and nothing can stop her. Only then does she set her sights to the south.

The cicada and the student-dove laugh at her, saying, “When we start up and fly, we struggle for the elm or the sandalwood. Sometimes we don’t even make it but just plunk to the ground. What is she doing rising ninety thousand *li* and heading south?” People going to the green meadows can bring three meals and return with their bellies still full. People going a hundred *li* need to grind grain for an overnight. People going a thousand *li* need to gather grain for three months. What do these two little bugs know?

Little knowledge does not measure up to big knowledge, or few years to many. How do I know this is so? The morning mushroom does not know the waxing and waning of the moon, and the Hui-cricket does not know spring and fall. This is because they are short lived. South of Chu there is a turtle called Dark Genius, which counts five hundred years as a single spring and five hundred years as a single fall. In high antiquity there was a tree called Big Spring, which counted eight thousand years as a single spring and eight thousand years as a single fall. Nowadays, only eight-hundred-year-old Peng Zu is famous, and everyone compares themselves to him. Isn’t it sad?

This was the subject of King Tang’s questions to his teacher, Cramped.⁴

³We have no knowledge of this text and, judging from its name, it appears to be fictitious. Here and elsewhere, Zhuangzi may be parodying appeals to textual authority by appealing to fanciful “classics.”

⁴Tang’s teacher is named “Ji 棘,” which commentators explain means narrow—as opposed to “Tang 湯,” which means broad. Chapter Five of the book *Liezi* is entitled “The Questions of Tang” and contains an expanded version of what might have been their conversation. For a translation, see A. C. Graham, *The Book of Lieh Tzu*, reprint (London: John Murray, 1973), pp. 92–117. For more on King Tang, see *Important Figures*.

In the bald north there is a dark sea, Heaven's pool. There is a fish there whose breadth is several tens of thousands of *li*. No one knows his length. His name is Minnow. There is a bird there, whose name is Breeze. Her back is as huge as Mount Tai, and her wings are like clouds hanging from Heaven. Circling on the whirlwind, she spirals upward ninety thousand *li*, bursts through the clouds and mist, carrying the blue sky. Afterward she heads south, traveling to the southern darkness.

The accusing quail laughs at her, saying, "Where is *she* going? I rear up and don't go more than a few yards before coming down, soaring and roaming amid brambles and briars—this indeed is the perfection of flying! Where is she going?" This is the debate between little and big.

People who know how to do one job, handle a small town, or impress a ruler to get put in charge of a state see themselves like this. Songzi would still laugh at them. The whole world could praise him and he would not be encouraged. The whole world could condemn him and he would not be upset. He has fixed the difference between inner and outer and distinguished the limits of glory and disgrace. Yet he stops there. He is unconventional, but there is still something left unplanted.

Liezi⁵ rides about on the wind. It's wonderful! He's gone two weeks at a time. His attitude toward wealth is unconventional. But, though he manages to avoid walking, he still relies on something. If he could chariot the norms of Heaven and earth and ride the changes in the six mists⁶ to wander the inexhaustible, then what would there be to rely on? Hence it is said that perfect people have no self, spiritual people have no accomplishment, and sagely people have no name.

The sage-king Yao offered his empire to the hermit Whence. "To keep the torches burning when the sun and moon are shining is troubling too much for light. Irrigating the fields when the spring rains are falling is working too hard for water. You are here, my teacher, and the empire is in order. With me still presiding over it, I feel defective. Please take it."

⁵Little is known of Liezi. The book that bears his name contains scant biographical information. He may have been a practitioner of magic, or an ascetic who achieved freedom by withdrawing from the world. Either way, Zhuangzi's highly metaphoric criticism of him here suggests that he would have been better off accepting the world as it is.

⁶"Mists," here and below, is *qi* 氣. See *Important Terms*.

Whence said, “With you ordering it, the empire is well ordered. If I were to go ahead and replace you, would it be for the name? But name is only the guest of reality. Do I want to be the guest? The tailor bird nesting in the deep forest takes no more than a branch. The mole drinking at the river takes no more than a bellyful. Give it up, my lord. I have no use for the empire. Though the cook at the sacrifice fails to order the kitchen, the presiding priest does not leap over the goblets and platters to replace him.”

Shoulder Dig said to Step Brother,⁷ “I heard what Jie Yu said.⁸ It was big but didn’t stand for anything. It went on and on without coming back. I was frightened by what he said. It was as endless as the Milky Way, full of inconsistencies, and didn’t approach the human situation.”

Step Brother asked, “What did he say?”

“He said there are spiritual people living in the distant Maiden Mountains. Their skin is like frost, and they are gentle and restrained as virgins. They don’t eat the five grains but sip wind and drink dew. They chariot the cloudy mists, ride the flying dragons, and wander beyond the four seas. By concentrating their spirit, they keep things from harm and ripen the harvests. I thought he was crazy and didn’t believe him.”

Step Brother said, “Yes. The blind can’t appreciate beautiful patterns or the deaf bells and drums. But are blindness and deafness confined to the physical form? Your knowledge has them, too. His talk is like a fertile woman.⁹ Those people he describes, with that Virtue of theirs, will align with the ten thousand things and make them one. The world longs for chaos, but why should they fret and make the world their business? Nothing can harm these people. Though a great flood should knock against Heaven, they would not drown. Though a heat wave should melt stone and scorch the earth, they would not burn. From their dust and chaff you could mold the sages Yao and Shun. Why would they want to make things their business? A man of Song¹⁰ invested in ceremonial caps and took them to Yue. But the Yue people cut their hair and tattoo their bodies and had no use for them. Yao brought order

⁷This character’s name, Lian Shu, may also suggest a connection to the Shu clan, one of the Three Families that ruled Kongzi’s native state of Lu for most of his lifetime.

⁸In *Analects* 18.5 (not in this volume), Jie Yu, known as The Madman of Chu, criticizes Kongzi for wasting his efforts on a lost cause. When Kongzi tries to speak with him, he runs away.

⁹Jie Yu’s words are “like a fertile woman” in the sense that they await the right kind of person in order to bear fruit.

¹⁰The people of Song were the butt of many jokes. Cf. *Mengzi* 2A2 and *Hanfeizi*, chapter 49, p. 324.

to the people of the empire and stabilized the government within the seas. But when he went to see the four masters of the distant Maiden Mountains, north of the Fen River, he lost the world in a daze.”¹¹

Huizi said to Zhuangzi, “The king of Wei¹² left me the seeds of a big gourd. I planted them, and when they grew, the fruit was a yard across. I filled them with water but they weren’t sturdy enough to hold it. I split them into ladles but they were too big to dip into anything. It wasn’t that they weren’t wonderfully big, but they were useless. So I smashed them.”¹³

Zhuangzi said, “You, sir, are certainly clumsy about using big things. There were some people in Song who were good at making ointment to prevent chapped hands. Year after year, they used it in their business bleaching silk. A traveler heard about it and asked to buy the formula for a hundred pieces of gold. The clan assembled and consulted, saying, ‘For years we’ve bleached silk and never made more than a few pieces of gold. Today in a single morning we can sell the trick for a hundred pieces. Let’s give it to him!’

“The traveler got it and recommended it to the king of Wu, who was having trouble with the state of Yue. The king of Wu put him in command, and that winter he met the men of Yue in a naval battle. Using the ointment to keep his soldiers’ hands from chapping, he defeated Yue badly and was rewarded with a portion of the conquered territory. The ability to prevent chapped hands was the same in either case. But one gained territory while the others never escaped bleaching silk because what they used it for was different.¹⁴ Now you had these gigantic gourds. Why not lash them to-

¹¹Earlier in Chinese history, the Fen River had been the northwestern border separating the Chinese from the non-Chinese world (i.e., the “barbarians”). By Zhuangzi’s time, however, military expansion and cultural assimilation had moved the boundary back, so the Fen was closer to the center.

¹²Wei is another name for the state of Liang. Hence this is King Hui of Liang, the same ruler who employed Huizi in his administration.

¹³It is clear from the beginning of the next anecdote that Huizi’s story here is meant as a criticism of Zhuangzi.

¹⁴Wu and Yue were two non-Chinese states to the south that were gradually incorporated into the Chinese world during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. When hostilities broke out between them in 510 B.C.E., Wu dominated initially, which was presumably when Zhuangzi’s story was meant to take place. Yue rallied its forces, however, and destroyed Wu in 473, which probably meant execution for the traveler or his descendants. The history of Wu, which would have been familiar to Zhuangzi’s contemporary readers, makes the moral of the parable uncertain.

gether like big buoys and go floating on the rivers and lakes instead of worrying that they were too big to dip into anything? Your mind is full of underbrush, my friend.”¹⁵

Huizi said to Zhuangzi, “I have a big tree, the kind people call Spring. Its trunk is so gnarled it won’t take a chalk line, and its branches are so twisted they won’t fit a compass or square. It stands by the road but no builder looks twice at it. Your talk is similarly big and useless, and everyone alike rejects it.”

Zhuangzi said, “Haven’t you seen a weasel? It bends down then rises up. It springs east and west, not worrying about heights or depths—and lands in a snare or dies in a net. Now the yak is so big he looks like clouds hanging from Heaven. He sure can be big, but he can’t catch mice. You have a big tree and are upset that you can’t use it. Why not plant it by a nothing-at-all village in a wide empty waste? You could do nothing, dilly-dallying by its side, or nap, ho-hum, beneath it. It won’t fall to any axe’s chop and nothing will harm it. Since it isn’t any use, what bad can happen to it?”

Chapter Two: On Equalizing Things

Master Dapple of the South Wall sat leaning on his armrest. He looked up and sighed, vacant, as though he’d lost his counterpart. Yancheng Ziyou¹⁶ stood before him in attendance. “What’s this?” he said. “Can the body really be turned into dried wood? Can the mind really be turned into dead ashes? The one leaning on the armrest now is not the one who leaned on it before!”

Master Dapple said, “My, isn’t that a good question you’ve asked, Ziyou! Just now I lost myself. Do you know? You’ve heard the pipes of people, but not the pipes of earth. Or if you’ve heard the pipes of earth, you haven’t heard the pipes of Heaven.”

“May I ask what you mean?”

“The Big Lump belches breath and it’s called wind. If only it wouldn’t start! When it starts, the ten thousand holes begin to hiss. Don’t you hear the

¹⁵*Xin* 心 can be translated as either “heart” or “mind,” though the latter is usually more appropriate for Zhuangzi. The description of Huizi’s mind as full of underbrush may be a reference to Mengzi’s metaphor of moral sprouts. See also *xin* under *Important Terms*.

¹⁶This is evidently Kongzi’s disciple, Ziyou, who is described in *Analects* 17.4 (not in this volume) as using music to instruct people in the Way.

shsh-shsh? In the mountain vales there are great trees a hundred spans around with knots like noses, like mouths, like ears, like sockets, like rings, like mortars, like ditches, like gullies. Gurgling, humming, hooting, whistling, shouting, shrieking, moaning, gnashing! The leaders sing ‘Eeeeeeh!’ The followers sing ‘Ooooooh!’ In a light breeze it’s a little chorus, but in a gusty wind it’s a huge orchestra. And when the violent winds are over, the ten thousand holes are empty. Haven’t you witnessed the brouhaha?”

Ziyou said, “So the pipes of earth are those holes, and the pipes of people are bamboo flutes. May I ask about the pipes of Heaven?”

Master Dapple said, “Blowing the ten thousand differences, making each be itself and all choose themselves—who provokes it? Does Heaven turn? Does earth stay still? Do the sun and moon vie for position? Who is in charge here? Who pulls the strings? Who sits with nothing to do, gives it a push and sets it in motion? Do you think it’s locked in motion and can’t be stopped? Or do you think it’s spinning out of control and can’t slow itself down? Do the clouds make the rain? Or does the rain make the clouds? Who rumbles all this out? Who sits there with nothing to do and takes perverse delight in egging it on? The wind rises in the north—now west, now east, now dilly-dallying up above. Who huffs and puffs it? Who sits with nothing to do and blows it? May I ask the cause?”¹⁷

Big knowledge is unbounded,
Little knowledge is unbound.
Big talk is unstoppable,
Little talk doesn’t stop.

In sound sleep, spirits mingle,
On waking, bodies open out.
They greet and grapple,
And use their minds all day to struggle.

The humble ones, the high ones, the hidden ones: the little fears panic, the big fears calm.

They fly like an arrow from a bow—
that’s the way they guard their rights and wrongs.

¹⁷I follow Graham in importing the final lines of this passage, from “Does Heaven turn?” to the end, from a later chapter.

They stick like they'd sworn an oath—
that's the way they hold to victory.

They die like fall and winter—
that describes their daily deterioration.

They drown—
and what makes it happen can't bring them back.

They're sated as though sealed—
that describes their stagnation.

As the mind nears death, nothing can bring it back to vitality.

Happiness, anger, despair, joy, planning, sighing,
bending, freezing, elegance, ease, candor, posturing—

It's music out of emptiness!
Mist condensing into mushrooms!

Day and night they alternate in front of us without our knowing where they sprout from. Enough! Enough! Morning and evening we've got them, wherever they come from.

Without them there would not be me,
Without me there would be nothing to choose.

This is close. But no one knows what makes it like this. It seems as though there is a true master, but you can't get a glimpse of it. In our actions we take the self on faith, but we can't see its form. There is essence but no form.

The hundred bones, the nine orifices, the six organs all exist together. Which do I think of as closest to me? Do you like them all? Or do you have a favorite? If so, are the rest its servants and concubines? Can't servants and concubines rule among themselves? Can they take turns being lord and servant? But if there is a true lord among them, whether I find its *qing* 情, "essence," or not makes no difference to its truth.

Once you take a complete form, you don't forget it until the end. Clashing with things and rubbing against them, the race is run at a gallop and

nothing can stop it. Isn't it sad? Your whole life slaving away and never seeing the completion of your labors. Exhausted, you drudge and slave away without knowing where to turn for rest. Can you not mourn? People say they are not dead, but what difference does it make? Your form changes and your mind goes with it. Can you tell me that's not mournful? Is everyone's life really this confused? Or am I the only one confused and not other people?

If a made-up mind counts as a teacher, then who doesn't have a teacher? Why should it just be the self-chosen experts on the order of things who have them? Stupid people would have them, too. But to have right and wrong before you've made up your mind—that's like leaving for Yue today and getting there yesterday! That's like saying what isn't is. What isn't is? Even the spiritual sage Yu couldn't make sense of that. How could I?

Saying is not just blowing. Saying says something. But if what it says is not fixed, then does it really say anything? Or does it say nothing? We think it is different from the peeping of fledglings. But is there really any difference or isn't there? How is the Way obscured that there are true and false? How are words obscured that there are *shi* 是, "right," and *fei* 非, "wrong"? Where can you go that the Way does not exist? How can words exist and not be okay? The Way is obscured by small completions. Words are obscured by glory and show. So we have the rights and wrongs of the Confucians and the Mohists. Each calls right what the other calls wrong and each calls wrong what the other calls right. But if you want to right their wrongs and wrong their rights, it's better to throw them open to the light.

There is nothing that cannot be looked at that way.

There is nothing that cannot be looked at this way.

But that is not the way I see things;

Only as I know things myself do I know them.

Hence it is said, "*Bi* 彼, 'that,' comes from *shi* 是, 'this,' and this follows from that." This is the doctrine of the parallel birth of "this" and "that." Even so, born together they die together. Dying together they are born together. If they are both okay, they are both not okay. If they are both not okay, they are both okay. If they are right in a way, they are wrong in a way. If they are wrong in a way, they are right in a way. For this reason the sage does not follow this route but illuminates things with Heaven's light.¹⁸ He

¹⁸Translating the word for "Heaven" as "nature," this line could be read, "lets them shine by their natural light."

just goes along with things. What is this is also that, and what is that is also this. That is both right and wrong. This is also both right and wrong. So is there really a this and a that? Or isn't there any this or that? The place where neither this nor that finds its counterpart is called the pivot of the Way. Once the pivot finds its socket it can respond endlessly. What's right is endless. And what's wrong is endless, too. This is why I say it's better to throw them open to the light.

Making a point to show that a point is not a point is not as good as making a nonpoint to show that a point is not a point. Using a horse to show that a horse is not a horse is not as good as using a nonhorse to show that a horse is not a horse.¹⁹ Heaven and earth are one point, the ten thousand things are one horse.

Okay? Okay. Not okay? Not okay. A way is made by walking it. A thing is so by calling it. How is it so? In so-ing it, it is so. How is it not so? In not-so-ing it, it is not so. There is always a way in which things are so. There is always a way in which things are okay. There is nothing that is not so, nothing that is not okay. You can insist that it is a twig or a pillar, a freak or the beautiful Xi Shi.²⁰ No matter how diverse or strange, the Way comprehends them as one. Their division is their completion and their completion is their ruin. But nothing is completed or injured when they are again comprehended as one. Only the penetrating person knows to comprehend them as one. Don't insist but lodge in the usual. The usual is useful. You can use it to penetrate. When you penetrate, you get it. Get it and you're almost there. Just go along with things. Doing that without knowing how things are is what I call the Way.

But exhausting the spirit trying to illuminate the unity of things without knowing that they are all the same is called "three in the morning." What do I mean by "three in the morning"? When the monkey trainer was passing out nuts he said, "You get three in the morning and four at night." The monkeys were all angry. "All right," he said, "you get four in the morning and three at night." The monkeys were all pleased. With no loss in name or substance, he made use of their joy and anger because he went along with them. So the sage harmonizes people with right and wrong and rests them on Heaven's wheel. This is called walking two roads.

¹⁹A reference to the "School of Names" thinker Gongsun Long. For more, see *Important Figures* and *Important Terms*.

²⁰Xi Shi was a legendary beauty sent by the king of Yue to marry the king of Wu, spy on him, and help overthrow his kingdom.

In olden days, people's knowledge got somewhere. Where did it get? There were those who thought there had never been anything. Perfect! Done! There was nothing to add. Next were those who thought there were things but never any boundaries. Next were those who thought there were boundaries but never any right or wrong. The Way is lost in the glorification of right and wrong. The Way is lost in the completion of love. But are there such things as loss and completion? Or are there no such things as loss and completion? Loss and completion—that's Master Bright Works playing his lute. No loss and no completion—that's Master Bright Works not playing his lute. Bright Works playing his lute, Shi Kuang holding his baton, Huizi leaning on his desk: the knowledge of these three masters was almost perfect, and they passed their successes on to later years. What they liked they tried to set apart from other things. What they liked they tried to illuminate. But they only succeeded in illuminating the other things and so ended in a paradoxical gloom. Their followers ended up tangled in the string of works and were incomplete their whole lives. If this counts as completion, then we are all complete, too. If this doesn't count as completion, then none of us have ever been complete. So the torch of slippery doubt is what the sage steers by. Don't insist, but lodge in the usual: this is what I mean by throwing things open to the light.

Now suppose I say something here. I don't know whether it fits into your category or not. But in terms of the category that includes both things that fit and things that don't, it's no different from anything else. Nonetheless, let me try saying it:

There is a beginning. There is a not-yet beginning to be a beginning. There is a not-yet beginning to be a not-yet beginning to be a beginning.

There is something. There is nothing. There is a not-yet beginning to be nothing. There is a not-yet beginning to be a not-yet beginning to be nothing. Suddenly there is nothing. But then I don't know whether nothing is or isn't.

Now I've said something, but I don't know if what I've said meant anything or not.

Nothing in the world is bigger than the tip of an autumn hair²¹ but Grand Mountain is small. No one lives longer than a dead

²¹An animals' hair is most fine (and hence thin) during the autumn.

child and Peng Zu died young. Heaven and earth were born
 alongside me, and the ten thousand things and I are one.

If we're already one, can I say it? But since I've just said we're one, can I not say it? The unity and my saying it make two. The two and their unity make three. Starting from here, even a clever mathematician couldn't get it, much less an ordinary person! If going from nothing to something you get three, what about going from something to something? Don't do it! Just go along with things.

The Way has never been bounded, words have never been constant. Insist on it and there are boundary-paths. Let me describe these paths. There is left. There is right. There are relations. There is righteousness. There are divisions. There are debates. There is competition. There is contention. These are called the eight Virtues. The sage acknowledges what is beyond the six dimensions but does not discuss it. He discusses what is within the six dimensions but does not deliberate on it. He deliberates on the springs and autumns of successive generations and the records of former kings but does not debate about them. Divisions have something they do not divide. Debates have something they do not debate. "What?" you ask. The sage clasps it to his bosom while ordinary people debate to show it off. Hence it is said, "Debate leaves something indiscriminated."

The great Way is not announced.
 The great debate is not spoken.
 Great benevolence is not benevolent.
 Great modesty is not reserved.
 Great courage is not aggressive.

A way that shines does not lead.
 Words in debate do not reach.
 Benevolence that is constant is not complete.
 Modesty that is pure is not trustworthy.
 Courage that is aggressive is not complete.

These five are round but almost square. Therefore knowledge that stops at what it does not know is perfect. Who knows the unspoken distinction, the unled Way? If you could know it, it would be called the store of Heaven. Pour into it and it does not fill up, draw from it and it does not run dry. Not knowing where it comes from, it is called the shaded glow.

Once Yao said to Shun, "I want to attack Zong, Guai, and Xu-ao. I sit on my throne and it bothers me. Why is this?"²²

Shun said, "These three small states still dwell among the underbrush. Why are you bothered? Once ten suns came out together and the ten thousand things were all illuminated. Shouldn't Virtue be better than ten suns?"²³

Gaptooth asked Royal Relativity,²⁴ "Do you know what all things agree upon as right?"

Royal Relativity said, "How could I know that?"

"Do you know that you don't know it?"

"How could I know that?"

"Doesn't anyone know anything?!"

"How could I know that? But even so, suppose I tried saying something. How could I possibly know that when I say I know something, I don't not know it? How could I possibly know that when I say I don't know something, I don't know it?²⁵ Let me try asking you something. If people sleep in the damp, their backs hurt and they wake half paralyzed. But is this true of an eel? If they live in trees they shudder with fear. But is this true of a monkey? Of these three, then, which knows the right place to live? People eat the flesh of cattle, deer eat fodder, maggots like snakes, and hawks enjoy mice. Of these four, which knows the right taste? Monkeys take baboons as partners, deer befriend elk, and eels consort with fish. People say that Mao-qiang and Lady Li are beautiful. But if fish saw them they would dive deep, if birds saw them they would fly high, and if deer saw them they would cut and run. Of these four, which knows beauty rightly? From where I see it,

²²Three backward states that resisted Yao's authority. To see why this bothered him, consider *Analects* 2.1 and 12.19.

²³The *Huainanzi* tells us that the ten suns were too bright, so nine had to be shot down by the archer Yi. Shun's point is that, rather than insist on enlightening these backward states himself, the Virtuous path would be to allow them to find their own way naturally. He is advocating "the shaded glow," "illuminating things with Heaven's light" rather than one's own.

²⁴The second character in this name, Ni, means end or extreme. Elsewhere, in a portion of the text not translated here, Zhuangzi argues that extremes are extreme only relative to one another: the small is small only in comparison to the large, etc., hence the current translation. Later on, Zhuangzi will speak of "harmonizing things by means of Heaven's relativity," that is, taking advantage of their sameness in difference, like the monkey trainer.

²⁵Cf. *Analects* 2.17 (not in this volume): "To say that you know when you do know and that you don't when you don't is knowledge."

the sprouts of benevolence and righteousness and the pathways of right and wrong are all snarled and jumbled.²⁶ How would I know the difference between them?”

Gaptooth said, “If you don’t know gain from loss, do perfected people know?”²⁷

Royal Relativity said, “Perfected people are spiritual. Though the lowlands burn, they are not hot. Though the He and the Han rivers freeze, they are not cold. When furious lightning splits the mountains and winds thrash the sea, they are not scared. People like this mount the clouds and mists, straddle the sun and moon, and roam beyond the four seas. Death and life make no difference to them, how much less the sprouts of benefit and harm!”

Master Nervous Magpie asked Master Long Desk, “I heard from my teacher, Kongzi, that the sage does not make it his business to attend to affairs. He does not seek gain or avoid loss. He does not enjoy being sought out and does not follow any Way. Saying nothing he says something, saying something he says nothing, and he wanders outside the floating dust. My teacher thought this was wild talk, but I thought it captured the mysterious Way. What do you think about it?”

Master Long Desk said, “This would make Huang Di’s ears ring. How could Kongzi understand it? But you’re getting ahead of yourself. You see an egg and listen for the rooster’s crow. You see a bow and expect roast owl. I’m going to try saying some crazy things to you, and you listen crazily—how about it? Flank the sun and moon, embrace space and time, and meet like lips, settling in the slippery murk where servants exalt each other. Ordinary people slave away, while the sage is stupid and simple, participating in ten thousand ages and unifying them in complete simplicity. The ten thousand things are as they are, and so are jumbled together.

“How do I know that loving life is not a mistake? How do I know that hating death is not like a lost child forgetting its way home? Lady Li was the daughter of the border guard of Ai. When the duke of Jin got her, her tears fell until they soaked her collar. But once she reached the royal palace,

²⁶Cf. “sprouts of benevolence and righteousness” (*ren yi zhi duan* 仁義之端) with *Mengzi* 2A6.

²⁷“Gain” (利 *li*) and “loss” (害 *hai*) are important terms for Mozi—who thinks of them as “benefit” and “harm,” respectively—and Mengzi, who contrasts *li*, in the sense of “profit,” with *yi* 義, “righteousness.”

slept in the king's bed, and ate the meats of his table, she regretted her tears. How do I know that the dead don't regret that they ever longed for life?²⁸

"One who dreams of drinking wine may weep in the morning. One who dreams of weeping may go for a hunt the next day. In the dream, you don't know it's a dream. In the middle of a dream, you may interpret a dream within it. Only after waking do you know it was a dream. Still, there may be an even greater awakening after which you know that this, too, was just a greater dream. But the stupid ones think they are awake and confidently claim to know it. Are they rulers? Are they herdsmen? Really?! Kongzi and you are both dreaming. And in saying you are dreaming, I am dreaming, too. These words might be called a puzzle. But if after ten thousand generations we encounter a single sage who knows the solution, it would be no different from what we encounter every morning and evening."

Once you and I have started arguing, if you win and I lose, then are you really right and am I really wrong? If I win and you lose, then am I really right and are you really wrong? Is one of us right and the other one wrong? Or are both of us right and both of us wrong? If you and I can't understand one another, then other people will certainly be even more in the dark. Whom shall we get to set us right? Shall we get someone who agrees with you to set us right? But if they already agree with you how can they set us right? Shall we get someone who agrees with me to set us right? But if they already agree with me, how can they set us right? Shall we get someone who disagrees with both of us to set us right? But if they already disagree with both of us, how can they set us right? Shall we get someone who agrees with both of us to set us right? But if they already agree with both of us, how can they set us right? If you and I and they all can't understand each other, should we wait for someone else?

Shifting voices waiting on one another may just as well not wait on one another. Harmonize them by means of Heaven's relativity, orient them with the flowing flood, and so live out your years. Forget the years, forget righteousness, but be stirred by the limitless and lodge within it. What do I mean by "harmonize them by means of Heaven's relativity"? I mean right is not right, so is not so. If right were really right, it would be so different from not-

²⁸Lady Li, a legendary beauty and villain, was born a member of the non-Chinese Rong people living to the north and west of China. She was given as a hostage to Duke Xian of Jin (r. 676–651 B.C.E.), became his concubine, estranged him from his wife and legitimate heirs, and wreaked havoc in the kingdom. She is an ambiguous figure: a barbarian in China, beautiful yet dangerous. Zhuangzi compounds the ambiguity by retelling the story from her perspective.

right that there would be no room for argument. If so were really so, then it would be so different from not-so that there would be no room for argument.

Penumbra said to Shadow, “First you walk and then you stop. First you sit and then you rise. Why are you so restless?”

Shadow said, “Do I depend on something to be the way I am? Does what I depend on also depend on something to be the way it is? Does a snake depend on its scales to move or a cicada on its wings to fly? How should I know why I am this way? How should I know why I’m not otherwise?”

One night, Zhuangzi dreamed of being a butterfly—a happy butterfly, showing off and doing as he pleased, unaware of being Zhuangzi. Suddenly he awoke, drowsily, Zhuangzi again. And he could not tell whether it was Zhuangzi who had dreamt the butterfly or the butterfly dreaming Zhuangzi. But there must be some difference between them! This is called “the transformation of things.”

Chapter Three: The Key to Nourishing Life

Life is bounded. Knowledge is unbounded. Using the bounded to follow the unbounded is dangerous. And if you take that as knowledge, that’s really dangerous! If you do good, avoid fame. If you do bad, avoid punishment. Follow the middle line and you can protect yourself, complete your life, raise your family, and finish your years.

A butcher was cutting up an ox for Lord Wenhui.²⁹ Wherever his hand touched, wherever his shoulder leaned, wherever his foot stepped, wherever his knee pushed—with a zip! with a whoosh!—he handled his chopper with aplomb, and never skipped a beat. He moved in time to the *Dance of the Mulberry Forest*, and harmonized with the *Head of the Line Symphony*.³⁰ Lord Wenhui said, “Ah, excellent, that technique can reach such heights!”

²⁹This is the same King Hui who gave Huizi the seeds to the giant gourds in *Zhuangzi*, chapter 1, p. 208, and who speaks with Mengzi in *Mengzi* 1A1 and 1A3. This story may be a parody of *Mengzi* 1A7, substituting a lesson on butchery for one on compassion.

³⁰The *Dance of the Mulberry Forest* celebrates Tang’s victory over Jie and the founding of the Shang dynasty. The *Head of the Line Symphony* is part of a larger corpus known as the *Whole Pond Music* commemorating the reign of Yao. The spontaneous harmony of the butcher’s movements with traditional music may suggest the inner compatibility of Zhuangzi’s Daoism with Confucianism. Cf. *Mengzi* 4A27.

The butcher sheathed his chopper and responded, “What your servant values is the Way, which goes beyond technique. When I first began cutting up oxen, I did not see anything but oxen. Three years later, I couldn’t see the whole ox. And now, I encounter them with spirit and don’t look with my eyes. Sensible knowledge stops and spiritual desires proceed. I rely on the Heavenly patterns, strike in the big gaps, am guided by the large fissures, and follow what is inherently so. I never touch a ligament or tendon, much less do any heavy wrenching! A good butcher changes his chopper every year because he chips it. An average butcher changes it every month because he breaks it. There are spaces between those joints, and the edge of the blade has no thickness. If you use what has no thickness to go where there is space—oh! there’s plenty of extra room to play about in. That’s why after nineteen years³¹ the blade of my chopper is still as though fresh from the grindstone.

“Still, when I get to a hard place, I see the difficulty and take breathless care. My gaze settles! My movements slow! I move the chopper slightly, and in a twinkling it’s come apart, crumbling to the ground like a clod of earth! I stand holding my chopper and glance all around, dwelling on my accomplishment. Then I clean my chopper and put it away.”

Lord Wenhui said, “Excellent! I have heard the words of a butcher and learned how to care for life!”

Gongwen Xuan³² was startled when he saw the Commander of the Right,³³ and he asked “What kind of man is this? What happened to you? Was it Heaven, or was it human?”

The Commander said, “It was Heaven, not human. Heaven makes each thing unique.³⁴ People try to look alike. That’s how I know it was Heaven, not human. The marsh pheasant has to go ten steps for a peck, a hundred

³¹For the significance of this period of time, see the *Mozi*, chapter 31, p. 92, n. 60.

³²Nothing is known about this person, though the name does not appear to be fictional.

³³The Commander of the Right indicates the supreme military commander.

³⁴The word for “unique” can also mean “one-footed,” so the suggestion is that the Commander is missing a foot. Gongwen’s question asks whether he was born that way or lost it later. Amputations, tattoos, and death were common punishments not just for crimes but for bad political advice, and even for good advice that the ruler did not want to hear, and hence were considered indicative of moral as well as physical deformity. Zhuangzi’s stories of criminals, cripples, and outcasts, therefore, address the same theme as the abstract discussions of perfection, completion, and wholeness.

steps for a drink. But it doesn't want to be pampered in a cage. It does the spirit no good even to be king."

When Laozi died, Qin Shih³⁵ went to mourn him, cried three times, and left. A student asked, "Weren't you our teacher's friend?"

"Yes."

"Then is it okay for you to mourn him this way?"

"Yes. At first I thought these were his people, but now I see they are not. When I went in earlier, there were old ones crying as though for a child, and young ones as though for their mothers. The one who gathered them here did not want them to talk, but they talk. He did not want them to cry, but they cry. They've run from Heaven, denied their essence, forgotten what they received, and hence suffer what used to be called 'the punishment for running from Heaven.'³⁶ Our teacher came because it was time and left when it had passed. If you are content with the time and abide by the passing, there's no room for sorrow or joy. This is what they used to call 'the divine release.' You can point to the exhausted fuel. But the flame has passed on, and no one knows where it will end."

Chapter Four: The Human Realm

Yan Hui asked Kongzi for permission to make a trip.³⁷

"Where are you going?" he said.

"To Wei."

"What will you do there?"

"I have heard that the lord of Wei is young and willful. He trifles with his state and does not acknowledge his mistakes. He is so careless with people's lives that the dead fill the state like falling leaves in a swamp.³⁸ The people have nowhere to turn. I have heard my teacher say, 'Leave the well-governed state and go to the chaotic one. There are plenty of sick people at the doctor's door.' I want to use what I have learned to think of a way the state may be saved."

³⁵Nothing is known about this person, though the name does not appear to be fictional.

³⁶Cf. *Analects* 3.13 (not in this volume): "When you commit a crime against Heaven, there is nowhere you can turn."

³⁷Yan Hui, also known as Yan Yuan, was Kongzi's favorite and most promising student; he died young. See *Analects* 5.9, 6.3, 6.7, and 6.11.

³⁸This is probably Duke Chu, who first ruled in Wei from 492 to 481 B.C.E.

Kongzi said, “Sheesh! You’re just going to get yourself hurt. The Way does not like complexity. Complexity quickly becomes too much. Too much leads to agitation, agitation leads to worry, and worry never solved anything. The perfect people of olden times first found it in themselves before looking for it in others. If what you’ve found in yourself isn’t settled yet, what leisure can you spare for this bully’s behavior?”

“Do you know how Virtue is squandered and where knowledge comes from? Virtue is squandered in fame, and knowledge arises from struggle. People use fame to trample each other and knowledge as a weapon. Both of them are tools of ill-fortune, not the means of finishing your mission.

“Though your Virtue is deep and your faith strong, you have not comprehended the man’s *qi* 氣. You’ve got a reputation for not being contentious, but you have not comprehended the man’s mind. If you insist on parading standards of benevolence and righteousness before this bully, you will just make him look bad in comparison to you. That’s antagonism, and one who antagonizes others is sure to be antagonized in return. You don’t want to antagonize him!

“Or suppose he likes worthy people and dislikes the depraved, then what use is there in changing him? Better not to speak! Kings and dukes love to dominate people and force their submission. He’ll want to dazzle you, intimidate you, tongue-tie you, cue you, and persuade you. Trying to reform this kind of person is like piling fire on fire or water on water. It’s called ‘adding to the excessive.’ Your initial compliance will know no end until he no longer trusts your good word. You will surely die at this bully’s hands. . . .

“Even so, you must have a plan. Come, tell me about it!”

Yan Hui said, “Suppose I am upright but dispassionate, energetic but not divisive. Would that work?”

“No! How could that work?” said Kongzi. “You’d use all your energy to sustain the performance, and your face would be unsettled. Other people can’t stand that, so they have to resist what you suggest in order to ease their own minds. If gradual Virtue wouldn’t work, how much less such a great show of force! He’ll dig in his heels and resist change. Though he may seem well disposed on the outside, on the inside he’ll never consider it. How could that work?”

Yan Hui said, “Then how about being inwardly straight and outwardly bending, having integrity but conforming to my superiors? By being inwardly straight, I could follow Heaven. As a follower of Heaven, I would know that even the Son of Heaven and I are both children of Heaven. If I

speak only for myself, why worry about the approval or disapproval of other people? I could be what people call childlike, which is what I mean by being a follower of Heaven.

“By being outwardly bending, I could follow other people. Lifting the ceremonial tablets, kneeling, bending, bowing—this is the etiquette of a minister. Others do it, why shouldn’t I? As long as I do what other people do, who can complain? This is what I mean by following people.

“Having integrity and conforming to superiors, one follows olden times. My words, whether they are in fact instructions or even criticisms, belong to antiquity; they are not my own. This way one can be straightforward without causing injury. This is what I mean by following olden times. Would that work?”

Kongzi said, “No! How could that work? You have too many policies. You are planning without reconnaissance. Even if you succeeded in avoiding blame, it would stop there. How could you hope to change him? You’re still making the mind your teacher.”

Yan Hui said, “I have nothing else to offer. May I ask what to do?”

Kongzi said, “You must fast! Let me explain. Is it easy to do anything with your mind? If you think it is, bright Heaven will not approve.”

Yan Hui said, “My family is poor. Indeed, I have not drunk wine or eaten any meat for months. Can this be considered fasting?”

Kongzi said, “That is the fasting one does before a sacrifice, not the fasting of the mind.”

“May I ask about fasting of the mind?”

“Unify your *zhi* 志, ‘plans.’ Do not listen with your ears but listen with your mind. Do not listen with your mind but listen with your *qi*. Listening stops with the ear. The mind stops with signs. *Qi* is empty and waits on external things. Only the Way gathers in emptiness. Emptiness is the fasting of the mind.”³⁹

Yan Hui said, “Prior to receiving this instruction, I was full of thoughts of Hui. But having applied it, it’s as though Hui never existed. Is this what you mean by emptiness?”

The Master said, “Perfect. Let me tell you. You can go wander in his cage without being moved by his fame. If you’re getting through, sing. If not,

³⁹In *Mengzi* 2A2, Mengzi criticizes Gaozi for suggesting that the mind must conform itself to words, i.e., doctrine. Here Zhuangzi has Kongzi disagreeing with both of them by saying that both the mind and words must be guided by *qi*.

stop. No schools. No prescriptions. Dwell in unity and lodge in what cannot be helped, and you're almost there.

"To stop leaving tracks is easy. Not to walk upon the ground is hard.⁴⁰ It's easy to fake what people do. Faking what Heaven does is hard. You've heard of using wings to fly, but not of using no wings to fly. You've heard of using knowledge to know, but not of using no knowledge to know. Look up at the hole in the wall that fills the empty room with light. The blessed stop stopping. Not stopping means galloping while you sit. If you let the ears and the eyes communicate with the inside and banish knowledge outside the mind, then even ghosts and spirits will come to dwell. Why not men? This is the transformation of ten thousand things, the secret of the ancient sages, not to mention ordinary people!"

Zigao, the Duke of She,⁴¹ was sent to Qi. He said to Kongzi, "The king is putting me on a high-priority mission. Qi treats emissaries very well, but never hurries. You can't budge an ordinary person along, much less a feudal lord! I'm already shaking. You've always told me, 'Few tasks of whatever size are completed happily except by means of the Way. If you don't complete it, you'll be in trouble with other people. If you do complete it, you'll have trouble with your own *yin* and *yang*.'⁴² Only someone of Virtue can avoid trouble in success and failure alike.' I'm the kind of person who eats simply and sparingly so my diet doesn't give me indigestion. But I received my orders in the morning and by evening I was drinking ice-water. I'm burning up inside! I haven't even started on the actual job yet and I'm already having trouble with *yin* and *yang*; if the mission doesn't succeed, then I'll also be in trouble with other people. I lose both ways! I can't handle the responsibility of taking on this assignment. Do you have anything you can tell me?"

⁴⁰Cf. Zhuangzi's criticism of Liezi in *Zhuangzi*, chapter 1, p. 206, "though he manages to avoid walking, he still relies on something."

⁴¹The Duke of She was an influential politician in the state of Chu in the early fifth century B.C.E. The *Zuozhuan* describes him as an advocate of the Confucian principle of government by Virtue instead of force who later made good on his word by returning power to the rightful ruler when he was in a position to take over militarily. He and Kongzi spoke about politics and disagreed politely over the priority of obligations to the family and to the state. See *Analects* 7.19, 13.16, and 13.18.

⁴²Success achieved in the wrong way harms a person internally. Good health requires a balanced harmony between the *yin* and *yang*. See *yin* and *yang* under *Important Terms*.

Kongzi said, “In this world, there are two great concerns. One is destiny. One is righteousness. Children’s love for their family is destiny:⁴³ you can’t undo it in your mind. The service of subjects for their rulers is righteousness: there is nowhere you can go and not have rulers, nowhere you can escape between Heaven and earth. These are great concerns. To serve your family, wherever they go, is the perfection of filial piety. To serve your rulers, whatever they ask, is the height of loyalty. To serve your own mind, so that sorrow and joy aren’t constantly revolving in front of you, knowing what you can’t do anything about and accepting it as though it were destiny, is the perfection of Virtue. As a subject or a child, there will certainly be things you can’t avoid. As long as you stick to the actual job and forget about yourself, what leisure do you have to love life or hate death? You’ll be able to do it.

“Let me tell you something else I’ve heard. In relationships, when people are close together, they generate trust through regular contact. When they are far apart, they have to establish loyalty with words, and words require communication. Communicating the words of two happy or two angry people is the hardest thing in the world. Two happy people inevitably exaggerate the good. Two angry people inevitably exaggerate the bad. But any exaggeration is false, and falsehood destroys trust. That’s when communication becomes dangerous. So the *Model Sayings*⁴⁴ have it, ‘Communicate the real essence; don’t communicate exaggerated words.’ Then you might come out whole.

“When people pit their strength in games of skill, they start out bright like *yang* but usually end dark as *yin*. They get up to more strange tricks the longer they go. People drinking wine at a ceremony start out orderly enough but usually end in chaos. The party gets stranger the longer it lasts. Everything is like this. What starts out clean usually ends up dirty. What starts out simple inevitably turns unsupportable.

“Words are like wind and waves. Actions fulfill or disappoint them. Wind and waves are easily moved, and fulfillment and disappointment easily lead to danger. Rage has no other source but clever words and one-sided language.⁴⁵ As the hunt draws to a close, the dying animal doesn’t choose its sounds but snorts its breath furiously, breeding a similar madness in the

⁴³The word translated here as “destiny” is translated as “orders” in the previous paragraph. In both cases, the character in question is *ming* 命 (“fate” or “mandate”). See *ming* under *Important Terms*.

⁴⁴Another probably fanciful “classical source.”

⁴⁵That is, what matters most is not what people do, but what they say, since it is the words that give the actions meaning.

minds of its hunters. Pushing hard toward the conclusion makes people vicious without their knowing it. And if they don't know it, who knows how it will end? So the *Model Sayings* have it, 'Don't change your orders. Don't strive for completion. Anything over the line is too much.' Changing your orders and striving for completion are dangerous business. A fine completion takes a long time, and a bad one cannot be changed. Can you afford not to be careful?

"Harness things so your heart can wander. Nourish your middle by accepting what cannot be avoided: that's perfection. What is there for you to do in return? Nothing is as good as fulfilling your destiny.⁴⁶ That's as hard as it gets." . . .

Splay-limb Shu's chin is sunk in his belly. His shoulders are above his head, pinched together so they point at the sky. His five organs are on top, his thighs tight against his ribs. Plying a needle and taking in laundry he makes enough to fill his mouth. Winnowing leftover grain he gets enough to feed ten people. When the people in charge are calling out troops, Splay-limb wanders among them waving goodbye. When they are press-ganging workers he is exempted as a chronic invalid. When they dole out grain to the sick, he gets three measures, and ten bundles of firewood. With splayed limbs, he is still able to keep himself alive and to live out the years Heaven gave him. What if he had splayed Virtue? . . .

Chapter Five: Signs of Abundant Virtue

In Lu there was an amputee named Royal Nag who had as many followers as Kongzi. Chang Ji⁴⁷ asked Kongzi, "Royal Nag is an amputee, yet you and he divide Lu for students. He doesn't stand and teach or sit and discuss, yet they go to him empty and come home full. Can there be teaching without words or a developed mind in a deformed body? What kind of person is he?"

Kongzi said, "He is a sage. I'm just running late and haven't been to see him yet. And if I intend to make him my teacher, is it surprising that others do? Forget about Lu; I'm going to lead the whole world to follow him."

⁴⁶"Fulfilling destiny" could also be translated "following orders."

⁴⁷Nothing is known about this person, though the name does not appear to be fictional. He may be connected to the Ji clan, the most powerful of the Three Families that ruled Lu for most of Kongzi's lifetime, reducing the Duke of Lu to little more than a figurehead.

Chang Ji said, "If that amputee can lord it over you, he must be far from ordinary. Someone like that must have a special way of thinking."

Kongzi said, "Death and life are big, but they make no difference to him. Heaven and earth could flip over, and it would not matter to him. He peers into the falseless and does not shift with things. He considers it destiny that they should change and holds on to their ancestor."

Chang Ji said, "What does that mean?"

Kongzi said, "Looked at from their differences, liver and gall are as far apart as the states of Chu and Yue. Looked at from their sameness, the ten thousand things are all one. Someone like him does not know what is appropriate for his ears and eyes but lets his mind wander in the harmony of Virtue. He looks at the way things are one and does not see what they're missing. He looks at losing a foot like shaking off dust."

Chang Ji said, "For his own sake he uses knowledge to gain control of his mind and uses control of his mind to achieve a constant mind. But why should others make so much of him?"

Kongzi said, "People don't mirror themselves in moving water, they mirror themselves in still water.⁴⁸ Only the still can still the crowd's stillness. Of those that receive their destiny on earth, only the pine and cypress are green winter and summer. Of those that receive their destiny from Heaven, only the sages Yao and Shun are proper. Those fortunate enough to correct their own lives can correct the lives of the crowd. The proof of guarding the beginning is the fact of not being nervous. A brave soldier will boldly go against the nine armies. If someone can risk his life like this for fame, how much more so one whose palace is Heaven and earth and whose treasure is the ten thousand things, one who only lodges in the form, treats hearing and sight as images, unifies what knowledge knows, and whose mind never tastes death? He will pick his day to transcend the falseness, which is why people follow him. Why would he be willing to make mere things his business?" . . .

Duke Ai of Lu⁴⁹ asked Kongzi, "There was an ugly man in Wei named Sad Nag. Men hung around with him. They thought about him all the time and couldn't tear themselves away. Women saw him and by the dozen they vowed to their parents that they'd rather be his concubine than another man's wife. No one ever heard him sing the lead, all he ever did was harmonize with oth-

⁴⁸Cf. *Xunzi*, chapter 21, p. 277.

⁴⁹Duke Ai (r. 494–468 B.C.E.) is depicted asking questions of Kongzi and his disciples in several passages in the *Analects*. For example, see *Analects* 6.3 and 12.9.

ers. He had no lordly status to save people from death, no piles of wealth to fill their bellies, and he was ugly enough to shock the world. He harmonized without singing and knew nothing beyond his own borders, but cocks and hens coupled in his presence. There had to be something special about him! So We summoned him for an audience, and he really was ugly enough to shock the world. He stayed with Us, and before a month was out We took an interest in his personality. By the time a year passed, We trusted him. Since the state had no minister, We put him in charge. He looked glum and faltered, as though he might even decline. We were embarrassed but eventually got him to take it. Before long, however, he abandoned Us. We were crushed, as though We'd lost a loved one, as though there was no one to enjoy the state with. What kind of man was this?"

Kongzi said, "I was once sent to Chu. On the way I saw piglets feeding at their dead mother. After a while, they all blinked and ran off. They didn't see themselves in her, didn't find their kind. What they loved was their mother—not her form, but what moved her form. When someone dies in battle, his people don't bother with medals at his burial. An amputee's old shoes mean nothing to him. Both have lost the root. Women of the imperial retinue don't pare their nails or pierce their ears. A married man is sent on no more outside missions. When we do this to keep the form whole, how much more should we do to keep Virtue whole! Now this Sad Nag was trusted before he spoke and was loved though he accomplished nothing. He got people to give him their own states and worry he wouldn't take them! He must have completed the potential, though his Virtue took no form."

Duke Ai asked, "What do you mean by completing the potential?"

Kongzi said, "Death, life, survival, loss, failure, success, poverty, wealth, worth, depravity, slander, praise, hunger, thirst, winter, summer—their change is the process of destiny. Day and night they alternate in front of us, but knowledge cannot measure their beginning. Don't let them slip out of harmony or penetrate the spirit store. Indulge them harmoniously. Let them circulate without leaking away. Day and night, without a break, make it springtime with things. As you greet each new circumstance, generate the season in your own mind. This is what I mean by completing the potential."

"What do you mean by Virtue taking no form?"

"Levelness is the height of still water, so it can be used as a standard.⁵⁰ Hold it from within and it will not be disturbed from without. Virtue is

⁵⁰Cf. the opening section of chapter 13, p. 237 below.

the cultivation of complete harmony. When Virtue takes no form, things cannot leave it.”

Later, Duke Ai told Minzi,⁵¹ “At first when I ruled the empire, I held the reins of the people and worried about their welfare. I thought I had perfected it. Now that I’ve heard this explanation of the perfect person, I worry that I lacked the real substance and that I damaged the state by neglecting myself. Kongzi and I are not subject and lord, but friends in Virtue.” . . .

Where sages wander, knowledge is a curse, restrictions are paste, favors are a patch, and effort is for trade. Sages do not plan, so why do they need knowledge? They do not cut, so why do they need paste? They have nothing to lose, so why do they need favors? They’re not buying, so why do they need trade? In these four ways they feed at Heaven. Feeding at Heaven, they are nourished by Heaven. Once they are nourished by Heaven, why do they need other people? They have human form but not human *qing* 情 “essence.” Since they have human form, they flock with people. Since they lack human essence, right and wrong do not get to them. Infinitesimally small, they flock with people. Indescribably large, they complete their Heaven alone.

Huizi asked Zhuangzi, “Can people really have no essence?”

Zhuangzi said, “Yes, they can.”

Huizi said, “But if they have no essence, how can you call them ‘people’?”

Zhuangzi said, “The Way gave them a face. Heaven gave them a form. How can you not call them ‘people’?”

Huizi said, “But if you call them ‘people,’ how can they have no essence?”

Zhuangzi said, “Rights and wrongs (*shi/fei* 是非) are what I mean by ‘essence.’ By ‘no essence,’ I mean people not letting in good and bad to hurt them. Follow the natural and do not help life along.”⁵²

Huizi said, “How can people exist without helping life?”

Zhuangzi said, “The Way gave them a face, Heaven gave them a form—by not letting likes and dislikes in to do harm, that’s how. But you shut out your spirit, and tire your energies, leaning on a podium ranting, slumping

⁵¹Min Ziqian is a disciple of Kongzi praised in several passages in the *Analects* that are not included in this volume.

⁵²Cf. *Laozi*, chapter 55.

at your desk and napping. Heaven chose a form for you, and you use it to sing disputations!⁵³

Chapter Six: The Great Ancestral Teacher

To know what Heaven does and to know what humans do is to have reached perfection. Those who know what Heaven does are born of Heaven.⁵⁴ Those who know what humans do use what they know they know to nurture what they know they don't know, living out their Heavenly years and not dying along the way. This is the flourishing of knowledge.

Even so, there is a problem. Knowledge depends on something before it can be fitting. But what it depends on has not yet been fixed. So how do I know that what I call "Heaven" is not really human and what I call "human" is not really Heaven? Only when there are true people can we have true knowledge. What do I mean by true people? The true people of olden times did not resist poverty. They did not glory in success. They did not plan their affairs. They could miss without regretting it and hit without being pleased. Such people could climb high without shuddering. They could enter water without getting wet and fire without getting burned. Such is the knowledge that is able to climb up to the Way. . . .

The true people of the olden days knew nothing of loving life and nothing of hating death. They emerged without delight and returned without resistance. They came and went briskly, nothing more. They neither forgot their beginning nor sought their end. They enjoyed what they received, forgot it, and handed it back. This is called not using the mind to block the Way, not using the human to help Heaven. These are called true people. . . .

Hence what they liked was one and what they didn't like was one. Their being one was one and their not being one was one. Seeing it as one, they were followers of Heaven. Seeing it as not one, they were followers of hu-

⁵³The *qing* 情, "essence," is the underlying truth or fact about a thing, as opposed to its reputation or the opinions people have of it. The "human essence" is understood here as the basic emotions or commitments that give rise to judgments of right and wrong. Cf. *Mengzi* 6A6 and 6A8. Someone without essence would not have no emotions, but would lack pre-conceptions about what those emotions are.

⁵⁴Translating the word for "Heaven" as "nature," the phrase "born of Heaven" could also be read "live naturally."

manity. When neither Heaven nor humanity wins out over the other, this is called being a true person. . . .

When the springs dry up, the fish are stuck together on the land. They douse each other with spit and spray each other with drool, but it is not as good as forgetting each other in the rivers and lakes. Praising Yao and condemning Jie is not as good as forgetting them both and transforming with the Way. The Big Lump burdens me with a form, labors me with life, eases me with old age, and rests me with death. So if I like my life, for the same reason I must also like my death.

You hide your boat in a gully or your net in a swamp and call them secure. But in the middle of the night a strong man could still take them on his back and leave, and you would be asleep and not know. Hiding the small in the large seems fitting, but still you lose. But if you hid the world in the world, you would have nothing to lose. This is the essence of what lasts. You trespass on human form and still delight in it. As a human, you can change ten thousand times without ever reaching the limit. Can you count the different things that have made you happy? So the sage wanders in what exists everywhere and can't be lost. He likes growing old and he likes dying young. He likes the beginning and he likes the end. People model themselves on the sage. But why not on that to which the ten thousand things are tied and on which every change depends?

The Way has an essence and can be trusted. But it takes no action and has no form. It can be passed on but not received, gotten but not seen. It is its own trunk, its own root. Before Heaven and earth existed, it spiritualized the ghosts and gods, and gave birth to Heaven and earth. It is above the supreme ultimate but not high, below the six limits but not deep. It was born before Heaven and earth but does not age. It is more venerable than high antiquity but is not old.⁵⁵ . . .

South Lord Master Flower said to Out-of-step Woman, "You are old in years but have the look of a child. How do you do it?"

She said, "I've heard the Way."

South Lord Master Flower asked, "May I study the Way?"

She said, "How? How could you? You're not the person for it. Buliang Yi had the stuff of a sage but not the way of a sage. I have the way of a sage but not the stuff of a sage. I wanted to teach him, to see if maybe he really could become a sagely person. If not, at least it would be easier to explain

⁵⁵Cf. *Laozi*, chapter 25.

the way of a sage to someone with the stuff of a sage. So I stuck with it, explaining it to him for three days, after which he could put the world outside of himself. Once he'd put the world outside, I kept at it. After seven days he could put things outside. Once he'd put things outside, I kept at it. After nine days he could put life outside himself. Once he'd put life outside himself, the light dawned. After the light had dawned, he could see he was alone. Having seen he was alone, he could have no past or present. With no past or present, he was able to enter no living or dying. What kills life does not die; what lives life is not alive. The kind of thing it is—there is nothing it does not see off, nothing it does not greet, nothing it does not ruin, nothing it does not bring to completion. Its name is Disturbing Peace. The Disturbing Peace completes things only after disturbing them.”

South Lord Master Flower asked, “Where did you hear it?”

She said, “I heard it from Ink-Aid’s son. Ink-Aid’s son heard it from Faltering Recitation’s grandson. Faltering Recitation’s grandson heard it from Looking-up-at-the-light. Looking-up-at-the-light heard it from Whispered Promise. Whispered Promise heard it from Needs Work. Needs Work heard it from Sing “Ooh!” Sing “Ooh!” heard it from Mysterious Darkness. Mysterious Darkness heard it from Present-in-vacancy. Present-in-vacancy heard it from Dubious Beginning.”

Master Sacrifice, Master Chariot,⁵⁶ Master Plow, and Master Arrive all four spoke together, saying, “Who can take nothing as the head, life as the spine, and death as the tail? Who knows death, life, existence, and annihilation as all the same thing? I’ll be that person’s friend.” All four looked at each other and smiled. There was no resistance in their hearts, and so they became friends.

Suddenly, Master Chariot got sick. Master Sacrifice went to ask after him. “How extraordinary of the maker of things to knot me up like this. My back is hunched out. My organs are all out of order. My chin is hidden in my navel. My shoulders are peaked. And my neck bones point to Heaven.” But though his *yin* and *yang qi* were fouled, in his mind there was nothing the matter. He hobbled over to look at his reflection in the well. “Sheesh! The maker of things really is knotting me up.”

Master Sacrifice said, “Do you dislike it?”

⁵⁶Zi Yu, “Master Chariot,” is also the name of Kongzi’s disciple Zengzi. Since none of the other names refer to real people, however, it is probably not significant.

He said, “Not at all. What is there to dislike? If, in time, he turns my left arm into rooster, I’ll use it to crow the day. If he turns my right arm into a bow, I’ll shoot down a dove for roasting. If he turns my buttocks into wheels and my spirit into a horse, I’ll climb aboard. What better carriage? You get something when it’s time. You lose it when it’s passed. If you are content with the time and abide by the passing, there’s no room for sorrow or joy. This is what the ancients called ‘loosing the bonds.’ If you don’t loose yourself, things will bind you. Nothing has ever beaten Heaven. What is there to dislike?”

Suddenly Master Arrive got sick. Gasping, he was on the point of death. His wife and children circled around him weeping. Master Plow came to ask after him and said to them, “Stop! Get back! Don’t be afraid of the change.” Leaning on the door frame he said, “How extraordinary, the one who makes these changes! What will he do with you next? Where will he send you? Will he make you a rat’s liver? Will he make you a bug’s arm?”

Master Arrive said, “A child goes wherever its parents say—east, west, north, or south. How much more are *yin* and *yang* to a person than parents! If they bring me to the point of death and I refuse to obey, I would only be being stubborn. What fault is it of theirs? The Big Lump burdens me with a form, labors me with life, eases me with old age, and rests me with death. So if I like my life, for the same reason I must also like my death. Suppose a great smith were casting metal. If the metal were to rear up and say ‘I insist on being a *Moye*!’⁵⁷ the great smith would certainly take it as inauspicious material. If, having once trespassed on the human form, I were to say ‘Only a human! Only a human!’ then the maker of changes would certainly take me as an inauspicious person. If you take Heaven and earth as a great furnace and the maker of changes as a great smith, then where can you go that will not be all right? I will doze off whole and, drowsily, wake up.” . . .

Yan Hui questioned Kongzi, “When Mengsun Cai’s mother died he cried without tears.⁵⁸ In his inner heart he did not mourn. And conducting the funeral, he did not grieve. With these three lapses, his reputation as a mourner still covers Lu. Is it really possible to gain the name while lacking the substance? I was shocked.”

⁵⁷*Moye* was the famous sword of King Helü of Wu (514–496 B.C.E.), the smelting of which was said to have required human sacrifices in order to fuse the alloys. The art of metallurgy was endowed with mystical significance, partly because it was dimly understood, and partly also because of the enormous military advantages it conferred upon its possessors.

⁵⁸The Mengsun clan was one of the Three Families that ruled Lu during Kongzi’s lifetime, though nothing specific is known of Mengsun Cai.

Kongzi said, “Mengsun is done. He is beyond knowing. He would make it even simpler, but he can’t. Still, he did simplify it some. Mengsun does not know why he lives. He does not know why he dies. He’s not aware of moving forward. He’s not aware of falling back. If he changes into something, he lets the unknown change finish it. When he changes, how does he know he isn’t not changing? When he doesn’t change, how does he know he hasn’t changed already? Take you and me—we’re dreaming and haven’t woken up! But something can shock his body without harming his mind. He stays here only for a day but feels no death. Mengsun is awake. People cry, so he cries; this is why.

“We say ‘I.’ But how do I know what I mean by ‘I’? You dream you’re a bird crossing Heaven or a fish sunk in the depths. There’s no telling if the one who speaks now is awake or dreaming. Directing the trip doesn’t measure up to smiling, and laughing doesn’t measure up to stepping aside. Step aside and leave the changes. Then you will enter the oneness of the vacant sky.”

Master Thinker went to see Whence. Whence asked him, “How has Yao rewarded you?”

Master Thinker said, “Yao told me, ‘You must submit to benevolence and righteousness to speak clearly about right and wrong.’”

Whence said, “So what did you come here for? Yao’s already tattooed your face with benevolence and righteousness and cut off your nose with right and wrong. How can you expect to wander distant, unrestrained, and rolling paths?”

Master Thinker said, “But still, I’d like to wander along the edge.”

Whence said, “It’s not like that. The blind can’t share in the loveliness of faces or the near-sighted in far-off vistas.”

Master Thinker said, “But beauties lose their looks and strong men lose their strength. Even Huang Di forgot his knowledge—all in the process of being recast. How do you know the maker of things won’t erase my tattoos, replace my nose, and make me whole so I can follow you, sir?”

Whence said, “Ah, you never know! I’ll give you the main outlines.

My teacher! My teacher! He orders ten thousand things but is not righteous. He’s kind to ten thousand generations but is not benevolent. He’s more venerable than high antiquity but is not old. He roofs Heaven, floors earth, and fashions everything between but is not handy. That’s how you wander.”

Yan Hui said, "I'm improving."

Kongzi said, "How so?"

"I've forgotten benevolence and righteousness."

"Good, but there's more."

Yan Hui saw him again the next day and said, "I'm improving."

"How so?"

"I've forgotten rites and music."

"Good, but there's more."

Yan Hui saw him again the next day and said, "I'm improving."

"How so?"

"I sit and forget."

Kongzi started and said, "What do you mean by 'sit and forget'?"

Yan Hui said, "I cast off my limbs, dismiss hearing and sight, leave my form, abandon knowledge, and unify them in the great comprehension. That's what I mean by 'sit and forget.' "

Kongzi said, "If you've unified them then you have no preferences. If you've changed then you have no constancy. You really are worthy! I would like to ask to be your follower!"⁵⁹ . . .

Chapter Seven: The Proper Way for Emperors and Kings

Gaptooth asked Royal Relativity four times and got four "I-don't-know's" in response.⁶⁰ Gaptooth jumped up and down, he was so happy, and went to tell Master Reed Coat.

Master Reed Coat said, "You're just learning that now? Shun didn't measure up to the really ancient sages. Shun still stockpiled benevolence in order to win people. He got people, but he never escaped from not-people. Now the really ancient sages—they slept calmly and woke blankly. Sometimes they took themselves for horses. Sometimes they took themselves for cows. Their knowledge of the essence was trustworthy, and their Virtue was exceptionally true. They never entered into not-people." . . .

Don't make a name for yourself or follow a plan. Don't take responsibility or claim knowledge. Thoroughly embody what can't be exhausted and wander where you can't be seen. Take everything you get from Heaven but don't consider it gain. Just be empty. Perfected people use their minds like

⁵⁹Cf. Kongzi's remarks in *Analects* 5.9 and 6.11.

⁶⁰See *Zhuangzi*, chapter 2, p. 216.

mirrors, not welcoming things as they come or escorting them as they go. They respond without keeping, so they can conquer without harm.

The emperor of the north sea was Whish. The emperor of the south sea was Whoosh. The emperor of the center was All-full. Whish and Whoosh sometimes lodged together at All-full's place and he treated them exceptionally well. Whish and Whoosh decided to return All-full's kindness. "Everyone has seven holes to see, hear, eat and breathe, but he alone has none. Let's try drilling him some!" Each day they drilled a hole. And in seven days, All-full died.⁶¹

Chapter Twelve: Heaven and Earth

. . . Kongzi's student Zigong⁶² wandered south to Chu and was returning through Jin. As he passed the south bank of the Han River, he saw an old man gardening a small plot. He'd dug a tunnel for a well and was coming out carrying a jug to water his fields. He was huffing and puffing, working hard for little reward.

Zigong said, "There's a machine now that can water a hundred gardens in one day. You get a big reward for easy work. Wouldn't you like one, sir?"

The gardener raised his head to look at him. "How does it work?"

"You carve the contraption⁶³ out of a piece of wood. The back is heavy and the front is light. You can lift the water with one hand, until it's practically bubbling over. It's called a well sweep."⁶⁴

The gardener flushed angrily and laughed, "I heard from my teacher that where there are mechanical contraptions there will be mechanical business, and where there is mechanical business there are mechanical minds. With a mechanical mind, you cannot preserve your simplicity. When you cannot preserve your simplicity, your spiritual life is unsettled, and the Way

⁶¹This marks the end of the "Inner Chapters," which many regard as the earliest strata within the *Zhuangzi* and possibly the work of the man Zhuangzi.

⁶²Zigong was arguably Kongzi's most successful student. He was held in high esteem both by the Master and also by influential politicians. Kongzi sometimes seemed to worry that things came too easily to him. See *Analects* 1.15, 5.9, 5.12 etc.

⁶³This word can also mean "shackle."

⁶⁴For an image of a well sweep, see the web site for this volume.

will not support an unsettled spiritual life. I'm not ignorant of your contraption. I would be embarrassed to use it!" . . .

When the freak gives birth in the middle of the night, she reaches frantically for a torch, gasping, worrying only whether the child looks like her. . . .

Chapter Thirteen: Heaven's Way

. . . The sage is calm, but not because he declares calmness good. None of the ten thousand things are enough to rattle his mind, so he is calm. When water is calm, you can see the wispy hair on your temples in it. Its surface is level and sets the standard for great builders. If water is so clear when calm, how much more so the spirit! The calm mind of the sage is a mirror to Heaven and earth and a looking glass for the ten thousand things. . . .

Duke Huan⁶⁵ was reading a book up in his hall. Wheelwright Slab was chiseling a wheel [in the courtyard] below.⁶⁶ He put down his hammer and chisel and ascended, asking Duke Huan, "Excuse me. What are you reading?"

The Duke said, "The words of the sages."

"Are the sages still around?"

The Duke said, "They're dead."

"Then what M'Lord is reading is nothing more than the leavings of the ancients."

Duke Huan said, "How dare a wheelwright criticize what We read? If you have an explanation, okay. If not, you die!"

Wheelwright Slab said, "Your servant looks at it from the point of view of his own business. When I chisel a wheel, if I hit too softly, it slips and won't bite. If I hit too hard, it jams and won't move. Neither too soft nor too hard—I get it in my hand and respond with my mind. But my mouth cannot put it into words. There is an art to it. But your servant can't show it to his own son, and he can't get it from me. I've done it this way seventy years and am growing old chiseling wheels. The ancients died with what they could not pass down. So what M'Lord is reading can only be their leavings."

⁶⁵For Duke Huan of Qi, see the entry for Guan Zhong under *Important Figures*.

⁶⁶The scene in this passage is similar to what we see in *Mengzi* 1A7. See *Mengzi*, 1A7; see especially n. 3.

Chapter Fourteen: Heaven's Turning

. . . For traveling on water there's nothing like a boat. For traveling on land, there's nothing like a cart. But though a boat can go on water, if you try pushing it on land, you can push until you die and not go an inch. Aren't past and present like water and land? Aren't the states of Zhou and Lu like boats and carts? Those who insist on using the ways of Zhou in Lu might as well be pushing a boat on land. They exhaust themselves without success and bring certain misfortune on their heads. They do not know the directionless revolution that responds to things without tiring. . . .

The beautiful Xi Shi had a stomach ache and glowered at the villagers. When her ugly neighbor saw how good she looked that way, he went home clasp his stomach and glowering at his neighbors, too, until the wealthy people slammed their windows and doors and the poor grabbed their children and ran. . . .

Chapter Seventeen: Autumn Floods

. . . The *kui*⁶⁷ said to the millipede, "I go hippety-flopping on one foot, and there's nothing like it! How do you manage those ten thousand feet of yours?"

The millipede said, "It's not like that. Haven't you seen a man spit? He just hawks and—drops big as pearls! fine as mist! mixing and falling! You can't count them all! I just put my heavenly mechanism into motion. I don't know how it works!"

The millipede said to the snake, "I use this mob of legs to walk but still don't match up to you with none at all. How do you do it?"

The snake said, "The heavenly mechanism does it. What could be easier? What use would I have for legs?"

The snake said to the wind, "I move with just my ribs and spine. But I still seem to exist. You bluster up from the north sea and bluster off to the south sea, but you don't seem to be anything at all. How do you do it?"

The wind said, "Yes, I bluster up from the north sea and off to the south sea. But a finger raised against me can stop me. A screen can beat me. Even

⁶⁷A mythical one-legged beast.

so, only I can snap huge trees and lift great buildings, because I turn all those little defeats into a great victory. Only the sage is capable of the great victory.”

Did you hear about the frog in the collapsed well? He said to the turtle of the eastern sea, “Aren’t I happy! I come out and spring on the railing, or I go in and rest in the hollow of a missing brick. When I float in the water, it hugs me under the arms and supports my chin. When I stomp in the mud, my feet sink in until it covers my ankles. Look around at the larvae and shrimp and polliwogs. None of them can match me! To control the water of an entire gully and straddle the happiness of a whole collapsed well—this is really getting somewhere! Why don’t you come in some time and see?”

Before the turtle of the eastern sea could get his left foot in, his right knee was already stuck. He teetered and fell back, and then began to tell of the sea. “A thousand *li* wouldn’t measure its breadth. A thousand fathoms wouldn’t plumb its depths. In Yu’s time there were floods nine years in ten, but its waters never rose. In Tang’s time there were droughts seven years in eight, but its shores never receded. Not to change or shift for an instant or ever, not to advance or retreat a little or a lot—that’s the happiness of the eastern sea.”

When the frog in the caved in well heard this, he spluttered in surprise and forgot who he was. . . .

Did you hear about the toddler from Shouling who studied walking in Handan? Before he learned the local walk, he’d lost his native gait and had to shuffle home on his hands and knees.⁶⁸ . . .

Zhuangzi was angling by the Pu River when the king of Chu sent two officers to him, saying, “We would like to trouble you with administering Our kingdom.”

Without looking up from his pole, Zhuangzi said, “I’ve heard Chu has a sacred turtle. It’s been dead three thousand years and the king keeps it wrapped and boxed and stored up in his ancestral hall. Now, would that turtle rather have its bones treasured in death, or be alive dragging its tail in the mud?”

⁶⁸Shouling was not actually a city but a tomb, construction of which was begun in 335 B.C.E. and probably continued throughout Zhuangzi’s lifetime. Handan was the walled capital of Zhao and was also famous for its funerary parks. Assuming that the project at Shouling was to some extent modeled on the one at Handan, Zhuangzi’s story may imply a sly criticism of people who follow the past to make sepulchers for themselves in the present.

The two officers said, "It would rather be alive dragging its tail in the mud."

Zhuangzi said, "Go! I'll keep my tail in the mud, too." . . .

Zhuangzi and Huizi were wandering on a bridge over the Hao River. Zhuangzi said, "Look at those mottled fish out wandering at ease. That's what fish like!"

Huizi said, "You are not a fish. How do you know what fish like?"

Zhuangzi said, "You are not me. How do you know I don't know what fish like?"

Huizi said, "I'm not you, so I certainly don't know what you know. And since you're not a fish, you don't know what fish like. There, perfect!"

Zhuangzi said, "Let's go back to the beginning. When you asked how I knew what fish like, you had to know I knew already in order to ask. I know it by the Hao River—that's how."⁶⁹

Chapter Eighteen: Perfect Happiness

. . . When Zhuangzi's wife died, Huizi came to mourn her. At that moment, Zhuangzi was squatting down, beating on a tub, and singing.

Huizi said, "You lived with this person, raised children, and grew old together. Not to cry when she died would be bad enough. But to beat on a tub singing! Isn't that too much?"

Zhuangzi said, "No. When she first died, don't you think I was like everyone else? But then I considered her beginning, before she was alive. Not only before she had life, but before she had form. Not only before she had form, but before she had *qi*.

In all the mixed up bustle and confusion, something changed and there was *qi*. The *qi* changed and there was form. The form changed and she had life. Today there was another change and she died. It's just like the round of the four seasons: spring, summer, fall, and winter. She was resting quietly, perfectly at home, and I followed her crying 'Wah-hah!' It seemed like I hadn't comprehended fate. So I stopped." . . .

⁶⁹The word translated as "how" can also mean "where."

Chapter Nineteen: Penetrating Life

. . . Yan Hui said to Kongzi, “I once crossed the depths at Goblet Gulf. The ferryman handled the boat like a spiritual being. I asked him, ‘Can a person learn to handle a boat like that?’ He said, ‘A good swimmer can master the ability. And a diver can handle it easily even if he’s never seen a boat before.’ I asked him for more but he wouldn’t tell me. May I ask you what he meant?”

Kongzi said, “A good swimmer can master it because he forgets the water. A diver can handle it easily without ever seeing a boat before because he views the depths like a hillside and a flipped boat like a slipping cart. The ten thousand things could all flip and slip in front of him and they wouldn’t get in his front door. Where could he go and not be at ease? Betting for tiles, you’re good. Betting for buckles, you worry. Betting for gold, you panic. Your skill is the same, but you care, so you value what is on the outside. Those who value what is on the outside are clumsy on the inside.” . . .

Chapter Twenty: The Mountain Tree

. . . Zhuangzi was wandering by the edge of the Diaoling preserve when he saw a strange magpie flying up from the south. Her wings were seven feet across and her eyes were an inch around. She bumped into his forehead and then crashed in a chestnut grove. He said, “What kind of bird is this, with such magnificent wings that don’t get it anywhere and such big eyes that can’t see?”⁷⁰ Hitching up his robes and tiptoeing forward, he pursued it, bow in hand. He saw a cicada forgetting itself in a pretty bit of shade. A praying mantis took advantage of the cover to grab for it, forgetting its own body at the sight of gain. The strange magpie was right behind, eyeing the prize and forgetting its truth. Zhuangzi shuddered. “Eeeee! Things certainly entangle one another, each one dragging in the next!” He threw down his bow and ran back the way he came—but then the warden of the grove saw and pursued him, cursing.

Zhuangzi went home and didn’t come out for three days. His attendant, Straw, asked, “Sir, why haven’t you left the house recently?”

Zhuangzi said, “I was guarding my body but forgot myself. I looked at muddy water and mistook it for clear depths. I’ve heard my teacher say,

⁷⁰The strange magpie could be Breeze on her return journey. See *Zhuangzi*, chapter 1, pp. 204–09.

‘Out in the world, follow its rules.’ Now I was wandering by Diaoling and forgot myself. A strange magpie bumped my forehead, wandered into the chestnut grove, and forgot its truth. And the grove warden took me for a poacher! That’s why I haven’t been out.” . . .

Chapter Twenty-Two: Knowledge Wandered North

. . . Master East Wall asked Zhuangzi, “Where is this so-called Way?”

Zhuangzi said, “There’s nowhere it isn’t.”

Master East Wall said “You must be more specific.”

Zhuangzi said, “It’s in an ant.”

“How about even lower?”

“It’s in the grass.”

“How about lower still?”

“In tiles.”

“How about even lower than that?”

“It’s in dung and urine.”

When Master East Wall did not reply, Zhuangzi said, “Your questions don’t reach the substance. When the inspector of the hunt asked the superintendent of the market about poking pigs for fatness, he was told the lower the better. But you shouldn’t insist on that. Don’t reject anything. The perfect Way is like this and so are great words. ‘Whole,’ ‘everywhere,’ and ‘all’ are three different names for the same thing, making a single point.” . . .

Chapter Twenty-Three: Mister Gengsang Chu

. . . People who have had their feet cut off forsake jewelry, because they are beyond praise and blame. Chained convicts are not afraid of heights because they have left life and death behind them. They have given up. They do not care. They have forgotten other people, and by forgetting other people they have become people of Heaven. You can honor them and they won’t be pleased. You can despise them and they won’t be mad. Only those who have identified with Heaven’s harmony are like this. . . .

Chapter Twenty-Four: Mister Ghostless Slow

. . . Zhuangzi was accompanying a funeral when he passed by Huizi’s grave. Turning to his attendants, he said, “When plasterer Ying got a speck of mud on his nose as thick as a fly’s wing, he would ask Builder Stone to slice

it off. Builder Stone would twirl his axe like the wind and chop away obediently, getting all the mud and leaving the nose unharmed, while the plasterer stood there without changing his expression. Years later, when Ying had passed away, Lord Yuan of Song⁷¹ heard about the trick and summoned Builder Stone.

“Do it for Us!” he commanded.

“Builder Stone replied, ‘I was able to do it once, but the material I worked with died long ago.’

“Since my own teacher died,” Zhuangzi continued, “I have been without material. I have no one to talk to.” . . .

Kongzi said, “I have heard the unspoken speech but I’ve never tried to speak it . . . I wish I had a beak a yard long!”⁷² . . .

Chapter Twenty-Six: Outside Things

. . . A trap is for fish: when you’ve got the fish, you can forget the trap. A snare is for rabbits: when you’ve got the rabbit, you can forget the snare. Words are for meaning: when you’ve got the meaning, you can forget the words. Where can I find someone who’s forgotten words so I can have a word with him? . . .

Chapter Thirty-Two: Mister Clampdown Lie

. . . When Zhuangzi was about to die, his students wanted to bury him lavishly. He said to them, “I’ll have Heaven and earth for a casket, the sun and moon for ornaments, the constellations as pall-bearers, and the ten thousand things as mourners. Isn’t everything prepared for the funeral? What could you add?”

“We’re afraid the crows and kites will eat you.”

“Above ground I’ll feed the crows and kites. Below I’ll feed the crickets and ants.” Zhuangzi said. “Stealing from one to feed the other would be awfully unfair.”⁷³

⁷¹Reigned 531–517 B.C.E.

⁷²Cf. *Zhuangzi*, chapter 2, p. 212, “We think [human speech] is different from the peeping of fledglings. But is there really any difference or isn’t there?”

⁷³Cf. *Analects* 9.12.

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