Wisdom of the East · Book II

Understanding the Zhuangzi

The 33 chapters with philosophical commentaries

Juan Segurola

English reading version
compared with Legge and the Chinese text

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Editorial note

This Book II of Wisdom of the East offers an English reading version of the thirty-three chapters of the received Zhuangzi, compared with James Legge and the Chinese text. Each chapter separates the primary text, its explanation, a philosophical interpretation and the collation. The brief commentaries guide reading; they do not replace the narratives or claim exhaustive exegesis. The author's earlier essay on the Zhuangzi remains a separate companion study and is not silently incorporated into this volume.

James Legge's historical translation, *The Texts of Taoism* (1891), is the principal intermediary for this version. The wording is compared with transcriptions of the received Chinese text and, where a passage calls for it, with traditional commentaries. The collation therefore sometimes explains Legge's interpretation and why a different reading is adopted. This is neither a verbatim reproduction of his English nor a certified direct translation from Classical Chinese.

The textual and commentarial reference is Guo Qingfan's *Zhuangzi jishi* (1894), based on the received thirty-three-chapter tradition associated with Guo Xiang. The working digital transcription is Wikisource, 莊子, identified by chapter; not every written form is presumed to coincide with Guo's printed edition. Material differences, such as 義 and 戾 in chapters 6 and 13, are declared in the notes. Web copies of Legge serve as consultation aids, not as new historical editions.

This is a reading version with textual comparisons, not a critical edition or an independent philological validation. The collations make choices and ambiguities visible; they do not guarantee a single interpretation of every construction. Images of longevity, bodily transformation and immunity belong to the ancient work's language, not to established medical fact. Speeches attributed to its characters are not historical assertions made by the editor.

The identifier 06.22 means chapter 6, paragraph 22 of this edition. The 563 identifiers are identical in English and Spanish, allowing readers to move from a note to the passage and compare both versions independently of page numbers. They are this edition's identifiers, not Harvard-Yenching or Chinese Text Project numbers. Episode locators refer to the traditional chapter and the opening words of the Chinese text; the package's concordance file preserves the correspondences.

Personal names use pinyin without tone marks; technical terms cited in the notes carry tones and are italicised. *Dào* (道) is understood as way; *dé* (德) as virtue, integrity or potency; *qì* (氣) as breath; and *shì/fēi* (是非), according to context, as assertion and denial or approval and rejection. Chinese characters use traditional forms. Ancient units are retained without conversions that would simulate a precision absent from the text.

The division into Inner, Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters does not remove their differences. Skill may be praised in one scene and questioned in another; withdrawal may protect or prove insufficient; government and ritual receive differing assessments. Understanding these tensions requires preserving them rather than dissolving them into a uniform doctrine.

Reading version, edition and commentary: Juan Segurola. Classical text: Zhuangzi. Historical translation reference: James Legge (1891).

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Inner Chapters · 1 to 7

01. Wandering Freely

Xiaoyao you | 逍遙遊

Chapter text

01.01 In the northern ocean there is a fish called Kun. I do not know how many thousands of li it measures. It changes into a bird called Peng, whose back is also I do not know how many thousands of li across. When it rises powerfully into flight, its wings are like clouds covering the sky. When the sea stirs, it prepares to move to the southern ocean. That ocean is the Pool of Heaven.

01.02 The Qi Xie is a record of marvels. It says: “When Peng moves to the southern ocean, it strikes the waters for three thousand li, rises ninety thousand li on a whirlwind and departs on the breath of six months.” Vapours running like wild horses, suspended dust and living beings stir one another with their breath. Is blue the true colour of the sky? Or does it come from a distance with no reachable limit? Looking down from above, the bird would see just the same.

01.03 If accumulated water is not deep enough, it cannot support a large boat. Pour a cup of water into a hollow: a blade of grass can float upon it. Put the cup there, and it sticks, because the water is shallow and the boat too large. If the wind has not accumulated thickly enough, it cannot support great wings. That is why Peng rises ninety thousand li: only then does it have beneath it the mass of wind that can carry it. With the blue sky on its back, and nothing obstructing or interrupting its course, it can set out towards the south.

01.04 A cicada and a little dove laughed at it. “We make an effort and fly towards an elm or a sandalwood tree. Sometimes we do not even reach it, but fall to the ground. Why rise ninety thousand li and head south?” Someone who goes to the nearby fields and returns by the third meal still has a full belly. Someone travelling a hundred li must prepare grain for an overnight stay; someone travelling a thousand li must gather provisions for three months. What do those two little creatures know of this?

01.05 Small understanding does not reach great understanding; a short life does not encompass a long one. How do we know? The morning mushroom does not know the beginning and end of a month; the short-lived cicada does not know the succession of spring and autumn. These are short lives. South of Chu there is a mingling for which five hundred years make a spring and another five hundred an autumn. In remote antiquity there was the great chun, whose spring lasted eight thousand years and whose autumn lasted as long. Yet Peng Zu is still famous for his longevity, and everyone wishes to equal him. Is that not pitiable?

01.06 Tang’s question to Ji concerns the same thing: “In the barren and desolate north there is a dark and vast sea, the Pool of Heaven. In it lives a fish several thousand li wide, whose length nobody knows. Its name is Kun. There is also a bird called Peng, with a back like Mount Tai and wings like clouds covering the sky. It rises ninety thousand li upon a whirlwind twisting like a ram’s horn. Passing beyond clouds and vapours, with the blue sky on its back, it turns south towards the southern ocean.” A marsh quail laughed: “Where does it think it is going? I leap up, rise a few fathoms, descend and fly among the grasses and bushes. That is the utmost flying can do. Where does that creature think it is going?” This is the difference between the small and the great.

01.07 In the same way, someone able to discharge an office, someone distinguished in a village by their conduct, someone whose virtue pleases a ruler, or someone whose ability wins a state, looks upon themselves like that quail. Song Rongzi would have laughed at them. If the whole world praised him, he would make no greater effort; if the whole world condemned him, he would not be disheartened. He distinguished the inward

from the outward and the boundaries of honour and disgrace. That was as far as he went. He did not toil over worldly affairs, yet there remained something in which he was not firmly established.

01.08 Liezi travelled riding upon the wind with admirable lightness and returned after fifteen days. He did not strive for what others call good fortune. Although freed from walking, he still depended upon something. But one who rode upon the proper course of Heaven and Earth and guided the transformations of the six breaths to wander through the unlimited: upon what would such a person depend? Hence the saying: “The consummate person clings to no self; the spiritual person claims no merit; the sage seeks no name.”

01.09 Yao wished to yield the government to Xu You. “When the sun and moon have risen, is it not pointless to keep torches burning for light? When the seasonal rains fall, is continued watering not wasted labour? If you took my place, the world would be well governed. I still preside over it, but consider myself inadequate. Please accept the government.” Xu You replied, “You govern the world, and it is already well governed. If I replaced you, would it be for the name? A name is a guest of reality. Should I concern myself with that guest? A bird nesting deep in the forest needs only one branch; a mole drinking from the river takes only what fills its belly. Return and remain in your place, my lord. I have no need of the government of the world. Even if the cook neglects the kitchen, the person representing the deceased and the leader of the prayers do not leave their cups and ritual stands to replace him.”

01.10 Jian Wu asked Lian Shu, “I heard Jie Yu utter grand words corresponding to nothing, going away and never returning. They frightened me: like the Milky Way, they had no discernible beginning or end. They departed utterly from the usual and resembled nothing in human experience.” Lian Shu asked what he had said. Jian Wu replied, “On distant Mount Gushe, he said, lives a spiritual person, with skin like ice or snow and delicate as a young woman. This person eats none of the five grains, but inhales the wind and drinks the dew, mounts the clouds, drives flying dragons and wanders beyond the four seas. The concentrated spirit keeps beings free from disease and brings the harvest to maturity. I thought it madness and did not believe it.”

01.11 “Indeed,” said Lian Shu. “You cannot explain beautiful patterns to the blind or the sound of bells and drums to the deaf. But deafness and blindness affect not only the body; they also occur in understanding, as your words show. That person and that potency encompass the myriad things and gather them into one. Even if the world were in disorder and called for intervention, why should such a person weary themselves by making its government their task? Nothing could harm them. A flood reaching Heaven could not drown them; a drought melting metal and stone and scorching earth and mountains would not make them hot. From their dust and scraps people like Yao and Shun could still be fashioned. Why would they wish to occupy themselves with things?”

01.12 A man of Song took a consignment of ceremonial caps to Yue. But the people of Yue cut their hair short and tattooed their bodies, so they had no use for the caps. Yao governed the people of the world and maintained order within the four seas. He went to see the four masters on distant Mount Gushe and, north of the Fen River, became so absorbed that he forgot his possession of the world.

01.13 Huizi said to Zhuangzi, “The king of Wei gave me seeds of a great gourd. I planted them, and the fruit grew to a capacity of five shi. I tried to use it as a water vessel, but it was not strong enough to bear the weight. I cut it into ladles, but the halves were too broad and hollow to hold anything. It was certainly large: I broke it because it was useless.” Zhuangzi replied, “You are clumsy in using what is large. There was a man in Song who knew how to make an ointment against chapped hands. His family had washed and bleached silk for generations. A stranger heard of it and offered a hundred pieces of metal for the recipe. The family gathered and said, ‘We have bleached silk for generations and earned only a few pieces. Now we can sell our skill for a hundred in one morning. Let him have it.’ The stranger acquired the recipe and presented himself to the king of Wu. Wu was at war with Yue, and the king put him in command of his forces. In a winter naval battle he utterly defeated the men of Yue and received territory as his reward. Preventing chapped hands was the same in both cases, but for one it won a fief, while the others merely continued washing silk. The difference lay in

the use. You had a gourd holding five shi. Why not make it a great float and wander upon rivers and lakes, instead of complaining that its halves were useless as containers? Your mind is tangled!”

01.14 Huizi said to Zhuangzi, “I have an enormous tree called a chu. Its trunk is so swollen and knotted that a marking line cannot be applied to it; its small branches are too twisted for compass or square. Though it stands beside the road, no carpenter turns to look at it. Your words are like that: great and useless, rejected by everyone.” Zhuangzi replied, “Have you never seen a wildcat or weasel? It crouches waiting for prey, leaps this way and that, avoiding neither heights nor depths, until it falls into a trap or dies in a net. A yak, by contrast, is as large as a cloud hanging in the sky, but cannot catch mice. You worry that your great tree is useless. Why not plant it in the land where nothing exists, in a vast open expanse? You could wander aimlessly beside it and sleep freely beneath its shade. No axe would shorten its life and nothing would harm it. If it has no usefulness for others to exploit, where would its distress and suffering come from?”

Explanation of the chapter

The enormous fish transformed into a bird, and the small creatures mocking its flight, introduce different scales of experience. A judgment may make sense within the narrow range of its speaker yet miss possibilities outside that range. The huge gourd and the supposedly useless tree raise another question: useless for which purpose, and in whose eyes? The tale does not establish that greater size is always better, or that all practical purposes are misguided.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

The freedom explored here is not simply the ability to fly higher than others. It is the refusal to treat familiar measures as the limits of possibility. Even the immense bird relies on wind: absolute independence is not its condition. Apparent uselessness may disclose opportunities hidden by an excessively narrow standard of productivity. Both insights matter: the enlargement of perspective and dependence on circumstances.

Textual collation

Both versions follow the complete course of the chapter in wording based on Legge and checked against the Chinese. They retain Kun and Peng, the units li and shi, and the uncertain identity of the mingling; marvels are not converted into empirical assertions. The breath of six months allows different readings. 汾水之陽 denotes the north or sunny side of the river, not the south found in Legge. The gourd episode distinguishes the vessel’s strength and its use, not simply its weight. The identification of some plants and animals remains approximate.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 逍遙遊 (Wikisource, oldid 7908417).

01.01-01.03: 北冥有魚; **01.04-01.05:** 蜩與學鳩笑之; **01.06-01.08:** 湯之問棘; **01.09:** 堯讓天下於許由; **01.10-01.11:** 肩吾問於連叔; **01.12:** 宋人資章甫; **01.13:** 魏王貽我大瓠之種; **01.14:** 吾有大樹.

02. Equalising Things

Qi wu lun | 齊物論

Chapter text

02.01 Nanguo Ziqi sat leaning upon his low table. He looked towards Heaven and breathed out slowly, absorbed, as though he had lost his companion. Yancheng Ziyou stood beside him and asked, “What is happening? Can the body become like dried wood and the mind like extinguished ashes? The person leaning on this table today is not the one who was here before.” Ziqi replied, “Yan, you do well to ask. Just now I lost myself. Can you understand? You have heard the pipes of people, but not those of Earth; you have heard those of Earth, but not those of Heaven.”

02.02 Ziyou asked him to explain. Ziqi said, “The Great Clod exhales its breath, and we call it wind. When it does not rise, nothing happens; when it rises, the myriad openings roar. Have you not heard their long bellowing? In the mountain forests, trees a hundred armspans around have hollows resembling noses, mouths, ears, square sockets, rings, mortars, pools and depressions. Some sound like torrents; others whistle, command, inhale, shout, howl, moan or creak. The first sound one voice and the next answer with another. A gentle breeze makes a small harmony; a gale makes a great one. When the gust passes, all the hollows are empty. Have you not seen how they sway and tremble?”

02.03 Ziyou said, “The pipes of Earth, then, are these hollows, and human pipes are bamboo tubes. What are the pipes of Heaven?” Ziqi replied, “The breath passes through ten thousand differences, and each responds of itself. Each takes from itself what belongs to it. Who makes them sound?”

02.04 Great understanding is broad and calm; small understanding is minute and divisive. Great words are luminous; small words are incessant. In sleep, souls intertwine; on waking, bodies open. Contact with our surroundings entangles us, and every day the mind does battle. Some are slow, some deep, some guarded. Small fears unsettle; great fears leave one stunned. Assertions and denials shoot out like arrows released by a mechanism. The will to win clings to them as to an oath. The spirit withers like things in autumn and winter, declining day by day. It sinks into its own actions and cannot return. It closes like a seal and is exhausted in old age. A mind approaching death cannot recover clarity.

02.05 Joy and anger, sorrow and pleasure, worry and sighing, change and obstinacy, elation and abandon, frankness and affectation: they arise like music from an empty hollow or mushrooms from dampness. Day and night they succeed one another before us, and we do not know where they spring from. Enough, enough! What we encounter at every dawn and dusk: could that be what gives rise to life? Without it there would be no me; without me there would be no one to receive it. We come close, but do not know what makes it act. There seems to be a genuine governor, although we cannot discover its trace. Its efficacy may command trust, but we do not see its form. There is reality in it without a visible figure.

02.06 The hundred members, nine openings and six organs are all here, complete. To which should I feel closest? Do you value them equally, or favour one? Are they all servants and maids? Can they not govern one another? Do they alternate as rulers and subjects? Is there a genuine master among them? Whether or not we grasp its reality neither increases nor diminishes what it is. Once we receive our form, we cling to it until we exhaust it. We collide with things and wear ourselves down with them, rushing to the end with nothing to stop us. Is that not sad? We labour all our lives without seeing our work completed; exhausted by effort, we do not know where we return. Is that not painful? What good is saying that we are not dead yet? The body changes and the mind accompanies it. Is that not a great affliction? Is human life wrapped in such darkness? Am I alone confused, while others are not?

02.07 If everyone takes their already formed mind as a teacher, who lacks a teacher? Not only someone who understands succession and chooses independently: the fool has one too. But to establish right and wrong before the mind is formed would be like setting out for Yue today and arriving yesterday: making what does not exist exist. Even the marvellous Yu could not understand such a thing. What could I do?

02.08 Speaking is not merely blowing air. Someone who speaks says something; but if what is said is not fixed, has something really been said or has nothing been said? The speaker believes this differs from the chirping of chicks: is there truly a difference or not? How is the Way concealed so that true and false appear? How are words concealed so that right and wrong appear? Where could the Way go and not be present? Where could words exist and not be acceptable? The Way is hidden by partial achievements; words by brilliance and display. Hence the disputes between Confucians and Mohists: each affirms what the other denies and denies what the other affirms. To deal with their assertions and denials, nothing is better than bringing light to the matter.

02.09 Nothing fails to be "that"; nothing fails to be "this." From that, this is not seen; from what one knows, one knows. Hence the saying: "That arises from this, and this depends upon that." This explains their arising together. Thus in being born one dies, and in dying one is born; the acceptable becomes unacceptable and the unacceptable acceptable; assertion rests upon denial and denial upon assertion. The sage does not pursue this opposition but illuminates things through Heaven, also resting upon a "this." This is also that, and that is also this. That has its right and wrong; this has its own. Are there really a that and a this? Or are there not? When this and that no longer confront each other as a pair, what is called the pivot of the Way appears. Situated at the centre of the circle, it responds without exhaustion. Assertions are inexhaustible; so are denials. Hence the saying: "Nothing is better than bringing light to the matter."

02.10 Using a finger to show that a finger is not a finger is not as good as using what is not a finger to show it. Using a horse to show that a horse is not a horse is not as good as using what is not a horse. Heaven and Earth are a finger; the myriad things are a horse. The acceptable is accepted; the unacceptable is not. A way is made by walking it; things are made so by naming them. Why are they so? Because they are considered so. Why are they not so? Because they are not considered so. Each thing has that by which it is what it is and that by which it is acceptable. No thing lacks these.

02.11 Thus a blade of grass and a pillar, an unattractive person and Xi Shi, the expansive, the strange, the deceptive and the monstrous, communicate as one in the Way. Dividing completes something; completing something destroys something else. No thing has absolute completion or destruction by itself: all communicate again as one. Only one who understands this communication knows how to bring them together. Such a person does not impose a position but lodges in the common. The common enables use; use enables communication; communication enables attainment. Attaining what is fitting is enough to come close. One rests there. Resting without knowing why it is so is called the Way.

02.12 Exhausting the spirit in trying to make everything one, without recognising what is already shared, is called "three in the morning." What does this mean? A keeper distributing acorns to monkeys said, "Three in the morning and four in the evening." They were all angry. So he said, "Very well: four in the morning and three in the evening." They were all pleased. Neither the name nor the actual amount had diminished, yet joy and anger responded to the change. This too is resting upon a "this." The sage harmonises assertion and denial and rests in Heaven's balance. This is called allowing both courses to proceed.

02.13 The understanding of the ancients reached an extreme. What extreme? Some held that there had never been things: this was the limit, with nothing to add. Others held that there were things but not yet boundaries between them. Others held that there were boundaries but not yet distinctions of right and wrong. When these appear, the Way is divided and preferences form. But are there really completion and impairment? Or are there not? If there are, Zhao plays his zither; if there are not, Zhao does not play it.

02.14 Zhao Wen playing the zither, Shi Kuang marking time with his staff and Huizi reasoning while leaning on a tree reached great proficiency. All three attained the summit of what they knew and practised it to the end of their lives. They loved it because it differed from what others knew and wanted to make it clear to them. Yet they tried to clarify what could not be clarified in that way and ended in the darkness of disputes about hardness and whiteness. Their sons continued the threads of their work without bringing it to completion. If that can be called accomplishment, I too have accomplished it; if not, neither things nor I have accomplished it. Therefore the sage attends to the clarity appearing among doubts and confusions. Rather than imposing a position, the sage lodges in the common. This is making use of illumination.

02.15 Now I shall say something. I do not know whether it belongs to the same kind as what came before or to a different kind. But "of the same kind" and "of a different kind," taken together, form a kind, so they do not differ from that. Nevertheless, I shall try to speak. There is a beginning. There is a not yet having begun to have a beginning. There is a not yet having begun that not yet having begun. There is being; there is nonbeing. There is a not yet having begun to have nonbeing, and a not yet having begun that not yet having begun to have nonbeing. Suddenly there are being and nonbeing, without our knowing which is really being and which nonbeing. Now I have said something, but I do not know whether I have thereby said something or said nothing.

02.16 Nothing under Heaven is greater than the tip of an autumn hair, and Mount Tai is small. Nobody lives longer than a child who dies prematurely, and Peng Zu died young. Heaven, Earth and I were born together; the myriad things and I are one. If we are one, can there be words? But if we have already said "one," can there be no words? The one and its utterance make two; those two and the one make three. From there, even the cleverest calculator could not finish the count, much less an ordinary person. If we reach three in passing from nonbeing to being, where would we arrive in passing from being to being? Let us not proceed along that course: let us rest here.

02.17 The Way never had boundaries; words never had absolute constancy. In asserting "this," limits are drawn. Consider those limits: left and right, relationships and obligations, divisions and distinctions, rivalry and dispute. These are the eight determinations. Of what lies beyond the six directions, the sage acknowledges existence but does not discuss it; within them, the sage discusses but does not pronounce judgments. Concerning the Spring and Autumn Annals, which order the world and preserve the intentions of the ancient kings, the sage judges but does not dispute. There is, then, a dividing that does not divide and a distinguishing that does not dispute. What does this mean? The sage keeps it inwardly; others dispute to display themselves. Hence the saying that disputing reveals something not seen.

02.18 The great Way is not proclaimed; great distinction needs no words; great humanity does not strive to appear humane; great integrity does not boast of modesty; great courage does not attack. The Way put on display ceases to be the Way; disputatious words fall short; humanity fixed as a rule is not fulfilled; ostentatious purity inspires no trust; aggressive courage does not reach completion. These five, originally rounded, tend to become angular. Knowing how to stop before what one does not know is the highest attainment. Who knows distinction without words and the Way that cannot be stated? Whoever knows possesses Heaven's treasury: pour into it and it does not fill; draw from it and it does not run dry, without knowing whence it comes. This is called preserving the light.

02.19 Once Yao asked Shun, "I wish to attack Zong, Kuai and Xu'ao. Even when seated facing south, I cannot cast off this unease. Why?" Shun replied, "Those three rulers still live among brushwood and mugwort. Why can you not leave them in peace? Long ago ten suns rose together and illuminated all things. How much more should a virtue surpassing the sun do so!"

02.20 Nie Que asked Wang Ni, "Do you know what all beings regard as right?" "How would I know?" "Do you know what you do not know?" "How would I know?" "Then do beings know nothing?" "How would I know? Nevertheless, I shall try to say something. How do I know that what I call knowing is not not-knowing?

How do I know that what I call not-knowing is not knowing? Let me ask you: if someone sleeps in a damp place, their hips ache and half their body goes numb. Does an eel experience the same? If they live in a tree, they tremble with fear. Does a monkey? Which of the three knows the right place to live? Humans eat animals fed on grain and grass; deer eat pasture; centipedes relish small snakes; owls and crows relish mice. Which of the four knows the right taste? Monkeys seek their mates, deer pair together and eels swim with other fish. Mao Qiang and Li Ji were beautiful to people, but fish sank when they saw them, birds flew up and deer fled. Which of the four knows the world's right beauty? As I see it, the principles of humanity and righteousness and the paths of assertion and denial are tangled and confused. How could I know how to distinguish them?"

02.21 Nie Que asked, "If you do not know benefit and harm, does the consummate person not know them either?" Wang Ni replied, "The consummate person is spiritual. A great marsh could burn without heating them; the He and Han rivers could freeze without chilling them; thunder could break mountains and wind shake the sea without frightening them. Such a person mounts the clouds, rides upon the sun and moon and wanders beyond the four seas. Life and death do not alter them: how much less considerations of benefit and harm!"

02.22 Qu Quezi asked Chang Wuzi, "I heard the Master say that the sage does not occupy himself with worldly affairs, seek advantage, avoid harm, delight in requests or cling to an established path; speaks without saying and says without speaking, and wanders beyond the world's dust. The Master considered these words extravagant; I consider them an expression of a marvellous Way. What do you think?" Chang Wuzi replied, "That would have bewildered even the Yellow Emperor. How could Qiu understand it? Besides, you hurry too much: you see an egg and already expect the cock to announce the night; you see a sling pellet and already expect to eat the roast bird. I shall speak without trying to fix everything; listen in the same way.

02.23 "Why not stand beside the sun and moon, embrace space and time, gather everything into a unity, set confusions aside and acknowledge the dignity of what appears inferior? Ordinary people toil; the sage seems simple and slow. The sage gathers ten thousand years into a single purity. The myriad things are thus, and in this way contain one another. How do I know that loving life is not a delusion? How do I know that hating death is not like losing one's way in youth and not knowing how to return? Li Ji was the daughter of the border warden of Ai. When taken to Jin, she wept until her clothing was soaked. But when she reached the palace, shared the ruler's bed and ate fine meats, she regretted having wept. How do I know that the dead do not regret having wished to remain alive?

02.24 "Someone who dreams of drinking wine may wake in tears; someone who dreams of weeping may go hunting on waking. While dreaming, one does not know it is a dream, and may even interpret a dream within another dream. Only on waking does one recognise the dream. Perhaps only with a great awakening shall we recognise that all this was a great dream. Fools believe they are awake and distinguish confidently: 'This one is a ruler; that one a herdsman.' How obstinate! Qiu and you are dreaming. And I, who say that you dream, am also dreaming. These words may seem strange. If after ten thousand generations we encountered a great sage able to understand them, it would be like meeting between a morning and an evening.

02.25 "Suppose you and I dispute. If you defeat me and I do not defeat you, are you necessarily right and I necessarily wrong? If I defeat you, am I necessarily right and you wrong? Is one right and the other wrong? Are we both right? Are neither of us right? If we cannot understand one another, others will be equally in the dark. Whom shall we ask to decide? Someone who agrees with you: how could that alone enable a decision? Someone who agrees with me: how could they decide? Someone who disagrees with both: how could they decide? Someone who agrees with both: how could they decide? Neither you, nor I, nor that other person can thereby reach mutual understanding. Must we wait for yet someone else?

02.26 "What does it mean to harmonise through Heaven's distinctions? That what is affirmed may not be so, and what is held to be such may not be such. If the right were indisputably right, its difference from the wrong would need no dispute. If what is so were indisputably so, its difference from what is not so would likewise

need no dispute. Changing voices depend upon one another as though they did not. Harmonise them through Heaven’s distinctions, follow their unfolding and you can complete your years. Forget the years and imposed differences, rise towards what has no limit and make your dwelling there.”

02.27 Penumbra asked Shadow, “Before you were walking, and now you have stopped; before you were sitting, and now you rise. Why have you no conduct of your own?” Shadow replied, “Do I depend on something to be like this? And does what I depend on depend upon something else? Do I depend upon a snake’s scales or a cicada’s wings? How can I know why it is so or why it is not?”

02.28 Once Zhuang Zhou dreamed he was a butterfly. He fluttered as a butterfly, content and at ease, not knowing he was Zhou. Suddenly he awoke: there he was, Zhou again. He did not know whether Zhou had dreamed of being a butterfly or a butterfly was dreaming of being Zhou. Between Zhou and the butterfly there must be a difference. This is called the transformation of things.

Explanation of the chapter

The chapter moves among the sounds of wind, disputes about right and wrong, and Zhuang Zhou's famous dream of a butterfly. The opposition between "this" and "that" reveals how judgment begins from a situated standpoint. The pivot of the Way suggests a capacity to respond to disputes, not a rule declaring every assertion equally valid.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

Careful reading must distinguish recognition of the contingency of criteria from denial that differences exist. The butterfly does not erase the distinction between forms of life; it unsettles the claim to an identity untouched by transformation. Our contemporary proposal is to reason while acknowledging the limits of one's standpoint, but that proposal neither exhausts the passage nor constitutes a systematic doctrine attributable to a single author.

Textual collation

Every sequence is retained, from the pipes to the butterfly dream. *Shì/fēi* can function as assertion/denial and as right/wrong; neither usage is reduced to a modern theory of truth. Legge’s “the One Lord” is not reproduced: the wording about unity does not by itself identify a divine lord. The question of a genuine governor remains open. Zhao Wen’s passage follows the Chinese contrast between playing and not playing, rather than a chronology of doctrinal corruption. Situated understanding and the criticism of victory in debate do not imply that all assertions have equal justification.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 齊物論 (Wikisource, oldid 6037725).

02.01-02.03: 南郭子綦隱几而坐; **02.04-02.07:** 大知閑閑; **02.08-02.09:** 夫言非吹也; **02.10-02.12:** 以指喻指之非指; **02.13-02.14:** 古之人; **02.15-02.16:** 今且有言於此; **02.17-02.18:** 夫道未始有封; **02.19:** 故昔者堯問於舜; **02.20-02.21:** 齧缺問乎王倪; **02.22-02.26:** 瞿鵲子問乎長梧子; **02.27:** 罔兩問景; **02.28:** 昔者莊周夢爲胡蝶.

03. Caring for Life

Yangsheng zhu | 養生主

Chapter text

03.01 Our life has a limit, while knowledge has no limit. To pursue the unlimited with the limited is dangerous; persisting in that pursuit only increases the danger. In doing good, do not approach fame; in doing wrong, do not approach punishment. Take the central course as your guide: thus you can protect your body, preserve your life, care for your parents and complete your years.

03.02 Cook Ding was cutting up an ox for Lord Wen Hui. The touch of his hand, the support of his shoulder, the placing of his foot and the pressure of his knee accompanied the sounds of the blade. Everything fitted a rhythm, like the Mulberry Forest dance and the measures of Jingshou. Wen Hui exclaimed, “Wonderful! Can skill reach such a point?”

03.03 Ding laid down his knife and replied, “What I value is the Way, which goes beyond technique. When I began cutting up oxen, I saw only the whole animal. Three years later I no longer saw it as a whole. Now I meet it with the spirit rather than merely looking with the eyes. Sensory knowing stops and the spirit follows its course. I accord with the natural structure, enter the great openings and guide the blade through the great cavities, following what is already so. I do not even touch the tendons and delicate joins, much less the great bones.

03.04 “A good cook changes his knife every year, because he cuts; an ordinary one changes it every month, because he hacks and breaks. My knife has been in use for nineteen years and has cut up thousands of oxen, yet its edge seems newly sharpened. The joints have spaces, and the edge has no appreciable thickness. When what has no thickness enters what has space, the blade finds more than enough room to move. That is why, after nineteen years, its edge is still as though newly sharpened.

03.05 “Nevertheless, whenever I reach a place where the structures come together, I recognise the difficulty. I become watchful, fix my gaze and slow my movement. The blade scarcely moves and suddenly the parts separate, falling like a clod to the ground. Then I stand with the knife in my hand, look around, satisfied and unhurried, clean it and put it away.” Wen Hui replied, “Excellent! Listening to Cook Ding, I have learned how to care for life.”

03.06 Gongwen Xuan saw the Master of the Right and was startled. “What kind of person is this? Why has he only one leg? Is it the work of Heaven or of people?” The answer was: “Of Heaven, not people. In giving him life, Heaven made him singular in this way; the ordinary human form has paired limbs. That is how I know that his condition comes from Heaven, not people.”

03.07 A marsh pheasant takes ten steps for a morsel of food and a hundred for a drink. It does not wish to be fed inside a cage. Even if it enjoyed abundance there, it would not consider that good.

03.08 When Lao Dan died, Qin Shi came to offer condolences. He gave three cries and went out. The disciples asked, “Were you not the Master’s friend?” “Yes.” “Then is it fitting to take leave of him like that?” “Yes. At first I thought he was the person he should have been; now I no longer think so.

03.09 “When I went in to take leave, I saw old people weeping as though they had lost a son and young people as though they had lost a mother. In gathering them in this way, there must have been those who said what they did not wish to say and wept without wishing to weep. This is turning from Heaven, exceeding the measure of feeling and forgetting what has been received. The ancients called it the punishment for turning from Heaven.

03.10 “The Master came when it was his time and departed following the course of things. Resting in the time and following that course allows sorrow and joy no entry to rule us. The ancients called it releasing the Sovereign’s suspension.”

03.11 The firewood reaches its end, but the fire is transmitted, and we do not know where it ends.

Explanation of the chapter

The opening contrasts finite life with apparently boundless knowledge. Cook Ding displays skill developed not by forcing rigid movements onto passive material but by perceiving joints and openings. Yet mastery does not mean acting without caution: when the task becomes difficult, the cook stops and proceeds with special care.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

This is not an invitation to despise knowledge or discard technique. Rather, it asks when frontal effort ceases to help and when action should adjust to structures we did not create. The mourning for Lao Dan, also included in this chapter, prevents a merely technical reading: limitation concerns existence itself. Technical excellence alone does not establish the moral legitimacy of an action.

Textual collation

為惡 is rendered as “in doing evil”, not “in avoiding evil”. The difficult maxim is retained rather than recast as modern moral advice. 右師 means Master of the Right, although Legge gives Left; 百步一飲 gives one hundred steps to drink, not thirty. The lost limb episode does not establish a congenital medical cause or justify an amputation. The referent of 其人 in the mourning scene is disputed. 帝之縣解 preserves an image of suspension and release. The fire and fuel image does not, by itself, prove personal immortality.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 養生主 (Wikisource, oldid 6400427).

03.01: 吾生也有涯; **03.02-03.05:** 庖丁爲文惠君解牛; **03.06:** 公文軒見右師; **03.07:** 澤雉十步一啄; **03.08-03.10:** 老聃死; **03.11:** 指窮於爲薪.

04. In the Human World

Renjian shi | 人間世

Chapter text

04.01 Yan Hui visited Zhongni and asked permission to leave. “Where are you going?” asked the Master. “To Wei.” “For what purpose?” “I have heard that its ruler is young and acts on his own authority. He treats the country lightly and does not see his errors. He sends his people to their deaths without concern: the dead cover the land, piled like bundles of firewood across plains and marshes. The people do not know what to do. I once heard you say, ‘Leave a well-governed country and go to a disordered one. Many sick people stand at a physician’s door.’ Drawing upon your teachings, I would like to consider a course of action that might relieve that country’s troubles.”

04.02 Zhongni replied, “Alas! I fear you will go only to suffer punishment. The Way does not admit mixture. Mixture multiplies methods; their multiplication brings confusion; confusion produces distress, and distress will not save you. The consummate people of antiquity first established in themselves what they later sought in others. If it is not yet settled within you, how will you have time to attend to a tyrant’s actions?

04.03 “Do you also know how virtue is dissipated and how knowledge comes out on display? Virtue dissipates in fame, and knowledge displays itself in contention. Through fame people oppress one another; knowledge becomes an instrument of dispute. Both are destructive weapons and should not be given free rein. Even if your virtue is solid and your sincerity firm, if you do not understand that man’s disposition; even if you do not compete for a name, if you do not understand his heart and insist on imposing words of humanity and righteousness as rules and measures, you will use your excellence to expose his wickedness. This is called harming another. Whoever harms another receives harm in return. I fear that man will end by harming you!

04.04 “If he really valued the worthy and detested the unworthy, why would he need you to seek distinction before him? Before you explain your ideas, the ruler will exploit his position and compete with you in cleverness. Your eyes will be dazzled; your face will try to accommodate him; your mouth will seek ways out; your bearing will adapt to his, and your heart will end by confirming him. It will be fighting fire with fire and water with water: increasing what you meant to remedy. Once such accommodation begins, it will have no end. If, not being believed, you insist with stronger words, you will end by dying before the tyrant.

04.05 “Long ago Jie killed Guan Longfeng, and Zhou killed Prince Bigan. Both cultivated themselves, bent compassionately towards the subjects, and on their behalf opposed those above. Their rulers used that conduct to eliminate them: so the desire for a name entered in. Yao attacked Congzhi and Xu’ao, and Yu attacked Hu. The countries were devastated and their inhabitants executed. Warfare did not cease and the pursuit of gain was never satisfied. All pursued names and possessions. Have you not heard? Even sages could not master that craving; how much less can you! Still, you surely have a proposal. Try explaining it.”

04.06 Yan Hui said, “Could I proceed uprightly and modestly, with constant effort and a single intention?” “No! How would that work? This man displays arrogance and an expression that changes continually. Others dare not contradict him. He uses his effect upon them to satisfy his own heart. He cannot even receive virtue introduced little by little; how would he receive great virtue? He will cling to himself and not change. Outwardly he may assent; inwardly he will reproach himself for nothing. How could it work?”

04.07 Yan Hui continued, “Then I will remain upright within, bend outwardly and support my words with the ancients. Being upright within is keeping company with Heaven. Knowing that both the Son of Heaven and I are children of Heaven, why seek others’ approval or disapproval of my words as though they were mine alone? They will regard me as a simple child. This is keeping company with Heaven. Bending outwardly is keeping company with people. Carrying the tablet, kneeling and bowing are a minister’s rites. Everyone

practises them: how would I dare not? If I do what others do, they will find no reason to blame me. This is keeping company with people. Supporting my words with the ancients is keeping company with antiquity. Even if my words instruct and in fact rebuke, they will come from the ancients, not me. Thus, though upright, I cannot be reproached. This is keeping company with the ancients. Would that work?"

04.08 Zhongni answered, "No! How would it work? You have too many rules and methods and have not yet understood the situation. Perhaps by clinging to them you could avoid a fault, but that would be all. How would you bring about transformation? You still take your own heart as your teacher." Yan Hui said, "I do not know how to proceed. May I ask the method?" "Fast, and I shall explain. Do you think it easy to act with something already prepared in your heart? Bright Heaven does not favour those who think it easy." Hui replied, "My family is poor. For months I have drunk no wine or eaten strong-smelling vegetables. Could that be called fasting?" "That is the fasting of sacrifices, not the fasting of the heart."

04.09 "May I ask about the fasting of the heart?" Zhongni replied, "Unify your intention. Do not listen with the ears, but with the heart; do not listen with the heart, but with the vital breath. Hearing stops at what it hears; the heart stops at its correspondences. The breath remains empty and waits for things. Only in emptiness does the Way gather. That emptiness is the fasting of the heart." Yan Hui said, "Before understanding how to practise it, I really was Hui. Now that I understand, that Hui is no longer there. Can this be called emptiness?" "You have understood completely.

04.10 "I shall tell you how to enter that enclosure without being moved by a name. If your words find an opening, speak; if not, stop. Open no other door and impose no other remedy. Dwell in a single lodging and make your home in what you cannot avoid: you will be close. Erasing tracks is easy; walking without treading on the ground is difficult. As a human envoy it is easy to pretend; as Heaven's envoy it is difficult. I have heard of flying with wings, but not without them; of knowing through knowledge, but not without it. Look at that opening: the empty room fills with light. Good fortune rests where there is stillness. Without stillness, one sits while the heart gallops. Let what the eyes and ears receive communicate inwardly, and put the heart's calculations outside. Even spirits will come to lodge there; how much more people! Thus things are transformed. Yu and Shun relied upon this, and Fuxi and Jiqu practised it to the end of their lives. How much more should everyone else!"

04.11 Zi Gao, the duke of She, was about to leave as an envoy to Qi and asked Zhongni, "The king entrusts me, Zhu Liang, with a weighty mission. Qi will surely receive the envoy with great respect but without haste. Even a private person is hard to move; how much more a prince! I am very afraid. You have always told me that, in great or small matters, few things end well unless the proper Way is followed. If the matter fails, there will be suffering caused by people; if it succeeds, there will be suffering from the imbalance of yin and yang. Only someone with virtue can avoid harm in success and failure alike. My food is coarse, without delicacies; nobody in my kitchen needs to cool down. Yet this morning I received the charge, and tonight I am already drinking iced water. Am I not burning within? Before entering the business I already suffer a disturbance of yin and yang. If I fail, I shall also suffer human punishment. These are two dangers, and as a minister I cannot bear them. Can you tell me something?"

04.12 Zhongni replied, "Under Heaven there are two great obligations. One is destiny; the other is duty. A child's love for the parents belongs to destiny: it cannot be untied from the heart. A minister's service to the ruler belongs to duty: wherever one goes there are rulers, and one cannot escape this between Heaven and Earth. Thus they are called great obligations. Serving one's parents without choosing the place, and resting in it, is the completion of filial piety. Serving one's ruler without choosing the task, and resting in it, is the fullness of loyalty. In caring for your own heart, let neither sorrow nor joy displace it. Recognising what cannot be avoided and resting in it as destiny is the completion of virtue. As a child or minister you certainly have unavoidable matters. Attend to the reality of the business and forget yourself: what time will you have to delight in life and detest death? You may undertake the journey.

04.13 "I will add what I have heard. Between neighbours, trust is demonstrated through dealings; at a distance, fidelity must be maintained through words that someone transmits. Carrying the words of two pleased parties or two angry parties is the hardest thing in the world. When both are pleased, excessive praise abounds; when both are angry, excessive reproaches abound. Every excess approaches falsehood. Falsehood destroys trust, and then the messenger suffers misfortune. Thus the rule says: 'Transmit the ordinary feeling, not overflowing words; thus you may remain whole.'

04.14 "Those who compete in strength begin openly but often finish by resorting to concealment; when competition becomes extreme, tricks proliferate. Those who drink according to the rites begin in order but often end in disorder; when they go too far, extravagant amusements proliferate. So with every affair: one begins sincerely and often ends meanly; the beginning is simple, and the outcome becomes enormous. Words are wind and waves; action may lose what was at stake. Wind and waves are easily stirred, and such loss easily leads to danger. From this arise outbursts without clear cause, artful words and partial judgments. A cornered beast does not choose the sound of its last cry: it snorts violently. Hostility is kindled in hearts in the same way. If pressure and examination become extreme, they provoke a harmful response without anyone understanding how. If no one knows how it begins, who will know where it ends? Thus the rule says: 'Do not alter the charge or force agreement.' Exceeding the measure adds difficulty; altering the charge and hurrying success endanger the business. Good things take time to accomplish; bad things may be done before there is time to correct them. How could one fail to be careful?

04.15 "Let the heart travel with things, and rely upon the unavoidable to nourish your centre. This is the highest course. What more should you manufacture in order to report back? The best is to transmit the charge: that is precisely where the difficulty lies."

04.16 Yan He was about to become tutor to the eldest son of Duke Ling of Wei and consulted Qu Boyu. "This man has a naturally cruel disposition. If I let him proceed without a rule, I endanger the country; if I subject him to a rule, I endanger myself. His intelligence is enough to recognise others' errors but not to know why he himself errs. What should I do?" Qu Boyu replied, "A good question! Be alert and careful. Put your own conduct right. With your body, the best is to draw near; with your heart, to harmonise. But both involve danger. Drawing near does not mean entering his actions; harmonising does not mean displaying yourself. If you draw near and enter his conduct, you will fall, be destroyed and collapse. If you seek harmony but let your superiority stand out, fame and reputation will follow, and he will regard you as an evil omen. If he acts like a child, be a child with him; if he recognises no boundaries, accompany him without immediately imposing yours; if he admits no heights or barriers, do not display them. Thus you can lead him towards a situation without harm.

04.17 "Do you not know the praying mantis? It angrily raises its arms to stop a carriage wheel, unaware that it cannot perform the task and proud of its ability. Be alert and careful! If you build confidence in your merits in order to confront him, you will be close to disaster. Do you not know the tiger keeper? He dares not give them living animals, lest he excite the fury of killing, or whole prey, lest he awaken the fury of tearing. He observes when they are hungry and when satisfied, and understands their disposition. A tiger belongs to another species, yet becomes tame with its feeder because the feeder follows its nature; it kills whoever opposes that nature. There are also people who love horses so much that they collect their dung in baskets and their urine in vessels. If a mosquito or gadfly settles on a horse and the keeper strikes at it at the wrong moment, the horse breaks the bit, injures its head and hurts its chest. The intention goes too far, and the care is lost. How could one fail to be careful?"

04.18 Carpenter Shi was travelling to Qi. At Quyuan he saw an oak revered as the tree of the earth altar. It was large enough to hide an ox, a hundred armspans around, rising beside the hill for ten ren before branching. More than ten branches would have served to make boats. People came to see it as though attending a market, but Shi did not turn to look and kept walking. His apprentice remained admiring it, then ran to catch up. "Since

following you with an axe, I have never seen such fine timber. Why would you neither look nor stop?" "Enough! Do not speak of it. It is useless wood. A boat made of it would sink; a coffin would soon rot; a utensil would break; a door would ooze sap; a pillar would fill with insects. It is good for nothing. That is why it has reached such an age."

04.19 On Shi's return, the altar oak appeared to him in a dream. "With what do you wish to compare me? With the trees you consider valuable? Pear trees, citrus trees, gourds and other fruiting plants are stripped and mistreated when they ripen. Their large branches are broken and their small ones torn away. Their ability makes life bitter: they do not complete their natural years but perish halfway, exposed to the blows of customary treatment. So it is with all things. I have long sought to be useful for nothing. I nearly died, but now I have succeeded, and this is my great usefulness. Had I been useful, would I have reached this size? You and I are things among things: why treat one another as objects judged from outside? You, a useless man close to death, what do you know of useless timber?"

04.20 Shi awoke and considered the dream. His apprentice asked, "If it seeks uselessness, why does it serve as the altar tree?" "Be quiet! Say no more. It merely lodges there to protect itself from insults and abuse by those who do not understand. Had it not been the altar tree, would it not have come close to being cut down? What it protects differs from what the multitude protects. Are you not far from understanding when you measure it by your own criterion?"

04.21 Nanbo Ziqi wandered over the hills of Shang and saw an enormous, extraordinary tree. A thousand chariots with their horses could shelter in its shade. "What tree is this? Its timber must be remarkable!" He looked up: its small branches were too crooked for beams. He looked down: its great roots divided so that they were unsuitable for coffins. He licked a leaf and his mouth became sore. Its smell could leave someone deranged, as though drunk, for three days. "It really is a tree unsuitable for timber. That is why it has reached this size. Ah! A spiritual person makes use of the same lack of suitability."

04.22 In Song there is a place called Jingshi, where catalpas, cypresses and mulberries flourish. When their trunks reach a handspan or two in thickness, they are cut for stakes to tether monkeys. At three or four armspans around, people wanting great beams for houses cut them; at seven or eight, noble families and rich merchants cut them for coffin planks. Without completing their natural years, they fall halfway beneath the axe: this is the misfortune of being useful as timber. Likewise, sacrificial rules exclude white-foreheaded oxen, pigs with upturned snouts and people suffering from haemorrhoids as offerings to the river. Diviners and officiants know these marks and consider them unfavourable; the spiritual person considers them, for precisely that reason, most favourable.

04.23 Shu had a misshapen body: his chin hid his navel, his shoulders rose above his head, his topknot pointed skyward, his organs crowded the upper body and his thighs resembled ribs. With needlework and washing clothes he could feed himself; by sifting and cleaning grain he could support ten people. When the ruler recruited soldiers, he wandered among them with his arms exposed. When great compulsory works were undertaken, his permanent illness exempted him. When grain was distributed to the sick, he received three zhong and ten bundles of firewood. If someone whose body departs so far from the usual form can feed himself and complete his years, how much more someone who takes their virtue outside the usual measures!

04.24 Confucius arrived in Chu. Jieyu, the madman of Chu, passed his door singing: "Phoenix, phoenix! Why has your virtue declined so? The coming world cannot be awaited; the past cannot be recovered. When the Way prevails under Heaven, the sage performs his work; when it does not, he preserves his life. In these times he can scarcely avoid punishment. Happiness weighs less than a feather, but nobody knows how to support it. Misfortune weighs more than the earth, but nobody knows how to avoid it. Enough, enough of approaching people with your virtue! Danger, danger in marking out an enclosure and running within it! Thorns, thorns, do not obstruct my way! I walk backwards and sideways: do not hurt my feet."

04.25 The trees of the mountain invite their own felling. The fat that feeds the fire consumes itself. Cinnamon can be eaten and is therefore cut; lacquer is useful and is therefore tapped. Everyone knows the usefulness of the useful, but nobody knows the usefulness of the useless.

Explanation of the chapter

Yan Hui's plan to advise a dangerous ruler places philosophy in a political situation without innocent solutions. The "fasting of the mind" should not be confused with deliberate ignorance or submission. It marks a willingness to listen and suspend assurances that might turn a well-meant intervention into recklessness.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

The chapter also questions how quickly we decide which lives and capacities are useful. Its attention to trees and people that fail ordinary expectations resists the reduction of worth to immediate effectiveness. Yet prudence cannot become a universal excuse for withdrawal: the text leaves questions that any modern interpretation of responsibility must confront independently.

Textual collation

Xīnzhāi (心齋) is rendered as fasting of the heart, and *qì* (氣) as vital breath, without making either a clinical technique. The dialogue’s political obligations belong to its historical setting. In 致命, at the close of Zi Gao’s mission, both languages adopt transmitting the charge, rather than Legge’s sacrificing one’s life. The tree’s size is retained in ren without conversion to a modern measure. Being the altar tree provides provisional protection, not proof of absolute uselessness. In the final song, 迷陽 is read as thorns rather than Legge’s avoidance of publicity. Shu’s occupations and the reversal of deformity belong to a narrative image, not a medical classification or a judgment of human worth.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 人間世 (Wikisource, oldid 2327589).

04.01-04.10: 顏回見仲尼; **04.11-04.15:** 葉公子高將使於齊; **04.16-04.17:** 顏闔將傅衛靈公太子; **04.18-04.20:** 匠石之齊; **04.21:** 南伯子綦遊乎商之丘; **04.22:** 宋有荊氏者; **04.23:** 支離疏者; **04.24:** 孔子適楚; **04.25:** 山木自寇也.

05. The Fullness of Virtue

De chong fu | 德充符

Chapter text

05.01 Wang Tai lived in Lu and had lost a foot. His followers were as numerous as Zhongni's disciples. Chang Ji asked Zhongni, "Wang Tai has undergone amputation, yet he shares half the disciples of Lu with you. Standing, he does not teach; sitting, he does not discuss. People come to him empty and return full. Is there really teaching without words? Can the heart be whole when the body is not? What kind of man is he?" Zhongni replied, "That teacher is a sage. I have simply been slow to visit him. I shall take him as my teacher; all the more reason for those less capable than I am to do so! Why stop at Lu? I would lead everyone to follow him."

05.02 Chang Ji said, "He has lost a foot, yet people call him Master Wang. He must be far removed from an ordinary person. How does he use his heart?" "Life and death are great matters, but they cannot change him. Even if heaven and earth overturned and collapsed, he would not be lost with them. He perceives what does not depend on anything borrowed and does not shift with things. He accepts their transformations as destiny and stays with their source." "What does that mean?" Zhongni explained, "Viewed through their differences, liver and gall bladder are as far apart as Chu and Yue. Viewed through what they share, the ten thousand things are one. He is not confined by what suits the eyes and ears, but lets his heart wander in the harmony of virtue. He looks at what unites things, not at what they have lost. He regards the loss of his foot as the loss of a little earth."

05.03 Chang Ji asked, "He attends to himself; through understanding he reaches his heart, and through his heart he reaches constancy. Why do people gather around him?" "No one looks for a reflection in running water, but in still water. Only stillness can still those who seek rest. Among beings that receive their destiny from earth, pine and cypress stand out, green in winter and summer. Among those who receive it from heaven, Shun stands out: he was fortunate enough to set his own life right and thereby set others' lives right. Consider the sign of someone who preserves his beginning and has no fear: a single brave warrior charges into nine armies. If someone who seeks fame and masters himself to obtain it can already do this, how much more someone who makes heaven and earth his domain and the ten thousand things his storehouse, lodges in his body, receives images through eyes and ears, brings his knowledge together and never lets his heart die! If he chose a day to rise above, people would follow him. But how could he agree to make things his occupation?"

05.04 Shentu Jia had lost a foot and studied with Zichan of Zheng under Master Bohun Wuren. Zichan told him, "If I leave first, you stay behind; if you leave first, I shall stay behind." The next day they were again sitting in the same hall on the same mat. Zichan repeated, "If I leave, you stay; if you leave, I stay. I am leaving now. Will you stay behind or not? When you see someone who governs, you do not even move aside. Do you consider yourself equal to a governor?" Shentu Jia replied, "Is there really a governor here at our teacher's door who must be treated like that? You delight in your office and therefore want to put others behind you. I have heard it said, 'When a mirror is clear, dust does not settle on it; if dust settles, it is no longer clear. Someone who stays long with a worthy person becomes free from faults.' You chose our teacher for his greatness, yet you still speak like this. Are you not mistaken?"

05.05 Zichan replied, "In your condition, you still claim to rival Yao in goodness! Is your virtue not enough for you to examine yourself?" Shentu Jia said, "Many explain their offences to argue that they did not deserve to lose a foot; few stop justifying themselves and acknowledge that they did not deserve to keep it. Only someone with virtue recognises what cannot be remedied and rests in it as destiny. If you enter the range of Yi's bow, the centre is where you may be hit; if you are not hit, that too is destiny. Many who still have their feet laugh because I do not. I become angry, but when I visit the teacher I return stripped of that anger. I do not

know whether he has washed me with his goodness. I have been with him for nineteen years without being conscious of my amputation. You and I now seek what lies within bodily form, yet you look for me in its exterior. Are you not mistaken?" Zichan grew uncomfortable, changed expression and said, "You need say no more."

05.06 In Lu lived Shushan No-Toes, who had undergone amputation. He came on his heels to see Zhongni. Zhongni said, "Through lack of care you previously brought this misfortune upon yourself. What can you achieve by coming now?" No-Toes replied, "I did not understand what I should attend to and treated my body lightly; that is why I lost a foot. But I have come because I still possess something worth more than my feet and want to keep it whole. Nothing lies beyond what heaven covers or earth supports. I thought you would be like heaven and earth to me. How could I have known you would receive me like this?" Confucius said, "How limited I have been! Why not come in? I shall tell you what I have learned." No-Toes left. Confucius then told his disciples, "Make an effort! That man who has suffered amputation still applies himself to learning in order to repair his former conduct. All the more should those whose virtue remains whole!"

05.07 No-Toes later spoke to Lao Dan: "Kong Qiu has not yet become a consummate person, has he? What is this eagerness to gather disciples? He seeks a reputation for being extraordinary and marvellous, unaware that to a consummate person this is a shackle." Lao Dan asked, "Why did you not lead him to see life and death as one thread, and the acceptable and unacceptable as one continuity, to loosen his bonds? Would that not be possible?" No-Toes replied, "Heaven has punished him. How can he be released?"

05.08 Duke Ai of Lu asked Zhongni, "In Wei there is a very ugly man called Aitai Tuo. Men who live with him cherish him so much that they cannot leave. More than ten women have told their parents, 'Rather than be another man's wife, I would be this man's concubine.' He has never been heard to take the lead; he simply responds in harmony with others. He has no lordly rank to save them from death or accumulated income to fill their bellies. His ugliness frightens everyone. He harmonises without leading, and his knowledge does not extend beyond his surroundings; yet men and women gather before him. There must be something different about him. I summoned him and saw him: his ugliness really could frighten the world. Within a few months I had begun to take an interest in him; within a year, I trusted him. As I lacked a minister, I offered him the government. He responded with reluctance and seemed about to refuse. I felt ashamed of myself, but in the end I entrusted the state to him. Soon afterwards he left me and went away. I felt pain, as though I had lost something and no longer had anyone with whom to enjoy this kingdom. What kind of man was he?"

05.09 Zhongni replied, "Once, when I was sent to Chu, I saw piglets suckling their dead mother. Before long they looked at her in alarm and all moved away. They no longer found in her a gaze that recognised them or a life like their own. They did not love her shape alone, but what had animated it. Someone who dies in battle is not buried with the same feathered ornaments; someone who has lost his feet has no reason to value shoes: in both cases, what gave them meaning is absent. Women serving the Son of Heaven do not have their nails cut or their ears pierced; a newly married man is kept from further service for a time. If preserving the body alone merits such treatment, how much more preserving virtue whole! Aitai Tuo gains trust without speaking and affection without performing special services. People hand him a state, fearing only that he will not accept it. His capacities must be complete and his virtue must not display itself."

05.10 Duke Ai asked, "What does it mean to have complete capacities?" Zhongni replied, "Life and death, preservation and loss, failure and success, poverty and wealth, worthiness and unworthiness, blame and praise, hunger and thirst, cold and heat are changes in affairs and courses of destiny. They pass before us day and night, while knowledge cannot establish where they begin. Therefore they should not disturb harmony or enter the enclosure of the spirit. Keeping that harmony open and calm, without losing joy; allowing no interruption by day or night; being springtime for things and letting the appropriate moment arise in the heart at every encounter: this is having complete capacities."

05.11 “And what does it mean for virtue not to display itself?” “The surface of still water reaches the greatest levelness. That is why it can serve as a measure: it is preserved within and undisturbed outside. Virtue is the cultivation of fulfilled harmony. When it does not impose itself as a visible form, things cannot part from it.” Another day, Duke Ai told Minzi, “I used to think I had reached the greatest understanding because I sat facing south, governed the state, attended to the people’s standards and cared about their deaths. Now that I have heard of a consummate person, I fear I lack that reality, treat my own life lightly and may lose my state. Between Kong Qiu and me there is more than a ruler’s relationship with a minister: we are friends in virtue.”

05.12 A bent man with twisted feet and no lips advised Duke Ling of Wei. The duke was so pleased with him that when he later looked at a man of ordinary appearance, the neck seemed too thin and small. Another man, with a goitre as large as a jar, advised Duke Huan of Qi; this duke was so pleased that he too found the necks of ordinarily shaped men narrow. Thus, when virtue stands out, bodily form is forgotten. People do not forget what they could forget, and forget what they should preserve: this is truly forgetting.

05.13 The sage therefore has a realm in which to wander. Knowledge can be a disturbing offshoot; agreements, glue; virtue exchanged, a means of connection; skill, merchandise. The sage makes no calculations: why need that knowledge? He neither cuts nor joins: why need glue? He has lost nothing: why need that repairing virtue? He does not trade: why act as a merchant? In these four respects heaven nourishes him; heaven’s provision is his food. If he receives it from heaven, why need human contrivance? He has human form but not human passions. His form groups him with other people; because he is not subject to those passions, their judgements of approval and rejection do not reach him. How small is that through which he belongs among humans! How great is that through which he fulfils his heavenly nature by himself!

05.14 Huizi asked Zhuangzi, “Can a person be without passions?” “Yes.” “If he lacks them, why call him human?” Zhuangzi replied, “The way gives him his appearance and heaven gives him his form. How could we not call him human?” Huizi persisted, “If you call him human, how can he lack passions?” “We do not mean the same thing by passions. When I say he is not subject to them, I mean that he does not hurt himself inwardly with preferences and aversions, continually follows what is spontaneous and adds no efforts to life.” “If he adds nothing to life, how does he preserve his body?” Zhuangzi said, “The way gives him his appearance and heaven gives him his form: he does not damage himself inwardly with preferences and aversions. You, however, pour your spirit outwards and exhaust your energy. You recite against a tree and doze while holding a dry trunk. Heaven has given you human form, and you start arguing about the hard and the white!”

Explanation of the chapter

Figures with injured or socially disparaged bodies challenge the habit of identifying human integrity with visible ideals of normality. Their interlocutors' reactions reveal more about the observer's standards than about the characters' worth. The chapter refuses a simple equation among appearance, prestige, and the quality of a life.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

These scenes can challenge hierarchies that confuse value with bodily form, without pretending that modern concepts were already articulated in the ancient text. The difficulty is not to replace one external norm with a new idealized picture of the sage. The more productive question is why particular traits acquire an authority over our judgments that they do not deserve.

Textual collation

Dé (德) includes lived potency, integrity and efficacy, not only normative morality. *Wúqíng* (無情) does not denote clinical insensibility: the dialogue itself explains it as not harming oneself through likes and dislikes. In

the Aitai Tuo episode (05.08), 丈夫 and 婦人 mean men and women here, not father-in-law and wife; 十數 means more than ten women, not a tenfold preference. Confucius’s mission is to Chu (楚), not Qi. In 05.03, the Chinese names Shun without adding Yao in the example of Heaven-given rectitude. The term 兀 is not automatically expanded into loss of both feet. “Hard and white” refers to a conceptual dispute, not strength and colour. References to punishment and amputation remain part of the dramatic situation, not a narrator’s equation of bodily injury with moral fault.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 德充符 (Wikisource, oldid 2437079).

05.01-05.03: 魯有兀者王駘; **05.04-05.05:** 申徒嘉; **05.06-05.07:** 魯有兀者叔山无趾; **05.08-05.11:** 魯哀公問於仲尼; **05.12-05.13:** 闉跂支離无脤; **05.14:** 惠子謂莊子.

06. The Great Ancestral Teacher

Da zong shi | 大宗師

Chapter text

06.01 Someone who knows what heaven does and what humans do has reached the highest point. To know what heaven does is to recognise spontaneous birth; to know what humans do is to use what one knows to nourish what one does not know. Completing one's natural years without dying halfway through is the fullness of knowledge. Yet there is a difficulty: knowledge depends on something in order to be right, and what it depends on has not yet been settled. How do I know that what I call heaven is not human, or that what I call human is not heaven? There must be a true person before there can be true knowledge.

06.02 What is a true person? The true people of antiquity did not reject what was scant, did not boast of achievement and did not scheme over their affairs. When they erred, they were not trapped in regret; when they succeeded, they did not congratulate themselves. They climbed heights without trembling, entered water without getting wet and entered fire without burning: that was how far their knowledge reached into the way. They slept without dreams, woke without worry, did not seek delicacies and breathed deeply. The true person breathes from the heels; the crowd, from the throat. Those who feel overcome force words from their throats as though vomiting. When desires run deep, heaven's workings become shallow.

06.03 The true people of antiquity knew neither delight in life nor hatred of death. They were not elated on coming out or resistant on going in: they went and came freely. They did not forget their beginning or seek their end. They received and rejoiced; they forgot and returned. This is not leaving the way through the heart's action or using the human to assist heaven. This is called being a true person. Their hearts were settled, their appearance calm and their brows plain. They were cool as autumn and warm as spring. Joy and anger moved with the four seasons. They responded fittingly to things, without anyone knowing their limits.

06.04 Thus, when the sage used arms, he could destroy a state without losing the people's hearts; his benefit reached ten thousand generations without presenting itself as love of humanity. Someone who delights in communicating everything to things is not thereby a sage; someone with partial affections is not thereby benevolent; someone who adapts to the seasons is not thereby worthy. Someone who does not understand the connection between benefit and harm is not a noble person; someone who seeks a name and loses himself is not a genuine scholar; someone who abandons himself without authenticity cannot lead others. Hu Bujie, Wu Guang, Boyi, Shuqi, Jizi (Xu Yu), Ji Ta and Shentu Di placed themselves in others' service and sought what suited others, not what suited themselves.

06.05 The true people of antiquity seemed upright without forming factions, and insufficient without flattering. They had distinct outlines without hardening into them; they opened themselves in emptiness without display. Calm, they seemed cheerful; lofty, they seemed to act only from necessity. Their presence invited approach, and their company settled others' virtue. Stern, they seemed people of the world; proud, they could not be dominated. They constantly seemed about to close their mouths and, absorbed, forgot their words.

06.06 They took punishment as their body, ritual as their wings, knowledge as their occasion and virtue as following. Taking punishment as the body left room even in killing; taking ritual as wings allowed them to move through the world; taking knowledge as the occasion responded to what affairs made unavoidable; taking virtue as following meant climbing a hill with those who had feet. Others nevertheless thought it all arose from diligent effort. In what they loved they were one; in what they did not love they were one. Their unity was one, and their lack of unity was also one. In unity they accompanied heaven; in difference they accompanied humans. Heaven and humans did not overcome one another: this is called being a true person.

06.07 Life and death belong to destiny; their regularity, like night and dawn, belongs to heaven. Human inability to intervene in all this is part of the condition of things. Some take heaven as their father and love it: how much more what surpasses it! Some regard the ruler as superior to themselves and die for him: how much more for what is true! When springs dry up, fish gather on land; they moisten one another with their breath and wet one another with foam. It would be better for them to forget one another in rivers and lakes. Rather than praise Yao and condemn Jie, it would be better to forget both and be transformed in the way.

06.08 The great mass burdens me with a form, wears me out through life, eases me in old age and lets me rest in death. What makes my life good therefore makes my death good too. You hide a boat in a ravine and a mountain in a lake and think they are safe. But at midnight someone strong carries them away on his back, while the sleeper knows nothing about it. You can hide something small or large in a suitable place, yet something may still escape. If you hide the world in the world, nothing can escape from it: this is the great condition of things enduring. Simply having happened upon a human form gives us joy; yet this form is subject to countless transformations with no known limit. Can their joys be calculated? The sage therefore wanders in what nothing can escape and in which everything is preserved. He finds good in dying young and in growing old, in beginning and in ending; others imitate him. How much more what all things depend upon and from which every transformation arises!

06.09 The way has reality and trustworthiness, but does not act and has no form. It can be transmitted but not received as an object; it can be reached but not seen. It is its own foundation and root. Before heaven and earth, it was already firmly present from of old. It gives spirits their efficacy and sovereign power its divinity; it brings forth heaven and earth. It comes before the Great Ultimate without being high, and lies below the six limits without being deep. Born before heaven and earth, it is not long-lived; preceding the remotest antiquity, it is not old.

06.10 Xiwei obtained it and held heaven and earth together. Fuxi obtained it and penetrated to the mother of the vital breath. The Northern Dipper obtained it and has not deviated throughout the ages. The sun and moon obtained it and have never ceased. Kanpi obtained it and entered Kunlun. Fengyi obtained it and wandered in the Great River. Jianwu obtained it and dwelt on the Great Mountain. Huangdi obtained it and ascended the cloudy sky. Zhuanxu obtained it and dwelt in the Dark Palace. Yuqiang obtained it and stood at the North Pole. The Queen Mother of the West obtained it and took her seat in Shaoguang: no one knows her beginning or her end. Peng Zu obtained it and lived from the time of the lord of Yu to that of the Five Hegemons. Fu Yue obtained it and became minister to Wu Ding, whose rule encompassed all under heaven; he then mounted the eastern cord, rode the celestial mansions Ji and Wei, and took his place among the stars.

06.11 Nanbo Zikui asked Nü Yu, “Your years are many, but your complexion is like that of a child. How is this?” “I have heard the Dao.” “Can I learn it?” Nü Yu said, “No. How could you? You are not the person for it. Buliang Yi had the abilities of a sage, but not the Dao of a sage; I had the Dao of a sage, but not the abilities. I wished to teach him, hoping that he might indeed become a sage. If not, it should be easy for one possessing the sage’s Dao to tell it to one possessing the sage’s abilities. I watched over him and told him. After three days he could put the world outside himself. This achieved, I watched over him again, and after seven days he could put things outside himself. Again I watched over him, and after nine days he could put life outside himself. Then came the clarity of dawn; after that, the vision of the single; after that, freedom from past and present; after that, entry into what neither dies nor is born. That which kills life does not die; that which gives life to life is not born. It accompanies everything and receives everything, destroys everything and completes everything. Its name is tranquillity amid disturbance: tranquillity attained through disturbance.”

06.12 “And from whom did you hear all this?” “From the son of Fumo; he heard it from the grandson of Luosong; he from Zhanming; Zhanming from Niexu; Niexu from Xuyi; Xuyi from Yu’ou; Yu’ou from Xuanming; Xuanming from Canliao; and Canliao from Yishi.”

06.13 Zisi, Ziyu, Zili, and Zilai were talking together. “Who can take nothingness for his head, life for his spine, and death for his rump? Who knows that death and life, preservation and disappearance, are one body? I would be friends with him.” The four looked at one another and laughed; their hearts did not oppose one another, and they became friends. Before long Ziyu fell ill, and Zisi went to visit him. “How great,” said the sufferer, “is the maker of things, to have made me so cramped!” His back was bent, his five internal organs thrust upward, his chin over his navel, his shoulders higher than his crown, and the bony projection pointed to the sky. The breaths of yin and yang were disordered, yet his mind was at ease and untroubled. Limping to a well, he looked at himself and said, “Ah, the maker of things has made me so cramped!”

06.14 Zisi asked, “Do you dislike it?” He replied, “No. Why should I? If my left arm were gradually transformed into a cock, I should use it to tell the hours of the night. If my right arm became a crossbow, I should use it to seek a roasted owl. If my rump became a wheel and my spirit a horse, I should ride them: why change for another team? What we gain arrives with its time; what we lose follows the course. Resting in the time and dwelling in the course, neither grief nor joy can enter. The ancients called this the loosening of the suspension. Those who cannot loosen themselves are tied by things. That things cannot overcome Heaven has long been the case. What should I dislike?”

06.15 Before long Zilai fell ill, gasping at the point of death; his wife and children stood around him weeping. Zili went to see him and said to them, “Hush! Step aside! Do not disturb the transformation.” Leaning against the door, he said, “How great is transformation! What will it make of you? Where will it take you? Will it make you a rat’s liver or an insect’s arm?” Zilai replied, “When parents tell their child to go east, west, south, or north, the child follows. Yin and yang are more to a person than parents. If they bring me near death and I refuse to obey, I am the rebellious one. What fault is theirs? The great mass burdens me with a form, wears me out through life, eases me in old age and lets me rest in death. What makes my life good therefore makes my death good too.

06.16 “Here is a great founder casting metal. If the metal leapt up and said, ‘I must become the sword Moye,’ the founder would regard it as inauspicious metal. Having happened upon human form, if I insisted, ‘A human, a human, and nothing else!’, the transforming maker would regard me as an inauspicious human. Once heaven and earth are taken as the great furnace and transformation as the great founder, where could I go that would not be fitting?” He slept peacefully, awoke suddenly, and broke into a sweat.

06.17 Zisang Hu, Meng Zifan, and Ziqin Zhang were talking together: “Who can associate without association and act for one another without acting? Who can mount heaven, wander in the mists, range through the limitless, and forget one another in life without an end?” The three looked at one another and laughed; their hearts did not oppose one another, and they became friends. After a time Zisang Hu died. Before the burial, Confucius heard of it and sent Zigong to help with the arrangements. One of the friends composed a song, the other struck the lute, and they sang together: “Ah, Sang Hu! Ah, Sang Hu! You have returned to your true condition, while we remain as humans!”

06.18 Zigong hurried forward: “May I ask whether singing beside the corpse accords with ritual?” They looked at one another and laughed: “What does this man know of the meaning of ritual?” Zigong returned and told Confucius, “What sort of men are they? They have made none of the usual preparations; they treat bodily form as something external; they sing beside the corpse without a change of expression. I cannot describe them. What sort of men are they?” Confucius answered, “They wander outside the bounds, while I wander within them. Outside and inside do not meet. It was my narrowness that sent you to offer condolences. They are now companions of the maker of things and wander in the single breath of heaven and earth. They regard life as an attached growth or hanging wart, and death as the bursting of a swelling or abscess. How would they know the position of life and death, or which comes first and which last? Borrowing different things, they lodge in a common body. They forget liver and gall and set ears and eyes aside. Endings and beginnings

follow one another without a known limit. Freely they roam beyond the dust and grime and wander in the work of non-action. How could they fuss over customary rites to impress the eyes and ears of the crowd?"

06.19 Zigong asked, "Then what bounds do you rely on, Master?" "I am one of Heaven's punished people. Nevertheless, I will share this with you." "May I ask the method?" Confucius said, "Fish find their life in water, and people in the Dao. Those who find it in water dig into the pools and have their nourishment supplied. Those who find it in the Dao need no contrived business, and their life is settled. Hence it is said: 'Fish forget one another in rivers and lakes; people forget one another in the way of the Dao.'" Zigong asked, "What of the unusual person?" "Unusual among men, but matched with Heaven. Thus the small person of Heaven is the superior person among men; the superior person among men is the small person of Heaven."

06.20 Yan Hui asked Zhongni, "When Mengsun Cai's mother died, he wailed without tears, felt no distress in his heart, and showed no sorrow in mourning. Without these three things, he was praised throughout Lu for mourning well. Can someone lack the reality and obtain the name? I find it very strange." Zhongni said, "Mengsun has reached the utmost and gone beyond knowing. He wished to simplify the observances but could not; nevertheless, he has simplified something. He does not know why one lives or why one dies; he does not know whether to choose what comes before or what comes after. Transformed into a thing, he awaits the transformation he does not yet know. When one is about to change, how does one know that one is not changing? When one is about not to change, how does one know that one has already changed? Perhaps you and I are dreaming and have not begun to wake.

06.21 "His bodily form is startled, but his heart suffers no loss. He has a new dwelling at dawn, without inwardly regarding this as dying. Mengsun alone is awake. Others weep and he weeps with them, following what is appropriate to him. We all say 'I' in our dealings with one another, but how do we know what we call 'I'? You dream that you are a bird soaring through heaven, or a fish sinking into the depths. We do not know whether those speaking now are awake or dreaming. Being at ease need not culminate in a smile; a pleased smile falls short of moving with change. Rest in this movement and accompany transformation: then you enter the vast unity of Heaven."

06.22 Yi'erzi went to see Xu You, who asked, "What has Yao given you?" "He told me, 'You must practise benevolence and righteousness yourself and speak clearly of right and wrong.'" Xu You said, "Then why come here? Yao has already tattooed you with benevolence and righteousness and cut off your nose with right and wrong. How can you wander in the free, far-ranging, ever-changing way?" Yi'erzi replied, "Even so, I would like to wander along its fence." "No. Eyes without pupils cannot share in the beauty of face and features; the blind cannot see the blue, yellow, and patterned sacrificial robes." Yi'erzi said, "Wuzhuang's loss of beauty, Juliang's loss of strength, and Huangdi's loss of wisdom all took place between furnace and hammer. How do you know that the maker of things will not erase my tattoo and restore my nose, so that I may follow you whole?" Xu You said, "Ah! It cannot yet be known. Let me tell you its outline. My master! My master! It breaks all things apart without this being righteousness; its benefit reaches ten thousand generations without this being benevolence; older than high antiquity, it is not old; it covers heaven, supports earth, and fashions all forms without counting it skill. This is where I wander."

06.23 Yan Hui said, "I am making progress." Zhongni asked, "What do you mean?" "I have forgotten benevolence and righteousness." "Good, but not yet enough." Another day Hui returned: "I am making progress." "What do you mean?" "I have forgotten rites and music." "Good, but not yet enough." Another day Hui returned: "I am making progress." "What do you mean?" "I sit and forget." Zhongni changed expression: "What is sitting and forgetting?" Yan Hui said, "I let limbs and body fall away, dismiss keen hearing and sight, leave form and set knowledge aside, and become one with the great thoroughfare. This is sitting and forgetting." Zhongni said, "Being one, you have no partial preferences; transformed, you have no fixed constancy. You truly are worthy! I ask to follow behind you."

06.24 Ziyu and Zisang were friends. When it had rained continuously for ten days, Ziyu said, “Zisang must be in distress.” He wrapped up some rice and went to feed him. At the door he heard something between singing and weeping, with a lute accompanying the words: “Father? Mother? Heaven? Men?” The voice could scarcely sustain itself and hurried through the verse. Ziyu entered and asked, “Why are you singing the poem like this?” Zisang answered, “I was thinking of what has brought me to this extremity and could not find it. Would my parents want me poor? Heaven covers without partiality and earth supports without partiality: would they single me out for poverty? I seek what has done this and cannot find it. Yet I have reached this extremity. It must be my allotted fate.”

Explanation of the chapter

Dialogues about transformation, illness, and death confront philosophical practice with what cannot be preserved by willpower. Yan Hui's account of sitting in forgetfulness, zuowang, takes the relinquishing of supports beyond intellectual revision: it concerns loosening bodily, social, and cognitive identifications.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

It would be inaccurate to turn such forgetting into simple advice to remain mentally flexible. Nor does the chapter license the conclusion that grief is a moral failure. Several distinct voices and gestures suggest different relations to the unavoidable. A responsible interpretation preserves the strangeness of the scenes rather than translating every detail into self-help or a contemporary moral theory.

Textual collation

06.01–06.03. *Zhēnrén* (真人) is rendered as a true person, not a demonstrated superior human state. The opening doubt about heaven and humans limits any absolute epistemic claim. In 06.02, 寡 may refer to what is scant or to the few; 士 also has a reading associated with 事, affairs. This version adopts not scheming over affairs without excluding other interpretations. In 06.03, 說 is read as 悅, delight, not attachment. Breathing from the heels and immunity to fire belong to the narrative, not to physical instructions.

06.04. Xu Yu (胥餘) is read as the personal name of Jizi (箕子), following Sima Biao’s gloss recorded by Lu Deming and Cheng Xuanying’s first explanation in the *Zhuangzi jishi* [5]. The same apparatus records identifications with Bi Gan and Wu Zixu, the latter also proposed by Cheng: unanimity is not claimed. Xu Yu is not Xu You (許由). The final contrast concerns seeking what suits others and what suits oneself, not failing to obtain satisfaction. The military and political sentences change the chapter’s register. Their place in the received text does not establish a single voice or date of composition for all its passages.

06.08, 06.13–06.16. *Dàkuài* (大塊), the great mass, receives the same equivalent in the repeated formula at 06.08 and 06.15. *Zàowùzhě* (造物者) and *zàohuà* (造化) express making and transformation without imposing a personal creator. 莫逆於心 indicates the friends’ concord. In the bodily description at 06.13, 五管 follows the visceral reading and retains the number five. The received transcription used [3] ends the Zilai episode with 發然汗出, the appearance of sweat; no clinical explanation is inferred from it.

06.10–06.12. Fu Yue is Wu Ding’s minister. 奄有天下 refers to the sovereign’s encompassing rule, not an instantaneous conquest by the minister. Ji and Wei are traditional celestial mansions. Nü Yu’s genealogy contains names with allegorical resonances, not an authenticated historical succession.

06.21. 無情死 follows Guo Xiang’s explanation: not inwardly regarding the transformation as dying. The image of a new dwelling is retained. For 造適不及笑, Guo and Cheng explain that constant ease need not culminate in a smile elicited by a pleasant occasion. In 獻笑不及排, a smile dependent on something pleasant falls short of moving with change. 排 is read as movement or transformation, not planning [5].

06.22 and 13.04. The verb appearing in forms such as 鑿 or 鏨 is understood through the gloss 碎, to break apart. Both versions retain the third person. The reference witness for chapter 6 prints 義, righteousness, whereas the parallel at 13.04 prints 戾, cruelty or violence. These expressly different readings are retained rather than silently harmonising chapter 6 with chapter 13. Repetition of the verb does not make every word in the passages identical. The paradox concerning the master provides no moral justification for violence.

06.23. *Zuòwàng* (坐忘) means sitting and forgetting. The scene is retained as philosophical and narrative questioning, not as a therapeutic prescription.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 大宗師 (Wikisource, oldid 2327595).

06.01: 知天之所爲; **06.02-06.06:** 何謂真人; **06.07-06.08:** 死生; **06.09-06.10:** 夫道; **06.11-06.12:** 南伯子葵問乎女偶; **06.13-06.14:** 子祀; **06.15-06.16:** 俄而子來有病; **06.17-06.19:** 子桑户; **06.20-06.21:** 顏回問仲尼; **06.22:** 意而子見許由; **06.23:** 顏回曰; **06.24:** 子輿與子桑友.

07. Responding to Rulers

Ying di wang | 應帝王

Chapter text

07.01 Nie Que put four questions to Wang Ni, and four times he answered that he did not know. Nie Que leapt up in delight and went to tell Puyi Zi. Puyi Zi said, “Do you only now know this? The ruler of the Yu line was not equal to the ruler of the Tai line. The ruler of Yu still kept benevolence within himself to draw men to him. He gained them, but had not gone beyond the human. The ruler of Tai slept tranquilly and awoke in contented simplicity. At one time he considered himself a horse, at another an ox. His knowledge was genuine and trustworthy, his virtue very true: he had not entered into human contrivance.”

07.02 Jian Wu went to see Jieyu, the mad recluse. Jieyu asked, “What did Rizhong Shi tell you?” “He told me that rulers should issue standards from themselves and measure men by righteousness. Who would dare not obey and be transformed?” Jieyu said, “That is a deception of virtue. To govern the world that way is like trying to wade through the sea, dig out the Yellow River, or make a mosquito carry a mountain. Does the sage’s government concern the outside? He sets himself right and then acts, doing only what he is truly able to do. Birds fly high to avoid the tethered arrow; the little mouse burrows deep beneath the sacred hill to avoid smoke and digging. Have you less understanding than these two small creatures?”

07.03 Tian Gen wandered south of Mount Yin and reached the Liao River. There he met the Nameless Man and asked, “How should the world be governed?” The Nameless Man replied, “Go away, you uncultivated fellow! Why ask so inopportunely? I am about to become companion to the maker of things. When weary, I shall ride the bird of the vast and subtle air, pass beyond the six limits, wander in the country where nothing exists, and dwell in the broad wilderness. Why trouble my heart with government?” Tian Gen asked again. The Nameless Man said, “Let your heart wander in simplicity; blend your vital breath with stillness; follow the spontaneous course of things and allow no private interest to intrude. Then the world will be ordered.”

07.04 Yang Ziju said to Lao Dan, “Suppose a man is alert and forceful, penetrating and clear in his understanding of things, and tireless in studying the Dao. Could he be compared with an enlightened king?” Lao Dan replied, “Beside a sage he is a petty functionary, bound to his skills, tiring his body and alarming his heart. The patterned coats of tigers and leopards bring hunters; the agility of monkeys and the skill of dogs that catch wild oxen bring ropes. Could such a man be compared with an enlightened king?” Yang Ziju looked abashed. “May I ask about the government of enlightened kings?” Lao Dan replied, “Their achievements cover the world, yet seem not their own. Their transforming influence reaches all things, but the people do not depend on them. No name is proclaimed; things delight in themselves. They stand in what cannot be measured and wander in what has no being.”

07.05 In Zheng there was a spirit-diviner called Jixian. He claimed knowledge of men’s deaths and births, preservation and ruin, misfortune and fortune, long life and early death, predicting the year, month, ten-day period and day as if divinely inspired. The people of Zheng fled when they saw him. Liezi met him and was intoxicated in his heart. Returning, he told Huzi, “I thought your Dao had reached the utmost, Master, but there is another that goes further.” Huzi said, “I have given you its outward pattern, but not yet its substance, and you think you possess the Dao? With many hens and no cock, how would there be fertile eggs? You confront the world with your Dao and insist on being believed; that is why this man can read your appearance. Bring him here and let me show myself to him.”

07.06 The next day Liezi brought him to Huzi. On leaving, the diviner said, “Alas! Your master is a dead man. He cannot live ten days. I saw something uncanny: wet ashes.” Liezi went in, weeping until his tears

soaked his robe, and told Huzi. Huzi said, “I showed him the pattern of earth, its sprouts neither moving nor rising upright. He probably saw my vital mechanism closed. Bring him again.”

07.07 Next day Liezi brought him again. On leaving, the diviner said, “Fortunately your master has met me. He is improving; life is returning fully. I saw his blocked balance beginning to move.” Liezi reported this to Huzi, who said, “I showed him heaven and earth, where name and substance do not enter and the mechanism issues from the heels. He probably saw the mechanism of my vitality. Bring him again.”

07.08 The following day the diviner returned. On leaving, he said, “Your master is not steady. I cannot read him. Let him become steady, and I shall examine him again.” Liezi reported this. Huzi said, “I showed him the great openness in which nothing prevails over anything else. He probably saw my vital breaths in balance. The pool where a great fish turns is an abyss; still water makes an abyss; flowing water makes an abyss. There are nine names for abysses: these are three. Bring him again.”

07.09 On the next day, before he had settled into his place, the diviner lost his composure and fled. “Follow him!” said Huzi. Liezi pursued him but could not catch him. He returned: “He has vanished; he is gone. I could not reach him.” Huzi said, “I showed myself before ever emerging from my source. I met him empty and yielding. He did not know who or what I was. Now I seemed to collapse, now to flow like waves; therefore he fled.”

07.10 After this Liezi thought he had not yet begun to learn. He returned home and did not go out for three years. He cooked for his wife and fed pigs as if feeding people. He took no special side in affairs. Putting away carving and polishing, he returned to the uncarved. Like a clod, he stood in his bodily form; amid distractions he remained closed against them. In this he continued to the end.

07.11 Do not become the host of fame, the storehouse of schemes, the bearer of business, or the master of knowledge. Embody fully what is inexhaustible and wander where no trace can be found. Complete what you have received from Heaven, without displaying acquisition: simply be empty. The Perfect man’s heart is like a mirror. It neither escorts what departs nor welcomes what has not arrived. It responds without retaining. Thus it can meet things without suffering injury.

07.12 The ruler of the Southern Sea was Shu; the ruler of the Northern Sea was Hu; the ruler of the centre was Hundun, the Undifferentiated. Shu and Hu often met in Hundun’s territory, and Hundun treated them very well. They discussed how to repay his kindness. “Everyone has seven openings for seeing, hearing, eating, and breathing. He alone has none. Let us try boring some for him.” Each day they bored one opening. On the seventh day Hundun died.

Explanation of the chapter

In the tale of Hundun, visitors bore the seven openings they believe he needs; he dies. The story challenges interventions that begin with a fixed picture of what another being ought to become. Its force lies in the benefactors' good intentions. Intention does not guarantee outcome.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

The tale does not ban every reform, medical treatment, or act of education. Such a universal rule would be as rigid as the conduct questioned by the story. It prompts inquiry into the intervener's assumptions: what is known, what is changed, and what could be destroyed unintentionally. The language of responsibility is our contemporary extension; we do not claim an ancient theory of impact assessment.

Textual collation

The four clauses beginning 無爲名尸 are read as negative exhortations: “do not become”. The historical rendering that turns them into promises of mastery through non-action is not followed. In the mirror passage, 不傷 can mean remaining uninjured; it is not expanded into a guarantee of never harming anyone. The opening Yu–Tai comparison has disputed syntax in 非人; the wording follows the contrast between benevolent constraint and spontaneity, without claiming an indisputable lexical equivalence. Jixian’s predictions belong to a story that questions their reach, not verified divination. “Fertile eggs” makes the analogy explicit without suggesting that hens cannot lay eggs without a cock. Hundun is retained as a name and glossed “the Undifferentiated”; his death is not turned into a universal prohibition on intervention.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 應帝王 (Wikisource, oldid 2327605).

07.01: 齧缺問於王倪; **07.02:** 肩吾見狂接輿; **07.03:** 天根遊於殷陽; **07.04:** 陽子居見老聃; **07.05-07.10:** 鄭有神巫; **07.11:** 无爲名尸; **07.12:** 南海之帝.

Outer Chapters · 8 to 22

08. Webbed Toes

Pian mu | 駢拇

Chapter text

08.01 Webbed toes and an extra finger arise from one's nature, yet seem excessive to its powers; attached growths and hanging warts arise from bodily form, yet seem excessive to nature. The many methods used in benevolence and righteousness may be lodged among the five organs, but are not the proper course of Dao and virtue. Webbing on the foot joins flesh that seems useless; an extra digit on the hand grows a finger that seems useless. Multiplying such webbing and branching in the dispositions of the five organs leads to excessive and distorted benevolence and righteousness and to elaborate uses of hearing and sight.

08.02 Excess in sight confuses the five colours and indulges in patterns, in the dazzling blue, yellow, black, and white of embroidered robes. Is that not what happens? Li Zhu is the example. Excess in hearing confuses the five notes and indulges in the six pitch standards, in the sounds of metal, stone, silk, and bamboo, of Huangzhong and Dalü. Shi Kuang is the example. Branching into benevolence raises virtue while blocking nature in order to gather reputation, making the world pipe and drum in service of an unattainable standard. Zeng and Shi are the examples. Excess in disputation piles tiles and knots cords, arranges phrases, and lets the mind wander among hard and white, same and different, wearing itself out in the praise of useless words. Yang and Mo are the examples. These are all ways of superfluous joining and branching, not the utmost rightness of the world.

08.03 That which is truly right does not lose the reality of its nature and allotted life. What is joined is not therefore excessive; what branches is not therefore superfluous. What is long has no surplus; what is short has no deficiency. The duck's legs are short, but lengthening them would cause distress; the crane's legs are long, but cutting them would cause grief. What is naturally long is not to be shortened, and what is naturally short is not to be lengthened: there is no need to remove a distress that was not there. Perhaps benevolence and righteousness do not belong to the human condition. Why else have benevolent men so many worries? Cut apart the webbing between toes and there will be tears; bite off an extra finger and there will be cries. One has more than the usual number and another appears to have fewer, yet the distress is the same.

08.04 The benevolent men of this age strain their eyes and worry over the world's troubles. The unbenevolent cut themselves off from the reality of their nature and life and greedily pursue rank and wealth. Perhaps benevolence and righteousness do not belong to the human condition. Since the Three Dynasties, how noisy the world has become! Whatever needs hook, line, compass, and square to be made correct has its nature cut away; whatever needs cords, glue, and lacquer to be made firm has its virtue invaded. Bending through rites and music, comforting with benevolence and righteousness, and thereby soothing the world's heart: this loses its ordinary constancy.

08.05 The world has its ordinary constancy. What is curved needs no hook; what is straight needs no line; what is round needs no compass; what is square needs no square. Things adhere without glue and lacquer and are held together without cords and ropes. Thus everything in the world comes to life without knowing how it comes to life, and attains what it has without knowing how it attains it. Ancient and present are not two in this, and it must not be impaired. Why, then, should benevolence and righteousness cling like glue, lacquer, cords, and ropes amid Dao and virtue, confusing the world?

08.06 A small confusion changes one's direction; a great confusion changes one's nature. How do I know? Since the ruler of Yu summoned benevolence and righteousness to disturb the world, everyone has hurried to obey them. Is that not changing their nature by means of benevolence and righteousness? Let us consider it. Since the Three Dynasties, no one has failed to exchange nature for things. The petty person sacrifices the body for profit; the scholar for reputation; the high officer for his house; the sage for the world. Their occupations differ and their reputations have different names, but in injuring nature and sacrificing themselves they are one.

08.07 Zang and Gu were tending sheep together, and both lost their sheep. Asked what he had been doing, Zang was found holding bamboo slips and reading; asked what he had been doing, Gu was found playing a game. Their occupations differed, but they were equal in losing sheep. Boyi died for reputation at the foot of Shouyang; Robber Zhi died for profit on Dongling. They died for different things, but were equal in damaging life and injuring nature. Why must Boyi be right and Robber Zhi wrong? The whole world sacrifices itself. If the sacrifice is for benevolence and righteousness, custom calls the person noble; if it is for goods and wealth, custom calls the person petty. The sacrifice is one, yet there are noble and petty labels. In damaging life and injuring nature, Robber Zhi is simply another Boyi. Where, in that respect, is the distinction between noble and petty?

08.08 Those who bind their nature to benevolence and righteousness, though as accomplished as Zeng and Shi, are not what I call good. Those who bind their nature to the five flavours, though as accomplished as Yu'er, are not what I call good. Those who bind their nature to the five notes, though as accomplished as Shi Kuang, are not what I call keen of hearing. Those who bind their nature to the five colours, though as accomplished as Li Zhu, are not what I call clear of sight.

08.09 What I call good is not benevolence and righteousness, but goodness in one's own virtue. What I call good is not what is called benevolence and righteousness, but allowing the reality of one's nature and allotted life. What I call hearing is not hearing something else, but hearing oneself. What I call sight is not seeing something else, but seeing oneself. To see others without seeing oneself, to acquire what others have without obtaining oneself, is to obtain their attainment and not one's own, to find their satisfaction and not one's own. Whoever finds others' satisfaction but not their own, whether Robber Zhi or Boyi, goes equally to excess and deviation. I am ashamed before Dao and virtue. Therefore, above, I do not dare undertake the imposed practice of benevolence and righteousness; below, I do not dare indulge in excess and deviation.

Explanation of the chapter

The bodily peculiarities in the title introduce a critique of additions imposed upon what things are. The chapter targets moral standards that claim to correct human life from outside. This is not proof that every custom lacks value: the target is the violence a norm can exert when it presents itself as an obligatory second nature.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

Its polemical voice differs from that of some Inner Chapters. The collection should not therefore be read as a single uniform speaker. A present-day reader must distinguish norms that protect from norms that deform, a problem the text does not settle comprehensively. Its enduring challenge concerns the self-confidence of those who assume improvement follows automatically from enforcement of an accepted rule.

Textual collation

The image of joined and extra digits is not turned into a medical judgment or a hierarchy of bodily dignity. The text itself rejects cutting or lengthening bodies to fit a standard. *Rén* (仁) and *yì* (義) remain "benevolence" and "righteousness" so that the polemic is neither softened nor made into rejection of every form of care. Zang and Gu are retained as names; the Chinese does not require Legge's identification of a male and a female slave. The comparison of Boyi and Zhi is explicitly limited to damage to their own lives, not moral equivalence of all their actions. The repeated final definition of "good" is retained from the Chinese source.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 駢拇 (Wikisource, oldid 2327618).
08.01-08.02: 駢拇枝指; **08.03:** 彼正正者; **08.04:** 今世之仁人; **08.05:** 天下有常然; **08.06:** 夫小惑易方; **08.07:** 臧與穀; **08.08:** 且夫屬其性乎仁義者; **08.09:** 吾所謂臧.

09. Horses' Hooves

Ma ti | 馬蹄

Chapter text

09.01 Horses have hooves with which to tread frost and snow, hair with which to resist wind and cold. They eat grass, drink water, lift their feet and leap: this is the true nature of horses. Even if they had magnificent terraces and great halls, they would have no use for them. Then Bole arrived and said, "I know how to manage horses." He singed and clipped them, pared and branded them, tied them with halters and hobbles, and arranged them in stables and stalls. Two or three in ten died. He starved and thirsted them, galloped and raced them, drilled them into regular order. Before them were the troubles of the bit and headgear; behind them, the terror of whip and switch. More than half the horses died.

09.02 The potter says, "I know how to manage clay. Round things fit the compass and square things the square." The carpenter says, "I know how to manage wood. Curves fit the hook and straight pieces the line." But does the nature of clay and wood wish to fit compass, square, hook, and line? Yet generation after generation praises Bole for managing horses and potters and carpenters for managing clay and wood. This is also the error of those who govern the world.

09.03 I think those who truly govern well do otherwise. The people have a constant nature: they weave to clothe themselves and till to feed themselves. This is their common virtue. United without factions, they are said to be released to Heaven. In the age of utmost virtue, their steps were steady and their gaze straightforward. There were no paths or tunnels in the mountains, no boats or bridges over the marshes. The myriad things lived in groups, their settlements joined together; birds and beasts formed flocks and herds, and grasses and trees grew freely. Animals could be led about, and one could climb to look into birds' and magpies' nests.

09.04 In that age people lived with birds and beasts and belonged to a family alongside the myriad things. How would they know noble people from petty ones? Sharing freedom from contrived knowledge, they did not depart from their virtue. Sharing freedom from desire, they were called simple and uncarved. In simplicity the people's nature found fulfilment. Then the sages arrived, hobbling in benevolence and stretching on tiptoe for righteousness, and the world began to doubt. They spread music extravagantly and twisted themselves through ritual, and the world began to divide.

09.05 If the uncarved wood had not been damaged, who would make sacrificial vessels? If white jade had not been broken, who would make ritual tablets? If Dao and virtue had not been abandoned, where would benevolence and righteousness be taken from? If nature and feeling had not been separated, what use would there be for rites and music? If the five colours had not been confused, who would make ornamental patterns? If the five notes had not been confused, who would respond to the six pitch standards? Damaging uncarved wood to make vessels is the craftsman's offence. Destroying Dao and virtue to make benevolence and righteousness is the sage's error.

09.06 Horses in the open eat grass and drink water. When pleased they entwine necks and rub one another; when angry they turn their backs and kick. Their knowledge extends this far. Put crossbar and yoke upon them, align them under crescent-shaped frontlets, and they learn to look sideways, twist their necks, resist, evade the bit, and steal the reins. That horses acquire the knowledge and ability to behave like thieves is Bole's offence.

09.07 In the age of Hexu, people stayed at home without knowing what to do and walked out without knowing where to go. Food in their mouths, they were happy; bellies full, they wandered. Their abilities extended this far. Then the sages arrived, bending and twisting through rites and music to correct the world's

bodily form, holding benevolence and righteousness high to soothe its heart. The people began to strain after knowledge and compete in their rush for profit, with no stopping them. This too is the sages' error.

Explanation of the chapter

Horse training under the celebrated expert Bo Le becomes an example of technique achieving its stated aims by destroying conditions of life that previously needed no correction. Skill is thus seen in a different light from Cook Ding's: not every technical competence deserves the same judgment.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

Reading across chapters requires preserving divergence. The cook of chapter three learns to follow articulations; the trainer here subjects an animal to an imposed model. It is not enough to ask whether a technique works. One must also ask who defines its purpose and who bears its costs. This distinction is a present-day argument rather than an explicit formula in the ancient text.

Textual collation

Bole is an exemplary figure of training; the proportions of horses that die belong to the narrative argument, not measured historical data. *Pǔ* (樸) means the uncarved, not a demonstration that all technical transformation is harmful. Hexu's age is an ideal contrast within the chapter, not established historical reconstruction. The chapter's aggressive images against ritual and moralisation are retained rather than artificially harmonised with chapters assigning different roles to government and rites.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 馬蹄 (Wikisource, oldid 2327617).

09.01: 蹄可以踐霜雪; **09.02:** 陶者曰; **09.03:** 吾意善治天下者; **09.04:** 夫至德之世; **09.05:** 故純樸不殘; **09.06:** 陸居則食草飲水; **09.07:** 夫赫胥氏之時.

10. Breaking Open Chests

Qu qie | 胠篋

Chapter text

10.01 To guard against thieves who open chests, search bags and break into coffers, people tighten their cords and fasten their clasps and locks. This is what the world calls wisdom. But when a great thief arrives, he carries off the coffer on his back, lifts the chest and shoulders the bag. His only fear is that the cords, clasps and locks may not be strong enough. Does not what was previously called wisdom amount to gathering things together for a great thief?

10.02 Let us examine this. Is there anything in what the world calls wisdom that does not accumulate goods for great thieves? Is there anything in what it calls sageliness that does not guard them? How can we know? In former times the neighbouring settlements of Qi could see one another, and the sounds of their cocks and dogs could be heard between them. The land covered by nets and worked by ploughs and hoes extended over more than two thousand square li. Within its four borders, the ancestral temples and altars of soil and grain, the government of towns and dwellings, districts, villages and neighbourhoods, all followed the rules of the sages. Yet one day Tian Chengzi killed the ruler of Qi and stole his state. Was the state alone what he stole? He stole the laws of sagely wisdom along with it. Although he bore the name of a robber, he lived as securely as Yao and Shun. Small states did not dare to condemn him, and great states did not dare to punish him. His house possessed Qi for twelve generations. Was this not stealing the state of Qi together with its laws of sagely wisdom, and using them to protect a robber?

10.03 Let us examine this again. Does anything called the highest wisdom fail to accumulate goods for great thieves? Does anything called the highest sageliness fail to guard them? How can we know? Longfeng was beheaded, Bigan was cut open, Chang Hong was disembowelled and Zixu was torn to pieces. Worthy as these four men were, they could not escape execution. A follower of Robber Zhi asked him, “Is there a Way even in robbery?” Zhi replied, “Where could one go without a Way? Guessing what is stored inside a room is sagacity; being the first to enter is courage; being the last to leave is righteousness; knowing whether an attempt is practicable is wisdom; dividing the spoils equally is benevolence. No one in the world has ever become a great robber without all five.”

10.04 Seen from this, a good person cannot establish himself without the Way of the sages, and Zhi cannot conduct his business without it either. Good people in the world are few, and those who are not good are many. Therefore the benefit the sages bring the world is small, and the harm is great. Thus it is said: when the lips disappear, the teeth grow cold; the wine of Lu was thin, and Handan was besieged; sages arise, and great robbers appear.

10.05 Strike down the sages and let the thieves go, and only then will the world begin to be ordered. When a stream dries up, its valley is empty; when a hill is levelled, the hollow is filled. When the sages are dead, great robbers will no longer arise, and the world will be peaceful and free from trouble. So long as the sages do not die, great robbers will not cease. To govern the world by placing still greater weight on the sages is to give still greater profit to Robber Zhi.

10.06 Make pecks and bushels for measuring, and they steal the pecks and bushels with the goods. Make weights and balances for weighing, and they steal the weights and balances as well. Make tallies and seals to establish trust, and they steal the tallies and seals too. Establish benevolence and righteousness to set people straight, and they steal benevolence and righteousness with everything else. How do we know? Someone who steals a belt-hook is executed; someone who steals a state becomes a feudal lord. At the gates of those lords stand men of righteousness. Is this not stealing benevolence, righteousness and sagely wisdom? Those who

pursue great robbery, raise themselves to lordship and appropriate the profits of benevolence, righteousness, measures, balances, tallies and seals cannot be turned from it by the rewards of carriages and ceremonial caps, nor restrained by the terror of the executioner's axe. Giving such great profit to Robber Zhi that he cannot be restrained is the fault of the sages. Thus it is said: fish must not be taken from the deep pool, and the state's sharp instruments must not be displayed to others.

10.07 Sages are the sharp instruments of the world; they are not what should be used to illuminate it. Therefore cut off sageliness and abandon wisdom, and great robbers will cease. Cast away jade and destroy pearls, and small thieves will not arise. Burn tallies and break seals, and people will become plain and simple. Smash measures and break balances, and people will cease competing. Destroy the sagely laws of the world completely, and only then can one begin to reason with the people.

10.08 Confound the six pitch standards, melt or destroy the pipes and zithers, and stop the ears of the blind music master Kuang: then everyone will retain their own hearing. Abolish elaborate patterns, scatter the five colours and seal Li Zhu's eyes: then everyone will retain their own sight. Destroy hooks and marking-lines, discard compasses and squares, and break the fingers of craftsman Chui: then everyone will have their own skill. Thus it is said: great skill looks clumsy. Remove the conduct of Zeng and Shi, close the mouths of Yang and Mo, and cast away benevolence and righteousness: then the world's virtue will enter a deep unity. When people retain their own sight, the world is not dazzled; when they retain their own hearing, it is not burdened; when they retain their own knowing, it is not bewildered; when they retain their own virtue, it is not distorted. Zeng, Shi, Yang, Mo, music master Kuang, craftsman Chui and Li Zhu all set their excellence outside themselves and use it to dazzle and confuse the world. Such models are of no use.

10.09 Do you alone not know the age of highest virtue? In former times there were Rongcheng, Dating, Bohuang, Zhongyang, Lilu, Lichu, Xuanyuan, Hexu, Zunlu, Zhurong, Fuxi and Shennong. In those days people used knotted cords. They found their food sweet, their clothes beautiful, their customs joyful and their homes secure. Neighbouring states could see one another and hear one another's cocks and dogs, yet people grew old and died without going back and forth between them. At such a time, order was complete.

10.10 Now people stretch their necks and rise on tiptoe, saying, "There is a worthy man in such-and-such a place!" They shoulder provisions and hurry towards him. At home they abandon their parents; abroad they leave the service of their rulers. Their footprints cross the borders of the feudal states, and their wheel-tracks run together beyond a thousand li. This is the fault of those above who delight in cleverness.

10.11 When those above genuinely delight in cleverness but have no Way, the world falls into great disorder. How do we know? When there is much knowledge of bows, crossbows, nets, tethered arrows and ingenious mechanisms, birds are disturbed in the sky. When there is much knowledge of hooks, bait, nets, lift-nets and fish-traps, fish are disturbed in the water. When there is much knowledge of stakes, cages, snares and traps, beasts are disturbed in the marshes. When there are many transformations of cunning, deception, insidious malice and slippery arguments about the hard and the white, sameness and difference, ordinary people are bewildered by disputation.

10.12 Thus whenever the world falls into great disorder, the fault lies in delighting in cleverness. Everyone knows to investigate what they do not know; no one knows to investigate what they already know. Everyone knows to condemn what they regard as bad; no one knows to question what they already approve. Hence the great disorder. Above, the light of the sun and moon is obscured; below, the vitality of mountains and rivers is exhausted; in between, the workings of the four seasons are ruined. Breathing, crawling, creeping and flying creatures all lose their nature. How deeply the love of cleverness disorders the world! This has been so since the Three Dynasties. People abandon the plain and simple and take pleasure in busy flatterers; they set aside quiet, unforced action and delight in clamorous proposals. This clamour has already disordered the world.

Explanation of the chapter

The chapter provocatively argues that devices intended to guard property and organize society may also assist powerful thieves. Institutions and civilizing categories are not automatically justified by their declared purposes. A strong lock can make an entire chest a more valuable prize for someone able to carry it away.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

A satire should not be inflated into a complete political theory. The argument's force lies in showing how an intervention may strengthen the problem it intends to solve. This criticism coexists with other strands of the book less hostile to social organization. The tension requires historical sensitivity rather than the claim that every textual layer proposes an identical solution.

Textual collation

The violent rhetoric against the sages is retained without becoming an editorial recommendation. 并與…竊之 describes the appropriation of the instruments of measurement, legitimacy and virtue themselves, not merely cheating with them. The twelve ancient lineages and twelve generations belong to the text’s account, not to a historically verified chronology. Its radical critique is not harmonised with chapters more favourable to government.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 胠篋 (Wikisource, oldid 2327612).

10.01: 將爲胠篋探囊; **10.02:** 故嘗試論之; **10.03:** 昔者龍逢斬; **10.04:** 由是觀之; **10.05:** 掊擊聖人; **10.06:** 爲之斗斛; **10.07:** 彼聖人者; **10.08:** 擢亂六律; **10.09:** 子獨不知至德之世; **10.10:** 今遂至使民; **10.11:** 上誠好知; **10.12:** 故天下每每大亂.

11. Letting Be and Preserving

Zai you | 在宥

Chapter text

11.01 I have heard of letting the world be and giving it room; I have not heard of governing it. Letting it be means fearing that its nature may be driven to excess; giving it room means fearing that its virtue may be displaced. If the world's nature is not driven to excess and its virtue is not displaced, what need is there to govern it? Formerly, Yao's government made everyone joyful and pleased with their nature: this was not tranquillity. Jie's government made everyone exhausted and afflicted in their nature: this was not contentment. Neither the absence of tranquillity nor the absence of contentment accords with virtue. Nothing contrary to virtue can endure for long.

11.02 When people become excessively joyful, they lean towards yang; when excessively angry, they lean towards yin. If both yin and yang are thrown out of balance, the four seasons fail to arrive and cold and heat fail to harmonise. Does this not in turn injure the human body? Joy and anger lose their proper place; people's dwelling and activity become unsettled; their thoughts find no ease, and they cannot bring a course of action to completion. Then the world begins to display arrogance, contentiousness, ambition and violence, followed by the conduct of Robber Zhi and of Zeng and Shi. The whole world would not suffice to reward all that is called good or to punish all that is called bad. Great as the world is, it is insufficient for rewards and punishments. Since the Three Dynasties people have been in constant turmoil, making rewards and punishments their business. What leisure have they had to rest in the reality of their nature and allotted life?

11.03 Moreover, delight in sharp sight leads to excess in colours; delight in keen hearing leads to excess in sounds; delight in benevolence disorders virtue; delight in righteousness opposes the pattern of things; delight in ritual fosters contrivance; delight in music fosters indulgence; delight in sageliness fosters accomplishments; delight in cleverness fosters fault-finding. If the world rests in the reality of its nature and allotted life, these eight may be present or absent. If it does not, these eight begin to crumple, twist and crush it into disorder, yet people start to honour and cherish them. How profoundly the world is deluded! It does not merely encounter them and pass on. People purify themselves to discuss them, kneel to present them, and drum, sing and dance over them. What am I to do with such a world?

11.04 Thus, when a noble person has no choice but to preside over the world, nothing is better than acting without forcing. Only then can the reality of nature and allotted life rest secure. One who values caring for his own person above administering the world may be entrusted with the world; one who loves his own person in undertaking the world may have the world committed to him. If he can avoid unsettling his five viscera and straining his hearing and sight, he may sit still as a ceremonial representative of the dead and appear like a dragon, remain silent as an abyss and sound like thunder. His spirit moves and heaven follows. At ease, acting without forcing, he lets the myriad things rise and gather of themselves. What leisure would he then have to govern the world?

11.05 Cui Qu asked Lao Dan, "If the world is not governed, how can people's hearts be made good?" Lao Dan replied, "Take care not to disturb people's hearts. Press a heart down and it sinks; urge it up and it rises. Rising and sinking can imprison and destroy it. It may be pliant and supple, or hard and strong; its sharp edges carve and cut. Its heat scorches like fire and its cold freezes like ice. In the time it takes to bow and raise one's head, it can twice reach beyond the four seas. At rest it is deep and still; in movement it hangs high in heaven. Proud and impetuous, impossible to bind: is this not the human heart?

11.06 "In former times the Yellow Emperor first disturbed people's hearts with benevolence and righteousness. Yao and Shun then wore the hair from their thighs and shins in labouring to nourish everyone's bodies. They exhausted their five viscera in practising benevolence and righteousness and strained their blood and breath in setting laws and standards, yet could not succeed. Yao therefore exiled Huan Dou to Mount

Chong, sent the Three Miao to Sanwei and banished Gong Gong to the Dark Capital. This showed his inability to cope with the world. By the time of the kings of the Three Dynasties, the world was greatly alarmed. Below there were Jie and Zhi; above there were Zeng and Shi; the Confucians and Mohists arose together. Joy and anger bred mutual suspicion; the foolish and the knowing deceived one another; the good and the bad condemned one another; the false and the truthful mocked one another. The world declined. Great virtue no longer agreed with itself, and nature and allotted life were scattered and ruined. The world loved cleverness, and ordinary people exhausted themselves seeking it.

11.07 "Then axes and saws were put to work; the marking-line determined who was killed; mallets and chisels cut people apart. The world became jagged with great disorder. The fault lay in disturbing people's hearts. Worthy people hid beneath the rocks of great mountains, while rulers of ten thousand chariots trembled in their ancestral halls. Today the bodies of those put to death lie pillowed on one another; those in cangues press against one another; the mutilated and punished are everywhere in sight. Yet Confucians and Mohists rise on tiptoe and bare their arms among the fetters and manacles. Ah, how extreme their lack of shame! I do not see how sageliness and cleverness could be anything but the crossbars of the cangue, or benevolence and righteousness anything but the mortises and tenons of the shackles. How do we know that Zeng and Shi are not the whistling arrows that lead the way for Jie and Zhi? Thus it is said: cut off sageliness and abandon cleverness, and the world will be greatly ordered."

11.08 The Yellow Emperor had been Son of Heaven for nineteen years, and his commands were obeyed throughout the world. Hearing that Guangchengzi lived on Mount Kongtong, he went to see him. "I hear that you have attained the utmost Way," he said. "May I ask about its essence? I wish to draw upon the essence of heaven and earth to assist the five grains and nourish the people. I also wish to direct yin and yang so that all living beings may flourish. How should I do this?" Guangchengzi replied, "What you wish to ask about is the substance of things; what you wish to direct is their destruction. Since you began governing the world, clouds rain before gathering, plants and trees shed their leaves before turning yellow, and the light of sun and moon grows dimmer. With your narrow, ingratiating mind, how could you be fit to discuss the utmost Way?"

11.09 The Yellow Emperor withdrew, relinquished the world, built a solitary chamber, laid down a mat of white grass and lived there in seclusion for three months. Then he went to seek another audience. Guangchengzi lay with his head to the south. The emperor approached humbly on his knees, bowed twice with his forehead to the ground and asked, "I hear that you have attained the utmost Way. How may I care for my person so that it endures?" Guangchengzi rose abruptly. "A good question! Come, I shall tell you about the utmost Way. Its essence is deep and dark; its farthest reach is dim and silent. Do not look, do not listen; embrace the spirit in stillness, and the body will straighten itself. Be still, be clear; do not exhaust your body or shake your vital essence. Then you may live long. Let the eyes see nothing, the ears hear nothing and the heart know nothing: your spirit will guard your body, and the body will endure.

11.10 "Guard what is within; close what leads outside. Much knowing brings ruin. I shall lead you above the Great Brightness to the source of utmost yang; I shall enter with you the gate of deepest darkness to the source of utmost yin. Heaven and earth have their offices, and yin and yang their storehouses. Carefully preserve your body, and things will strengthen themselves. I guard the One and dwell in its harmony. Thus I have cultivated myself for twelve hundred years, and my body has never declined."

11.11 The Yellow Emperor bowed twice with his forehead to the ground. "Guangchengzi is what one calls heaven!" Guangchengzi said, "Come, I shall tell you more. What is inexhaustible, people think has an end; what is unfathomable, they think has a limit. Whoever attains my Way is an august sovereign above and a king below. Whoever loses my Way sees the light above and becomes earth below. All the flourishing things are born from earth and return to earth. Therefore I shall leave you, enter the gate of the inexhaustible and wander in the fields of the limitless. I shall join my brightness to the sun and moon and endure with heaven and earth. Those who confront me become obscure; those who remain far from me remain in darkness. Others will all die; shall I alone remain?"

11.12 Cloud General was travelling east. Passing a branch of the whirlwind, he happened upon Vast Obscurity, who was slapping his thighs and hopping about like a bird. Cloud General stopped in astonishment and stood respectfully. “Old sir, who are you? Why are you doing this?” Without ceasing to slap his thighs and hop, Vast Obscurity replied, “Wandering!” “I should like to ask a question,” said Cloud General. Vast Obscurity looked up at him. “Ah!” Cloud General said, “Heaven’s breath is out of harmony, earth’s breath is obstructed, the six breaths are unbalanced and the four seasons irregular. I wish to combine the essences of the six breaths to nourish all living things. How should I do it?” Vast Obscurity slapped his thighs, hopped and shook his head. “I do not know! I do not know!” Cloud General could obtain no answer.

11.13 Three years later, travelling east again across the wilds of Song, Cloud General encountered Vast Obscurity. Delighted, he hurried forward. “Has Heaven forgotten me? Has Heaven forgotten me?” He bowed twice with his forehead to the ground and asked for instruction. Vast Obscurity replied, “I drift about without knowing what I seek; I roam freely without knowing where I go. I wander at leisure to observe what is without falsification. What do I know?” Cloud General said, “I too consider myself a free wanderer, but the people follow wherever I go. I cannot avoid the people, and now I am their model. I ask for a single word.”

11.14 Vast Obscurity said, “Confusing heaven’s constant pattern, opposing the reality of things, preventing mysterious heaven from completing its work, scattering the herds so that birds cry all night, bringing disaster to plants and trees and calamity to insects: ah, these are the faults of governing people!” “Then what should I do?” asked Cloud General. “Ah, harmful indeed! Go back, go lightly on your way!” Cloud General said, “It is difficult to encounter you, Heaven. I beg for a single word.”

11.15 “Ah, nourish the heart!” said Vast Obscurity. “Simply dwell in unforced action, and things will transform themselves. Let go of your bodily form, cast off your sharp hearing and sight, forget distinctions and things. Join the great sameness of the dim and undifferentiated; release the heart and free the spirit, become still as though without a soul. The myriad things in their abundance each return to their root. Each returns to its root without knowing it. Undifferentiated and indistinct, they never leave it throughout their lives. If they knew it, they would thereby depart from it. Do not ask their names; do not spy into their condition. Things live of themselves.” Cloud General replied, “Heaven, you have bestowed virtue upon me and shown me silence. I have sought this with my whole person, and only now have I obtained it.” He bowed twice with his forehead to the ground, rose, took his leave and departed.

11.16 Ordinary people delight in those who agree with them and dislike those who differ. To desire agreement and reject difference is to set one’s heart on standing above the multitude. But when has someone bent on standing above the multitude really stood beyond it? They depend upon the multitude to secure what they have heard, although they do not equal its many abilities. Then they wish to administer another person’s state. They seize upon the advantages of the kings of the Three Dynasties without seeing their dangers. This is gambling with someone else’s state. How often does such gambling avoid losing it? Their chance of preserving a state is not one in ten thousand; before one success, there are more than ten thousand losses. How lamentable that possessors of territory do not understand!

11.17 One who possesses territory possesses a great thing. Possessing a great thing, one must not be made into a thing by it. Dealing with things without being made into a thing, one can deal with things as things. Clearly understanding that what handles things is not itself a thing, would one merely govern the world’s people? One goes out and in through the six directions, wanders over the nine regions, comes alone and goes alone. This is called sole possession. The person of sole possession is called supremely valuable.

11.18 The teaching of the great person is like a body’s shadow and a sound’s echo. Asked a question, he responds, fully expressing what is within, a counterpart to the world. He dwells where there is no echo and moves where there is no fixed direction. He carries you beyond the turmoil of going and returning to wander without an end, entering and leaving without boundaries, sharing with the sun a course without beginning. Speak in praise of his bodily form: it joins the great community. Joined to that community, he has no private self. Without a private self, how could he possess possessions? Those who look to possessing were the noble people of old; those who look to not possessing are the friends of heaven and earth.

11.19 Lowly, yet unavoidable in their use: things. Humble, yet indispensable as a basis: the people. Hidden, yet unavoidable in their performance: affairs. Coarse, yet necessary to set forth: laws. Distant, yet necessary to dwell in: righteousness. Close, yet necessary to extend widely: benevolence. Restrictive, yet necessary to accumulate: ritual. Centred within, yet necessary to exalt: virtue. One, yet necessary to adapt: the Way. Spiritual, yet necessary in its operation: heaven.

11.20 Therefore the sage observes heaven without helping it, fulfils virtue without being burdened by it, proceeds from the Way without planning, joins benevolence without relying on it, approaches righteousness without accumulating it, responds to ritual without concealment, meets affairs without refusing them, accords with laws without disorder, relies on the people without belittling them and follows things without discarding them. Things do not provide a sufficient ultimate purpose, yet one cannot avoid dealing with them. One who does not understand heaven is not pure in virtue; one who does not comprehend the Way has no ground for what is appropriate. How pitiful not to understand the Way! What is called the Way? There is heaven’s Way and the human Way. To act without forcing and yet be honoured is heaven’s Way; to act and be burdened is the human Way. Heaven’s Way belongs to the ruler; the human Way to the minister. Heaven’s Way and the human Way are far apart: their difference must be examined.

Explanation of the chapter

The distinction between caring for the world and ruling it through an endless will to order drives the critique of intervention. The chapter's varied materials move among advice on government, practices of the spirit, and distrust of those who appoint themselves the world's correctors.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

"Letting be" should not be read as a universal command to remain passive. The multiplicity of scenes demands the question of when intervention is excessive and when neglect may itself cause injury. A present-day reading benefits from keeping that question open rather than treating the chapter as a blanket endorsement of inaction.

Textual collation

The chapter combines criticism of interventionist government, accounts of inner cultivation and a conclusion preserving the hierarchy of ruler and minister. These tensions are retained. Guangchengzi is the speaker’ s name; Kongtong is the place, not an alternative speaker. Longevity and images of *yīn* (陰), *yáng* (陽) and the seasons belong to the narrative, not to medical or physical findings. 鴻蒙 and 雲將 are rendered as allegorical names. The formula entrusting the world to someone who values their person permits syntactic nuances and is not made into an injunction to selfishness.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 在宥 (Wikisource, oldid 2327593).

11.01: 聞在宥天下; **11.02:** 人大喜邪; **11.03:** 而且悅明邪; **11.04:** 故君子不得已; **11.05-11.07:** 崔瞿問於老聃; **11.08-11.11:** 黃帝立爲天子十九年; **11.12-11.15:** 雲將東遊; **11.16:** 世俗之人; **11.17:** 夫有土者; **11.18:** 大人之教; **11.19:** 賤而不可不任者; **11.20:** 故聖人觀於天而不助.

12. Heaven and Earth

Tian di | 天地

Chapter text

12.01 Although heaven and earth are vast, their transformations proceed together; although the myriad things are many, their ordering is one; although people are numerous, their head is the ruler. The ruler has his source in virtue and reaches completion in heaven. Thus it is said: the rulers of the remote past acted without forcing; they did no more than follow heaven's virtue. Look at words through the Way, and the world's ruler is correctly placed; look at distinctions through the Way, and the relation between ruler and minister is clear; look at abilities through the Way, and the world's offices are ordered; look broadly through the Way, and the responses of all things are complete. What penetrates heaven and earth is virtue; what moves through all things is the Way; what those above use in governing people is affairs; what enables accomplishment is skill. Skill is included in affairs, affairs in righteousness, righteousness in virtue, virtue in the Way, and the Way in heaven. Thus it is said: those who nourished the world in antiquity had no desires and the world had enough; they did not force action and all things transformed; they were deep and still and the people settled. The Record says: "Penetrate the One and the myriad affairs are completed; attain the absence of a calculating heart and ghosts and spirits submit."

12.02 The Master said, "The Way covers and supports all things. How overflowing and vast it is! The noble person must empty the heart for it. To act without forcing is called heaven; to speak without contrivance is called virtue; to love people and benefit things is called benevolence; to bring differences into common accord is called greatness; not to make one's conduct conspicuously different is called generosity; to contain myriad differences is called richness. Holding to virtue is called the guiding thread; completing virtue is called establishment; following the Way is called preparedness; not letting things break one's resolve is called wholeness. Understanding these ten, the noble person keeps affairs within the breadth of the heart, and acts abundantly as all things move along. Such a person leaves gold in the mountains and pearls in the deep. He seeks no gain in property and money and does not approach wealth and rank. He does not rejoice in longevity or grieve over an early death; he does not glory in success or feel ashamed of hardship. He does not seize the world's advantages as his private share, nor make ruling the world his personal distinction. His distinction is clarity: all things belong to one storehouse, and life and death have the same standing."

12.03 The Master said, "How deep is the dwelling of the Way, how clear its purity! Without it, metal and stone could not sound. Yet although metal and stone possess sound, they do not sound unless struck. Who can determine all things? A person of kingly virtue moves in simplicity and is ashamed to be absorbed in affairs. Established at the root and source, his knowing reaches the spiritual and his virtue broadens. When his heart goes forth, there are things to receive it. Without the Way, form does not come to life; without virtue, life does not become manifest. To preserve form and fulfil life, establish virtue and make the Way clear: is this not kingly virtue? Vastly, suddenly he emerges; vigorously he moves, and all things follow. This is a person of kingly virtue. He looks into darkness and listens to silence. In darkness he alone sees clarity; in silence he alone hears harmony. Deeper and deeper, he can find things there; more spiritual and more spiritual, he can reach their essence. Thus in meeting all things he reaches having nothing and yet supplies what they seek; he moves with the times and yet returns to his resting-place. Great and small, long and short, distant and far-reaching: he meets them all."

12.04 The Yellow Emperor travelled north of the Red River, climbed the Kunlun hills and looked south. On returning, he lost his dark pearl. He sent Knowledge to look for it, but Knowledge did not find it. He sent the keen-sighted Li Zhu, but Li Zhu did not find it. He sent the disputant Chigou, but Chigou did not find it. Then he sent Xiangwang, the Formless, and the Formless found it. "How strange!" said the Yellow Emperor. "Was it really the Formless who could find it?"

12.05 Yao's teacher was Xu You; Xu You's teacher was Nie Que; Nie Que's teacher was Wang Ni; Wang Ni's teacher was Piyi. Yao asked Xu You, "Could Nie Que match heaven? I would ask Wang Ni to bring him to it." Xu You replied, "What danger and peril for the world! Nie Que is acute, clear-sighted, discerning and knowledgeable, quick with answers and skilful in calculation. His natural abilities surpass others, yet he would use the human to receive the heavenly. He is careful to prevent errors but does not know what gives rise to them. Would you have him match heaven? He would rely on the human and neglect heaven. He would take himself as the basis and distinguish other forms; exalt knowing and race like fire; be made a servant of what he began; become entangled in things; look in every direction for their response; accommodate the crowd's notions of what is right; change with things without ever having constancy. How could he match heaven? Still, there are branches and ancestors: he could be a father of many, but not the father of those fathers. His government would lead disorder, bring calamity in the position of a minister and ruin in the position of a ruler."

12.06 Yao was touring Hua. Its border-warden said, "Ah, a sage! Let me bless the sage: may you live long!" "I decline," said Yao. "May you be rich!" "I decline." "May you have many sons!" "I decline." The warden asked, "Long life, wealth and many sons are what people desire. Why do you alone reject them?" Yao replied, "Many sons bring many fears; wealth brings many affairs; long life brings many humiliations. These three do not nourish virtue, so I decline them." The warden said, "At first I took you for a sage; now I see that you are merely a noble man. Heaven brings forth all the people and must give them their tasks. Give your many sons their tasks: what would you fear? Share your wealth with others: what affairs would trouble you? The sage lodges like a quail and feeds like a fledgling; he travels like a bird without leaving a mark. When the world has the Way, he flourishes with things; when it lacks the Way, he cultivates virtue and seeks leisure. After a thousand years, weary of the world, he leaves it and rises among the immortals. Riding white clouds, he reaches the sovereign's heavenly dwelling. The three troubles do not reach him; his person is always free from calamity. What humiliation could there be?" The warden left. Yao followed: "May I ask...?" The warden said, "Go back!"

12.07 When Yao governed the world, Bocheng Zigao was established as a feudal lord. Yao handed the world to Shun, and Shun to Yu. Bocheng Zigao then gave up his lordship and took to farming. Yu went to see him and found him ploughing in the fields. Approaching respectfully, Yu stood and asked, "When Yao governed the world, you became a lord. Yao handed it to Shun, and Shun to me; then you gave up your lordship and took to farming. May I ask why?" Zigao replied, "When Yao governed, people were encouraged without rewards and stood in awe without punishments. Now you reward and punish, yet people become unbenevolent. Virtue begins to decline from this point, punishments begin to be established, and the disorder of later ages begins here. Why do you not leave? Do not interrupt my work!" He bent to his ploughing and did not look back.

12.08 In the Great Beginning there was nonbeing: no being and no name. The One arose, but still had no form. Things obtained it and came to life; this was called virtue. Before form there were distinctions, continuous and without separation; this was called allotted life. Through abiding and movement, things came forth. Completed things developed the patterns of life; this was called form. Bodily form preserved spirit, each having its own rules and measures; this was called nature. Cultivating nature returns one to virtue; virtue at its utmost becomes the same as the beginning. This sameness is emptiness, and emptiness is greatness. The mouth closes and its song falls silent; closing and silence join heaven and earth. Their union is obscure, as though foolish or dim. This is called mysterious virtue, the same as the great accord.

12.09 The Master asked Lao Dan, "There are people who order the Way as though matching rules: they approve what is approved, disapprove what is disapproved, affirm what is affirmed and deny what is denied. Disputants say that they separate the hard and the white as clearly as houses suspended in space. Can such people be called sages?" Lao Dan replied, "They are petty functionaries tied to their skills, exhausting their bodies and alarming their hearts. Dogs that catch prey are bound by their usefulness, and agile monkeys are taken from their mountain forests. Qiu, I shall tell you what you cannot hear and cannot put into words: many have heads and feet but no heart or ears; none preserve both a bodily form and what has neither form nor

shape. Their movement is rest, their death is life, their abandonment is emergence; yet these do not explain what makes them so. Ordering lies in the human. Forget things, forget heaven: this is called forgetting oneself. One who forgets himself is said to enter heaven."

12.10 Jianglü Mian visited Ji Che and said, "The ruler of Lu asked me for instruction. I declined, but he would not accept my refusal, so I spoke. I do not know whether I was right and would like to repeat it to you. I told him: 'You must practise respect and restraint, promote those who are public-spirited and loyal, and allow no favouritism or private interest. Who among the people would dare not to be harmonious?'" Ji Che laughed. "Compared with the virtue of emperors and kings, your words are like a praying mantis angrily raising its arms against a carriage wheel: it cannot bear the task. Such a ruler would put himself in danger. With many valuables on his viewing-platform, many would come to follow in his footsteps."

12.11 Jianglü Mian was alarmed. "Your words leave me bewildered. Even so, I ask you to describe the general influence." Ji Che said, "When a great sage governs the world, he loosens people's hearts, changes their teaching and customs, extinguishes their harmful intentions and advances each one's own resolve, as though their nature acted of itself. They do not know what makes it so. Would such a person look up to Yao and Shun as elder brothers in teaching the people? In the dim undifferentiated state, he would treat them as younger brothers. He wishes to be one with virtue and let the heart rest there."

12.12 Zigong travelled south to Chu and was returning to Jin. Passing south of the Han River, he saw an old man making irrigation beds in his garden. The man had dug a passage down to a well and carried up jars in his arms to water them. He laboured hard and achieved little. Zigong said, "There is a device that can water a hundred beds in a day with little effort and much result. Would you like one?" The gardener looked up. "How does it work?" "Wood is made into a lever, heavy at the back and light at the front. It draws up water quickly, as though pouring it from a boiling pot. It is called a well-sweep."

12.13 The gardener's face flushed with anger, and he laughed. "I have heard from my teacher that whoever has mechanical devices is bound to have mechanical affairs, and whoever has mechanical affairs is bound to have a calculating heart. When a calculating heart remains in the breast, pure simplicity is incomplete. When simplicity is incomplete, the life of the spirit is unsettled. An unsettled spirit is not sustained by the Way. It is not that I do not know the device; I am ashamed to use it." Zigong looked abashed, lowered his head and gave no answer. After a while the gardener asked, "Who are you?" "A disciple of Kong Qiu." "Are you not one of those who imitates sageliness with extensive learning, boasts of surpassing the multitude, and sings mournfully to his solitary strings to sell his reputation to the world? Forget your spiritual energies and let go of your bodily form, and perhaps you may come near. You cannot even order yourself: what leisure have you to order the world? Go away and do not hinder my work!"

12.14 Zigong drew back, pale and ashamed, unsettled and ill at ease. Only after walking thirty li did he recover. His disciples asked, "Who was that man? Why did your face and bearing change when you saw him, so that you have not returned to yourself all day?" Zigong replied, "Previously I thought there was only one such man in the world; I did not know that this man also existed. I heard the Master say that seeking what is practicable, completing one's work and obtaining much result with little effort is the sage's Way. Now it is not so. Those who hold to the Way are whole in virtue; whole in virtue, they are whole in body; whole in body, they are whole in spirit. Wholeness of spirit is the sage's Way. Entrusting themselves to life, they travel alongside the people without knowing where they are going. How vast and complete their simplicity! Achievement, profit, machinery and cleverness must be absent from such a person's heart. He goes nowhere contrary to his resolve and does nothing contrary to his heart. If the whole world praised him and he obtained what people acclaim, he would loftily disregard it; if the whole world condemned him and he lost what people acclaim, he would freely refuse to accept it. The world's blame and praise neither benefit nor harm him. This is a person of complete virtue. I am one of those tossed about like waves by the wind."

12.15 On returning to Lu, Zigong told Confucius. Confucius said, "He borrows the arts of the Undifferentiated. He knows one aspect but not the other; he orders his interior but not his exterior. Someone who enters simplicity through clarity, returns to the uncarved through unforced action, embodies nature and

embraces spirit while wandering among ordinary people: would such a person necessarily astonish you? Besides, how could you and I be adequate to understand the arts of the Undifferentiated?"

12.16 Zhun Mang was going east to the Great Abyss when he met Yuan Feng on the shore of the Eastern Sea. "Where are you going?" asked Yuan Feng. "To the Great Abyss." "What for?" "The Great Abyss is such that what flows into it never fills it and what is drawn from it never exhausts it. I shall wander there." Yuan Feng said, "Have you no concern for the people with eyes set sideways across their faces? I would like to hear about sagely government." Zhun Mang replied, "Sagely government? Offices are distributed appropriately, people promoted according to their abilities, circumstances fully examined and actions carried out accordingly. Deeds and words arise of themselves and the world transforms. At a movement of the hand or a gesture of the chin, the people of the four quarters all arrive together. This is called sagely government."

12.17 "I would like to hear about a person of virtue." "A person of virtue rests without brooding and acts without anxiety, storing neither right and wrong nor beauty and ugliness. Sharing benefits with everyone within the four seas is his pleasure; sharing provisions is his peace. He seems forlorn as a baby that has lost its mother, bewildered as a traveller who has lost the road. Wealth and resources are abundant, yet he does not know where they come from; food and drink suffice, yet he does not know their source. This is the appearance of a person of virtue." "I would like to hear about a spiritual person." "The highest spirit rides on light, and bodily form falls away. This is called illuminating vastness. Fulfilling allotted life and the reality of things, he rejoices with heaven and earth; the myriad affairs dissolve and all things return to their true condition. This is called undifferentiated darkness."

12.18 Men Wugui and Chizhang Manji were watching King Wu's army. Chizhang Manji said, "He did not reach the standard of the Lord of Yu; therefore he encounters this trouble." Men Wugui asked, "Was the world evenly ordered when the Lord of Yu governed it, or did he govern it only after disorder had arisen?" Chizhang Manji replied, "If an evenly ordered world is what one desires, why calculate upon the Lord of Yu? His treatment was medicine for a sore, a wig for baldness, a physician sought after illness. A filial son carries medicine to heal his kind father, his face anxious and worn; the sage is ashamed of such a state. In the age of highest virtue, the worthy were not exalted and the able were not employed. Those above were like the top branches of a tree; the people were like wild deer. They were upright without knowing it as righteousness, loved one another without knowing it as benevolence, were genuine without knowing it as loyalty, and were fitting in their conduct without knowing it as trustworthiness. They moved naturally and served one another without considering it a favour. Their actions therefore left no trace and their affairs no transmitted record."

12.19 A filial child does not flatter a parent, and a loyal minister does not fawn upon a ruler: these are the highest examples of child and minister. If a child agrees with everything a parent says and approves everything a parent does, common opinion calls that child unworthy. If a minister agrees with everything a ruler says and approves everything a ruler does, common opinion calls that minister unworthy. Yet does it recognise the necessary consequence? When people agree with whatever common opinion calls right and approve whatever it calls good, they are not called servile flatterers. Is custom therefore more commanding than a parent and more honoured than a ruler? Call someone a servile flatterer and their face flushes with anger; call them an ordinary follower of the crowd and their face flushes with resentment. Yet they spend their whole lives flattering and following the crowd. They adjust comparisons and decorate phrases to attract the multitude; beginning and end, root and branch, do not fit together. They let their robes trail, display colours and arrange their bearing to please their age, yet do not call themselves flatterers. They join others and share their approvals and disapprovals, yet do not call themselves ordinary followers. This is the height of foolishness.

12.20 One who knows his foolishness is not profoundly foolish; one who knows his confusion is not profoundly confused. The deeply confused never unravel it throughout their lives; the deeply foolish never become clear. If three people travel together and one is confused about the way, they may still reach their destination because the confused are fewer. If two are confused, they labour without arriving because the confused prevail. Now the whole world is confused. Though I have a direction in which I would pray to go, I cannot attain it. Is this not sad? Great music does not enter village ears, while "Breaking the Willows" and

“Brilliant Flowers” provoke delighted laughter. Lofty words do not stay in ordinary hearts; the utmost words do not emerge because commonplace words prevail. Two earthen pots confuse the sound of a bell, and its intended effect is lost. Now the whole world is confused; though I have a desired direction, how could I attain it? Knowing I cannot attain it and nevertheless forcing the attempt would be another confusion. Better to let it go and not press on. Not pressing on, who would share my sorrow? A man afflicted with a disfiguring disease, whose child is born at midnight, hastily takes a light to inspect it, urgently fearing that it resembles him.

12.21 A hundred-year-old tree is cut up to make a sacrificial vessel, decorated with green and yellow, while its offcuts lie in a ditch. Compare the vessel with the offcuts: they differ in beauty and ugliness, but are alike in having lost their nature. Robber Zhi and Zeng and Shi differ in conduct and righteousness, yet are alike in losing their nature. There are five ways to lose it. First, the five colours disorder the eyes and deprive them of clear sight. Second, the five sounds disorder the ears and deprive them of keen hearing. Third, the five smells assail the nose and oppress the centre of the forehead. Fourth, the five flavours disturb the mouth and impair its taste. Fifth, pursuit and rejection agitate the heart and send nature flying away. These five all harm life. Yet Yang and Mo stand on tiptoe, each thinking they have attained something. What they attain is not what I call attainment. If attainment means confinement, can it be called attainment? Then doves and owls in cages could also be said to have attained it.

12.22 Moreover, pursuits and rejections, sounds and colours pile barriers within, while leather caps, feathered hats, tablets thrust into belts and long ceremonial sashes bind the outside. Inwardly crowded with fences and outwardly wrapped in cords, they gaze placidly from their bonds and think they have attained what they seek. On that reckoning, criminals with arms bound and fingers constrained, or tigers and leopards in sacks and cages, could also be said to have attained it!

Explanation of the chapter

The chapter brings cosmological and political reflections together with figures seeking to situate human practices amid heaven and earth. In this heterogeneous material, the vocabulary of Dao can accompany ideas of rule and hierarchy that do not neatly match the critique of authority elsewhere in the collection.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

That friction matters. A study of all thirty-three chapters cannot portray an entirely anti-hierarchical philosophy or, conversely, a unified handbook of good government. Interpretation must identify what each narrative says and what arises only when different narratives are compared. The reader gains a truer view of a plural textual tradition, not the comfort of a doctrine without tensions.

Textual collation

At 12.12, 漢陰 denotes the south side of the Han River; Legge places it to the north. Confucius’s conclusion questions the speakers’ ability to understand the arts of Hundun; it does not declare those arts worthless. The gardener episode contains disagreeing voices and cannot establish a single rejection of all technology. The brief cosmogony and the passage about closing mouth and song retain a historical reading from Legge; their syntax is obscure and they are not presented as modern physics. 厲 is rendered as disfiguring disease without diagnosis. Xiangwang, here the Formless, is an allegorical name whose interpretation is debated.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 天地 (Wikisource, oldid 2327597).

12.01: 天地雖大; **12.02:** 夫道覆載萬物; **12.03:** 夫道淵乎其居; **12.04:** 黃帝遊乎赤水之北; **12.05:** 堯之師曰許由; **12.06:** 堯觀乎華; **12.07:** 堯治天下; **12.08:** 泰初有无; **12.09:** 夫子問于老聃; **12.10-12.11:** 蔣閭茷見季徹; **12.12-12.15:** 子貢南遊於楚; **12.16-12.17:** 諄芒將東之大壑; **12.18:** 門无鬼與赤張滿稚; **12.19-12.22:** 孝子不諛其親.

13. The Way of Heaven

Tian dao | 天道

Chapter text

13.01 Heaven's Way moves without accumulating anywhere, and therefore all things are completed. The sovereign's Way moves without accumulating anywhere, and therefore the world returns to him. The sage's Way moves without accumulating anywhere, and therefore all within the seas submit. One who understands heaven, comprehends sageliness and opens the six directions and four quarters to the virtue of emperors and kings acts of himself, obscurely and wholly at rest. The sage is not still because he says stillness is good. He is still because nothing among the myriad things can disturb his heart. Still water clearly reflects beard and eyebrows; its level meets the standard, and the master craftsman takes it as his model. If still water is clear, how much more the vital spirit! The sage's still heart is the mirror of heaven and earth, the reflection of all things.

13.02 Emptiness, stillness, tranquillity, plainness, silence, quiet and unforced action are the level of heaven and earth and the utmost of the Way and virtue. Therefore emperors, kings and sages rest in them. Resting, they are empty; empty, they are full; full, they are ordered. Empty, they are still; still, they move; moving, they attain. Still, they act without forcing; acting without forcing, they hold those entrusted with affairs responsible. Acting without forcing, they are at ease. Where there is ease, worry and distress cannot lodge, and life endures. Emptiness, stillness, tranquillity, plainness, silence, quiet and unforced action are the root of all things.

13.03 To understand this and face south is to be a ruler like Yao; to understand this and face north is to be a minister like Shun. Occupying the higher position through it is the virtue of emperors, kings and Sons of Heaven; occupying the lower through it is the Way of mysterious sages and uncrowned kings. Retiring through it to wander at leisure by rivers and seas, one wins the accord of the people of mountains and forests. Advancing through it to care for the age, one achieves great work and evident reputation, and the world becomes one. Still, one is a sage; moving, a king. Acting without forcing, one is honoured; plain and simple, one has no rival in beauty. Clear understanding of heaven and earth's virtue is called the Great Root and Great Ancestor: it harmonises with heaven. By evenly ordering the world, it harmonises with people. Harmony with people is called human joy; harmony with heaven is called heavenly joy.

13.04 Zhuangzi said, "My teacher, my teacher! It breaks all things apart without this being cruelty; its benefit reaches ten thousand generations without this being benevolence; it is older than high antiquity without longevity; it covers and supports heaven and earth and carves all forms without craftsmanship. This is called heavenly joy. Thus it is said: one who knows heavenly joy lives in heaven's course and dies in the transformation of things. Still, he shares yin's virtue; moving, he shares yang's waves. One who knows heavenly joy does not resent heaven, blame people, become burdened by things or incur the reproach of spirits. Thus it is said: his movement is heaven and his stillness earth; with a settled, undivided heart he rules the world. His ghosts do not haunt him and his soul is not wearied; with a settled, undivided heart all things submit. Extending emptiness and stillness to heaven and earth and communicating with all things is called heavenly joy. Heavenly joy is the heart with which the sage nourishes the world."

13.05 The virtue of emperors and kings takes heaven and earth as its ancestor, the Way and virtue as its master, and unforced action as its constant rule. Acting without forcing, they employ the world and still have resources to spare; acting deliberately, they are employed by the world and remain insufficient. Therefore the ancients valued unforced action. If those above do nothing and those below also do nothing, the two have the same virtue; then there is no minister. If those below act and those above also act, the two have the same way; then there is no ruler. Those above must act without forcing and employ the world; those below must act and be employed for the world. This is an unchanging way.

13.06 Thus the ancient rulers, although their knowledge encompassed heaven and earth, did not calculate for themselves; although their discrimination carved out all things, they did not explain for themselves; although their ability exhausted all within the seas, they did not act for themselves. Heaven does not produce deliberately, yet all things transform; earth does not grow deliberately, yet all things are nourished; emperors and kings act without forcing, yet the world's work is accomplished. Thus it is said: nothing is more spiritual than heaven, nothing richer than earth, nothing greater than emperors and kings. Their virtue matches heaven and earth. This is the way to ride heaven and earth, set all things in motion and employ the multitude.

13.07 The root lies above, the branches below; the essentials belong to the ruler, the details to the minister. Directing the three armies and the five weapons is a branch of virtue. Rewards, punishments, advantages, harms and the five penalties are branches of teaching. Ritual, law, measures, numbers and the detailed comparison of forms and names are branches of government. Bells and drums, plumes and banners are branches of music. Weeping, mourning hemp and the graded mourning garments are branches of grief. These five branches should follow only after the movement of the vital spirit and the activity of the heart's arts. The ancients possessed learning about branches, but did not put it first.

13.08 The ruler precedes and the minister follows; the father precedes and the son follows; the elder brother precedes and the younger follows; the old precede and the young follow; the male precedes and the female follows; the husband precedes and the wife follows. Honour and lowliness, precedence and following are the course of heaven and earth, and the sages took them as a model. Heaven honoured and earth lowly mark the positions of the spiritual powers; spring and summer first, autumn and winter after, mark the sequence of the seasons. The myriad things transform and arise, each shoot having its shape; flourishing and decline follow the stream of change. Even heaven and earth, most spiritual, have an order of high and low, before and after. How much more the human way! In ancestral temples, kinship is honoured; at court, rank; in villages, age; in affairs, worthiness. This is the sequence of the Great Way. To discuss the Way while rejecting its sequence is to reject the Way. If one's discussion rejects it, how can it obtain it?

13.09 Therefore the ancients who understood the Great Way first understood heaven, then the Way and virtue, then benevolence and righteousness, then the division and keeping of duties, then forms and names, then appointments according to capacity, then examination of origins and results, then right and wrong, then rewards and punishments. Once rewards and punishments were clear, the foolish and the knowing found appropriate places; high and low occupied their stations; the benevolent, the worthy and the unworthy were dealt with according to their actual condition. Their abilities had to be distinguished and their names followed. Through this they served those above, nourished those below, ordered things and cultivated themselves. Calculation and scheming were not employed; they necessarily returned to heaven. This is called Great Peace, the utmost of government.

13.10 Thus the Book says: "There are forms and there are names." The ancients had forms and names, but did not put them first. When discussing the Great Way, they reached forms and names at the fifth transition and rewards and punishments at the ninth. To rush into forms and names is not to know the root; to rush into rewards and punishments is not to know the beginning. Those who speak by reversing the Way and explain by opposing it must be governed by others: how could they govern others? To rush into forms, names, rewards and punishments is to know the tools of government, not its Way. Such people can be employed by the world but are insufficient to employ it. They are called disputants, people of a single corner. Ritual, law, numbers, measures and detailed comparisons of forms and names existed in antiquity, but were the means by which those below served those above, not the means by which those above nourished those below.

13.11 Shun once asked Yao, "How does the heavenly king employ his heart?" Yao replied, "I do not treat the helpless arrogantly, do not abandon the poor, grieve over the dead, cherish children and pity women. That is how I employ my heart." Shun said, "Fine indeed, but not yet great." "Then how should it be?" "Heaven's virtue brings forth tranquillity; the sun and moon shine and the seasons proceed, like the regular alternation of day and night and the clouds moving to distribute rain." Yao said, "How entangled and disturbed I have been! You accord with heaven; I accord with people." Heaven and earth were what antiquity considered great, and

what the Yellow Emperor, Yao and Shun all admired. What did the ancient rulers of the world do? Heaven and earth, and nothing more.

13.12 Confucius wished to deposit writings westward in the Zhou royal collection. Zilu advised him: "I have heard that Lao Dan, keeper of the Zhou archives, has left office and returned home. Since you wish to deposit writings, why not try obtaining his help?" Confucius agreed and went to see him, but Lao Dan would not consent. Confucius then unfolded the Twelve Classics to explain himself. Lao Dan interrupted: "Too diffuse. I should like to hear the essentials." Confucius said, "The essentials are benevolence and righteousness." "Are benevolence and righteousness human nature?" "Yes. Without benevolence, the noble person is incomplete; without righteousness, he cannot live as he should. Benevolence and righteousness are the nature of the genuine person. What else should he pursue?"

13.13 Lao Dan asked, "What do you mean by benevolence and righteousness?" Confucius replied, "To be inwardly sympathetic to things, to love universally without private interest: that is their reality." Lao Dan said, "Ah, how close to empty, belated talk! Is not universal love a roundabout approach? Claiming to have no private interest is itself private interest. Do you wish the world not to lose its proper tending? Heaven and earth already have their constancy; sun and moon their brightness; stars their ranks; birds and beasts their flocks; trees their standing places. Simply move in accordance with virtue and proceed along the Way, and you have arrived. Why so urgently raise up benevolence and righteousness, like someone beating a drum to find a lost child? Ah, you are disordering human nature!"

13.14 Shicheng Qi visited Laozi and said, "I heard that you were a sage, so I did not refuse the long journey to see you. Across a hundred stages, with calluses upon calluses, I did not dare to rest. Now I see that you are no sage. There is surplus food by the rat-holes, yet you abandon your younger sister: that is unbenevolent. Raw and cooked food lie uneaten before you, yet you accumulate without limit." Laozi remained silent and did not answer.

13.15 Shicheng Qi returned the next day. "Yesterday I reproached you; now that impulse has withdrawn from my heart. Why?" Laozi said, "I consider myself free of being a clever, knowing, spiritual or sagely man. Yesterday, had you called me an ox, I would have accepted 'ox'; had you called me a horse, I would have accepted 'horse'. If there is the reality and people give it a name, refusing it merely brings another affliction. My acceptance is constant; I did not put on acceptance to achieve acceptance." Shicheng Qi stepped sideways to avoid Laozi's shadow, then advanced carefully and asked, "How should I cultivate myself?"

13.16 Laozi replied, "Your bearing is abrupt, your eyes thrust forward, your forehead is exposed, your mouth gapes like a roar, and your appearance is self-righteous. You are like a tethered horse held still: moving, you are restrained; released, you would spring like a trigger. You inspect minutely and judge closely; your cleverness displays itself in excess. All this amounts to a lack of trust. At the frontier there are people like this, and their name is 'thief'."

13.17 The Master said, "The Way is not exhausted in the greatest and leaves nothing out of the smallest; therefore all things are complete within it. How broad, containing everything; how deep, beyond measurement! Forms, virtue, benevolence and righteousness are branches of the spiritual. Who but the complete person could establish their place? The complete person may possess the world: is that not great? Yet it is insufficient to burden him. The world raises its handle of power, but he does not go along with it. Clear about what is not borrowed or false, he is not shifted by profit. He reaches the truth of things and can guard their root. Therefore he places heaven and earth outside, leaves the myriad things behind, and his spirit is never confined. He penetrates the Way, joins virtue, gives benevolence and righteousness their place, and treats ritual and music as guests. The complete person's heart has found where to settle."

13.18 What the world values as the Way is books. Books are no more than words, and words have something valuable in them. What is valuable in words is meaning; meaning follows something, and what it follows cannot be transmitted in words. Yet the world values words and transmits books. Although it values them, I do not find them sufficient to value, because what it values is not what is valuable. What the eyes can see is form and colour; what the ears can hear is names and sounds. How sad that people think form, colour, names and

sounds suffice to grasp the reality of that! They do not suffice. Thus those who know do not speak, and those who speak do not know. How could the world recognise this?

13.19 Duke Huan was reading in his hall, while wheelwright Bian was making a wheel below. Bian put down his mallet and chisel, went up and asked, “May I ask whose words you are reading?” “The words of sages.” “Are the sages alive?” “They are dead.” “Then what you are reading is only the dregs of the ancients.” Duke Huan said, “I am reading: how may a wheelwright discuss it? If you have an explanation, well and good; if not, you die.”

13.20 Bian replied, “I look at it through my own work. When I fit a wheel, if I go too gently, it is loose and not firm; if too forcefully, it is tight and will not enter. Neither too gentle nor too forceful: I obtain it in my hands and it answers in my heart. My mouth cannot put it into words, but there is a measure in it. I cannot explain it to my son, and my son cannot receive it from me. That is why, at seventy, I am still making wheels in my old age. The ancients died together with what they could not transmit. Therefore what you are reading is only their dregs.”

Explanation of the chapter

Among the best-known scenes is Wheelwright Pian, whose manual skill cannot be wholly transferred through words or books. The anecdote challenges the assumption that all valuable knowledge consists of propositions passed unchanged from one person to another. Embodied experience brings another relation to knowing into view.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

The story does not prove books useless: it appears inside a book. Rather, it limits the written word's claim to self-sufficiency. A reader cannot replace practice with description, although description may guide attention to what remains to be learned. Other passages place cosmic order near political order, requiring sensitivity to the different registers assembled in this collection.

Textual collation

The hierarchical and male-precedence political passage is retained as a historical position of the text, not a norm endorsed by this edition. The fifth and ninth transitions follow the Chinese count; Legge describes four and eight preceding steps. Shicheng Qi’ s accusation about the sister follows a traditional reading recorded by Guo Xiang and other commentators: it does not establish a biographical fact about Laozi, and the passage admits interpretative variants. The wheelwright’ s story concerns the transmission of skill and does not prove that every book is useless. 天樂 may mean heavenly joy or heavenly music according to context.

13.04 points back to the formula at 06.22. Both passages render the verb as breaks apart and retain the third person. Here the text reads 戾, cruelty, whereas the reference witness for chapter 6 has 義, righteousness. The difference is preserved and explained in the collation at 06.22; the verb is not assigned the opposite sense of composing or joining.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 天道 (Wikisource, oldid 2327599).

13.01-13.03: 天道運而无所積; **13.04:** 吾師乎; **13.05-13.06:** 夫帝王之德; **13.07:** 本在於上; **13.08:** 末學者; **13.09-13.10:** 是故古之明大道者; **13.11:** 昔者舜問於堯; **13.12-13.13:** 孔子西藏書於周室; **13.14-13.16:** 士成綺見老子; **13.17:** 於大不終; **13.18:** 世之所貴道者; **13.19-13.20:** 桓公讀書於堂上.

14. The Movements of Heaven

Tian yun | 天運

Chapter text

14.01 Does heaven revolve? Does earth remain still? Do sun and moon contend for their places? Who directs all this? Who holds its cords together? Who, dwelling without affairs, sets it moving? Is there some hidden mechanism that leaves it no choice? Or does it turn and move without being able to stop itself? Do clouds make rain, or rain make clouds? Who bestows it so abundantly? Who, dwelling without affairs, delights in its profusion and urges it on? Wind rises in the north, goes now west and now east, and wanders above. Who breathes it out and in? Who, dwelling without affairs, fans and stirs it? May I ask why this is so?

14.02 The shaman Xian Zhao said, “Come, I shall tell you. Heaven has six extremities and five constant powers. When emperors and kings follow them, there is order; when they oppose them, misfortune. Through the affairs of the Nine Luo, government is completed and virtue made whole. They look down upon and illuminate the lands below, and the world supports them. Such are called the highest sovereigns.”

14.03 Tang, the chief minister of Shang, asked Zhuangzi about benevolence. Zhuangzi replied, “Tigers and wolves are benevolent.” “What do you mean?” “Parents and offspring are affectionate towards one another. Why are they not benevolent?” “May I ask about utmost benevolence?” “Utmost benevolence distinguishes no privileged kinship.” Tang said, “I have heard that without kinship affection there is no love, and without love no filial devotion. May one say that utmost benevolence is unfilial?”

14.04 Zhuangzi replied, “No. Utmost benevolence is exalted beyond what filial devotion can express. This is not speech that passes beyond filial devotion after reaching it; it does not concern that category. A traveller going south reaches Ying, turns north and cannot see Mount Ming. Why? Because he has gone far from it. Thus it is said: to be filial through respect is easy; through love is difficult. To be filial through love is easy; to forget one’s parents is difficult. To forget one’s parents is easy; to let one’s parents forget oneself is difficult. To let one’s parents forget oneself is easy; to forget the whole world is difficult. To forget the whole world is easy; to let the whole world forget oneself is difficult. Such virtue leaves Yao and Shun behind without aspiring to their achievements. Its benefits extend to ten thousand generations, and the world does not know it. Why merely sigh and speak of benevolence and filial devotion? Filial devotion, brotherly respect, benevolence, righteousness, loyalty, trustworthiness, steadfastness and integrity are all efforts that put virtue into service; they are not enough to magnify it. Thus it is said: with utmost nobility, a state’s ranks fall away; with utmost wealth, a state’s riches fall away; with utmost fulfilment, fame and praise fall away. Therefore the Way does not change.”

14.05 Beimen Cheng asked the Yellow Emperor, “You performed the music of the Xianchi in the wilds of Dongting. At first I heard it with fear; then with weariness; finally with bewilderment. Swept away and silent, I lost my composure.” The emperor replied, “That is just how it might affect you. I performed it through the human and attuned it through heaven, carried it through ritual and righteousness and established it in the Great Clarity. Utmost music first responds to human affairs, follows heaven’s patterns, moves through the five virtues and answers to what is so of itself. Then it orders the four seasons and brings all things into great harmony. The seasons arise in succession and all things follow into life. Now flourishing, now fading, its civil and martial strains keep their order. Now clear, now turbid, it harmonises yin and yang and sends its sound flowing in light. Hibernating creatures begin to stir, and I startle them with thunder. Its ending has no tail and its beginning no head. Now dying, now living, now collapsing, now rising, its constancy is inexhaustible, yet no single moment can be held. That is why you were afraid.

14.06 "I next performed it in the harmony of yin and yang and illuminated it with sun and moon. Its sounds could be short or long, supple or firm. Its changes were joined as one, without being governed by a fixed old pattern. In valleys it filled valleys; in hollows it filled hollows. Close the openings and guard the spirit, and let things set their measure. Its sound was expansive and generous; its name, high and bright. Therefore ghosts and spirits kept to their darkness, while sun, moon and stars followed their courses. I stopped it at what has an end and let it flow into what never stops. You wanted to consider it but could not know it, look towards it but could not see it, pursue it but could not reach it. You stood bewildered on the road open in all four directions, leaned against a withered wutong tree and hummed. Your eyes' knowing was exhausted by what they wanted to see; your strength failed before what you wanted to pursue. You could no longer reach it. Your bodily form filled with emptiness and you yielded to its winding course. Because you yielded, you became weary.

14.07 "I next performed it with sounds that do not weary, attuning them to the allotment of what is so of itself. They seemed mingled and pursuing one another, growing in clusters, a forest's music without visible form. They spread and moved without dragging, deep and dark without sound. They moved in no fixed direction and dwelt in profound obscurity. Some called this death, others life; some called it fruit, others blossom. They flowed, dispersed and shifted without being ruled by constant sounds. The world doubted them and referred them to the sage. A sage reaches the reality of things and fulfils their allotted course. Heaven's mechanism is not drawn, yet the five faculties are complete. This is called heavenly music: the heart delights without words. The Lord of Yan praised it thus: 'Listen, and you do not hear its sound; look, and you do not see its form. It fills heaven and earth and encloses the six extremities.' You wished to hear it but could not make contact with it; that is why you were bewildered.

14.08 "The music began with fear, and fear made you feel haunted. I followed with weariness, and weariness made you retreat. I ended with bewilderment, and bewilderment made you simple as a fool. Such simplicity leads to the Way. You can bear the Way and go along with it."

14.09 Confucius travelled west to Wei. Yan Yuan asked music master Jin, "What do you think of the Master's journey?" Jin replied, "Alas! Your Master is heading for hardship." "Why?" "Before straw dogs are displayed at a sacrifice, they are placed in chests and baskets, covered with embroidered cloth, and the ceremonial representative and invoker purify themselves to present them. After the display, passers-by tread on their heads and backs, and grass-cutters take them for fuel. If someone gathered them again, placed them in chests and baskets, covered them with embroidery and travelled, stayed or slept beneath them, he would suffer bad dreams or repeated nightmares. Your Master likewise gathers the straw dogs already displayed by the former kings and leads his disciples to travel, stay and sleep beneath them. Thus the tree was cut down in Song, his traces were erased in Wei and he was driven to extremity in Shang and Zhou. Were these not his bad dreams? He was surrounded between Chen and Cai and went seven days without cooked food, with life and death next to each other. Was that not his nightmare?

14.10 "For travelling on water, nothing is better than a boat; on land, a carriage. Because a boat travels on water, suppose you try to push it over land: in a whole lifetime it will not move a few paces. Are not antiquity and the present like water and land, and Zhou and Lu like boat and carriage? To seek to practise Zhou in Lu is to push a boat over land: much labour, no result, and unavoidable harm. He does not understand a transmission without fixed direction, responding to things without exhaustion.

14.11 "Have you not seen a well-sweep? Pull it and it bends; release it and it rises. It is pulled by a person; it does not pull the person. Therefore in bending and rising it does not offend him. The rituals, righteousness, laws and standards of the Three August Ones and Five Emperors were valued not for being identical but for bringing order. They are like hawthorns, pears, oranges and pomelos: different in flavour, yet all fit for the mouth. Thus ritual, righteousness, law and standards change in response to their time. Dress a monkey in the robes of the Duke of Zhou, and it will bite and tear until it has removed them all. Antiquity differs from the present as much as the monkey differs from the Duke of Zhou.

14.12 "When Xi Shi suffered pain in her heart, she frowned as she went through her village. An ugly neighbour saw the frown and thought it beautiful. Returning home, she too pressed her hands to her heart and frowned through the village. The rich shut their doors and would not come out; the poor took wives and children and ran away. She knew that the frown was beautiful but did not know what made it beautiful. Alas, your Master is heading for hardship!"

14.13 At fifty-one, Confucius had not heard the Way, so he went south to Pei to see Lao Dan. "You have come," said Lao Dan. "I hear you are a worthy man of the north. Have you attained the Way?" "Not yet." "Where have you sought it?" "In measures and numbers; after five years I had not attained it." "Where else?" "In yin and yang; after twelve years I still had not attained it."

14.14 Laozi said, "Just so. If the Way could be offered, everyone would offer it to their ruler. If it could be presented, everyone would present it to their parents. If it could be told, everyone would tell their brothers. If it could be given, everyone would give it to their descendants. That it cannot be done has no other cause: without a master within, it does not remain; without a proper response outside, it does not proceed. When what comes from within is not received outside, the sage does not send it out. When what enters from outside has no master within, the sage does not store it away. Reputation is a public instrument; one must not take too much. Benevolence and righteousness are the former kings' temporary shelters: one may lodge for a night, but not stay long, or people will find much to reproach.

14.15 "The complete people of old borrowed a road through benevolence and lodged a night in righteousness, wandering in the empty spaces of free ease, feeding in the fields of plain sufficiency and standing in gardens that required no borrowing. Free ease is unforced action; plain sufficiency is easy to nourish; no borrowing means no expenditure. The ancients called this wandering that gathers the genuine.

14.16 "Those who approve wealth cannot relinquish income; those who approve prominence cannot relinquish reputation. Those attached to power cannot share its handle with others. Holding it, they tremble; releasing it, they grieve. They find no single mirror in which to examine what they pursue without rest. Such are people punished by heaven. Resentment and kindness, taking and giving, remonstrance and instruction, preserving life and killing: these eight are tools of rectification. Only those who follow great change without obstruction can use them. Thus it is said: rectification makes straight. If the heart refuses this, heaven's gate has not opened."

14.17 Confucius visited Lao Dan and spoke of benevolence and righteousness. Lao Dan said, "If chaff blown about gets into the eyes, heaven, earth and the four directions seem to change places. If mosquitoes and gadflies bite the skin, one cannot sleep all night. Your insistence on benevolence and righteousness painfully agitates my heart: no greater disorder could there be. Let the world retain its uncarved simplicity; move with the wind and stand in the whole of virtue. Why so conspicuously carry a great drum to search for a lost child? The swan does not bathe every day to be white, nor the crow blacken itself every day to be black. Their natural black and white do not require disputation; the spectacle of reputation and praise does not enlarge them. When springs dry up, fish lie together on dry ground, moistening one another with their breath and wetting one another with foam. Better to forget one another in rivers and lakes!"

14.18 After seeing Lao Dan, Confucius returned and did not speak for three days. His disciples asked, "You have seen Lao Dan. What correction did you offer him?" Confucius replied, "Now I have seen a dragon! Gathered, it forms a body; dispersed, it forms patterns. It rides the cloud-breath and is nourished by yin and yang. My mouth opened and I could not close it. How could I correct Lao Dan?" Zigong said, "Then can a person really sit like a ceremonial representative and appear like a dragon, sound like thunder and remain silent as an abyss, and move like heaven and earth? May I, Ci, also see him?" He went to Lao Dan in Confucius's name.

14.19 Lao Dan sat at ease in his hall and said quietly, “My years are passing. What warning have you brought me?” Zigong replied, “The Three Kings and Five Emperors governed differently but share one reputation. Why do you alone consider them not to have been sages?” “Come forward a little. Why do you say they differed?” “Yao handed the world to Shun, and Shun to Yu. Yu used strength and Tang used arms. King Wen obeyed Zhou and did not dare oppose him; King Wu opposed Zhou and would not obey him. That is why I say they differed.”

14.20 Lao Dan said, “Come forward a little and I shall tell you about the government of the Three August Ones and Five Emperors. The Yellow Emperor made people’s hearts one. If someone’s parents died and he did not weep, no one condemned him. Yao made people’s hearts affectionate towards kin. If someone graded the mourning for other relatives below that for his parents, no one condemned him. Shun made people’s hearts competitive. Women gave birth after ten months; children spoke at five months and began distinguishing people before they had reached childhood. Then premature death began. Yu made people’s hearts change. People became scheming and found justification for weapons: ‘Killing a robber is not killing a person.’ People formed separate groups, and this spread throughout the world. The world became alarmed, and Confucians and Mohists arose. At first they made distinctions of relationship; now they go on to wives and daughters: what can be said! I tell you, although it is called government, nothing produced more disorder than the government of the Three August Ones and Five Emperors. Their knowledge opposed the brightness of sun and moon above, violated the vitality of mountains and rivers below, and ruined the work of the four seasons between. It was more harmful than a scorpion’s tail or a fierce beast. Unable to rest in the reality of nature and allotted life, they still called themselves sages. Is that not shameful? How shameless they were!” Zigong stood shifting uneasily.

14.21 Confucius said to Lao Dan, “I have long studied the Six Classics: the Odes, Documents, Rites, Music, Changes and Spring and Autumn Annals. I believe I know their origins well. I have sought audiences with seventy-two rulers, discussing the ways of the former kings and explaining the traces of the dukes of Zhou and Shao, yet not one has taken up my proposals. How difficult people are to persuade! Or is the Way difficult to make clear?” Laozi replied, “Fortunate that you have not encountered a ruler who could govern the age! The Six Classics are the old traces of the former kings, not what produced those traces. Your words are still only traces. A trace comes from a shoe, but is the trace the shoe? White herons look at one another without moving their pupils and are transformed into fertility; the male insect calls from upwind, the female answers downwind, and transformation occurs; the creature called lei is both female and male and therefore transforms of itself. Nature cannot be exchanged, allotted life cannot be changed, time cannot be stopped and the Way cannot be blocked. Attain the Way, and nothing you proceed from is impossible; lose it, and nothing you proceed from is possible.”

14.22 Confucius stayed indoors for three months, then returned. “I have attained it,” he said. “Crows and magpies hatch their young; fish transmit foam; narrow-waisted creatures transform; when a younger brother arrives, the elder cries. For a long time I have failed to become a person together with transformation. Without becoming a person together with transformation, how could I transform others?” Laozi replied, “Good, Qiu. You have attained it!”

Explanation of the chapter

Heavenly and seasonal changes provide a counterpoint to human habits that try to fix forms of conduct once and for all. Encounters attributed to ancient teachers suggest that the authority of the past cannot by itself justify a rule in the present. The effectiveness of a practice also depends on the world in which it operates.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

The critique should not be simplified into a rejection of all cultural inheritance. The sharper question is what happens when we preserve a procedure but forget the conditions that once made it meaningful. That is a useful contemporary question, yet it cannot replace close reading of individual episodes or erase the several intellectual strands present in the chapter.

Textual collation

The opening questions remain questions, not astronomical assertions. The musical narrative develops fear, weariness and bewilderment without describing a therapeutic protocol. The modes of reproduction attributed to herons, insects and lei belong to ancient knowledge and imagery, not validated zoology. Footprints and shoes distinguish transmitted effects from the process that produces them. Nine Luo, mourning grades and some details of the criticism of ancient rulers are philologically difficult; a historical reading is retained without turning the scene into documented biography. 無親 is read here as the absence of privileged kinship, not an instruction to abandon one’s parents.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 天運 (Wikisource, oldid 2327622).

14.01: 天其運乎; **14.02:** 巫咸袑曰; **14.03-14.04:** 商大宰蕩問仁於莊子; **14.05-14.08:** 北門成問於黃帝; **14.09-14.12:** 孔子西遊於衛; **14.13-14.16:** 孔子行年五十有一; **14.17:** 孔子見老聃而語仁義; **14.18-14.20:** 孔子見老聃歸; **14.21-14.22:** 孔子謂老聃曰.

15. Forced Intentions

Ke yi | 刻意

Chapter text

15.01 To harden one's intentions and exalt one's conduct, to withdraw from the world and differ from common ways, to speak loftily in complaint and reproach: this is only to aim at aloofness. Such things please the scholars of mountains and valleys, the men who condemn their age, those who wither away or cast themselves into the depths.

15.02 To speak of benevolence, rightness, loyalty and trustworthiness, of reverence, frugality, deference and yielding: this is only to aim at self-cultivation. Such things please the scholars who would bring peace to the world, the teachers, and those who travel or settle down to study.

15.03 To speak of great achievements and establish a great name, to regulate the relations of ruler and minister and put superior and inferior in their proper places: this is only to aim at government. Such things please the men of the court, those who honour their ruler and strengthen the state, and those who accomplish deeds and annex territories.

15.04 To resort to marshes and lakes, dwell in empty and spacious places, fish and live at leisure: this is only to aim at non-action. Such things please the men of rivers and seas, those who avoid the world and seek ease. To blow and breathe, exhale the old and inhale the new, hang like a bear and stretch like a bird: this is only to aim at longevity. Such things please the practitioners of guiding and stretching, those who nourish the body and hope to attain Pengzu's old age.

15.05 But to be lofty without hardening one's intentions, cultivated without benevolence and rightness, ordered without achievements and fame, at leisure without rivers and seas, long-lived without guiding and stretching; to forget nothing less than everything and possess nothing less than everything, to be peacefully without limit and have all excellence follow: this is the way of Heaven and Earth and the virtue of the sage. Thus it is said: tranquillity, simplicity, stillness, emptiness and non-action are the balance of Heaven and Earth and the substance of the Way and virtue.

15.06 Thus it is said: when the sage rests at ease, he becomes balanced and untroubled; being balanced and untroubled, he becomes tranquil and simple. When he is balanced, untroubled, tranquil and simple, anxiety cannot enter and harmful influences cannot attack. His virtue is therefore whole and his spirit undiminished.

15.07 Thus it is said: the sage's life follows Heaven's course, and his death is the transformation of a thing. In stillness he shares the virtue of yin; in movement he moves with the waves of yang. He does not take the lead in seeking good fortune or initiate misfortune. He responds only after being affected, moves only when pressed, and rises only when he cannot do otherwise. He puts aside contrivance and calculated knowledge and follows Heaven's patterns. Consequently no calamity of Heaven strikes him, no thing burdens him, no person reproaches him and no spirit accuses him. His life is like floating, his death like resting. He does not labour in anxious thought or devise plans in advance. He is bright but does not dazzle, trustworthy but does not make appointments with events. His sleep is without dreams and his waking without anxiety. His spirit is pure, his soul unwearied. Through emptiness and tranquillity he accords with Heaven's virtue.

15.08 Thus it is said: sorrow and pleasure disturb virtue; joy and anger overstep the Way; liking and disliking cause virtue to be lost. For the heart to be free from anxiety and exultation is the utmost of virtue. To be one and unchanging is the utmost of stillness. To meet nothing in opposition is the utmost of emptiness. Not to become entangled with things is the utmost of tranquillity. To resist nothing is the utmost of purity.

15.09 Thus it is said: if the body labours without rest, it wears out; if the vital essence is used without cease, it becomes exhausted, and exhaustion ends in depletion. Water is clear when nothing is mixed with it and level when nothing disturbs it; yet if it is stopped up and cannot flow, it cannot remain clear. Such is the image of Heaven's virtue. Thus it is said: to be pure and unmixed, still and unified without alteration, tranquil and without contrived action, and in movement to follow Heaven's course: this is the way to nourish the spirit.

15.10 A person who possesses a sword from Gan or Yue puts it in a case and stores it away, not daring to use it, so highly does he treasure it. The vital spirit reaches in all four directions and flows everywhere without limit. Above, it reaches Heaven; below, it coils through the earth. It transforms and nourishes the myriad things, yet cannot be represented by a form. Its name is "sharing with the sovereign".

15.11 The way of purity and simplicity consists in guarding the spirit alone. Guard it without losing it and become one with it. Through the penetrating essence of this unity, accord with Heaven's order. A country saying has it: "Ordinary people value profit; upright scholars value reputation; worthy people esteem their aspirations; sages prize the vital essence." Simplicity means being unmixed with anything else; purity means not impairing one's spirit. One who can embody purity and simplicity is called a genuine person.

Explanation of the chapter

The chapter discusses ways of cultivating life and spirit while distrusting the display of techniques, austerities, or exceptional behavior as automatic evidence of wisdom. It is important not to turn the exercises it mentions into one systematic prescription: the text distinguishes different approaches to a fulfilled life.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

Our key question is whether a discipline loosens dependency or creates a new attachment to the practitioner's prestige. A compulsive search for purity may itself become a form of fixation. Yet it would be excessive to conclude that every form of training is condemned. The critical issue concerns the relation between practices and ends, not the mere existence of methods.

Textual collation

The chapter contrasts specialised practices with an integrity not dependent on any one of them. *Dǎoyǐn* (導引) denotes guiding and stretching exercises, not clinical advice. Assertions of immunity, longevity or dreamless sleep belong to the ideal portrait of the sage, not verified medical outcomes. The water image includes an important qualification: enforced immobility and stagnation also destroy clarity. *Tóng dì* (同帝) is retained as a formula of participation in the sovereign; it is not simply identified with a personal deity.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 刻意 (Wikisource, oldid 2327623).

15.01: 刻意尚行; **15.02:** 語仁義忠信; **15.03:** 語大功; **15.04:** 就藪澤; **15.05:** 若夫不刻意而高; **15.06:** 聖人休休焉; **15.07:** 聖人之生也天行; **15.08:** 悲樂者; **15.09:** 形勞而不休; **15.10:** 夫有干越之劍者; **15.11:** 純素之道.

16. Restoring Nature

Shan xing | 繕性

Chapter text

16.01 Those who try to restore their nature through conventional learning, hoping by it to recover their beginnings, and those who try to set their desires right through conventional thinking, hoping by it to attain clarity, are called people whose understanding is clouded and confused.

16.02 Those of old who cultivated the Way nourished understanding through tranquillity. When understanding arose, they did not use it to contrive actions: this was called nourishing tranquillity through understanding. Understanding and tranquillity nourished each other, and harmony and order emerged from their nature. Virtue is harmony; the Way is order. When virtue embraces everything, this is benevolence. When the Way puts everything in order, this is rightness. When rightness is clear and things are held close, this is loyalty. When the centre is pure and genuine and returns to what is truly so, this is music. When trustworthiness is expressed in bodily conduct and follows appropriate forms, this is ritual. When ritual and music are imposed everywhere, the world falls into disorder. Those who seek to rectify others obscure their own virtue. Virtue does not force itself upon things; when it does so, things necessarily lose their nature.

16.03 The people of old, within the indistinct and undivided condition, shared the tranquillity of their whole age. At that time yin and yang were harmonious and still, ghosts and spirits did not disturb, the four seasons observed their measures, the myriad things suffered no injury and living beings did not die before their time. Although people possessed understanding, they had no use for it. This was called the utmost unity. At that time no one contrived anything and things were constantly so of themselves.

16.04 Virtue declined, until Suiren and Fuxi began to govern the world. Things were compliant, but no longer one. Virtue declined further, until Shennong and the Yellow Emperor began to govern the world. Things were settled, but no longer compliant. Virtue declined again, until the rulers of Tang and Yu began to govern. They promoted government and transformation, diluted purity and scattered simplicity, departed from the Way in pursuit of goodness and endangered virtue through prescribed conduct. Then people abandoned their nature and followed their hearts. Heart joined with heart in calculating knowledge, yet this was not enough to settle the world. They then added ornament and increased the extent of learning. Ornament extinguished substance, and extensive learning drowned the heart. The people began to be confused and disordered, with no means of returning to their genuine nature and recovering their beginnings.

16.05 Seen in this way, the world lost the Way and the Way lost the world: each was lost to the other. How could a person of the Way rise in such a world? How could the world rise to the Way? When the Way could not flourish in the world and the world could not flourish in the Way, the virtue of sages was hidden even when they did not live in mountains and forests. It was hidden, but they did not deliberately hide it.

16.06 Those whom the ancients called recluses did not conceal their bodies so that no one could see them, close their mouths so that no words came out, or hide their understanding so that it was never expressed. The circumstances of their time and their allotted condition were gravely at odds. When the time allowed them to act widely in the world, they returned to unity without leaving traces. When the time did not allow this and they were utterly constrained, they struck deep roots, rested in the utmost stillness and waited. This was the way to preserve themselves.

16.07 Those of old who conducted their lives did not adorn understanding with disputation, use understanding to exhaust the world or use it to exhaust virtue. They remained firmly in their place and returned to their nature. What else did they need to do? The Way is not pursued through petty conduct, nor virtue attained through petty understanding. Petty understanding damages virtue, and petty conduct damages the Way. Hence

it is said: “Set yourself right, and that is enough.” To keep enjoyment whole is called fulfilling one’s aspiration.

16.08 What the ancients called fulfilling one’s aspiration did not mean acquiring ceremonial carriages and caps of office. It meant needing nothing to add to one’s enjoyment. What people now call fulfilling one’s aspiration is precisely acquiring carriages and caps. But carriages and caps are attached to the person, not to one’s nature or allotted life. They are things that arrive by chance, temporary lodgers. When they lodge with us, their arrival cannot be barred and their departure cannot be prevented. Thus one does not let aspiration run loose because of office, nor follow vulgar ways because of poverty and constraint. Enjoyment is the same in either condition, and there is simply no anxiety. But now, when the lodger departs, people cease to be happy. Seen in this way, even their happiness was never free from confusion. Hence it is said: “Those who lose themselves in things and lose their nature in conventions are people who put things upside down.”

Explanation of the chapter

Images of recovering nature place the effort to manufacture authenticity through external models under suspicion. The chapter belongs to a part of the collection whose historical classification remains debated. It should not be presented as a transparent continuation of the Inner Chapters, even though clear thematic echoes exist.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

The contemporary paradox is familiar: trying to become spontaneous according to a program can make spontaneity another obligation. Yet appeals to nature also require scrutiny. Not every earlier condition is good merely because it preceded change, and not every transformation is a loss. The text challenges confidence in artificial correction without settling every normative question thereby raised.

Textual collation

Knowledge and tranquillity are reciprocal here; the chapter does not simply demand ignorance. The succession of rulers is a polemical genealogy of lost spontaneity, not a demonstrated historical chronology. Tang and Yu here refer to Yao and Shun. In the passage about ritual and music, Legge’s historical translation introduces a “one-sided” application; the Chinese permits a more directly critical reading of their general extension. The image of offices as temporary lodgers does not make poverty an obligatory ideal.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 繕性 (Wikisource, oldid 2327624).

16.01: 繕性於俗; **16.02:** 古之治道者; **16.03:** 古之人; **16.04:** 逮德下衰; **16.05:** 由是觀之; **16.06:** 古之所謂隱士者; **16.07:** 古之行身者; **16.08:** 古之所謂得志者.

17. Autumn Floods

Qiu shui | 秋水

Chapter text

17.01 When the autumn floods arrived, the hundred streams poured into the Yellow River. Its rushing current was so broad that across the banks and islands an ox could not be distinguished from a horse. The River Lord rejoiced, believing that all the world's excellence lay in himself. He followed the current eastward until he reached the Northern Sea. Looking east, he could see no end to the water. Then he turned his face, gazed into the immensity towards Ruo and sighed: "A country saying speaks of someone who has heard a hundred teachings and thinks no one can equal him. It describes me. I once heard people make little of Confucius's learning and slight Boyi's rightness, and I did not believe them. Now I see how difficult it is to exhaust your extent. Had I not come to your gate, I would have remained in danger, forever laughed at by those acquainted with the great way."

17.02 Ruo of the Northern Sea replied: "You cannot discuss the sea with a well-frog: it is confined by its place. You cannot discuss ice with a summer insect: it is limited by its season. You cannot discuss the Way with a restricted scholar: he is bound by his instruction. Now you have left your banks and seen the great sea; you recognise your inadequacy, and we can discuss great principles. No waters in the world are greater than the sea. Ten thousand streams return to it, never ceasing, yet it does not fill. The Weilu outlet drains it, never stopping, yet it does not empty. Spring and autumn do not change it; flood and drought leave it unaware. How much it exceeds the Yangzi and Yellow River cannot be measured or counted. Yet I have never made much of myself on that account. I compare my form with Heaven and Earth and receive my vital breath from yin and yang. Between Heaven and Earth I am like a little stone or a little tree on a great mountain. While I recognise my smallness, how could I make much of myself?"

17.03 "Consider the four seas between Heaven and Earth: are they not like little hollows in a great marsh? Consider the central states within the seas: are they not like a millet grain in a great granary? The number of things is spoken of as ten thousand, and humanity is one among them. People inhabit the nine regions, where grain grows and boats and carts travel; an individual is only one among those people. Compared with the myriad things, is this not like the tip of a hair on a horse's body? All that the Five Emperors continued, all that the Three Kings contested, all that benevolent people worried about and capable officers laboured over amounts to this. Boyi renounced it to gain a name; Confucius discussed it to display broad learning. Their self-importance is like yours just now about your water."

17.04 The River Lord asked: "Then may I regard Heaven and Earth as great and a hair's tip as small?" Ruo replied: "No. The measures of things have no limit, time does not stop, allotted portions are not constant, and endings and beginnings have no fixed rule. Great understanding observes both far and near: it does not belittle the small or magnify the great, knowing that measures have no limit. It examines past and present: it is not distressed by remoteness or eager to grasp what is near, knowing that time never stops. It considers fullness and emptiness: it does not rejoice at gain or worry about loss, knowing that portions are inconstant. It understands the open course: it does not delight in birth or regard death as disaster, knowing that endings and beginnings cannot be fixed. What people know is less than what they do not know; the time they live is less than the time before they lived. Trying with what is smallest to exhaust the realm of what is greatest, they become confused and cannot find their footing. How, then, could a hair's tip define the limit of minuteness, or Heaven and Earth exhaust the realm of greatness?"

17.05 The River Lord asked: "Disputers say that the finest has no form and the greatest cannot be encompassed. Is this truly so?" Ruo replied: "Looking from the small towards the great, one cannot take it all in. Looking from the great towards the small, one cannot see it distinctly. Fineness is the extreme of smallness;

vastness is the abundance of greatness. Their different aptitudes follow from their circumstances. Fine and coarse apply to what has form. What has no form cannot be divided by numbers; what cannot be encompassed cannot be exhausted by numbers. What words can discuss is the coarse aspect of things; what thought can reach is their fine aspect. What words cannot discuss and thought cannot discern lies outside the division into fine and coarse."

17.06 "The great person's conduct does not aim to harm others, yet he makes no boast of benevolence and kindness. He does not act for profit, yet he does not despise gatekeepers and servants. He does not compete for possessions, yet he does not boast of declining them. He does not rely on others in his affairs, yet he does not boast of living by his own labour or despise the greedy and corrupt. His conduct differs from custom, yet he does not boast of eccentricity. He acts with the multitude, yet he does not despise flatterers. Worldly rank and salary cannot entice him, execution and shame cannot humiliate him. He knows that right and wrong cannot be made into a fixed division, or small and great into a fixed boundary. I have heard: 'The person of the Way is not renowned; utmost virtue does not obtain; the great person has no self.' This is the utmost restraint of one's allotted share."

17.07 The River Lord asked: "Outside things or inside them, where do distinctions between noble and base begin? Where do distinctions between small and great begin?" Ruo replied: "Viewed through the Way, things are neither noble nor base. Viewed from the things themselves, each values itself and disparages the others. Viewed through convention, nobility and baseness are not determined by oneself. Viewed through difference, if we call each thing great in respect of its greatness, nothing is not great; if we call each thing small in respect of its smallness, nothing is not small. Know that Heaven and Earth can be a millet grain and a hair's tip a mountain, and differences of measure become visible."

17.08 "Viewed through function, if we count what each thing possesses, nothing lacks a function; if we count what it lacks, nothing is without a lack. Know that east and west are opposed but cannot do without each other, and the distribution of functions becomes clear. Viewed through inclination, if we affirm what each affirms, nothing is not affirmed; if we reject what each rejects, nothing is not rejected. Know that Yao and Jie each approved himself and rejected the other, and their differing inclinations become visible. Yao and Shun yielded and remained emperors; Zhi and Kuai yielded and were destroyed. Tang and Wu fought and became kings; Duke Bai fought and perished. Thus contention and yielding, Yao's conduct and Jie's conduct, are valued or despised according to their time; they cannot be made into an invariable rule."

17.09 "A great beam can batter a city wall but cannot plug a small hole: tools have different uses. Qiji and Hualiu could gallop a thousand li in a day, yet were inferior to wildcats and weasels at catching rats: skills differ. An owl catches fleas at night and sees the tip of a hair, but in daylight stares without seeing a mountain: natures differ. To say, 'Take rightness as your teacher and have no wrong; take order as your teacher and have no disorder,' shows failure to understand Heaven and Earth's patterns and the circumstances of the myriad things. It is like taking Heaven without Earth, or yin without yang. Clearly it cannot work. To keep insisting on it is either folly or deception. The emperors yielded in different ways; the Three Dynasties transmitted power differently. One who opposes his time and its customs is called a usurper; one who accords with them is called righteous. Be still, River Lord! How could you know the gates of noble and base or the homes of small and great?"

17.10 The River Lord asked: "Then what should I do and not do? How am I to refuse or accept, pursue or abandon?" Ruo replied: "Viewed through the Way, what is noble and what is base? Their reversal is called reciprocal development. Do not bind your intention, or you will obstruct the Way. What is little and what is much? Their alternation is called exchange and distribution. Do not hold your conduct to a single form, or you will differ from the Way. Be dignified like a state's ruler who shows no private favour; unconfined like the earth altar at sacrifice, bestowing no private blessing; expansive like the limitless four directions, without

dividing boundaries. Embrace all things: which will you favour and support? This is called having no fixed direction. The myriad things are alike: which is short and which long?"

17.11 "The Way has no end or beginning; things die and are born, and their completion cannot be relied upon. Now empty, now full, they do not remain in one shape. Years cannot be raised again, time cannot be stopped. Diminishing and growing, full and empty, they end and begin again. This is how to discuss the direction of great rightness and the patterns of the myriad things. Their life races and gallops: no movement is without change, no time without alteration. What should you do or not do? They will assuredly transform of themselves."

17.12 The River Lord asked: "Then what is valuable about the Way?" Ruo replied: "One who knows the Way understands patterns; one who understands patterns understands how to weigh changing circumstances; one who understands this does not let things harm him. Fire cannot burn the person of utmost virtue, water cannot drown him, cold and heat cannot injure him, birds and beasts cannot attack him. This does not mean he presses against those dangers. It means he examines safety and danger, remains settled amid misfortune and fortune, and is careful about approaching and withdrawing, so that nothing can harm him. Hence it is said: the heavenly lies within, the human without; virtue lies in the heavenly. Know how the heavenly and the human proceed, root yourself in the heavenly and take your place in what you have attained. Hesitate before bending or stretching, return to what is essential and speak of the utmost."

17.13 "What is the heavenly, and what is the human?" asked the River Lord. Ruo replied: "Oxen and horses having four feet is the heavenly. Putting a halter on a horse's head and piercing an ox's nose is the human. Hence it is said: do not destroy the heavenly with the human; do not destroy allotted life with contrivance; do not sacrifice what you have attained for a name. Guard it carefully and do not lose it. This is called returning to what is genuine."

17.14 The one-legged kui envied the millipede, the millipede the snake, the snake the wind, the wind the eye, and the eye the heart. The kui said to the millipede: "I hop along on one foot and can hardly manage. How do you employ ten thousand feet?" The millipede replied: "It is not as you imagine. Have you not seen someone spit? The large drops are like pearls, the small like mist, falling together in countless numbers. I merely set my natural mechanism in motion without knowing why it works." The millipede said to the snake: "I move with many feet, yet cannot keep up with you who have none. Why?" The snake replied: "How could the movement of the natural mechanism be changed? What use would I have for feet?"

17.15 The snake said to the wind: "I move my spine and ribs and so have something visible to move with. You rise roaring from the Northern Sea and enter the Southern Sea, apparently without anything. How is that?" The wind replied: "Yes, I rise roaring from the Northern Sea and enter the Southern Sea. Yet a finger thrust against me overcomes me, and a foot stepping on me overcomes me. Even so, only I can break great trees and blow away great houses. Thus many small defeats become a great victory. Only the sage can achieve such a great victory."

17.16 Confucius was travelling in Kuang when people of Song surrounded him several ranks deep. He continued singing to his strings. Zilu entered and asked: "Master, how can you enjoy yourself?" Confucius replied: "Come, I shall tell you. I have long sought to avoid distress, yet have not escaped it: that is my allotment. I have long sought an open path, yet have not found it: that is the time. Under Yao and Shun no one was distressed, not because knowledge had succeeded; under Jie and Zhou no one found an open path, not because knowledge had failed. The circumstances of the time were simply so. Not avoiding dragons in the water is a fisherman's courage. Not avoiding rhinoceroses and tigers on land is a hunter's courage. Seeing crossed blades and regarding death as life is a resolute warrior's courage. Knowing that distress has its allotment and success its time, and meeting great danger without fear, is the sage's courage. Stay, You! My allotted life has its determination." Soon the commander approached and apologised: "We thought you were Yang Hu, and so surrounded you. Now we know you are not. Allow us to withdraw."

17.17 Gongsun Long asked Prince Mou of Wei: “When young I studied the former kings’ way; when grown I understood benevolence and rightness. I joined sameness and difference, separated hardness and whiteness, affirmed the unaffirmed and allowed the unallowable. I confounded the knowledge of the hundred schools and exhausted everyone’s arguments. I thought I had attained complete understanding. Now I hear Zhuangzi’s words and am bewildered by their strangeness. Is my reasoning inadequate or my knowledge unequal to his? I cannot open my mouth. May I ask how to proceed?”

17.18 Prince Mou leaned on his table, sighed deeply, looked up and laughed. “Have you never heard of the frog in the broken well? It said to a turtle of the Eastern Sea: ‘How happy I am! I leap on the well’s rim and rest in the gaps of its broken lining. In the water my armpits are supported and my chin held up; in the mud my feet and ankles disappear. Looking at the worms, crabs and tadpoles, none can match me. To command this whole pool and enjoy this broken well is perfection. Why do you not come in and see?’ Before the turtle’s left foot entered, its right knee was caught. It drew back and described the sea: ‘A thousand li cannot express its breadth, a thousand fathoms cannot exhaust its depth. In Yu’s time there were nine floods in ten years, yet its water did not increase; in Tang’s time seven droughts in eight years, yet its shores did not recede. It is not shifted by long or short duration, nor advanced or diminished by quantity. This is the great pleasure of the Eastern Sea.’ Hearing this, the frog was astonished and lost all composure.”

17.19 “Your knowledge does not reach the boundaries of right and wrong, yet you want to examine Zhuangzi’s words. That is like asking a mosquito to carry a mountain or a millipede to race a river: they cannot perform the task. Unable to understand discourse of the utmost subtlety, you content yourself with an immediate advantage. Are you not the well-frog? He treads the Yellow Springs and rises to the great heights, without south or north, freely opening in all directions and sinking into the unfathomable; without east or west, beginning in dark obscurity and returning to great openness. You narrowly seek him through analysis and pursue him through disputation. That is looking at Heaven through a tube or pointing at Earth with an awl. Is it not small? Go away! Have you not heard of the young man of Shouling who learned to walk in Handan? Before learning their skill, he lost his old way of walking and had to crawl home. Unless you leave, you will forget what you knew and lose your profession.” Gongsun Long’s mouth remained open, his tongue raised; then he fled.

17.20 Zhuangzi was fishing in the Pu when the king of Chu sent two officers ahead with the message: “We wish to burden you with the affairs of our realm.” Holding his rod without turning, Zhuangzi said: “I have heard that Chu has a sacred tortoise dead these three thousand years. The king wraps it in cloth, boxes it and keeps it in the ancestral temple. Would this tortoise prefer death and the honouring of its bones, or life dragging its tail in the mud?” The officers answered: “Life dragging its tail in the mud.” Zhuangzi said: “Go! I shall drag my tail in the mud.”

17.21 Huizi was chief minister in Liang, and Zhuangzi came to visit him. Someone told Huizi: “Zhuangzi is coming to replace you.” Alarmed, Huizi searched the state for three days and nights. Zhuangzi came to him and said: “There is a southern bird called the yuanchu. Do you know it? It flies from the Southern to the Northern Sea, alighting only on the wutong, eating only the fruit of the lian tree and drinking only sweet spring water. An owl found a rotten rat. As the yuanchu passed, it looked up and screeched, ‘Shoo!’ Do you now mean to screech at me over your state of Liang?”

17.22 Zhuangzi and Huizi were strolling above the Hao. Zhuangzi said: “The fish come out and swim at ease. That is the joy of fish.” Huizi said: “You are not a fish. Where does your knowledge of the joy of fish come from?” Zhuangzi said: “You are not me. How do you know I do not know the joy of fish?” Huizi said: “I am not you, so certainly I do not know you. You certainly are not a fish: that completes the case that you do not know the joy of fish.” Zhuangzi said: “Let us return to the beginning. When you asked, ‘Where does your knowledge of the joy of fish come from?’, you already knew I knew it and asked me. I know it from here above the Hao.”

Explanation of the chapter

The River God's encounter with the ocean exposes the insufficiency of the scale by which he had judged his own magnitude. Zhuangzi's exchange with Huizi about the fish's pleasure raises another problem: what allows us to speak about another being's experience, and how reasonable is the demand for an impossible standpoint as the price of understanding?

Philosophical interpretation and limits

The ocean episode does not make the sea the final possessor of an absolute view; the comparison itself moves the limits. Nor does the fish debate prove transparent access to another's experience. Between the arrogance of claiming complete knowledge and the demand that nothing can be known lies a space for attention and dialogue. That is our philosophical proposal inspired by the stories, not a dogma ascribed to them.

Textual collation

The sea dialogue refuses to turn even Heaven and Earth into an absolute scale. Differences of perspective do not establish that every assertion is equally true. The text itself explains its language of invulnerability through attention to dangers and circumstances; it does not license exposure to fire or water. The kui and wind sequence is a fable, not experimental zoology. The wind acknowledges small defeats by human actions while retaining its ability to uproot large trees; that contrast is not reversed.

17.22. The question “Where does your knowledge of the joy of fish come from?” is repeated verbatim in Huizi’s words and Zhuangzi’s quotation. 安知 allows discussion both of the grounds of knowing and of the place from which one knows. This version preserves the possibility of the spatial turn without presenting the ending as a logical proof that Zhuangzi directly knows the fish’s experience.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 秋水 (Wikisource, oldid 2477942).

17.01-17.03: 秋水時至; **17.04:** 然則吾大天地; **17.05-17.06:** 世之議者皆曰; **17.07-17.09:** 若物之外; **17.10-17.11:** 然則我何為乎; **17.12:** 然則何貴於道邪; **17.13:** 何謂天; **17.14-17.15:** 夔憐蚿; **17.16:** 孔子遊於匡; **17.17-17.19:** 公孫龍問於魏牟; **17.20:** 莊子釣於濮水; **17.21:** 惠子相梁; **17.22:** 莊子與惠子遊於濠梁之上.

18. The Highest Joy

Zhi le | 至樂

Chapter text

18.01 Is there utmost joy in the world or not? Is there a way to keep oneself alive or not? What should one do and rely on? What should one avoid and remain with? What should one approach and leave? What should one enjoy and dislike?

18.02 The world honours wealth, rank, long life and a good reputation. It enjoys bodily comfort, rich flavours, fine clothing, beautiful sights and pleasing sounds. It looks down on poverty, low station, premature death and a bad reputation. It suffers when the body lacks ease, the mouth rich flavours, the person fine clothing, the eyes beautiful sights and the ears pleasing sounds. When these are not obtained, people become deeply anxious and afraid. How foolishly they care for the body!

18.03 The rich afflict their bodies with strenuous labour and pile up wealth they cannot use: their care for the body is directed outside it. Those of high rank continue by night what they do by day, worrying about success and failure: their care for the body is remote from it. People are born together with their anxieties; the long-lived remain confused, worrying for a long time without dying. What bitterness! How distant their supposed care for the body has become! Resolute men are regarded by the world as good, yet this is insufficient to keep them alive. I do not know whether such goodness is truly good or not. If good, it does not preserve their lives; if not good, it may preserve the lives of others. Hence it is said: “When loyal remonstrance is not heard, withdraw and follow without contention.” Zixu contended and his body was destroyed; had he not contended, his name would not have been established. Is there really goodness here or not?

18.04 As for what custom makes people do and enjoy, I do not know whether their enjoyment is really enjoyment or not. I see them rushing after what custom calls joy, crowding together as if unable to do otherwise. They all call it joy. I do not find joy in it, yet neither have I declared it joyless. Is there truly joy or not? I take non-action to be genuine joy, yet this is what custom regards as most distressing. Thus it is said: “Utmost joy is without joy; utmost praise is without praise.” The world’s right and wrong cannot finally be settled. Nevertheless, through non-action they may be settled. Utmost joy and the preservation of life seem close to being found in non-action alone. Let me try to explain. Heaven acts without contrivance and is clear; Earth acts without contrivance and is at peace. Their two non-actions join, and all things transform and are born. Vast and indistinct, they seem to emerge from nowhere; indistinct and vast, they have no visible image. The myriad things in their multitude proliferate from non-action. Hence it is said: “Heaven and Earth do nothing, yet nothing remains undone.” Who among human beings can attain non-action?

18.05 Zhuangzi’s wife died. Huizi came to offer condolences and found Zhuangzi sitting with his legs spread out, beating a basin and singing. Huizi said: “She lived with you, raised children and grew old. Not weeping when she died would have been enough. But beating a basin and singing: is that not excessive?” Zhuangzi replied: “No. When she first died, how could I alone have felt no grief? I examined her beginning: originally there was no life. Not only no life, but no form; not only no form, but no vital breath. Amid the mingling of the vast and indistinct, transformation occurred and there was vital breath; breath transformed and there was form; form transformed and there was life. Now another transformation has occurred and she has died. These follow one another like spring, autumn, winter and summer. She lies at rest in the great chamber. If I followed her with loud weeping, I would think myself unable to understand allotted life. Therefore I stopped.”

18.06 Uncle Zhili and Uncle Huajie were looking at the mound of Mingbo in the Kunlun wastes, where the Yellow Emperor had rested. Suddenly a growth appeared on Huajie’s left elbow, and his manner showed agitation. Zhili asked: “Do you dislike it?” Huajie replied: “No. Why should I dislike it? Life is borrowed.

What is borrowed to sustain life is dust and dirt. Life and death are day and night. You and I were observing transformation, and now transformation has reached me. Why should I dislike it?"

18.07 On his way to Chu, Zhuangzi saw an empty skull, bare but retaining its shape. He tapped it with his riding whip and asked: "Did you come to this through greed for life and loss of principle? Through serving a ruined state and being executed by the axe? Through bad conduct and shame at disgracing parents, wife and children? Through cold and hunger? Or because your years had reached their end?" When he had finished speaking, he drew the skull towards him and lay down with it as a pillow.

18.08 At midnight the skull appeared in a dream and said: "You talk like a disputant. Everything you mentioned belongs to the burdens of living people. In death there is none of that. Would you hear an account of death?" Zhuangzi said: "Yes." The skull said: "In death there is no ruler above or minister below, nor the business of the four seasons. At ease, we take Heaven and Earth as our spring and autumn. Even the joy of a south-facing king cannot surpass it." Zhuangzi did not believe it. "Suppose I persuaded the controller of allotted life to restore your form, make your bones, flesh and skin again, and return you to parents, wife, children, neighbours and acquaintances. Would you want that?" The skull frowned deeply and wrinkled its brow: "How could I abandon the joy of a south-facing king to return to human toil?"

18.09 Yan Yuan went east to Qi, and Confucius looked worried. Zigong rose from his mat and asked: "May I ask why Hui's journey east to Qi troubles you?" Confucius replied: "A good question. Guanzi once said something I much approve: 'A small sack cannot hold something large; a short rope cannot draw water from a deep well.' This means that one's allotment has its determinate conditions and one's form its appropriate capacities; these cannot simply be diminished or increased. I fear Hui will speak to the marquis of Qi about the ways of Yao, Shun and the Yellow Emperor, adding the words of Suiren and Shennong. The marquis will seek their equivalent within himself and fail to find it. Failure will lead to confusion, and confusion in such a person can bring death."

18.10 "Have you not heard of the seabird that alighted outside Lu? The marquis welcomed it and offered it wine in the ancestral temple, had the Nine Shao music performed for its pleasure, and prepared the full sacrificial feast for its meal. The bird stared in bewilderment and sorrow, not daring to eat a morsel or drink a cup. In three days it died. This was nourishing a bird with one's own nourishment, not nourishing a bird with a bird's nourishment. To nourish it as a bird, let it perch in deep forests, wander on sandy ground, float on rivers and lakes, eat loaches and small fish, stop with its flock and live at ease. It dislikes even hearing human speech: why inflict all that clamour on it? If the Xianchi and Nine Shao music were performed in the wilds of Dongting, birds would fly away, beasts run off and fish dive deep. People, on the other hand, would gather to watch. Fish live in water and people die in it. They necessarily differ, and so do their likes and dislikes. Therefore the former sages did not make everyone's abilities one or everyone's activities the same. Names stopped at what was real; rightness was established where it fitted. This is called free passage through distinctions and the preservation of well-being."

18.11 Liezi was eating beside the road during a journey. Seeing a skull a hundred years old, he pulled aside the weeds, pointed to it and said: "Only you and I know that we have never died and never lived. Are you truly at rest? Am I truly joyful?"

18.12 The seeds of things contain subtle beginnings. In water they become a membranous growth; at the boundary of water and soil, the clothing of frogs and shellfish. Growing on high ground they become lingxi; lingxi in rich, damp conditions becomes crow's-foot. Its roots become grubs and its leaves butterflies. The butterfly called xu changes into an insect born beneath the stove, shaped like a cast-off skin, and named quduo. After a thousand days the quduo becomes a bird called ganyugu. The ganyugu's froth becomes simi; simi becomes shixi. Yilu comes from shixi, huangkuang from jiuyou, and mourui from decaying fuquan. Yangxi joins with bamboo that no longer sprouts; old bamboo produces qingning, qingning produces cheng, cheng

produces the horse, and the horse produces the human. The human returns again into the generative mechanism. All things come from that mechanism and all enter it again.

Explanation of the chapter

After Zhuangzi's wife dies, his unsettling act of drumming on a vessel and singing prevents an easy equation of transformation with immediate indifference. He describes a process: first there was grief, then an effort to understand what had changed. His response must not simply become a command addressed to every bereaved person.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

Other scenes on mortality and life's value resist reduction to a uniform theory of emotion. Responsible interpretation preserves the narrative's singularity: this is a transformation in one person's relation to loss, not proof that pain is wrong. "Enjoyment" in the chapter title is therefore neither perpetual happiness nor obligatory suppression of feeling.

Textual collation

The mourning for the wife explicitly includes initial grief; the later song proves neither absence of affection nor a prescription for other people’s bereavement. The skull episode is a philosophical dream, not testimony about an afterlife or a recommendation to die. *Liǔ* (柳), on Huajie’s elbow, is traditionally understood as a growth; no diagnosis is assigned. The final chain retains names of uncertain naturalistic identification. It is an ancient sequence of transformations, not a demonstrated anticipation of biological evolution; Legge’s added gloss “Evolution” for the generative mechanism is therefore removed.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 至樂 (Wikisource, oldid 2327625).

18.01: 天下有至樂; **18.02:** 夫天下之所尊者; **18.03:** 夫富者; **18.04:** 今俗之所為; **18.05:** 莊子妻死; **18.06:** 支離叔與滑介叔; **18.07-18.08:** 莊子之楚; **18.09-18.10:** 顏淵東之齊; **18.11:** 列子行食於道從; **18.12:** 種有幾.

19. Understanding Life

Da sheng | 達生

Chapter text

19.01 One who understands the circumstances of life does not labour at what cannot serve life. One who understands the circumstances of one's allotment does not labour at what knowledge cannot alter. To nourish the body, things must first be available; yet things may be abundant and the body remain unnourished. To have life, it must not have left the body; yet the body may remain and life be gone. Life's arrival cannot be refused, its departure cannot be stopped. How sad that people think nourishing the body is enough to preserve life! If it is not enough, what worldly undertaking will suffice? Although action is insufficient, there are things one cannot avoid doing, and so one remains unable to escape action.

19.02 To escape being constantly occupied with the body, nothing is better than relinquishing the world. Relinquishing it, one is without entanglements; without entanglements, one becomes upright and balanced; upright and balanced, one is renewed in life along with the other. Such renewal comes close. Why abandon affairs and forget life? Abandoning affairs, the body does not toil; forgetting life, the vital essence is not impaired. When the body is whole and the essence restored, one is one with Heaven. Heaven and Earth are the parents of the myriad things. Coming together, they form a body; dispersing, they make a beginning. When form and essence are not impaired, this is called being able to move with transformation. Refined and refined again, one returns to assist Heaven.

19.03 Master Liezi asked Guan Yin: "The utmost person moves beneath water without suffocating, treads fire without burning and travels above the myriad things without trembling. How does he attain this?" Guan Yin replied: "By guarding pure vital breath, not through knowledge, skill, resolution or daring. Sit down; I shall tell you. Whatever has appearance, image, sound or colour is a thing. How far apart can one thing and another be? How could they reach what precedes them? They are only visible forms. Things arise from what has no form and come to rest in what is not transformed. One who attains this and follows it to the end cannot be stopped by things. He stays within a measure that does not overflow, hides in a thread without an end and wanders where the myriad things begin and finish. He unifies his nature, nourishes his vital breath and joins his virtue, penetrating to the origin of things. His heavenly protection is whole and his spirit has no opening: where could things enter?"

19.04 "A drunken man falls from a carriage and, though injured, does not die. His bones and joints are the same as other people's, but his encounter with harm differs because his spirit is whole. He was unaware of riding and unaware of falling. Death and life, alarm and fear did not enter his breast, so he met things without shrinking. If completeness gained through wine can do this, how much more completeness gained through Heaven! The sage hides in Heaven, and so nothing can injure him. One seeking revenge does not break the Moye or Ganjiang sword; even a resentful person does not blame a falling roof tile. Through this the world becomes even and peaceful. The absence of the disorder of warfare and the punishments of slaughter follows this way. Do not open up the human manipulation of Heaven; open up Heaven's own heaven. Opening the heavenly produces virtue; opening the merely human produces injury. Without wearying of the heavenly or neglecting the human, people would approach what is genuine."

19.05 On his way to Chu, Confucius came out of a forest and saw a hunchback catching cicadas as easily as picking them up. Confucius said: "How skilful! Is there a way to this?" The man replied: "There is. After five or six months, when I could balance two pellets without dropping them, my failures were few; with three balanced pellets, I missed one in ten; with five, I caught them as if picking them up. I hold my body like a rooted stump and my arm like the branch of a withered tree. Though Heaven and Earth are vast and things numerous, I know only the cicada's wings. I do not turn or lean aside, and would not exchange the cicada's

wings for the myriad things. How could I fail?" Confucius turned to his disciples: "When intention is undivided, it concentrates in the spirit. Does that not describe this hunchback elder?"

19.06 Yan Yuan asked Confucius: "I once crossed the deep pool at Shangshen. The ferryman handled the boat like a spirit. I asked whether handling a boat could be learned. He said: 'Yes. A good swimmer can soon do it. A diver can handle it even without having seen a boat before.' I asked why, but he did not explain. What did he mean?" Confucius replied: "A good swimmer soon learns because he forgets the water. A diver can handle a boat without having seen one because he looks upon a deep pool as a hillside and upon a boat's capsizing as a cart's slipping back. Countless overturnings can occur before him without entering his inner dwelling. Where would he not be at ease? A person betting with tiles is skilful; betting with a buckle makes him anxious; betting with gold makes him bewildered. His skill is the same, but something is prized and the external stake becomes weighty. Whenever the external is weighty, the inner becomes clumsy."

19.07 Tian Kaizhi visited Duke Wei of Zhou. The duke asked: "I hear Zhu Shen studies how to live. You have associated with him: what have you heard?" Tian answered: "I only held a broom and served in his courtyard. What could I have heard from the master?" The duke said: "Do not be modest. I wish to hear." Tian replied: "I heard him say: 'Those who nourish life well are like shepherds who watch for the sheep lagging behind and whip them onward.'" Asked what this meant, he explained: "In Lu, Shan Bao lived among rocks and drank water, not competing with others for profit. At seventy he still had an infant's complexion. Unfortunately he met a hungry tiger, which killed and ate him. Zhang Yi, on the other hand, visited every high gate and hanging curtain; at forty he died of an internal fever. Bao nourished the inside, but the tiger ate his outside. Yi nourished the outside, but illness attacked his inside. Neither whipped up what lagged behind."

19.08 Confucius said: "Do not withdraw to conceal yourself; do not go out to display yourself. Stand like bare wood in the middle. If these three are attained, one's name will reach its utmost. On a dangerous road where one person in ten is killed, fathers and sons, elder and younger brothers warn one another and dare not travel without many attendants. Is that not wise? Yet dangers are taken upon sleeping mats and amid eating and drinking, and people do not know to guard against them. That is an error."

19.09 The master of sacrificial prayers, dressed in his dark ceremonial robe, approached the pigpen and persuaded the pigs: "Why dislike death? I shall feed you grain for three months, observe ten days of restraint and three days of purification, spread white grass and set your shoulders and hindquarters on carved offering stands. Would you accept this?" If planning for the pigs, he would say that eating bran and lees and being left in the pen is better. Planning for himself, however, he would accept the honour of carriage and cap in life, and an ornamented bier and coffin in death. He rejects for pigs what he accepts for himself. How does he differ from the pigs?

19.10 Duke Huan was hunting in a marsh with Guan Zhong driving when he saw a spirit. Grasping Guan Zhong's hand, he asked: "Father Zhong, what did you see?" "I saw nothing." The duke returned, spoke distractedly, became ill and did not go out for several days. Huangzi Gaoao, a scholar of Qi, said: "Your Grace has injured himself. How could a spirit injure you? When pent-up vital breath disperses without returning, there is insufficiency. When it rises without descending, a person becomes prone to anger. When it descends without rising, he becomes forgetful. When it neither rises nor descends but stays at the heart in the body's centre, illness results."

19.11 The duke asked: "Are there spirits, then?" "There are. In submerged places is the Lü; at the stove, the Ji; in the dust within the doorway, the Leiting. In low places to the northeast the Bei'a and Guilong leap; in low places to the northwest dwells the Yiyang. In water is the Wangxiang, on hills the Zu, in mountains the Kui, in the wild the Fanghuang and in marshes the Weiyi." "What does the Weiyi look like?" "As thick as a wheel hub and as long as a carriage shaft, with a purple robe and red cap. It dislikes the sound of the thunder-chariot, and holds up its head when it hears it. Whoever sees it is likely to become hegemon." Duke Huan

laughed broadly: “That is what I saw!” He straightened his clothes and cap and sat with Huangzi. Before the day ended, his illness had vanished without his noticing.

19.12 Ji Shengzi was training a fighting cock for the king. After ten days the king asked whether it was ready. “Not yet. It is vainly proud and relies on its energy.” After ten more days: “Not yet. It still responds to sounds and shadows.” After ten more: “Not yet. Its gaze is still fierce and its energy excessive.” After another ten: “Almost. Even when other cocks crow, it no longer changes. It looks like a wooden cock; its virtue is whole. Other cocks dare not challenge it and turn away.”

19.13 Confucius watched the falls at Lüliang: the water dropped thirty ren and its foam streamed forty li, where even great turtles, crocodiles and fish could not swim. Seeing a man swimming there, he thought the man suffered some grief and wished to die. He sent his disciples along the current to rescue him. After several hundred paces the man emerged, loosened his hair and walked singing beneath the bank. Confucius followed: “I thought you were a spirit, but looking closely I see you are human. Is there a way to tread such water?” The man replied: “No, I have no way. I began with what I was accustomed to, grew with my nature and completed it with my allotment. I go down with the inward whirl and emerge with the outward current. I follow the water’s way without imposing a private course. That is how I tread it.” Confucius asked what he meant by the three stages. “I was born on the hills and at ease there: that is familiarity. I grew up in water and was at ease there: that is nature. I do not know why I do it, yet I do: that is allotment.”

19.14 The woodworker Qing carved a bell-stand. When it was finished, those who saw it marvelled as if at spirits’ work. The marquis of Lu asked what technique he used. Qing replied: “I am a craftsman. What special technique could I have? Yet there is one thing. When I am about to make a stand, I never dare waste my vital breath. I purify myself to still my heart. After three days I no longer entertain thoughts of congratulations, rewards, rank or salary. After five days I no longer entertain blame or praise, skill or clumsiness. After seven days I suddenly forget that I have limbs and a body. Then there is no ruler or court; my skill is concentrated and external distractions disappear. I enter the forest and observe the trees’ heavenly nature. When the shape is entirely suitable, I see the completed stand in it and set my hand to work. Otherwise I stop. Thus I join the heavenly with the heavenly. That is perhaps why the object seems the work of spirits.”

19.15 Dongye Ji demonstrated his driving to Duke Zhuang. Forward and backward he followed a straight line; left and right his turns followed a compass. The duke thought even woven patterns could not surpass it and ordered him to make a hundred circuits and return. Yan He encountered him and told the duke: “Ji’s horses will collapse.” The duke remained silent. Soon the team returned, having collapsed. “How did you know?” the duke asked. “The horses’ strength was exhausted, yet he kept demanding more. That is why I said they would collapse.”

19.16 The craftsman Chui drew curves surpassing compass and square. His fingers transformed with the things without his heart stopping to calculate; his spiritual terrace was unified and unshackled. Forgetting one’s feet shows that the shoes fit; forgetting one’s waist shows that the belt fits. Understanding that forgets right and wrong shows that the heart fits. Neither changing inwardly nor following external inducements shows the fitting encounter with affairs. Beginning in what fits and never failing to fit is the fit that forgets fitting.

19.17 Sun Xiu came to the door of Master Bian Qing and complained: “Living in my village, I was never called uncultivated; facing danger, I was never called cowardly. Yet my fields never met a good harvest, and my service to the ruler never met a favourable age. I am treated as a stranger in my village and driven from my district. What crime have I committed against Heaven? Why this allotment?” Bian replied: “Have you not heard how the utmost person conducts himself? He forgets his liver and gall, puts aside ears and eyes, wanders indistinctly beyond dust and dirt and roams freely in the occupation of having no affairs. This is called acting without relying on it, growing without ruling. You adorn knowledge to astonish the ignorant and cultivate yourself to expose the impure, shining as though carrying sun and moon. Your body is whole, your nine

openings complete; you have not been cut short midway by deafness, blindness or lameness and remain among human beings. That is already fortunate. What leisure have you to complain against Heaven? Go!”

19.18 Sun Xiu left and Bian went inside. After sitting a while, he looked up and sighed. His disciples asked why. “Xiu came just now, and I told him of the utmost person’s virtue. I fear he was startled and will fall into confusion.” They said: “No. If Sun was right and you wrong, wrong cannot confuse right. If he was wrong and you right, he arrived already confused. What fault is yours?” Bian replied: “No. A bird once alighted outside Lu. The ruler rejoiced, prepared a full sacrificial feast and played the Nine Shao music for it. The bird grew sorrowful and bewildered and dared not eat or drink. That is nourishing a bird with one’s own nourishment. To nourish it with a bird’s nourishment, let it perch in deep forest, float on rivers and lakes, find its natural food and remain on level ground. Xiu is a man with a narrow opening and little learning. Telling him of the utmost person’s virtue is like conveying a tiny mouse in a horse-drawn carriage or entertaining a quail with bells and drums. How could he not be frightened?”

Explanation of the chapter

Stories about artisans, swimmers, and other accomplished practitioners revisit the connection between effectiveness and attention that does not continually obstruct its own task. The woodcarver Qing, for example, prepares by letting go of his fixation on reward and praise. His work requires time, training, and an appropriate relation to materials.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

These scenes should be compared with the critique of trainers in chapter nine. The point is neither to praise every technique as virtuous nor to condemn it as artificial. The contrast raises a decisive question: when does skill cooperate with a situation, and when does it impose violence? Our commentary offers that distinction as an analytical tool without claiming every story was written to illustrate it.

Textual collation

The drunken man’s fall and assertions of immunity are devices of the ancient argument, not safety advice or clinical facts. The chapter itself balances inward and outward care through the tiger and fever story. Sun Xiu says he was not regarded as uncultivated or cowardly; these negatives belong to the received text, unlike the historical transcription used. Zhang Yi frequents powerful households; he is not necessarily the host receiving their visitors. The teacher finally recognises that a teaching may be unsuitable for its recipient. Ancient references to disability are retained as the character’s words, not editorial assessments of persons.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 達生 (Wikisource, oldid 2327626).

19.01: 達生之情者; **19.02:** 夫欲免為形者; **19.03-19.04:** 子列子問關尹; **19.05:** 仲尼適楚; **19.06:** 顏淵問仲尼; **19.07:** 田開之見周威公; **19.08:** 无入而藏; **19.09:** 祝宗人玄端; **19.10-19.11:** 桓公田於澤; **19.12:** 紀渻子為王養鬬雞; **19.13:** 孔子觀於呂梁; **19.14:** 梓慶削木為鐻; **19.15:** 東野稷以御見莊公; **19.16:** 工倕旋而蓋規矩; **19.17-19.18:** 有孫休者.

20. The Mountain Tree

Shan mu | 山木

Chapter text

20.01 Zhuangzi was walking in the mountains when he saw a great tree with luxuriant branches and leaves. A woodcutter stopped beside it but did not take it. Asked why, he said: “It is of no use.” Zhuangzi said: “Through being useless timber, this tree can complete its heavenly years.” Leaving the mountain, the master lodged with an old friend. Delighted, the friend ordered a boy to kill and cook a goose. The boy asked: “One can cackle and the other cannot. Which shall I kill?” “Kill the one that cannot.” Next day a disciple asked Zhuangzi: “Yesterday the mountain tree lived out its years through uselessness; now our host’s goose died through uselessness. Where would you place yourself?”

20.02 Zhuangzi laughed: “I would place myself between usefulness and uselessness. Yet that position only resembles the right one and is not it, so it still does not escape entanglement. Riding the Way and virtue and floating freely is different: without praise or blame, now dragon, now snake, transforming with the time and unwilling to be fixed in one occupation; now above, now below, taking harmony as one’s measure, floating with the ancestor of the myriad things. Treating things as things without being made a thing by them, how could one be entangled? Such were the models of Shennong and the Yellow Emperor. But the circumstances of things and transmitted human relations are different. Union brings separation, completion destruction; sharp edges are blunted, the honoured criticised, the active impaired, the worthy plotted against and the unworthy deceived. How could anything here be certain? Alas, disciples, remember this! Is there any dwelling but the Way and virtue?”

20.03 Yiliao of the Southern Market visited the marquis of Lu and saw his worried expression. “Why are you troubled?” The marquis replied: “I study the former kings’ way and cultivate my predecessors’ work. I revere spirits and honour the worthy, personally putting this into practice without a moment’s interruption. Yet I do not escape trouble. That is why I worry.” Yiliao said: “Your method of removing trouble is shallow. Thick-furred foxes and patterned leopards dwell in mountain forests and hide in rocky caves: they are quiet. They travel at night and stay in by day: they are cautious. Even in hunger, thirst and hardship, they keep their distance and seek food by rivers and lakes: they are steadfast. Yet they do not escape nets and traps. What crime have they committed? Their skins bring disaster. Is not the state of Lu your skin? I wish you to empty your form, shed your skin, wash your heart, put aside desire and wander in a wilderness without people.”

20.04 “South of Yue is a settlement called the Country of Established Virtue. Its people are unknowing and simple, with little self-interest and few desires. They know how to work but not how to hoard; they give without seeking repayment. They do not know where prescribed rightness leads or where ritual takes them. Wandering freely and apparently at random, they tread the great direction. Their life can be enjoyed and their death given burial. I wish you to leave your state and abandon custom, walking in mutual support with the Way.” The marquis asked: “The road is distant and dangerous, with rivers and mountains. I have neither boat nor carriage. What can I do?” “Do not be proud in your bearing or cling to your residence. Let that be your carriage.”

20.05 “The road is obscure, distant and uninhabited. Who will be my neighbour? I have no provisions or food. How shall I arrive?” Yiliao replied: “Reduce your expenditure and your desires; even without provisions you will have enough. Cross the river and float on the sea, looking without seeing a shore, travelling farther without knowing its limit. Those who escort you will turn back at the bank. From there you will be far away. Possessing people is a burden; being possessed by people is anxiety. Therefore Yao neither possessed people nor was possessed by them. I wish to remove your burden and anxiety, so that alone with the Way you may wander in the country of great emptiness.”

20.06 "A person crosses a river in joined boats. If an empty boat collides with his, even a bad-tempered man does not get angry. But if someone is aboard, he calls to him to steer aside. He calls once and is not heard, calls twice and is not heard; at the third call, abusive words follow. Formerly he was not angry, now he is: formerly the boat was empty, now it is occupied. If one can empty oneself while wandering through the world, who can harm one?"

20.07 Beigong She collected contributions for Duke Ling of Wei to make bells and built an altar outside the city gate. Within three months the upper and lower sets were hung. Prince Qingji saw them and asked: "What technique did you employ?" She replied: "Within undivided concentration, I dared employ none. I have heard: 'After carving and polishing, return to simplicity.' I was innocent as if without knowledge, open and seemingly hesitant; amid the gathering confusion, I sent off those who left and welcomed those who came. I did not bar arrivals or detain departures. I followed the forceful and accommodated the yielding, letting each reach his own limit. Thus I collected morning and evening without injuring a hair. How much more could one who possesses the great road do!"

20.08 Confucius was surrounded between Chen and Cai and for seven days ate no food cooked over fire. Grand Duke Ren came to console him: "You nearly died?" "Yes." "Do you dislike death?" "Yes." Ren said: "I have spoken of a way not to die. In the Eastern Sea lives a bird called yidai. It flutters weakly as if incapable; it flies by drawing support from others and roosts pressed against them. Advancing, it dares not lead; retreating, it dares not be last. Eating, it dares not taste first and takes what is left. Thus its ranks do not cast it out, and outsiders cannot harm it. The straight tree is felled first; the sweet well is exhausted first. You adorn knowledge to astonish the ignorant and cultivate yourself to expose the impure, shining as if you carried sun and moon. That is why you do not escape."

20.09 "I once heard a person of great accomplishment say: 'Self-praise has no merit; completed merit falls, established fame diminishes.' Who can abandon achievement and fame and return among ordinary people? The Way flows without display; virtue proceeds without lodging in a name. Pure and constant, one resembles a madman. Erase your traces, relinquish power, and do not act for achievement or fame. Then you make no demands on others and others make none on you. The utmost person is unheard of. What are you so pleased about?" Confucius said: "Excellent!" He took leave of his associates and disciples and withdrew to a great marsh. Wearing skins and coarse cloth and eating acorns and chestnuts, he entered among beasts without disturbing their herds and among birds without disturbing their ranks. Birds and beasts did not dislike him: how much less would people!

20.10 Confucius asked Zisang Hu: "I was twice driven from Lu; in Song a tree was cut down over me; in Wei my traces were erased; in Shang and Zhou I was distressed; between Chen and Cai I was surrounded. As I encounter these troubles, intimates grow more distant and friends disperse. Why?" Zisang Hu replied: "Have you not heard of the flight of the man of Jia? Lin Hui abandoned a jade disc worth a thousand pieces of gold and ran carrying an infant. Someone asked: 'For its value? The infant's value is small. For freedom from burden? The infant's burden is great. Why abandon the jade and run with the infant?' Lin Hui answered: 'With the other I am joined by profit; with this one I am bound by Heaven.'"

20.11 "Those joined by profit abandon each other under poverty, calamity and danger. Those bound by Heaven gather one another in those circumstances. How far apart are gathering and abandoning! The friendship of noble people is plain as water; that of petty people is sweet as new wine. The noble are plain and become intimate; the petty are sweet and end in separation. Those joined without a ground also separate without a ground." Confucius said: "I respectfully receive your instruction." He walked slowly home at ease, stopped his studies and put away his books. His disciples no longer bowed before him for instruction, yet their affection increased. Another day Sang Hu added: "When Shun was about to die, he earnestly admonished Yu: 'Be careful. In bodily conduct nothing is better than following circumstances; in feeling, nothing is better than sincerity. Following circumstances avoids separation; sincerity avoids toil. Without separation or toil, there is

no need to seek ornament to support the person; without seeking such ornament, one does not depend on things.'"

20.12 Zhuangzi, in patched coarse cloth with his belt adjusted and his shoes tied with cord, visited the king of Wei. The king said: "How distressed you are, Master!" Zhuangzi replied: "Poor, not distressed. When a scholar has the Way and virtue but cannot put them into practice, that is distress. Worn clothing and broken shoes are poverty, not distress. This is called not meeting one's time. Have you not seen a leaping monkey? Among great nan, catalpa and camphor trees, it grasps branches and rules at ease; even Yi and Peng Meng cannot get a clear shot. Among mulberry, thorn and prickly shrubs, it moves cautiously, glances sideways and trembles. Its sinews and bones have not suddenly become stiff. Its situation is unsuitable and does not let it exercise its ability. Living now between a benighted ruler and disorderly ministers, how could one avoid distress? Bi Gan's heart being cut out is evidence of that."

20.13 Confucius was distressed between Chen and Cai and had eaten no cooked food for seven days. His left hand rested on a withered tree; with his right he struck a dry branch and sang the song of the Biao clan. He had an instrument without its measured intervals, a sound without the notes gong and jue; yet the sound of wood and the human voice distinctly accorded with the listeners' hearts. Yan Hui stood respectfully with folded hands and looked towards him. Confucius feared that Hui's admiration would exaggerate his greatness or his affection deepen his grief. He said: "Hui, not taking injury from Heaven is easy; not accepting advantage from people is hard. There is no beginning that is not an ending. Human and Heaven are one. Who is singing now?"

20.14 Hui asked: "What does it mean that not taking injury from Heaven is easy?" Confucius replied: "Hunger, thirst, cold, heat and being trapped without progress are Heaven and Earth's course, the outflow of changing things. One passes along with them. A minister dare not refuse his ruler; if ministerial conduct requires this, how much more our way of awaiting Heaven!" "What does it mean that not accepting human advantage is hard?" "Once employed, one's influence reaches everywhere; rank and salary arrive without end. These are benefits of things, not oneself. I call them what lies outside. The noble person is no robber, the worthy no thief. If I took these as my own, what would I be? Hence it is said that no bird is wiser than the swallow. It does not give a second glance to a place unfit to stay in; even if it drops its food, it leaves it and flies away. It fears people yet shelters among them. That is how its dwelling is preserved."

20.15 "What does 'no beginning that is not an ending' mean?" "The myriad things transform, yet we do not know what succeeds them. How could we know their end or beginning? We simply set ourselves right and await them." "What does 'human and Heaven are one' mean?" "That there are humans is Heaven; that there is Heaven is also Heaven. That humans cannot possess Heaven belongs to their nature. The sage calmly embodies the passing process and reaches its end."

20.16 Zhuang Zhou wandered in the enclosure at Diaoling and saw a strange magpie coming from the south, its wings seven chi across and its eyes an inch around. It brushed his forehead and settled in a chestnut grove. "What bird is this," he said, "with broad wings that do not carry it away and large eyes that do not see?" Gathering his robe, he strode forward and held his pellet-bow ready. He saw a cicada enjoying the shade and forgetting its body. A mantis hid behind leaves and struck at it, seeing its gain and forgetting its own form. The strange magpie followed to profit from both, seeing advantage and forgetting its genuine condition. Zhuang Zhou shuddered: "Ah! Things entangle one another; one kind draws another into danger." He threw down his pellet-bow and ran back. The keeper pursued and berated him.

20.17 Returning home, Zhuang Zhou stayed out of the courtyard for three days. Lin Qie asked: "Why have you lately avoided the courtyard so much?" Zhuang Zhou said: "I guarded form and forgot myself. I looked at muddy water and lost my way in the clear pool. I have heard the master say: 'Enter a place's customs and follow its rules.' At Diaoling I forgot myself. The strange magpie brushed my forehead; in the chestnut grove it forgot what was genuine. The grove's keeper treated me as an offender. That is why I have stayed out of the courtyard."

20.18 Master Yang went to Song and stayed at an inn. The innkeeper had two concubines, one beautiful and one ugly. The ugly one was honoured, the beautiful one slighted. Yang asked why. A boy of the inn replied: “The beautiful one thinks herself beautiful, and we do not recognise her beauty; the ugly one thinks herself ugly, and we do not recognise her ugliness.” Yang said: “Disciples, remember: act worthily but put aside the conduct of thinking yourself worthy. Where could you go and not be loved?”

Explanation of the chapter

The tree that survives because its timber is useless, and the bird that may be killed because it fails to perform an expected function, form a paradox. Neither usefulness nor uselessness guarantees safety. A feature that protects in one situation may expose in another. The chapter defeats the temptation to turn "the usefulness of the useless" into an infallible rule.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

The tension has methodological force. A single story might tempt us to carry away a recipe; read together, the stories test that very recipe. Flexibility is no longer a simple inversion of conventional values but attention to differences that no label fully predicts. This is our comparative interpretation, and it remains open to criticism.

Textual collation

The opening pair prevents uselessness from becoming a universal protective formula; a fixed midpoint is not simply approved either. The visit to Wei distinguishes poverty from inability to put the Way into practice: the latter does constitute distress. His assertion of poverty and denial of distress are therefore not contradictory. After Diaoling, the Chinese text consulted says three days (三日), not three months. The ruler’s “skin” and the empty boat are argumentative images, not literal instructions for bodily harm or guarantees of absolute safety.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 山木 (Wikisource, oldid 2327627).

20.01-20.02: 莊子行於山中; **20.03-20.06:** 市南宜僚見魯侯; **20.07:** 北宮奢為衛靈公; **20.08-20.09:** 孔子圍於陳蔡之間; **20.10-20.11:** 孔子問子桑雽; **20.12:** 莊子衣大布; **20.13-20.15:** 孔子窮於陳蔡之間; **20.16-20.17:** 莊周遊於雕陵之樊; **20.18:** 陽子之宋.

21. Tian Zifang

Tian Zifang | 田子方

Chapter text

21.01 Tian Zifang sat attending Marquis Wen of Wei and repeatedly praised Xi Gong. The marquis asked: “Is Xi Gong your teacher?” Zifang replied: “No. He is a man of my neighbourhood. His accounts of the Way are often apt, so I praise him.” “Then have you no teacher?” “I have.” “Who is he?” “Dongguo Shunzi.” “Why have I never heard you praise him?” Zifang replied: “He is genuine: human in appearance, empty as Heaven. He follows circumstances while guarding what is genuine, pure yet accommodating things. When things lack the Way, he sets his bearing right and awakens them, dissolving people’s fixed intentions. How could I be adequate to praise him?”

21.02 Zifang departed. Marquis Wen remained silent and disconcerted all day. Calling the ministers who stood before him, he said: “How far away is the noble person of complete virtue! I formerly thought the words of sagely knowledge and the practice of benevolence and rightness were the utmost. Hearing of Zifang’s teacher, my body loosens and I do not wish to move; my mouth closes and I do not wish to speak. What I have learned is merely a clay figure. The state of Wei is truly a burden to me.”

21.03 Wenbo Xuezi travelled to Qi and lodged in Lu. A man of Lu requested an audience. Wenbo said: “No. I have heard that the noble people of the central states understand ritual and rightness but are deficient in knowing the human heart. I do not wish to see him.” On returning from Qi he again lodged in Lu, and the same man again requested an audience. “He wanted to see me before and now asks again. He must have something to awaken me.” Wenbo met the guest and returned sighing. The next day he met him again and again returned sighing. His servant asked why. “I told you: the people of the central states understand ritual and rightness but are deficient in knowing the heart. The man who visited moved forward and backward as if describing circles and squares, and carried himself now like a dragon, now like a tiger. He admonished me like a son and instructed me like a father. That is why I sigh.”

21.04 Confucius saw Wenbo but said nothing. Zilu asked: “You have long wished to see Wenbo Xuezi. Why say nothing when you meet?” Confucius replied: “With such a person, the eyes meet and the Way is present. There is no room for a sound.”

21.05 Yan Yuan said to Confucius: “When you walk, I walk; when you hurry, I hurry; when you gallop, I gallop. But when you race beyond the dust, I stare from far behind.” “Hui, what do you mean?” “Your walking is your speaking, which I can follow. Your hurrying is your disputation, which I can follow. Your galloping is your discourse on the Way, which I can follow. But you are trusted without speaking, embrace all without partisanship, and without instruments or office people surge before you. I do not know how this is so. That is your racing beyond the dust while I stare behind.”

21.06 Confucius replied: “Ah! Must we not examine this? No sorrow exceeds the death of the heart; bodily death comes next. The sun rises in the east and enters the western limit, and all things orient themselves by it. Those with eyes and feet await it to accomplish their work; when it rises they are present, when it sets they disappear. All things are like this: they depend on something to die and on something to live. Once I received this completed form, I could not exchange it but awaited its end. I move in response to things, day and night without a gap, not knowing where it will end. Clearly this form has come about, yet knowledge of one’s allotment cannot chart what precedes it. Thus I pass away daily.”

21.07 “I have associated with you all your life, yet you miss me while our arms are touching. Is that not sad? You cling to what I have made manifest. It has already passed, yet you seek it as something still present: that is looking for a horse in an empty marketplace. What I have presented to you is largely forgotten, and what you

have presented to me is largely forgotten. Nevertheless, why worry? Though you forget my former self, something not forgotten remains."

21.08 Confucius visited Lao Dan, who had just washed his hair and was letting it hang to dry. He stood utterly still, as if not human. Confucius waited aside and later approached: "Were my eyes dazzled, or was it truly so? Your body just now was stiff as withered wood, as if you had left things and people behind and stood alone." Lao Dan replied: "I was letting my heart wander at the beginning of things." "What does that mean?" "The heart is constrained and cannot know it; the mouth opens and cannot say it. I shall try to discuss its outline. Utmost yin is cold and solemn; utmost yang is blazing. The cold and solemn comes from Heaven, the blazing issues from Earth. Their intercourse forms harmony and things are born. Something may govern the process, yet no one sees its form. Waning and waxing, fullness and emptiness, now dark, now bright, changing by days and transforming by months: something is done daily, yet no one sees the work. Life has a source from which it sprouts; death a place to which it returns. Beginning and end reverse without a first boundary, and no one knows their limit. Apart from this, what could serve as their ancestor?"

21.09 Confucius asked: "May I ask about wandering there?" Lao Dan replied: "Attaining this is utmost beauty and utmost joy. One who attains utmost beauty and wanders in utmost joy is called the utmost person." "I wish to hear the method." "Grass-eating animals are not distressed by changing marshes; water creatures are not distressed by changing waters. They undergo small changes without losing their great constancy, and joy, anger, sorrow and pleasure do not enter their breasts. The world is where the myriad things are one. Attain their unity and share it, and the limbs and hundred parts become dust, while life and death, end and beginning become day and night and cannot disturb you. How much less can gain and loss, misfortune and fortune interfere! One casts off subordinate attachments like mud, knowing oneself more valuable than them. What is valuable is within and is not lost in transformation. With ten thousand transformations never reaching an end, what is enough to trouble the heart? Those who practise the Way understand this."

21.10 Confucius said: "Your virtue matches Heaven and Earth, yet you still borrow utmost words to cultivate the heart. Who among the ancients could dispense with this?" Lao Dan replied: "No. Water rising from a spring does nothing contrived; its capacity is naturally so. The utmost person's virtue is not cultivated, yet things cannot depart from it. Heaven is high of itself, Earth substantial of itself, sun and moon bright of themselves. What cultivation is needed?" Confucius left and told Yan Hui: "In relation to the Way, I am like a vinegar gnat. Without the master's lifting the cover, I would not have known Heaven and Earth's vast completeness."

21.11 Zhuangzi visited Duke Ai of Lu. The duke said: "Lu has many scholars of the ru tradition, but few who practise your method." Zhuangzi replied: "Lu has few ru scholars." "Everyone in Lu wears their dress. How can they be few?" "I have heard that those wearing round caps understand Heaven's seasons; those wearing angular shoes understand Earth's contours; those carrying a jade decision-ring at their belt decide affairs as they arise. A noble person possessing the way need not wear its dress; one wearing its dress need not know the way. If you think otherwise, proclaim: 'Anyone wearing this dress without possessing this way shall be put to death.'" The duke proclaimed it. After five days no one dared wear ru dress except one man who stood at the palace gate. The duke summoned him and questioned him on state affairs. Through a thousand turns and ten thousand variations, his answers were inexhaustible. Zhuangzi said: "Only one ru scholar in all Lu: can you call that many?"

21.12 Rank and salary did not enter Baili Xi's heart, so he fed cattle and they grew fat. Duke Mu of Qin forgot his low station and entrusted government to him. Life and death did not enter the heart of the ruler of Yu, so he could move others.

21.13 Lord Yuan of Song wished to have a picture painted. All the painters came, received his greeting and stood, licking their brushes and mixing ink; half were still outside. One painter arrived late, moving unhurriedly. He received the greeting but did not remain standing, and went to his lodging. The lord sent

someone to observe him: he had taken off his clothes and sat freely, naked. The lord said: “That will do. He is a genuine painter.”

21.14 King Wen was looking about at Zang and saw a man fishing whose fishing was no ordinary fishing. He did not hold his line as someone intent on a catch; he simply fished. The king wished to elevate him and entrust government to him, but feared the unease of ministers and senior relatives. He wished to leave him alone, but could not bear the people having no heavenly protector. Next morning he told his ministers: “I dreamed of a worthy man, dark in complexion and bearded, riding a piebald horse with red on some of its hooves. He called: ‘Entrust your government to the elder of Zang; perhaps the people’s troubles will be cured.’” The ministers exclaimed: “It was the former king!” Wen said: “Then let us divine.” They replied: “It is the former king’s command. Have no second thoughts. Why divine?”

21.15 The king welcomed the elder and entrusted government to him. No statutes were changed and no partisan decrees issued. After three years, Wen surveyed the state: the officers had dismantled their factional supports and dispersed their groups; officeholders claimed no personal merit; foreign grain measures did not dare enter the borders. The dissolution of factions showed that common accord was valued; the absence of claimed merit showed that duties were shared; the absence of foreign measures showed that the neighbouring lords held no divided intentions. Wen made the elder Grand Preceptor and, facing north as a pupil, asked: “Can this government extend to all under Heaven?” The elder looked obscurely at him without replying and took an unconfined leave. In the morning he had issued orders; by night he had fled. Nothing more was heard of him throughout his life. Yan Yuan asked Confucius: “Was King Wen still incomplete? Why resort to a dream?” Confucius replied: “Silence! Say no more. Wen had exhausted the matter. What is there to criticise? He merely followed the circumstances of the moment.”

21.16 Lie Yukou demonstrated archery to Bohun Wuren. He drew the bow fully, placed a cup of water on his elbow and shot. One arrow left as another was fitted, and a third was ready. Throughout he stood like a statue. Bohun Wuren said: “This is the shooting of shooting, not the shooting of not-shooting. Let us climb a high mountain, tread dangerous rocks and stand over a precipice a hundred ren deep. Could you shoot then?” They climbed. Wuren walked backward until part of his feet hung over the edge and beckoned Yukou forward. Yukou fell flat, sweat running to his heels. Wuren said: “The utmost person looks into the blue sky above, dives to the Yellow Springs below and ranges over the eight limits, without change in spirit or vital breath. Now your eyes show apprehension. You are in danger of missing the mark.”

21.17 Jian Wu asked Sunshu Ao: “Three times you became chief minister without glorying in it; three times you left without a troubled look. At first I doubted you, but now I see how freely the breath moves at your nose. How do you use your heart?” Sunshu Ao replied: “How do I surpass others? I thought its arrival could not be refused and its departure could not be stopped. Gain and loss were not myself, so I showed no anxiety. That is all. How do I surpass others? Moreover, I do not know whether the honour lies there or in me. If there, it is absent from me; if in me, it is absent from there. While hesitating and looking all around, what time have I for other people’s honouring or despising?”

21.18 Confucius heard this and said: “The genuine people of old could not be talked round by the clever, seduced by the beautiful or coerced by robbers. Fuxi and the Yellow Emperor could not make them their friends. Life and death are great, yet did not change them: how much less rank and salary! Their spirit could pass through great mountains without obstruction, enter deep springs without getting wet and occupy low and small positions without distress. They filled Heaven and Earth; the more they gave others, the more they had.”

21.19 The king of Chu sat with the ruler of Fan. After a while the king’s attendants three times announced that Fan had fallen. The ruler of Fan said: “The fall of Fan is not enough to destroy what I preserve. If Fan’s fall cannot destroy what I preserve, Chu’s survival is not enough to preserve what truly survives. Viewed in this way, Fan has never begun to fall and Chu has never begun to survive.”

Explanation of the chapter

This chapter assembles meetings and portraits of teachers whose way of being and acting seems to communicate more than their explicit statements. Instead of reducing instruction to maxims, the scenes confront learners with examples that exceed their expectations. The sage's authority is also made problematic: how can it be recognized without relying on superficial signs?

Philosophical interpretation and limits

Our reading attends to the tension between exemplarity and imitation. Copying outward gestures does not necessarily reproduce the understanding they express. Yet description and comparison cannot be entirely abandoned. The collection invites reflection on the limits of teaching by models, provided that each exemplary figure is not converted into the unequivocal spokesman of one philosophical system.

Textual collation

The dialogues should not be read as literal biographical records of Confucius or Lao Dan. The dress episode contrasts appearance and competence; its capital threat is retained as part of the story, not as a recommendation. In the elder of Zang’s government, dismantling supports and groups is rendered as dissolving factions rather than Legge’s literal reading about bandits' plantations. The final report is announced three times; the historical reading that Fan had been destroyed on three separate occasions is not imposed. The precipice test is a literary scene of attention and fear, not a safe exercise.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 田子方 (Wikisource, oldid 2327628).

21.01-21.02: 田子方侍坐於魏文侯; **21.03-21.04:** 溫伯雪子適齊; **21.05-21.07:** 顏淵問於仲尼; **21.08-21.10:** 孔子見老聃; **21.11:** 莊子見魯哀公; **21.12:** 百里奚爵祿不入於心; **21.13:** 宋元君將畫圖; **21.14-21.15:** 文王觀於臧; **21.16:** 列禦寇為伯昏无人射; **21.17-21.18:** 肩吾問於孫叔敖; **21.19:** 楚王與凡君坐.

22. Knowledge Travels North

Zhi bei you | 知北遊

Chapter text

22.01 Knowledge travelled north to the Dark Water, climbed the hill of Hidden Height, and happened upon Silent Non-action. Knowledge asked: “What should I think and consider in order to know the Way? Where should I dwell and what should I practise in order to rest in it? What should I follow and by what path should I attain it?” He asked three times, but Silent Non-action did not answer. It was not that he would not answer: he did not know how to answer.

22.02 Unable to obtain a reply, Knowledge returned south of the White Water and climbed Fox Hill, where he met Wild Bent. He put the same questions to him. Wild Bent said: “Ah! I know, and shall tell you.” But as he was about to speak, he forgot what he meant to say. Knowledge returned to the imperial palace and questioned the Yellow Emperor. The emperor said: “Only without thinking and calculating do you begin to know the Way. Only without taking up a fixed place or practice do you begin to rest in it. Only without following a prescribed route do you begin to attain it.” Knowledge asked: “You and I know this, while those two do not. Which of us is right?”

22.03 The Yellow Emperor replied: “Silent Non-action is truly right; Wild Bent comes close. You and I are nowhere near it. Those who know do not speak; those who speak do not know. Thus the sage practises teaching without words. The Way cannot be brought to us; its power cannot be reached by effort. Benevolence can be deliberately practised; righteousness can be impaired; ritual allows people to deceive one another. Thus it is said: ‘When the Way is lost, there is virtue; when virtue is lost, benevolence; when benevolence is lost, righteousness; when righteousness is lost, ritual. Ritual is the flower of the Way and the beginning of disorder.’ It is also said: ‘In pursuing the Way, diminish daily. Diminish and diminish again until you reach non-action. With non-action, nothing remains undone.’ Now that we have become particular things, how difficult it is to return to the root! Only the great person finds it easy.

22.04 “Life follows death, and death begins life. Who knows their connecting thread? Human life is a gathering of vital breath. When it gathers, there is life; when it disperses, death. If life and death follow one another, what have I to fear? Thus the myriad things are one. What people find beautiful they call wondrous and spiritual; what they dislike they call foul and rotten. Foulness becomes wonder, and wonder becomes foulness. Hence the saying: ‘Throughout the world there is one vital breath.’ Therefore the sage values the one.” Knowledge said: “Silent Non-action did not answer because he did not know how. Wild Bent meant to tell me, but forgot. You know the answer: why are you not close to it?” The emperor replied: “The first is truly right because he does not know; the second comes close because he forgets; you and I are far from it because we know.” When Wild Bent heard this, he considered the Yellow Emperor one who understood words.

22.05 Heaven and earth possess great beauty, but do not speak. The four seasons have their clear pattern, but do not debate. The myriad things have the principles by which they take shape, but do not explain them. The sage traces the beauty of heaven and earth and penetrates the principles of things. Thus the utmost person does not interfere, and the great sage does not contrive: they observe heaven and earth. The most subtle spiritual efficacy accompanies the countless transformations. Things live and die, become round or square, yet no one knows their root. Nevertheless, from ancient times the myriad things endure. The six directions are vast, yet do not escape it; an autumn hair is small, yet depends upon it for its form. Everything rises and falls, never remaining unchanged through its life. Yin, yang and the four seasons circulate in their proper order. Dim as though absent, it is present; flowing without visible form, it is efficacious. It nourishes things without their knowing. This is the fundamental root, which can be observed in heaven.

22.06 Nie Que asked Bei Yi about the Way. Bei Yi said: “Set your body straight and unify your sight: the harmony of heaven will arrive. Gather your knowledge and unify your measure: the spirit will come to dwell. Virtue will be your beauty and the Way your home. Look simply, like a newborn calf, without seeking the

reason." Before he had finished, Nie Que fell asleep. Bei Yi was delighted and went away singing: "His form is like dry bones; his heart like cold ashes. True is his understanding, and he does not uphold himself with explanations. Dim and obscure, without calculating intention: one cannot plot with him. What a person he is!"

22.07 Shun asked Cheng: "Can the Way be obtained and possessed?" Cheng replied: "Your own body is not yours to possess. How could you possess the Way?" "If my body is not mine, whose is it?" "It is a form entrusted by heaven and earth. Life is not yours: it is their entrusted harmony. Your nature and allotted course are not yours: they are their entrusted ordering. Your children and grandchildren are not yours: they are transformations entrusted by heaven and earth. Thus you walk without knowing where you are going, remain without knowing what holds you, and eat without knowing what gives the flavour. All is the vigorous movement of heaven and earth's breath. How could you obtain and possess it?"

22.08 Confucius asked Lao Dan: "Today you are at leisure. May I ask about the utmost Way?" Lao Dan said: "Fast and purify yourself. Clear your heart, wash your spirit clean, and strike away your knowing. The Way is deep and difficult to speak of; I shall give you its outline. What shines comes from darkness; what has order comes from the formless. Spirit arises from the Way, bodily form from subtle essence, and things generate one another through their forms. Thus those with nine openings are born from the womb, and those with eight from eggs. Its coming leaves no track; its going has no boundary. It has neither gate nor chamber and opens brightly in every direction. Those who meet with it have strong limbs, clear thought, sharp hearing and sight. They do not exhaust their minds, and their responses to things have no fixed pattern. Heaven cannot but be high, earth broad, sun and moon moving, and things flourishing. Is this not their Way?

22.09 "Wide learning is not necessarily knowledge, nor disputation necessarily wisdom: the sage has settled this. What addition cannot increase and subtraction cannot diminish is what the sage preserves. Deep as the sea, lofty, returning to a beginning when it reaches an end, it measures and carries things without exhaustion. The gentleman's prescribed way is outside this. All things go to it for support, yet it is not exhausted. Is this not the Way? Within the central lands there are people who are neither yin nor yang, standing between heaven and earth, human for a while and about to return to the ancestral source. Seen from the root, living things are gatherings of breath. Whether a life is long or short, how great is the difference? A moment's distinction: how could it settle the rightness of Yao and the wrongness of Jie? Fruits have their patterns, and human relations, although difficult, have their successive order. The sage encounters things without resisting, lets them pass without clinging. To respond in harmony is virtue; to respond in fitting accord is the Way. From this emperors and kings arose.

22.10 "A human life between heaven and earth is like a white colt passing a crack: suddenly it is gone. Pouring and surging, all things come forth; flowing and fading, all return. They transform and live, then transform and die. Living beings mourn; humankind grieves. Release the heavenly sheath, let fall the heavenly covering: amid confusion and turning, the souls depart, the body follows, and there is the great return. The form of the formless and the formlessness of form are matters people commonly recognise and discuss, not the business of those approaching the utmost. Those who arrive do not dispute; those who dispute have not arrived. Clear sight does not secure the object; argument is not as good as silence. The Way cannot be heard: hearing is not as good as closing the ears. This is called the great attainment."

22.11 Dongguo Zi asked Zhuangzi: "Where is this thing called the Way?" Zhuangzi answered: "There is nowhere it is not." "You must be more specific." "It is in ants." "Why so low?" "In weeds." "Why lower still?" "In tiles and bricks." "Why worse and worse?" "In excrement and urine." Dongguo Zi made no reply. Zhuangzi said: "Your questions do not reach the substance. When the inspector Huo asked the market overseer about testing a pig by pressing it, the lower he pressed, the clearer the result. Do not insist on excluding anything: no thing escapes it. The utmost Way is like this, and so is great speech. 'All around', 'everywhere' and 'entirely' are different names for the same reality: they point to one thing.

22.12 "Let us wander together in the palace of Nowhere, speaking in accord without limit or end. Let us practise non-action together: calm and still, silent and clear, harmonious and at ease. My intention is empty. I go without knowing where I shall arrive, depart and return without knowing where I shall stop; I come and go without knowing the end. I wander through boundless openness. Great knowledge enters it without finding its

limit. What makes things things has no boundary imposed by things, while things have their boundaries. It is the boundary of the unbounded, and the unboundedness of boundaries. We speak of fullness and emptiness, decline and decay. What brings fullness and emptiness is not itself full or empty; what brings decline and decay does not decline or decay; what brings roots and branches is neither root nor branch; what brings gathering and dispersal is neither gathered nor dispersed."

22.13 Ehe Gan and Shennong studied together under Lao Long Ji. Shennong was leaning on a table, his door shut, sleeping during the day. At noon Ehe Gan burst in: "Lao Long is dead!" Shennong rose with his staff, then dropped it and laughed. "Heaven knew how narrow, negligent and presumptuous I am, and so he abandoned me and died. Gone, Master! He died without opening up the folly of my wild words." Yan Gang Diao heard this and said: "The world's gentlemen attach themselves to those who embody the Way. Here was one who had not attained a ten-thousandth of the tip of an autumn hair of it, yet knew to hide his wild words and die. How much more must this be true of one who embodies the Way! Look: it has no form. Listen: it has no sound. Those who discuss it are called obscure indeed. Such discussion is about the Way, not the Way itself."

22.14 Grand Purity asked Infinity: "Do you know the Way?" "I do not." He asked Non-action, who replied: "I know it." "Does your knowing have distinguishing marks?" "It does." "What are they?" "I know that it can be noble or lowly, gathered or dispersed. These are the marks through which I know it." Grand Purity reported both answers to No-beginning. "Which is right: Infinity's not knowing or Non-action's knowing?" No-beginning replied: "Not knowing is deep; knowing is shallow. Not knowing is inward; knowing is outward." Grand Purity sighed: "Then not knowing is knowing, and knowing is not knowing! Who knows the knowing that does not know?" No-beginning said: "The Way cannot be heard: what is heard is not it. It cannot be seen: what is seen is not it. It cannot be spoken: what is spoken is not it. Do you know the formless that gives form to forms? The Way does not answer to a name."

22.15 No-beginning continued: "One who answers questions about the Way does not know it; nor has the questioner heard it. The Way admits no questioning, and such questioning admits no answer. To question what cannot be questioned is to exhaust questioning; to answer what cannot be answered is to lack inward understanding. When emptiness of understanding meets exhausted questioning, neither the outer universe nor the inner great beginning is known. Such people cannot cross Kunlun or wander in the Great Void."

22.16 Radiance asked Non-being: "Master, do you exist or do you not?" Receiving no answer, he looked closely: deep and empty. All day he looked without seeing, listened without hearing, and grasped without taking hold. Radiance said: "Utmost indeed! Who could reach this? I can conceive the absence of being, but not the absence of that absence. How could I arrive at such non-being?"

22.17 The craftsman who forged hooks for the commander was eighty, yet had not lost a hair's breadth of precision. The commander asked: "Is this skill, or have you a way?" He replied: "I have something I keep to. At twenty I loved forging hooks. I looked at nothing else, examined nothing but hooks. By leaving other things unused, I prolonged the use of this one. How much more would be possible for one who leaves nothing unused! What thing would not lend its support?"

22.18 Ran Qiu asked Confucius: "Can we know what was before heaven and earth?" "We can. The ancient is like the present." Ran Qiu withdrew without further questions. The next day he returned: "Yesterday your answer was clear to me; today it is obscure. What did it mean?" Confucius said: "Yesterday your spirit received it first. Today, in your obscurity, are you seeking it with what is not spiritual? There is no ancient or present, no beginning or end. Could there be descendants before there were descendants?" Before Ran Qiu answered, Confucius continued: "Enough: do not reply. Do not use life to bring death to life, or death to put life to death. Do life and death depend upon something? They belong to one body. Was what preceded heaven and earth a thing? What makes things things is not a thing. A thing cannot come forth before things as though there were already another thing, and another without end. The sage's inexhaustible love of people also takes its pattern from this."

22.19 Yan Yuan asked Confucius: "I have heard you say: 'Do not send off, do not go out to welcome.' How does one move through life like that?" Confucius replied: "The ancients changed outwardly without changing

inwardly. People today change inwardly without changing outwardly. What changes with things is the one that does not change. Where is change, and where non-change? How can one be worn away together with things? One must not multiply such entanglements. The enclosure of Xi Wei, the Yellow Emperor's garden, the palace of the lord of Yu, the houses of Tang and Wu. Gentlemen such as the masters of the Confucian and Mohist schools grind one another down with right and wrong; how much more do people today! The sage handles things without harming them. Not harming things, he is not harmed by them. Only one who does no harm can accompany people as they come and go.

22.20 "Mountains and forests, riverbanks and fields: how they delight me! Before joy is finished, sorrow follows. I cannot prevent sorrow and joy from coming, or keep them when they leave. How sad that people are merely inns for things! They know what they meet, not what they have not met; can do what they can, not what lies beyond their power. Ignorance and inability are inescapable human conditions. To strive to escape what cannot be escaped: is this not sad? Utmost speech leaves speech behind; utmost action leaves action behind. To level everything by what knowledge knows is shallow."

Explanation of the chapter

Knowledge's journey and the answers it encounters expose the difficulty of turning Dao into an object confined by definition. Some scenes insist on its presence precisely where conventions of prestige would prefer not to look. The provocation challenges an excessively solemn and selective conception of what matters.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

The chapter does not authorize us to collapse all differences or abandon practical distinctions. It asks why we expect the essential to appear only in prestigious, noble, or elevated forms. Interpretation should preserve the conversations' questioning character: silence and extravagant replies do not automatically amount to positive information about the universe's ultimate structure.

Textual collation

The opening speakers have allegorical names; translating them does not turn their answers into a systematic doctrine. *Qì* (氣) is rendered as vital breath, not measurable physical energy. The nine/eight-aperture distinction belongs to an ancient classification, not current biology. The craftsman forges 鉤, hooks or buckles, not the swords of Legge' s rendering. In the final dialogue the consulted Chinese transcription marks a doubtful character; the sense of conflict between schools is retained without reproducing that typographic residue. The paradoxes of being, non-being and change remain open rather than becoming cosmological demonstrations.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 知北遊 (Wikisource, oldid 2327609).

22.01-22.04: 知北遊於玄水之上; **22.05:** 天地有大美而不言; **22.06:** 齧缺問道乎被衣; **22.07:** 舜問乎丞; **22.08-22.10:** 孔子問於老聃; **22.11-22.12:** 東郭子問於莊子; **22.13:** 妸荷甘與神農; **22.14-22.15:** 泰清問乎无窮; **22.16:** 光曜問乎无有; **22.17:** 大馬之捶鉤者; **22.18:** 冉求問於仲尼; **22.19-22.20:** 顏淵問乎仲尼.

Miscellaneous Chapters · 23 to 33

23. Gengsang Chu

Gengsang Chu | 庚桑楚

Chapter text

23.01 Among Lao Dan's followers was Gengsang Chu, who had acquired a particular part of his Way and went north to live on Mount Weilei. He dismissed servants who conspicuously displayed their intelligence and kept at a distance concubines who ostentatiously displayed kindness. He lived with the awkward and employed the unpolished. After three years, Weilei prospered greatly. Its people said: "When Master Gengsang first arrived, we were startled and thought him strange. Count his benefits by the day and they seem insufficient; count them by the year and they are abundant. Surely he is close to a sage! Why not join in honouring him with sacrificial offerings, as we honour the spirits of earth and grain?"

23.02 Gengsang heard this and sat facing south, uneasy. His disciples wondered why. He said: "When spring's breath comes forth, grasses grow; when autumn arrives, treasures ripen. Does this happen without something making it so? The Way of heaven is already at work. I have heard that the utmost person sits quietly in a small enclosed room while the people range freely, not knowing where to turn towards him. Now the small folk of Weilei secretly want to place offerings before me among the worthy. Am I to become a leader of that kind? Thinking of Lao Dan's words, I cannot be at ease."

23.03 The disciples said: "Not so. A ditch one or two fathoms wide leaves a great fish no room to turn, but small fish and loaches find it sufficient. A little mound cannot conceal a great beast, but a fox finds it favourable. Honour the worthy, appoint the capable, and put goodness and benefit first: Yao and Shun did this long ago. Why should the people of Weilei not do it? Let them." Gengsang replied: "Come here, children. A beast able to hold a carriage in its mouth, once isolated from its mountain, cannot escape the net. A fish able to swallow a boat, stranded without water, can be tormented by ants. Thus birds and beasts do not tire of height, nor fish and turtles of depth. Those who preserve body and life conceal themselves as deeply and remotely as possible.

23.04 "And why praise those two rulers? Their discriminating arguments are like recklessly piercing walls and planting weeds, separating hairs before combing them, counting grains before cooking them. What use is such fussiness to the world? Exalt the worthy, and people crush one another; employ the clever, and people steal from one another. None of this enriches the people's character. They pursue profit so eagerly that sons kill fathers and ministers kill rulers, robbing in broad daylight and breaking through walls at noon. I tell you: the roots of great disorder sprang up between Yao and Shun. Its branches remain a thousand generations later, when people will still devour one another."

23.05 Nanrong Chu straightened himself anxiously. "I am already old. What practice can I undertake to reach what you describe?" Gengsang said: "Keep your body whole, embrace your life, and do not let your thoughts bustle about. Do this for three years, and you may reach it." Nanrong replied: "Eyes are alike in bodily form, yet blind people cannot see; ears are alike, yet deaf people cannot hear; minds are alike, yet the deranged cannot find themselves. Our bodily forms are similar, but perhaps something intervenes, so that what I seek in you I cannot find in myself. Your instruction reaches my ears, but my effort takes me no farther." Gengsang said: "My words are exhausted. A little wasp cannot transform a bean caterpillar; a Yue hen cannot hatch a swan's egg, while a Lu hen can. Hens do not differ in their hen-nature, but their capacities are large or small. My capacity is small, insufficient to transform you. Why not go south and see Laozi?"

23.06 Nanrong took provisions and travelled seven days and nights to Laozi. Laozi asked: “Have you come from Chu?” “Yes.” “Why have you brought such a crowd with you?” Frightened, Nanrong looked behind. Laozi said: “Do you not understand?” Nanrong lowered his head in shame, then looked up and sighed. “I have forgotten my answer and lost my question.” Asked what he meant, he said: “Without knowledge, people call me foolish; with knowledge, I distress myself. Without benevolence, I harm others; with it, I distress myself. Without righteousness, I injure others; with it, I distress myself. Where can I escape these three troubles? Chu sent me to ask you.” Laozi replied: “I understood you when I saw the space between your brows and lashes; your words confirm it. You are anxious as though bereaved of your parents and searching for them in the sea with a pole. You are lost! You want to return to your genuine nature, yet find no entrance. How pitiable!”

23.07 Nanrong asked for lodging. He summoned what he liked and expelled what he disliked, tormenting himself for ten days before returning. Laozi said: “You have washed and cleansed yourself, but how troubled you remain! Something disagreeable still wells up within. External bonds cannot be caught by multiplying entanglements: close the inner gate. Internal bonds cannot be caught by further knotting: close the outer gate. One bound both inwardly and outwardly cannot hold to the Way and its power, much less merely follow after the Way.” Nanrong said: “When a sick villager can explain his illness to neighbours, his sickness is not yet beyond remedy. Hearing the great Way is for me like taking medicine that worsens my illness. I ask only for the rule of preserving life.”

23.08 Laozi said: “Can you embrace the one and not lose it? Know good and ill fortune without divination? Stop and cease? Leave others aside and seek within yourself? Be free, be simple, be a child? A child cries all day without becoming hoarse: its harmony is complete. It clenches its hand all day without cramping: its power is gathered. It looks all day without blinking: its attention is not divided by outward things. It goes without knowing where, stays without knowing why, and bends with things upon their waves. This is the rule of preserving life.” Nanrong asked: “Is this the virtue of the utmost person?” “No: this is called melting ice and thawing frost. Can you do it? The utmost person shares the earth’s food and heaven’s joy with others, without becoming entangled in the advantages and injuries of people and things. He does not compete in strangeness, schemes or undertakings. Freely he goes, simply he comes. This is the rule of preserving life.” “Is this the utmost?” “Not yet. I asked whether you could become a child. A child moves without knowing what it does, goes without knowing where. Its body is like a dry branch, its heart like cold ashes. Misfortune does not arrive, nor does good fortune. With neither, where could human calamity enter?”

23.09 When the inner space is calmly settled, heavenly light shines forth. In that light, people see the person, and things the thing. Self-cultivation then acquires constancy. With constancy, the merely human falls away and heaven assists. Those from whom the merely human falls away are called heaven’s people; those heaven assists are called heaven’s sons. The learner learns what cannot be learned; the practitioner practises what cannot be practised; the disputant argues what cannot be argued. To stop knowing at what cannot be known is the utmost. Whoever refuses this is broken by heaven’s turning wheel.

23.10 Provide what the body needs; keep unforeseen dangers from disturbing the heart; preserve inward respect in dealing with others. If every evil nevertheless arrives, it comes from heaven, not from human action. It need not unsettle what has been accomplished or enter the spirit’s terrace. That terrace has a keeper who does not know what he keeps and cannot be made to keep by deliberate holding. Act without seeing what is genuinely your own, and each action misses the mark; preoccupations enter and will not leave, and each further change goes wrong. Do wrong openly and people can punish you; do wrong in hidden places and spirits can punish you. Understand your relation to both people and spirits, and you can walk alone.

23.11 One whose warrant is within proceeds without seeking a name; one whose warrant is outside fixes his intention on acquisition. The nameless shines in ordinary conduct; the acquisitive is merely a trader. People see him standing on tiptoe, though he thinks himself towering. Exhaust yourself over things, and they enter you. Crowd yourself with things, and you cannot contain yourself: how then contain others? Unable to contain

others, you have no intimacy and are cut off from people. No weapon is more cruel than fixed intention; even the sword Moye ranks below it. No robbers are greater than yin and yang, from which there is no escape between heaven and earth. Yet it is not yin and yang that rob you: the heart makes them do so.

23.12 The Way passes through division, completion and destruction. The trouble with division is that it claims completeness; the trouble with completeness is that it requires something to complete it. Come forth without returning, and only a ghost is seen; come forth and obtain return, and this is called obtaining death. Extinction with a remaining reality is another aspect of the ghost. We settle the formless by imagining it through the formed.

23.13 It comes forth without a root and enters without an opening. It has reality without a place, duration without beginning or end. What comes forth without an opening has reality; reality without a place is space; duration without beginning or end is time. There is life and death, emergence and return; no form is seen in this coming and going. This is called heaven's gate. Heaven's gate is non-being. The myriad things emerge from non-being. Being cannot make itself be by being: it must emerge from non-being, and non-being is itself non-being. Here the sage takes shelter.

23.14 The ancients had knowledge that reached far. How far? Some held that things had never begun to exist: this was the utmost, complete and admitting no addition. Next were those who held that things existed, regarding life as loss and death as return; they had already made a division. Next came those who said: "First there was non-being; then life; soon afterwards death. Non-being is the head, life the body, death the rump. Whoever knows that being and non-being, life and death, have one keeping, shall be our friend." These three differ like branches of a royal clan: Zhao and Jing named from distinguished ancestors, Jia from an enfeoffed estate. Related, yet not identical.

23.15 Life is a dark accretion. Distinguish it sharply and you shift your judgments of what is right. Speaking of this shifting does not fully express it; there is something not understood here. The stomach and hooves of a sacrificial animal can be separated, yet cannot be separated from the one animal. A person inspecting a house goes through its chambers and ancestral temple, and also visits its private recesses. These examples show the shifting of approval.

23.16 Let me explain that shifting in ordinary terms. People take life as their root and knowledge as their teacher, and then ride upon right and wrong. Convinced of names and realities, they make themselves the measure, demand that others take them as a standard, and repay that standard with their death. Being employed becomes wisdom; not being employed, folly; success becomes honour; failure, disgrace. Such shifting judges are the people of today: like the cicada and the little dove, they are all alike.

23.17 Tread on a stranger's foot in the market and you apologise for carelessness; tread on an elder brother's and you offer a familiar consolation; with a parent, nothing need be said. Thus it is said: utmost ritual does not single out people, utmost righteousness does not cling to things, utmost knowledge does not scheme, utmost benevolence has no partial affection, utmost trust dispenses with pledges.

23.18 Remove the agitation of intention, untie the heart's knots, discard the burdens on virtue, and clear the obstacles to the Way. Rank, wealth, distinction, authority, fame and profit: these six agitate intention. Appearance, movement, complexion, reasoning, vital breath and thought: these six entangle the heart. Hatred, desire, joy, anger, grief and delight: these six burden virtue. Rejecting, approaching, taking, giving, knowledge and ability: these six obstruct the Way. When these four sets of six do not stir the breast, there is uprightness; uprightness brings stillness; stillness, clarity; clarity, emptiness; emptiness, non-action through which nothing remains undone. The Way is what virtue reveres; life is virtue's light; nature is life's substance. The movement of nature is called action; artificial action is called loss. Knowing is contact and knowing is planning; what knowing fails to know is that it looks sideways. Action compelled by what cannot be otherwise is called virtue; action that is entirely one's own is called order. The names oppose, but their realities accord.

23.19 Yi was skilled at hitting the smallest mark but unable to keep people from praising him. The sage is skilled with heaven but awkward with people. Only the complete person can be skilled with heaven and good with people. Only an insect can be an insect; only an insect can fulfil its heaven. The complete person dislikes the imposition of a heaven fashioned by humans. How much more would he dislike imposing his own heaven upon others!

23.20 A bird crossing Yi's path might certainly be caught, yet that is one encounter. Make the whole world its cage and it has nowhere to flee. Thus Tang caged Yi Yin through the office of cook, and Duke Mu of Qin caged Baili Xi through five sheepskins. No one can be caught in a cage that does not appeal to what he likes.

23.21 A mutilated person sets ornament aside, beyond outward praise and blame. A convict climbs heights without fear, having left life and death behind. Through repeated practice without seeking repayment, one forgets people; forgetting people, one becomes a person of heaven. Only one who shares heaven's harmony remains unelated by honour and unangered by insult. Let anger come forth without inward anger, and anger emerges from non-anger. Let action come forth without contrivance, and action emerges from non-action. To be still, calm the vital breath; to be spiritually responsive, follow the heart. There is still doing here. To act fittingly, follow what cannot be otherwise. Following that necessity is the sage's Way.

Explanation of the chapter

Teachings associated with Gengsang Chu combine discipline, withdrawal, and distrust of the motives that make people seek public recognition. The chapter invites examination of how the search for approval changes actions supposedly undertaken from conviction. Its heterogeneous texture, however, makes it difficult to assign one rigorously defined doctrine to every passage.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

The contemporary point is not that all social life is bad. It is to ask whether anticipated rewards come to govern conduct more strongly than the reasons we claim to follow. Withdrawal may protect a measure of autonomy, but it may also prevent legitimate responsibilities. The ambiguity must remain visible rather than turning seclusion into a rule for everyone.

Textual collation

偏得 is read as a partial or particular acquisition, not proven superiority over every disciple. Comparisons involving disability, illness and infancy retain the narrative's historical outlook, not current clinical judgments. All four six-term lists are retained. The expression concerning Yi is read as inability to prevent praise, not the desire for endless praise attributed to him by Legge. The abstract passages on the ghost, shifting approval and the humanly fashioned "heaven" are difficult; this rendering makes one possible reading explicit, not a uniquely settled philological solution. Preserving life is not a medical guarantee of immunity.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 庚桑楚 (Wikisource, oldid 2327629).

23.01-23.04: 老聃之役有庚桑楚者; **23.05:** 南榮趎蹙然正坐; **23.06-23.08:** 南榮趎贏糧; **23.09:** 宇泰定者; **23.10:** 備物以將形; **23.11:** 券內者; **23.12:** 道通; **23.13:** 出无本; **23.14:** 古之人; **23.15:** 有生; **23.16:** 請常言移是; **23.17:** 蹍市人之足; **23.18:** 徹志之勃; **23.19:** 羿工乎中微; **23.20:** 一雀適羿; **23.21:** 介者拸畫.

24. Xu Wugui

Xu Wugui | 徐無鬼

Chapter text

24.01 Through Nü Shang, Xu Wugui obtained an audience with Marquis Wu of Wei. The marquis greeted him sympathetically: “You must be worn out, Master. The hardships of the mountains and forests have finally made you willing to visit me.” Xu Wugui replied: “I have come to console you. What need have you to console me? If you satisfy your appetites and extend your likes and dislikes, the truth of your nature and life will suffer. If you suppress those appetites and constrain those preferences, your ears and eyes will suffer. I have come to console you, not you me.” The marquis withdrew into silence.

24.02 After a while Xu Wugui said: “Let me tell you how I judge dogs. The lowest kind seizes food and stops when full: a fox’s disposition. The middle kind seems to stare at the sun. The highest seems to have forgotten itself. But I judge horses better still. Straight movement matching a line, curves matching a hook, squares matching the square, circles matching the compass: these make a horse of a state, not yet a horse of the whole world. The latter’s capacity is complete. It looks troubled, lost, as though it had forgotten itself; it races beyond the dust without knowing where it is.” The marquis was delighted and laughed.

24.03 On leaving, Nü Shang asked: “How did you persuade our ruler? I discuss the Odes, Documents, Rites and Music, or the Metal Tablets and Six Strategies. The useful services I have urged are countless, but I have never seen him smile. What made him so happy?” Xu Wugui replied: “I merely described judging dogs and horses.” “Was that all?” “Have you not heard of an exile from Yue? After a few days away he is delighted to see an acquaintance; after a month, anyone he once saw at home; after a year, anyone who resembles his countrymen. The longer the separation, the deeper the longing. Someone living in an empty valley, where weeds block the weasels’ paths, rejoices at human footsteps, much more at the voices of relatives beside him. It is a long time since our ruler heard a genuine person’s voice at his side.”

24.04 At another audience the marquis said: “You have long lived in the forests, eating acorns and chestnuts, filling yourself with onions and leeks, keeping away from me. Are you old now, or do you crave wine and meat? Or is my state fortunate?” Xu Wugui answered: “Born poor and lowly, I never presumed to seek your wine and meat. I came to console your spirit and body.” “What do you mean?” “Heaven and earth nourish all alike. Standing high does not make one longer, nor standing low shorter. You alone command ten thousand chariots, burdening a whole state’s people to feed your ears, eyes, nose and mouth. Your spirit does not consent. Spirit loves harmony and dislikes crookedness; crookedness is sickness. That is why I console you. What is this sickness you have taken upon yourself?”

24.05 The marquis said: “I have long wished to see you. I want to love the people and end warfare through righteousness. Can I?” “No. Making a project of loving the people begins their injury; ending war through righteousness plants war’s root. Such a project is unlikely to succeed. A contrivance to perfect beauty becomes an evil instrument. Though you practise benevolence and righteousness, will it not approach pretence? Forms produce further forms; achievement brings boasting; the resulting change produces outward conflict. Do not display ranks of armed men in your towers, or station fine horses around your palace altars. Do not conceal opposition within apparent attainment, or defeat people by cleverness, schemes or war. Kill another state’s people and annex its land to nourish your private desires and spirit: even if you cannot tell whose fighting is better, where is the goodness of victory? Abandon this. Cultivate sincerity within, respond to the truth of heaven and earth, and do not interfere. The people will already have escaped death: what use then is your programme of ending war?”

24.06 The Yellow Emperor was travelling to see Da Wei on Mount Juci. Fang Ming drove; Chang Yu rode beside him; Zhang Ruo and Xi Peng went before the horses; Kun Hun and Gu Ji followed. In the fields of Xiangcheng all seven sages lost their way and found no one to ask. They met a boy tending horses. He knew both Mount Juci and Da Wei's dwelling. The emperor exclaimed: "Remarkable child! Let me ask you how to govern the world." The boy replied: "It is only like this. What business need I add? When young, I wandered within the six directions and suffered dimness of sight. An elder told me to ride the sun's carriage and wander in Xiangcheng. Now I am somewhat better and shall wander beyond the six directions. Governing the world is only like this. Why add business?" The emperor persisted: "It is not your business, but please tell me." The boy declined, then answered when asked again: "How is governing the world different from tending horses? Remove what harms the horses, that is all." The emperor bowed twice, touching his head to the ground, called him Heavenly Teacher, and withdrew.

24.07 The clever are unhappy without changes to ponder; disputants without speeches to arrange; critical examiners without something to denounce. All are enclosed by things. Those seeking worldly attention rise at court; those pleasing the people glory in office; the strong boast of difficult feats; the brave exert themselves in danger; soldiers delight in war; ascetics settle into reputation; legal experts extend administration; ritual teachers attend to appearances; advocates of benevolence and righteousness prize social encounters. Farmers feel out of place without fields to weed, merchants without markets. Ordinary people are encouraged by their morning and evening work; artisans feel strong with their skilled tools. The greedy worry when wealth does not accumulate; the ambitious grieve when power does not grow. Followers of circumstances and things enjoy change, seize their moment of usefulness and cannot refrain from acting. They follow the passing years without transforming with change. Driving their bodies and natures, they sink into things and never return throughout their lives. How sad!

24.08 Zhuangzi said to Huizi: "Suppose hitting without a previously fixed target counts as good archery: could everyone be Yi?" "Yes." "Suppose there is no publicly shared rightness, and each approves what he approves: could everyone be Yao?" "Yes." Zhuangzi said: "Then the Confucians, Mohists, followers of Yang and of Bing make four, and you make five. Which is really right? Are you like Lu Ju? His disciple said: 'I have attained your Way: I can heat a cauldron in winter and produce ice in summer.' Lu Ju replied: 'That is merely calling yang with yang and yin with yin, not my Way. I shall show you.' He tuned two zithers, putting one in the hall and one in an inner room. Strike gong here, and gong there responds; strike jiao, and jiao responds: the pitches match. But alter one string so that it corresponds to none of the five notes, and when it is struck all twenty-five strings respond. It has not ceased to be sound, yet it rules the sounds. Is yours like this?"

24.09 Huizi replied: "Those four schools dispute with me, opposing my words and overwhelming me with their voices, yet have never shown me wrong. What of that?" Zhuangzi said: "A man of Qi abandoned his son in Song as a gatekeeper, with no concern for keeping his body whole. Yet he tied up his vessels and bells securely. To find the lost son he would not leave his own territory: he had forgotten what belonged together. A man of Chu, lodging abroad as a mutilated gatekeeper, quarrelled with his boatman at midnight when no one else was there. Before leaving the shore, he had already produced resentment."

24.10 Accompanying a funeral, Zhuangzi passed Huizi's grave and told his followers: "A man of Ying had a speck of plaster on his nose, thin as a fly's wing. He asked Carpenter Shi to cut it away. Shi swung his axe with a rush of wind and removed every trace without harming the nose. The man stood without changing expression. Lord Yuan of Song heard and asked Shi to do it for him. Shi said: 'I could once do that, but my counterpart has long been dead.' Since the Master's death, I too have had no counterpart, no one with whom to speak."

24.11 Guan Zhong was ill. Duke Huan asked: "Father Zhong, your sickness is severe. Should it prove final, to whom should I entrust the state?" "Whom do you wish?" "Bao Shuya." "No. He is pure, honest and good, but will not associate with those unlike himself. Once he hears a fault, he never forgets it. In government he would

constrain you above and oppose the people below. Before long he would offend you." "Who, then?" "If I must name someone, Xi Peng. He forgets his high station and accommodates those below. Ashamed not to equal the Yellow Emperor, he pities those who do not equal himself. Sharing virtue is called sageliness; sharing wealth, worthiness. Use worthiness to stand over others, and you never win them; place it beneath others, and you do. In state affairs he leaves some things unheard; at home, some things unseen. If you insist, choose Xi Peng."

24.12 The king of Wu sailed on the river and climbed Monkey Mountain. The monkeys fled into the thickets, except one that swung and snatched about, displaying its skill. The king shot at it; it deftly caught the arrow. He ordered his attendants to shoot together, and the monkey was killed. The king told his friend Yan Buyi: "It boasted of its skill and trusted its agility to defy me. That brought its death. Take warning: do not use your manner to look down on people." Yan Buyi returned and studied under Dong Wu to alter his bearing. He renounced pleasure and distinction, and after three years the people praised him.

24.13 Nanbo Ziqi sat leaning on his table, looked at heaven and sighed. Yancheng Zi asked: "Master, you surpass others. Can the body really become like dry bones and the heart like cold ashes?" Ziqi replied: "I once lived in a mountain cave. Tian He visited me, and the people of Qi congratulated him three times. I must have displayed something first, or how could he know it? I must have offered myself for sale, or how could he buy? Had I possessed nothing to display, he could not have known; had I not sold myself, he could not have bought. I grieve for those who lose themselves; then for those who grieve over them; then for those who grieve over that grief. Each step carries us farther away."

24.14 Confucius went to Chu, and the king offered him wine. Sun Shu'ao stood holding the cup; Yiliao of Shinan received wine and poured a libation. "The people of old would have spoken here," he said. Confucius replied: "I have heard of speech without words but never spoken it. Here I shall. Yiliao juggled his balls and resolved the conflict between two houses. Sun Shu'ao slept peacefully holding his feather, and the people of Ying laid down their weapons. I wish I had a beak three feet long!" These are called the Way not laid out as a way and argument without words. Virtue gathers in the Way's unity, and speech rests where knowledge does not know: this is the utmost. What the Way unifies, separate virtues cannot make identical; what knowledge cannot know, argument cannot display. Adopt names like Confucian and Mohist, and harm follows.

24.15 The sea refuses none of the eastward streams: this is greatness at its utmost. The sage embraces heaven and earth and benefits the world, while no one knows whose doing it is. In life no rank, in death no honorary title; no accumulation of possessions, no established name: this is the great person. A dog is not good because it barks well, nor a person worthy because he speaks well. How much less does good speaking make greatness! Deliberately becoming great does not make greatness, much less virtue. Nothing is more completely great than heaven and earth, yet what do they seek? One who understands completeness seeks nothing, loses nothing, abandons nothing, and does not exchange himself for things. Returning within without exhaustion, following the ancient without wearing it away: this is the great person's sincerity.

24.16 Ziqi had eight sons. He lined them up and asked Jiufang Yin to judge their appearance: which would be fortunate? "Kun." Ziqi was startled and pleased. "How?" "He will eat at a ruler's table all his life." Ziqi burst into tears: "What has my son done to reach such an extremity?" Yin said: "Eating with a ruler benefits three branches of kin, much more his parents. You weep at good fortune! The son is fortunate; the father is not." Ziqi replied: "How could you know? Your fortune ends in wine and meat, in nose and mouth; you do not know where it comes from. I never kept sheep, yet a ewe gave birth in my inner room; never loved hunting, yet a quail nested in my chamber. Would that not be strange? I wander with my sons through heaven and earth, finding joy in heaven and food in earth. We do not undertake schemes, business or marvels; we ride their sincerity without entanglement in things, following together without calculating advantage. Now comes worldly recompense! Strange signs imply strange conduct. Danger threatens, not through our fault, but perhaps from heaven. That is why I weep." Soon Kun travelled to Yan. Robbers seized him, judged him easier to sell

mutilated than whole, cut off his foot and sold him in Qi. He became a gate attendant to Lord Qu and ate meat for the rest of his life.

24.17 Nie Que met Xu You. “Where are you going?” “Away from Yao.” “Why?” “He is so anxiously benevolent that I fear the world will laugh at him, and later people will devour one another. People are easily gathered: love them and they become close, benefit them and they come, praise them and they strive, give them what they dislike and they scatter. When love and benefit issue from benevolence and righteousness, few discard those labels and many profit from them. Their practice becomes insincere, a borrowed instrument for catching the greedy. One person’s decrees to benefit the world cut through it in a single stroke. Yao knows how worthy people benefit the world, not how they rob it. Only those outside the category of the worthy know.”

24.18 There are the self-satisfied, the complacently dependent, and those bent under entanglement. The self-satisfied learn one teacher’s words, warmly delight in them, privately congratulate themselves and think them sufficient. They do not know the condition in which things have not yet begun: that is their self-satisfaction. The complacently dependent are lice on a pig. They choose sparse bristles as spacious palaces and parks, folds, joints, nipples and thighs as safe homes. They do not know that one morning the butcher will spread straw, kindle fire and burn them with the pig. They advance and retreat within that limited domain: hence their complacent dependence.

24.19 Shun exemplifies the entangled. Mutton does not desire ants; ants desire mutton because of its smell. Shun’s conduct had such a smell, and people delighted in it. Three times he moved, and each place became a city. At Deng’s settlement, a hundred thousand households gathered. Yao heard of his worth and appointed him to an uncultivated territory, hoping to benefit from his arrival. Shun grew old, his hearing and sight declined, yet he could not rest or return home: that is entanglement. Thus the spiritual person dislikes crowds gathering. Crowds bring discord, and discord brings no benefit. He draws no one excessively close and keeps no one excessively distant, embracing virtue and warming harmony in accord with the world. This is the genuine person. From the ant he learns to discard cleverness, from the fish to find a plan, from the sheep to discard intention.

24.20 Use the eye to see the eye, the ear to hear the ear, the heart to return to the heart. Then your levelness matches the line and your changes follow circumstances. The genuine people of old met people through heaven, not bringing the human into heaven. For them, gaining could mean life and losing death; gaining could also mean death and losing life. Medicines illustrate this: jin, jiegeng, jiyong and zhuling each becomes sovereign at its proper time. How could all cases be enumerated?

24.21 Goujian held Kuaiji with three thousand armoured, shield-bearing men. Zhong knew how a lost state could survive, but not how his own person would come to grief. Thus it is said: the owl’s eye has its fitness, the crane’s leg its proper measure; to cut it apart causes suffering. Wind passing over a river diminishes it; sunlight does likewise. Yet let wind and sun keep watch together, and the river does not regard itself as disturbed: it relies on its source and flows on. Water keeps to the ground reliably, the shadow to the person, and things to things.

24.22 Thus sharp sight endangers the eyes, sharp hearing the ears, and obsessive pursuit the heart. Every capacity can endanger the storehouse in which it resides. Once danger is established, there may be no time to change. Calamities grow and accumulate; reversing them requires work, and results take time. Yet people regard such powers as their treasure. Is this not sad? States perish and people are slaughtered without end, while no one knows to question this.

24.23 The feet tread only a little ground, but depend on the untrodden ground to travel far. Human knowledge is small, but depends on what it does not know to understand what heaven means. To know great unity, great obscurity, great vision, great evenness, great scope, great trust and great stability is the utmost. Great unity

connects; great obscurity releases; great vision sees; great evenness follows; great scope embodies; great trust examines; great stability holds. In completeness there is heaven; in following, illumination; in darkness, a pivot; in beginning, that other source. Understanding then resembles not understanding, knowing resembles not knowing: only after not knowing does one know. Inquiry cannot have a fixed boundary, yet cannot be without bounds. Shifting and elusive, this reality has not been replaced from antiquity to now and cannot be diminished. Is it not a great field for inquiry? Why not ask about this instead of remaining confused? Use what is unconfused to untie confusion and return to freedom from it: this is the great freedom from confusion.

Explanation of the chapter

Encounters involving Xu Wugui and other figures explore forms of discernment that exceed conventional recognition. The well-known image of a craftsman displaying extraordinary precision before a partner capable of remaining still suggests that an ability develops within a relationship: when the right interlocutor disappears, the ability's meaning changes as well.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

It would be unwise to turn every anecdote of this composite chapter into a general proposition about friendship or politics. One fruitful question is what makes excellence recognizable when ordinary indicators fail. Interpretation becomes stronger when it admits that a scene's value often lies in its specificity, not in its conformity to a universal code.

Textual collation

Shi removes plaster from a living person’ s nose. The statue in Legge’ s version does not occur in the Chinese text. 投兵 means laying down weapons, not enrolling for war. The Qi gatekeeper and boatman anecdotes are difficult passages; no missing argument is invented to connect them. Kun’ s story contrasts promised prosperity with its bodily cost, rather than validating physiognomic divination. Ancient medicinal names remain transliterated because identifications vary; they are not treatment recommendations. The zithers' resonance functions as an argumentative image, not a replicated acoustic experiment.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 徐無鬼 (Wikisource, oldid 2327637).

24.01-24.03: 徐無鬼因女商; **24.04-24.05:** 徐無鬼見武侯; **24.06:** 黃帝將見大隗; **24.07:** 知士無思慮之變; **24.08-24.09:** 射者非前期而中; **24.10:** 莊子送葬; **24.11:** 管仲有病; **24.12:** 吳王浮於江; **24.13:** 南伯子綦隱几而坐; **24.14-24.15:** 仲尼之楚; **24.16:** 子綦有八子; **24.17:** 齧缺遇許由; **24.18-24.19:** 有暖姝者; **24.20:** 以目視目; **24.21:** 句踐也; **24.22:** 故目之於明也殆; **24.23:** 故足之於地也踐.

25. Ze Yang

Ze yang | 則陽

Chapter text

25.01 Ze Yang travelled to Chu. Yi Jie recommended him to the king, but returned home before an audience was granted. Peng Yang then asked Wang Guo: “Why do you not speak of me to the king?” Wang Guo replied: “I am not as suitable as Gongyue Xiu.” “Who is he?” “In winter he spears turtles in the river; in summer he rests in the mountains’ shade. When passers-by ask, he says: ‘This is my home.’ If Yi Jie failed, how could I succeed? I am not his equal. Yi Jie has knowledge but no virtue; unable to rely on himself, he treats his connections as marvellous, stumbling blindly among wealth and rank. Such mutual assistance does not strengthen virtue: it diminishes it. The cold person borrows clothes in spring; the overheated recalls winter’s cool winds. The king of Chu is imposing and stern, unforgiving as a tiger towards offenders. Who but an eloquent persuader or a person of upright virtue could bend him?

25.02 “The sage in poverty makes his household forget its poverty; in success, he makes kings and dukes forget rank and salary and become humble. He shares the pleasures of things, rejoices in communication with people and preserves himself. Sometimes without speaking he gives others harmony to drink; standing beside them, he transforms them. A fitting relation like that of father and son arises, although he returns home and acts upon them only at intervals. So far does he reach into people’s hearts. That is why I say: wait for Gongyue Xiu.”

25.03 The sage comprehends intertwined relations, encompassing the whole as one body without knowing why: this is his nature. Returning to his allotted course, moving and acting, he takes heaven as teacher, and people name him accordingly. If he worried over knowledge, his conduct would seldom last long; how could it ever come to rest? A person born beautiful is given a mirror by others; without being told, the person does not know that others find the beauty attractive. Whether knowing or not, hearing or not, the charm remains, and others’ delight remains: this is nature. People give the name of love to the sage’s regard for them; without being told, he does not know he loves them. Whether knowing or not, hearing or not, his love is unending and their ease with him unending: this is nature.

25.04 Seeing one’s old country and city from afar brings joy. Even if hills, trees and grasses have covered nine-tenths of it, entering still brings joy. How much more to see again what one saw and hear what one heard! It is like setting a tower ten fathoms high among the people. Ran Xiang attained the centre of the ring and followed things to completion, with neither beginning nor end, no dividing moment or fixed time. What transforms daily with things is the one that does not transform. Why ever abandon it? Take heaven as teacher yet fail to learn from heaven, and you perish along with things: what can such activity accomplish? The sage has never established heaven, humans, beginnings or things as separate fixities. He moves with the world without falling away, acting fully without exhaustion. How does he accord with it? Tang obtained Menyin Dengheng to hold the reins and serve as his teacher. He followed a teacher without being enclosed by him, attaining completion by following. The teacher presided over the name; the name exceeded the model, and both sides became visible. Confucius’ exhaustive reflection served as a teacher in this way. Rongcheng said: “Remove the days and there is no year; without an inside, there is no outside.”

25.05 Ying of Wei made a treaty with Marquis Tian Mou, who broke it. Ying grew angry and planned an assassination. Xishou, Gongsun Yan, heard and was ashamed: “You rule ten thousand chariots, yet would avenge yourself through an ordinary man! Give me two hundred thousand armoured troops. I shall attack, capture his people, tether his cattle and horses, and make his ruler burn with fever to his back. Then I shall seize the state; when he flees, I shall lash his back and break his spine.” Ji Zi heard and objected: “Build a wall ten fathoms high, then destroy it: that is the suffering of convict labourers. For seven years the army has not

marched; this is the foundation of kingship. Yan brings disorder. Do not listen." Hua Zi objected to both: "One who skilfully urges attacking Qi brings disorder; one who skilfully urges not attacking also brings disorder; one who declares both disorderly brings disorder as well." The king asked: "Then what should I do?" "Seek the Way, that is all."

25.06 Huizi heard and introduced Dai Jinren. Dai asked the king: "Do you know the snail?" "Yes." "On its left horn is the state of Chu; on its right, Man. They fight over territory, leaving tens of thousands dead. They pursue the defeated for fifteen days before returning." "Bah! Empty words!" "Let me make them real. Is there a limit to space in the four directions, above and below?" "No." "Let your mind wander in the unlimited, then return to the inhabited lands: do they not seem now present, now absent?" "Yes." "Among those lands is Wei; within Wei, Liang; within Liang, you. Is there a difference between you and the ruler of Man?" "None." Dai departed, leaving the king bewildered, as though something had vanished. When Huizi returned, the king said: "A great person! A sage does not match him." Huizi replied: "Blow into a flute and there is a full sound; into a sword's pommel, only a little puff. People praise Yao and Shun, but speak of them before Dai Jinren and it is only that puff."

25.07 Confucius travelled to Chu and lodged with a drink seller at Ant Hill. Nearby, husband, wife, male and female servants had climbed to the roof. Zilu asked what the crowd was doing. Confucius said: "The man serves the sages. He buries himself among the people, conceals himself at the margins. His reputation fades, but his intention is boundless. His mouth speaks, yet his heart has never spoken. He parts company with the age and disdains to take his heart along with it. He is submerged on dry land. Could he be Yiliao of Shinan?" Zilu asked to summon him. Confucius said: "Stop. He knows that I recognise him and that I am going to Chu. He thinks I shall have the king invite him; he will take me for a flatterer. Such a person is ashamed even to hear a flatterer's words, much more to meet him. Why should he remain?" Zilu went to look: the house was empty.

25.08 The border warden of Changwu told Zi Lao: "In government do not be careless; in managing people do not tear things apart. I once cultivated grain carelessly, and the harvest repaid me in kind; I weeded destructively, and the yield was likewise damaged. The following year I changed: ploughed deeply and covered the seed carefully. My grain grew thick and abundant, and I ate my fill all year." Hearing this, Zhuangzi said: "People now treat their bodies and order their hearts much as the warden describes. They evade their heaven, leave their nature, extinguish their genuine feelings and lose their spirit, following the crowd's activity. Carelessness towards nature makes desire and aversion sprout like weeds. Reeds and rushes first appear to support the body, then uproot its nature. Everything breaks and leaks without choosing an outlet: running sores, scabs, swellings, inward fever and greasy urine."

25.09 Bo Ju studied under Lao Dan and asked leave to wander the world. Lao Dan said: "Enough: the world is the same everywhere." Bo Ju asked again. "Where will you begin?" "Qi." Arriving there, he saw an executed man, lifted and straightened the body, removed his court robe to cover it, and cried to heaven: "My child! The world suffers a great calamity, and you have met it first. They say: 'Do not steal! Do not kill!' Yet establish honour and disgrace and you create what people suffer over; accumulate wealth and you create what they fight over. Establish their afflictions, gather their objects of contention, exhaust their bodies without rest: can you then expect them not to arrive at this?

25.10 "The ancient rulers placed success with the people and failure with themselves, rightness with the people and wrongness with themselves. If one person lost bodily wholeness, they withdrew and blamed themselves. Today it is otherwise. They conceal requirements and call people foolish for not knowing; demand difficult things and condemn those who dare not; impose heavy burdens and punish those who cannot bear them; lengthen the road and execute those who cannot arrive. When strength and knowledge fail, people continue through pretence. With more pretence every day, where could officials and commoners find a way

not to pretend? Insufficient strength produces pretence; insufficient knowledge, deception; insufficient resources, theft. Whom, then, should we blame for stealing?"

25.11 By sixty, Qu Boyu had changed sixty times. He always began by approving a view and ended by rejecting it as wrong. He did not know whether what he now called right was another of the fifty-nine errors. Things live, yet no one sees their root; they emerge, yet no one sees their gate. People honour what their knowledge knows, but do not know that knowledge depends upon what it does not know. Is this not a great perplexity? Enough, enough! There is no escape. What is called so: is it really so?

25.12 Confucius asked the historians Da Tao, Bo Changqian and Xi Wei: "Duke Ling of Wei drank and indulged in pleasure, ignoring government. He hunted with nets and arrows, ignoring dealings with other rulers. Why was he called Ling?" Da Tao answered: "Because of precisely that." Bo Changqian said: "He bathed in one tub with three women. Yet when Shi Qiu brought a court offering, he received and helped him with reverence. So extreme in indulgence, yet so respectful towards a worthy person: that is why he was Ling." Xi Wei said: "When he died, divination rejected the old burial ground but approved Sand Hill. Digging several fathoms, they found a stone coffin. Washed and examined, it bore the inscription: 'Do not trust your descendants; Duke Ling will seize this and dwell here.' His being Ling was settled long ago. How could those two know?"

25.13 Little Knowledge asked Great Impartial Harmony: "What is meant by the saying about hamlets and villages?" He replied: "Hamlets combine ten surnames and a hundred names into customs. They unite differences into sameness and disperse sameness into differences. Point to a horse's hundred parts and you do not have the horse; with the horse tied before you, those parts together are called a horse. Hills accumulate low ground into height; rivers join waters into greatness; the great person combines things into impartiality. What enters from outside has a centre, but is not held rigidly; what issues from within has correctness, but excludes nothing. The seasons have different breaths: heaven favours none, and the year is complete. Five offices have different duties: the ruler favours none, and the state is ordered. Civil and military capacities are not favoured one over the other, and virtue is complete. Things have different principles: the Way favours none and therefore has no name. Nameless, it does not contrive; not contriving, it leaves nothing undone. Times end and begin; ages transform. Misfortune and fortune mingle. What clashes here fits there; what one standpoint corrects another finds mistaken. Like a great marsh accommodating many kinds of growth, or a great mountain holding trees and stones on one terrace: this is the saying about hamlets."

25.14 Little Knowledge asked: "Is calling it the Way enough?" "No. Things number more than ten thousand; we call them 'the ten thousand things' simply by using a large number. Heaven and earth are greatest among forms; yin and yang greatest among breaths; the Way is common to them. We may borrow greatness to name and describe it, but once we have made it a determinate thing, how could it be compared adequately? Such a distinction is like classifying dogs and horses: it falls far short."

25.15 Little Knowledge asked: "Within the four directions and six bounds, where does the birth of things begin?" Great Impartial Harmony replied: "Yin and yang illuminate, cover and regulate one another. The seasons alternate, generate and destroy one another. Desires and aversions, departures and approaches arise; male and female divide and unite. Safety and danger exchange places; fortune and misfortune generate one another; slowness and urgency press upon one another; gathering and dispersal complete things. These names and realities can be recorded, their subtleties noted. Ordered succession and reciprocal movements guide one another. Exhaustion brings return; an ending brings a beginning. This belongs to things: it is where speech ends and knowledge reaches, the utmost of things. One who sees the Way does not pursue their disappearance or trace their first arising. There discussion stops."

25.16 Little Knowledge asked: "Ji Zhen says 'No one does it'; Jie Zi says 'Something makes it happen'. Which is true to the situation, which complete in principle?" Great Impartial Harmony replied: "Cocks crow and dogs bark: people know this. Even great knowledge cannot explain in words whence their transformations

arise or conceive what they will become. Analyse it until it is too minute for comparison or too vast to encompass: ‘Something makes it happen’ and ‘No one does it’ remain caught among things and finally go wrong. ‘Something makes it happen’ posits reality; ‘No one does it’ posits emptiness. Name and reality are where things dwell; neither name nor reality belongs to their vacancy. We can speak and think of it, yet the more we speak the farther away we go. What has not been born cannot be forestalled; what is dead cannot be pursued. Life and death are not far apart, but their principle is unseen. ‘Something makes it happen’ and ‘No one does it’ are hypotheses borrowed by doubt.

25.17 “Looking for the root, I find an endless recession; seeking the end, an unceasing advance. Endless and unceasing: call it non-being and you still reason by analogy with things. Posit a maker or no maker as its root and you give it the beginning and end of things. The Way cannot be possessed as a determinate being; what is there cannot simply be made absent. ‘Way’ is a borrowed name through which we proceed. A maker or no maker occupies one corner of things: what can either do with the great expanse? Were words sufficient, one could speak all day and exhaust the Way. Since they are insufficient, one can speak all day and exhaust only things. At the limit of Way and things, neither speech nor silence carries it. Beyond speech and silence, discussion has its utmost reach.”

Explanation of the chapter

This collection of dialogues and stories repeatedly explores the limits of explanation and the difficulty of separating an event from its conditions. Questions about why something happens lead toward broader contexts, while apparently firm distinctions change their meaning when the scale of observation changes.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

Philosophical reading should not invent continuity where the materials are juxtaposed. Recurring concerns may be identified without presenting the chapter as a chain of demonstrations. Our contribution is to make the emerging questions explicit while distinguishing responses found within the stories from inferences supplied later by the reader.

Textual collation

Ze Yang and Peng Yang designate the same interlocutor in the received text. The Tang and Menyin Dengheng passage is difficult to segment; the rendering retains its relations between teacher, name and model without claiming an unambiguous reading. Qu Boyu changes sixty times, not merely once at sixty. The war on the snail’s horns is a narrative miniature, not zoological evidence. The final positions are “No one does it” and “Something makes it happen”, not merely forbidding or permitting action. Both explanations are limited without proving either atheism or a personal creator.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 則陽 (Wikisource, oldid 2327630).

25.01-25.02: 則陽游於楚; **25.03:** 聖人達綢繆; **25.04:** 舊國舊都; **25.05:** 魏瑩與田侯牟約; **25.06:** 惠子聞之而見戴晉人; **25.07:** 孔子之楚; **25.08:** 長梧封人問子牢; **25.09-25.10:** 柏矩學於老聃; **25.11:** 蘧伯玉行年六十; **25.12:** 仲尼問於大史; **25.13-25.17:** 少知問於大公調.

26. External Things

Wai wu | 外物

Chapter text

26.01 External things cannot be counted upon. Thus Long Feng was executed, Bi Gan killed, Jizi driven to madness, E Lai died, and Jie and Zhou perished. Rulers want loyal ministers, but loyalty does not guarantee trust: Wu Yuan's body floated down the river, and Chang Hong died in Shu; his blood, kept for three years, became green jade. Parents want filial children, but filial conduct does not guarantee love: Xiao Ji was troubled and Zeng Shen grieved. Wood rubbed against wood ignites; metal held against fire melts. When yin and yang move awry, heaven and earth are greatly disturbed: thunder crashes, fire appears amid water and burns the great locust tree. A person caught between two dangers, distressed and unable to escape, trembles without achieving anything, the heart suspended between heaven and earth. Comfort and struggle sink into trouble. Benefit and harm rub together, producing abundant fire. Ordinary people burn away their harmony; moonlight cannot overcome the fire, and collapse follows, exhausting the Way.

26.02 Zhuang Zhou's family was poor, so he went to borrow grain from the superintendent of the river. The man said: "Certainly. When the town's revenue arrives, I shall lend you three hundred pieces of money. Will that do?" Zhuang Zhou flushed with anger. "Yesterday, on my way here, someone called from the road. I looked into a wheel rut and saw a little fish. 'What are you doing here?' I asked. It replied: 'I am a minister of the Eastern Sea's waves. Have you a dipper or a measure of water to keep me alive?' I said: 'Certainly. I shall travel south to the kings of Wu and Yue and divert the Western River to meet you. Will that do?' The fish grew angry: 'I have lost my usual element and have nowhere to stay. A little water would keep me alive. Rather than say that, look for me soon in the dried-fish shop!'"

26.03 The prince of Ren made a great hook and a huge black line, baited it with fifty oxen, settled on Mount Kuaiji and cast into the Eastern Sea. He fished every morning for a year without catching anything. Finally a great fish swallowed the bait, dragged the hook down, then surged up, beating its fins. White waves rose like mountains; the sea shook; a sound like spirits terrified the country for a thousand li. The prince caught the fish, cut it up and dried it. East of the Zhi River and north of Cangwu, everyone ate their fill. Later, people of small talent who traded in stories repeated it in amazement. But raise a thin rod and line, hurry to ditches and watch for minnows, and you will hardly catch a great fish. Dress up little tales to seek a magistrate's favour, and you are far from great understanding. Someone who has never heard the manner of the prince of Ren is far from fit to manage the world.

26.04 Confucian scholars were opening a tomb with the Odes and Rites. The senior scholar called down: "Dawn rises in the east. How goes the work?" The juniors replied: "The jacket and skirt are not yet undone, but there is a pearl in the mouth. The Ode says: 'Green, green the wheat growing on the mound's slope. While alive he gave nothing: why hold a pearl when dead?'" They grasped the hair at his temples, pressed down his beard and used an iron hammer to pry the chin, slowly parting the jaws without damaging the pearl.

26.05 A disciple of Lao Laizi met Confucius while gathering firewood. He returned and reported: "There is a man with a long upper body, short lower body, stooped back and ears set far behind. He looks as though he were administering all within the seas. I do not know who he is." Lao Laizi said: "That is Qiu. Bring him." When Confucius arrived, Lao Laizi said: "Qiu, discard your bodily pride and display of knowledge, and you will be a gentleman." Confucius bowed and stepped back, then changed expression and asked: "May I advance in my undertaking?" Lao Laizi replied: "Unable to bear one age's suffering, you disregard the troubles of ten thousand ages. Is this deliberate narrowness or failure to grasp the whole? Proudly making others rejoice in your beneficence is a lifelong disgrace, the conduct of an ordinary man. You draw one another by reputation and bind one another by concealed interests. Rather than praise Yao and condemn Jie, forget both and close

the source of your praises. Reflection brings injury; movement brings deviation. The sage hesitates before undertaking things and thus often succeeds. Why do you remain burdened with pride to the end?"

26.06 At midnight Lord Yuan of Song dreamed of a dishevelled man peering through a side gate. "I come from the depths of Zailu. The Clear River sent me to the River Earl, but the fisherman Yu Qie caught me." On waking, the lord had the dream interpreted: "It is a divine turtle." He asked whether there was a fisherman named Yu Qie. There was, and he summoned him for the next morning. "What did you catch?" "A white turtle, five feet around." "Present it." When it arrived, the lord repeatedly wished to kill it and repeatedly to spare it. He divined: "Killing the turtle for divination is auspicious." They gutted it. Seventy-two holes were drilled in its shell, and not one divination failed.

26.07 Confucius said: "The divine turtle could appear in Lord Yuan's dream, but could not evade Yu Qie's net. Its knowledge answered seventy-two divinations without error, but could not evade the disaster of being gutted. Knowledge has its limits; spiritual power has things it cannot reach. Though someone has utmost knowledge, ten thousand others scheme against him. Fish do not fear nets, but fear pelicans. Discard small knowledge and great knowledge becomes clear; discard contrived excellence and become excellent of yourself. An infant has no great teacher, yet learns to speak by living with those who speak."

26.08 Huizi said to Zhuangzi: "Your words are useless." Zhuangzi replied: "Only someone who understands uselessness can discuss use. The earth is broad and great, but a person uses only enough to place his feet. Suppose the ground beside them were dug away down to the Yellow Springs: would that remaining ground still be useful?" "No." "Then the usefulness of the useless is clear."

26.09 Zhuangzi said: "Can someone able to wander be prevented from wandering? Can someone unable to wander truly wander? An intention bent on drifting away, a conduct determined to sever all ties: ah, is that the task of utmost knowledge and deep virtue? Falling without returning, racing like fire without looking back! Even the relationship of ruler and minister belongs to a particular time; in another age neither need be lower than the other. Thus the utmost person leaves no fixed track of conduct.

26.10 "Honouring antiquity and belittling the present is the scholars' habit. Yet view the present even from Xi Wei's age: who can avoid its waves? Only the utmost person wanders in the world without becoming distorted, follows people without losing himself. He teaches without imposing learned formulas, receives intentions without excluding others. Open passage through the eye is clarity; through the ear, acuity; through the nose, discernment of scent; through the mouth, taste; through the heart, knowledge; through knowledge, virtue. No way wants obstruction. Obstruction chokes; continued choking stops movement; stopped movement breeds many harms. Living awareness depends on breath. If it is insufficient, heaven is not to blame. Heaven opens passages day and night without ceasing, while people stop their own openings. The womb has its spacious enclosure; the heart has heaven's wandering. Without room in a house, wife and mother-in-law quarrel; without heaven's wandering in the heart, the six openings clash. Forests, hills and mountains please people because their spirit cannot bear such disturbance.

26.11 "Virtue spills into fame; fame into violence. Plans arise under pressure, cleverness from contention, obstruction from stubborn guarding; official business is settled through fitting things to many people. When spring rain and sunshine arrive in season, plants surge into growth and hoes are prepared. More than half the plants are overturned and rooted out, without knowing why. Quiet can support the sick, care for the eyes can ease old age, calm can stop agitation. Yet these are concerns of the weary; those at ease have not passed through them and do not inquire. What the sage uses to astonish the world, the spiritual person does not ask about; what the worthy uses to astonish an age, the sage does not ask about; what the gentleman uses to astonish a state, the worthy does not ask about; what the petty person uses to fit the times, the gentleman does not ask about.

26.12 “At Yan Gate a man whose parent died wasted himself so skilfully in mourning that he was made a model for officials. Half his neighbours imitated him and wasted themselves to death. Yao offered the world to Xu You, who fled. Tang offered it to Wu Guang, who grew angry. Ji Ta heard and led his disciples to retreat beside the Kuan River. The lords came to offer condolences; three years later Shentu Di cast himself into the river. A fish trap is for catching fish: obtain the fish and forget the trap. A snare is for catching rabbits: obtain the rabbit and forget the snare. Words are for meaning: obtain the meaning and forget the words. Where can I find someone who has forgotten words, so that I may speak with him?”

Explanation of the chapter

One memorable image distinguishes the fishing trap from the fish, or words from what they allow us to grasp. Means may be necessary without becoming ultimate ends. Scenes of material need also prevent the idealization of wisdom as wholly detached from ordinary conditions of life.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

The invitation to "forget words" once their purpose has been fulfilled does not show language to be worthless; the chapter relies on language to convey that very provocation. The question is when a tool illegitimately takes the place of what it was meant to serve. The distinction also applies to our commentary: a useful interpretation must accept that it does not exhaust the text it tries to make intelligible.

Textual collation

Wu Yuan’s corpse cast into the river is not turned into a traveller walking beside it. The dried fish and the turtle unable to evade the net question promises and knowledge, rather than establishing verified supernatural powers. Water and money units are rendered generically to avoid false modern equivalences. The difficult vegetal phrase 到植 is read as plants overturned or uprooted, not automatic recovery of fallen plants. Fatal mourning and Shentu Di’s death are narrated consequences, not recommendations. Forgetting words does not require abandoning reading or reasoning.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 外物 (Wikisource, oldid 2327631).

26.01: 外物不可必; **26.02:** 莊周家貧; **26.03:** 任公子為大鉤巨緇; **26.04:** 發冢; **26.05:** 老萊子之弟子出薪; **26.06-26.07:** 宋元君夜半而夢; **26.08:** 惠子謂莊子; **26.09-26.10:** 人有能遊; **26.11:** 德溢乎名; **26.12:** 演門有親死者.

27. Figurative Words

Yu yan | 寓言

Chapter text

27.01 Borrowed words account for nine tenths; weighty words for seven tenths; goblet words emerge daily, harmonised by heaven's distinctions. Borrowed words use what lies outside to discuss a matter. A father does not act as matchmaker for his own son: his praise is less persuasive than another person's. This is not my fault, but people's. They respond to what agrees with them and oppose what does not; what resembles their own position they call right, what differs they call wrong.

27.02 Weighty words, seven tenths, bring disputation to a stop by invoking the elders. Yet age alone does not make a person a predecessor: someone who has not grasped the warp and weft, root and branch, cannot claim authority merely through years. A person with nothing by which to lead others lacks the human way; such a person is only a remnant of the past.

27.03 Goblet words emerge daily, harmonised by heaven's distinctions, spreading freely through the years. Without fixed speech there is equalisation; equalisation and speech are not the same, nor speech and equalisation. Hence the saying: no speech. Speak without fixed speech: one may speak throughout life without having spoken, and remain silent throughout life without having failed to speak. There is a standpoint from which something is acceptable and one from which it is not; a standpoint from which it is so and one from which it is not so. Why is it so? Because it is taken as so. Why not so? Because it is taken as not so. Why acceptable? Because it is accepted. Why unacceptable? Because it is not accepted. Things have what makes them so and what makes them acceptable; nothing is without such a perspective. Without goblet words emerging daily and harmonising with heaven's distinctions, who could endure? All things are seeds, succeeding one another in different forms, beginning and ending like a ring whose order cannot be grasped. This is heaven's equalising wheel, and that wheel is heaven's distinctions.

27.04 Zhuangzi said to Huizi: "By sixty, Confucius had changed sixty times. What he initially approved he finally rejected, without knowing whether his present approval was another of the fifty-nine errors." Huizi said: "Confucius diligently directed his will and practised knowledge." Zhuangzi replied: "He had renounced that, though he had not expressed it. He said: 'We receive our capacities from the great root and return to spiritual responsiveness in living.' Making sounds match the pitch-pipes and speech match the rules, setting benefit and righteousness before people, marking likes and dislikes, right and wrong: this merely subdues their mouths. To make their hearts yield without daring to resist, to establish the world's settledness: enough, enough! How could I reach that?"

27.05 Zengzi twice took office, and twice his heart changed. He said: "While my parents lived, I served for three fu of grain and was happy. Later I served for three thousand zhong, but they were no longer there, and I was sad." A disciple asked Confucius: "Can Shen be called free of entanglement in his fault?" Confucius answered: "He was already entangled. Could one without entanglement grieve like that? He would see three fu and three thousand zhong as sparrows, mosquitoes and horseflies passing before him."

27.06 Yancheng Ziyou said to Dongguo Ziqi: "After hearing your words, in the first year I became rustic; in the second, compliant; in the third, open; in the fourth, like a thing among things; in the fifth, things came to me; in the sixth, the spirit entered; in the seventh, heaven completed itself; in the eighth, I knew neither death nor life; in the ninth, I reached the great mystery. Life has activity and death follows. Urging impartiality, people assign a source to death, while the arising of life through yang is taken as sourceless. Is it really so? Where does it go, and where does it not go? Heaven has its countable cycles; earth has places occupied by people. Where shall I seek it? Not knowing the end, how can I assert that there is no allotted course? Not

knowing the beginning, how can I assert that there is one? When things respond to one another, how can I assert that there are no spirits? When they do not, how can I assert that there are?”

27.07 The penumbrae asked the shadow: “You were looking down, now up; your hair was tied, now loose; you sat, now stand; you walked, now stop. Why?” The shadow replied: “Restless questioners, why ask about such small things? I exist, but do not know why. I am like a cicada’s shell or a snake’s slough, yet not the same. With fire and sunlight I gather; with darkness and night I disappear. Perhaps I depend on something; how much more elusive is what has no dependence! When that comes, I come; when it goes, I go; when it moves vigorously, I move with it. About this vigorous movement, what more is there to ask?”

27.08 Yang Ziju was travelling south to Pei while Lao Dan travelled west to Qin. He went to meet him and encountered him at Liang. On the road Laozi looked up and sighed: “At first I thought you could be taught; now I see you cannot.” Yang Ziju said nothing. At the lodging he brought water for washing and rinsing, a towel and comb, removed his shoes outside and approached on his knees. “Earlier I wanted to ask, but you were travelling and had no leisure. Now may I ask my fault?” Laozi said: “With your lofty stare and wide-eyed airs, who could live with you? Great whiteness looks stained; abundant virtue looks insufficient.” Yang Ziju changed expression in alarm: “I receive your instruction respectfully.” On his outward journey the inn’s people welcomed and escorted him; the host carried his mat, the hostess his towel and comb; lodgers gave up their seats and those warming themselves moved from the stove. On his return, the lodgers competed with him for a place on the mat.

Explanation of the chapter

The chapter reflects on attributed sayings, words suited to the occasion, and forms of expression that exceed direct argument. Philosophical storytelling is not merely ornamental: how a story is told affects what can be said, who can hear it, and what response it elicits.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

Variety of expression does not imply that all statements are equally true. The force of a metaphor depends on its use and on the limits it helps us recognize. Readers should ask both what a parable illuminates and what it may conceal. Our edition adopts the same standard, refusing to confuse accessibility with philological certainty.

Textual collation

寓言, 重言 and 卮言 are rendered as borrowed, weighty and goblet words; none of these labels exhausts their rhetorical functions. The proportions are not additive book statistics. In the lifelong-speech sentence the paradoxical reading “without having spoken” is adopted against a duplicated negative in the digital Chinese transcription, with comparison to Legge. The nine-year sequence is not a universal training schedule. Questions about allotted fate and spirits retain both sides of the doubt. The final scene shows the loss of special deference, not a failure of teaching.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 寓言 (Wikisource, oldid 2327600).

27.01: 寓言十九; **27.02:** 所以已言也; **27.03:** 因以曼衍; **27.04:** 莊子謂惠子; **27.05:** 曾子再仕而心再化; **27.06:** 顏成子游謂東郭子綦; **27.07:** 衆罔兩問於景; **27.08:** 陽子居南之沛.

28. Yielding the Throne

Rang wang | 讓王

Chapter text

28.01 Yao offered all under heaven to Xu You, but Xu You would not accept it. He next offered it to Zizhou Zhifu, who said, “Making me Son of Heaven might be acceptable. Even so, I happen to be suffering from a deep-seated illness. I am attending to it and have no leisure to govern the world.” The world is of the greatest importance, yet he would not let it harm his life. How much less would he let anything else do so! Only someone who has no use for ruling the world can be entrusted with it.

28.02 Shun offered the world to Zizhou Zhibo. Zizhou Zhibo said, “I happen to have a deep-seated illness. I am attending to it and have no leisure to govern the world.” The world is a great vessel, yet he would not exchange his life for it. This is how those who possess the Way differ from ordinary people.

28.03 Shun offered the world to Shan Juan. Shan Juan said, “I stand within space and time. In winter I wear skins and furs, in summer light hempen cloth. In spring I plough and sow, giving my body sufficient exercise; in autumn I gather the harvest, giving it rest and food. I work at sunrise and rest at sunset. I wander freely between heaven and earth, content in heart and purpose. What use have I for the world? How sad that you do not understand me!” He refused, went deep into the mountains, and no one knew where he was.

28.04 Shun offered the world to his friend, the farmer of Shihu. The farmer said, “How busily our ruler exerts himself! He is a man who hoards his strength.” He considered Shun’s virtue not yet complete. The husband shouldered a load, the wife carried one on her head, and they took their child with them to the coast, never returning for the rest of their lives.

28.05 Great King Danfu lived in Bin, where the Di attacked him. He offered them skins and silk, but they refused; dogs and horses, but they refused; pearls and jade, but they refused. They wanted the land. Danfu said, “I cannot bear to live with a man’s elder brother while causing his younger brother to be killed, or with a father while causing his son to be killed. All of you should try to remain here. What difference is there between being my subjects and being subjects of the Di? I have heard that one must not harm what is being nourished for the sake of what nourishes it.” Taking his staff, he departed. The people followed in an unbroken line, and a state was established at the foot of Mount Qi. Danfu may be said to have respected life. Those who respect life do not, when rich and honoured, injure themselves with what should nourish them; nor, when poor and lowly, burden their bodies for gain. Nowadays those with high office and rank dread losing them, yet at the sight of profit lightly risk their lives. Is this not delusion?

28.06 The people of Yue had killed their rulers for three successive generations. Prince Sou feared this and fled to the caves of Dan. Yue was left without a ruler. They searched for him, eventually tracked him to the cave, and, when he would not emerge, smoked him out with mugwort and seated him in the royal carriage. Taking the strap to climb aboard, he looked up to heaven and cried, “Rulership! Rulership! Could you not leave me alone?” He did not dislike being ruler; he disliked its dangers. He would not injure his life for a state, and this was precisely why the people of Yue wanted him as ruler.

28.07 Han and Wei were disputing occupied territory. Master Zihua visited Marquis Zhaoxi and found him troubled. “Suppose,” he said, “a written covenant were placed before you declaring: ‘Seize this with your left hand and lose the use of your right; seize it with your right and lose the use of your left. Whoever seizes it will possess the whole world.’ Would you seize it?” “I would not,” replied the marquis. “Excellent. Your two arms are worth more to you than the world, and your body more than your arms. Han is far less than the world, and the land now disputed far less than Han. Yet you distress your body and injure your life through anxiety about not obtaining it!” The marquis said, “Excellent! Many have advised me, but I have never heard such words.” Master Zihua knew the difference between what weighs heavily and what weighs lightly.

28.08 The ruler of Lu heard that Yan He possessed the Way and sent a messenger with gifts of silk. Yan He lived in a poor dwelling, wore coarse hemp, and fed his own cow. He answered the messenger himself. “Is this Yan He’s house?” “It is.” As the messenger presented the gifts, Yan He said, “Perhaps you heard your instructions incorrectly and will be blamed. Better make certain.” The messenger returned to verify the order. When he came again, Yan He could not be found. Someone like Yan He truly disliked wealth and honour.

28.09 Thus it is said: the reality of the Way serves to order oneself; its remainder serves a state and household; its dust and refuse serve to govern the world. The accomplishments of emperors and kings are therefore the sage’s incidental work, not what completes the person and nourishes life. Yet most gentlemen of the present age endanger their bodies and abandon life in pursuit of things. Is this not sad? Before acting, a sage examines the end and the means. Suppose a man used the pearl of the Marquis of Sui as a pellet to shoot a sparrow a thousand fathoms away. Everyone would laugh: the thing expended is valuable, the thing sought trifling. Is life worth only as much as that pearl?

28.10 Liezi was poor and looked hungry. A visitor said to Ziyang of Zheng, “Lie Yukou appears to possess the Way. If such a man remains poor in your state, might people think you do not value worthy men?” Ziyang immediately ordered grain to be sent. Liezi met the envoy, bowed twice, and refused it. When the envoy had left, his wife beat her breast and said, “I have heard that a man of the Way’s wife and children enjoy ease. We look starved. The ruler has sent food, yet you refuse it. Is this our fate?” Liezi laughed. “The ruler does not know me himself. He sends grain because of someone else’s words; he may likewise condemn me because of someone else’s words. That is why I refused.” Eventually the people rebelled and killed Ziyang.

28.11 When King Zhao of Chu lost his kingdom, Yue the sheep butcher fled with him. After regaining the kingdom, the king wished to reward his followers, including Yue. Yue said, “When the king lost his kingdom, I lost my sheep stall. When he regained it, I regained my stall. My rank and income have already been restored. What further reward is there?” “Make him accept,” said the king. Yue replied, “The kingdom was not lost through my fault, so I did not presume to undergo punishment; it was not regained through my achievement, so I do not presume to receive a reward.” The king ordered him brought to an audience. Yue said, “Chu’s law grants an audience after great service and reward. My wisdom could not preserve the kingdom, nor did my courage suffice to die fighting the invaders. When Wu entered Ying, I feared danger and escaped; I did not set out deliberately to follow the king. If he now breaks the law and the established terms to receive me, that is not how I wish to be known.” The king told Sima Ziqi, “The butcher’s station is low, but his account of what is right is high. Offer him one of the three great dignities.” Yue answered, “I know that such rank is nobler than my stall and that ten thousand zhong in salary exceed its earnings. But should my greed for rank and pay give our ruler a reputation for improper rewards? I dare not accept. I wish to return to my sheep stall.” He refused.

28.12 Yuan Xian lived in Lu in a small house roofed with growing grass. Its brushwood door was incomplete, with mulberry wood for a pivot. Earthen jars formed the windows of the two rooms, plugged with coarse cloth. The roof leaked and the floor was damp; he sat upright playing his zither. Zigong came in a carriage drawn by large horses, wearing dark blue inside and white outside. The carriage could not enter the lane. Yuan Xian, in a bark cap and worn shoes, met him with a goosefoot staff. “Ah, Master, what distress!” said Zigong. Yuan Xian replied, “I have heard that lacking money is poverty; learning without being able to practise is distress. I am poor, not distressed.” Zigong stepped back in shame. Yuan Xian smiled. “Acting to win the world’s favour, forming partisan friendships, learning to impress others, teaching for oneself, disguising wrongdoing as benevolence and righteousness, displaying carriages and horses: these I cannot bear to do.”

28.13 Zengzi lived in Wei. His padded robe lacked an outer covering; his face was swollen and worn, his hands and feet calloused. He went three days without lighting a cooking fire and ten years without new clothes. Straightening his cap broke its strings; pulling together his robe exposed his elbows; putting on his shoes split their heels. Yet, dragging his shoes, he sang the Odes of Shang, his voice filling heaven and earth like bronze and stone. The Son of Heaven could not make him a minister, nor a lord claim him as a friend.

Thus one who nourishes purpose forgets the body; one who nourishes the body forgets profit; one who reaches the Way forgets the heart-mind.

28.14 Confucius said, “Come, Hui. Your family is poor and your dwelling humble. Why not take office?” Yan Hui replied, “I do not wish to. I have fifty mu outside the city, enough for grain and porridge, and ten mu within, enough for silk and hemp. Playing the zither gives me pleasure, and the Way I learn from you gives me joy. I do not wish to take office.” Confucius’s expression changed. “How good your purpose is! I have heard that the contented do not burden themselves with profit, that those secure in what they have found within are not frightened by loss, and that those who cultivate themselves inwardly are not ashamed of lacking office. I have recited this for a long time. Today I see it in Hui. This is what I have gained.”

28.15 Prince Mou of Zhongshan said to Zhanzi, “My body is beside the rivers and sea, but my heart is at the towers of Wei. What should I do?” Zhanzi said, “Value life. Then profit becomes light.” “I know that, but cannot master myself.” “Then follow your inclination; do not let your spirit be embittered. To be unable to master yourself and nevertheless force yourself not to follow it is a double injury. Those doubly injured do not belong among the long-lived.” Mou of Wei was a prince of a state of ten thousand chariots. For him, retreat among rocks and caves was harder than for a commoner. Though he had not reached the Way, he had some intention towards it.

28.16 Confucius was trapped between Chen and Cai. For seven days he had no cooked food; his goosefoot broth contained no grain. His face was exhausted, yet he played and sang indoors. Yan Hui was picking vegetables while Zilu and Zigong said, “The Master was twice driven from Lu, his traces erased in Wei, the tree cut down over him in Song; he suffered in Shang and Zhou and is besieged between Chen and Cai. Anyone may kill or mistreat him without penalty. Yet he keeps playing and singing. Can a gentleman be so shameless?” Yan Hui could not answer and reported this to Confucius. Confucius put aside the zither and sighed, “You and Ci are petty men. Call them in.”

28.17 Zilu said, “This surely is extremity.” Confucius replied, “What are you saying? A gentleman’s access to the Way is success; obstruction in the Way is failure. I hold to benevolence and righteousness while encountering the troubles of a disordered age. How is that failure? Examining myself, I am not obstructed in the Way; meeting hardship, I do not lose my virtue. When winter comes with frost and snow, we see the flourishing endurance of pine and cypress. This confinement in Chen and Cai is good fortune for me.” He resumed his zither and song. Zilu seized a shield and danced; Zigong said, “I did not know how high heaven is or how deep the earth.” Those of old who found the Way were joyful in hardship and in success. Their joy was not hardship or success: with the Way and virtue present, these came like cold, heat, wind and rain. Thus Xu You enjoyed himself north of the Ying, and the Earl of Gong found fulfilment on Gongshou.

28.18 Shun offered the world to his friend Beiren Wuze. Beiren Wuze said, “What a strange ruler you are! You lived among the fields and then frequented Yao’s gate. Not content with that, you now want to smear me with your disgraceful conduct. I am ashamed to see you.” He threw himself into the deep pool of Qingling.

28.19 When Tang was about to attack Jie, he consulted Bian Sui. “It is no business of mine,” said Bian Sui. “Whom should I consult?” “I do not know.” Tang consulted Wu Guang, who likewise said, “It is no business of mine.” “Whom should I consult?” “I do not know.” “What of Yi Yin?” “He is strong and can endure disgrace. I know nothing else about him.” Tang consulted Yi Yin, attacked Jie and defeated him, then offered the throne to Bian Sui. Bian Sui refused. “When you sought my counsel against Jie, you must have taken me for a robber. Now you offer me the throne after victory, you must take me for a greedy man. Born in a disordered age, I have twice been approached by someone without the Way, trying to smear me with his disgraceful conduct. I cannot bear to hear it repeatedly.” He threw himself into the Chou River and died.

28.20 Tang then offered the throne to Wu Guang. “The wise plan, the brave accomplish, and the benevolent occupy the throne: that is the ancient Way. Why will you not take your place?” Wu Guang refused. “Deposing a ruler is not righteous; killing the people is not benevolent; enjoying another man’s gain after he has borne the danger is not disinterested. I have heard that one must not accept an unjust salary or tread the soil of a world

without the Way. How much less accept its highest honour! I cannot bear to see you longer.” Carrying a stone, he drowned himself in the Lu River.

28.21 When Zhou was rising, two men of Guzhu, Boyi and Shuqi, said to one another, “We hear that someone in the west seems to possess the Way. Let us go and see.” They reached the sunny side of Mount Qi. King Wu heard of them and sent Shu Dan to meet them with a covenant: their wealth would be raised two grades and their offices placed in the first rank. The sacrificial animal was bled and buried. The brothers looked at each other and laughed. “How strange! This is not what we call the Way. When Shennong possessed the world, he offered seasonal sacrifices with full reverence but did not pray for blessings. In dealing with people he fulfilled his task faithfully and sincerely without asking anything. He governed in accordance with their willingness for government and brought order in accordance with their willingness for order. He did not build himself upon others’ ruin, raise himself through others’ abasement, or use opportunity for private gain.

28.22 “Now Zhou has seen Yin in disorder and rushed to govern it, plotting above and distributing bribes below, relying on arms and maintaining its might, slaughtering victims and making covenants as proof of trust, advertising its conduct to please the crowd, killing and attacking for gain. This is to replace violence by promoting disorder. We have heard that the men of old did not evade their responsibilities in an ordered age, nor cling dishonourably to survival in a disordered one. Now the world is dark and Yin’s virtue has declined. Rather than join Zhou and soil ourselves, let us withdraw and preserve our conduct.” The two went north to Mount Shouyang and died of hunger. Men like Boyi and Shuqi, whenever they could avoid wealth and rank, would not depend on them. Their integrity was high and their conduct apart; they delighted in their purpose alone and did not serve the world. Such was the resolve of these two men.

Explanation of the chapter

Stories of refusing political power shift the scale of value away from wealth and status toward the life one seeks to preserve. They do not all constitute a developed political theory; many are extreme examples exposing the cost of accepting office and honors. The text asks whether something conventionally desirable must truly be desirable for everyone.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

It would be unwise to turn every refusal into a compulsory moral model. A choice that protects one person's freedom may leave collective problems unresolved. The chapter's force is to question whether power itself measures human fulfillment, not to prove every exercise of government unworthy. That limit permits reading without romanticizing withdrawal.

Textual collation

The husband carries a load on his back and the wife one on her head: 夫負妻戴 does not say that he carries his wife, as Legge understood it. The farmer’s explicit judgment that Shun’s virtue remains incomplete is retained. Mu and zhong are not converted into acres or modern measures. Near the end it is Yin’s virtue, not Zhou’s, that declines. The chapter juxtaposes care for life with voluntary deaths for integrity; this tension is neither removed nor made into a recommendation. In the final sentence, 戾行 is understood as apart or singular conduct, without adopting the additional moral censure in Legge’s closing interpretation.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 讓王 (Wikisource, oldid 2327632).

28.01: 堯以天下讓許由; **28.02:** 舜讓天下於子州支伯; **28.03:** 舜以天下讓善卷; **28.04:** 舜以天下讓其友石戶之農; **28.05:** 大王亶父居邠; **28.06:** 越人三世弑其君; **28.07:** 韓魏相與爭侵地; **28.08:** 魯君聞顏闔; **28.09:** 道之真以治身; **28.10:** 子列子窮; **28.11:** 楚昭王失國; **28.12:** 原憲居魯; **28.13:** 曾子居衛; **28.14:** 孔子謂顏回; **28.15:** 中山公子牟謂瞻子; **28.16-28.17:** 孔子窮於陳蔡之間; **28.18:** 舜以天下讓其友北人无擇; **28.19:** 湯將伐桀; **28.20:** 湯又讓務光; **28.21-28.22:** 昔周之興.

29. Robber Zhi

Dao Zhi | 盜跖

Chapter text

29.01 Confucius was a friend of Liuxia Ji, whose younger brother was called Robber Zhi. Zhi had nine thousand followers who ranged across the world, attacking and abusing the lords. They broke through walls and doors, drove off cattle and horses, and carried away wives and daughters. Greedy for gain, they forgot their kin, disregarded parents and brothers, and made no offerings to their ancestors. Wherever they passed, large states guarded their walls and small ones retreated into their strongholds. All the people suffered from them.

29.02 Confucius said to Liuxia Ji, “A father must be able to instruct his son, an elder brother to teach his younger brother. Otherwise what value has the bond between father and son or between brothers? You are a gifted man of this age, yet your younger brother is Robber Zhi, a plague upon the world, and you cannot teach him. I am ashamed on your behalf. Let me go and persuade him.” Liuxia Ji replied, “If a son does not listen to his father’s instructions and a younger brother does not accept his elder’s teaching, what can even your eloquence do? Zhi’s heart is like a gushing spring and his purpose like a whirlwind. His strength can resist an enemy and his eloquence disguise wrongdoing. Agree with him and he is pleased; oppose him and he is furious. He readily insults people. You must not go.”

29.03 Confucius did not listen. With Yan Hui driving and Zigong on the right, he went to visit Zhi. Zhi was resting his troops on the sunny side of Mount Tai, slicing human liver and eating it. Confucius left his carriage and addressed the usher: “Kong Qiu of Lu has heard of the general’s lofty righteousness.” He respectfully bowed twice. The usher announced him. Zhi was enraged, his eyes bright as stars and his hair rising against his cap. “Is this not Kong Qiu, that crafty hypocrite of Lu? Tell him: ‘You invent speeches and falsely invoke Wen and Wu. You wear a branching wooden cap and a belt made from a dead ox’s flank. You eat without ploughing and dress without weaving. You wag your lips and tongue, arbitrarily manufacture right and wrong, confuse the world’s rulers and keep its scholars from returning to their roots. You fabricate filial and fraternal duties, hoping to gain a fief, wealth and rank. Your crimes are enormous. Hurry home, or I shall add your liver to my midday meal.’”

29.04 Confucius sent another message: “I enjoy Ji’s friendship and wish to stand beneath your tent.” Zhi said, “Let him come.” Confucius hurried forward, declined a mat, stepped back and bowed twice. Zhi stretched out his legs, gripped his sword and glared, roaring like a tigress with cubs. “Come, Qiu. Speak in accordance with my wishes and live; oppose me and die.”

29.05 Confucius said, “I have heard that there are three excellences. To be tall, handsome and without equal, pleasing to young and old, noble and humble, is the highest. To comprehend heaven and earth and distinguish all things in speech is the middle. To be brave, resolute and daring, gathering followers and leading soldiers, is the lowest. Any one of these is enough to face south and call oneself a ruler. General, you possess all three. You are eight chi and two cun tall, your face shines, your lips are vermilion, your teeth like aligned shells, your voice in tune with the Yellow Bell. Yet you are called Robber Zhi. I am ashamed of that name for you and cannot accept it. Listen to me, and I will go south to Wu and Yue, north to Qi and Lu, east to Song and Wei, west to Jin and Chu. I shall have a city several hundred li across built for you, with hundreds of thousands of households, and have you honoured as a feudal lord. Begin anew with the world. End the fighting, rest your soldiers, gather and support your brothers, and offer sacrifices together to your ancestors. This is the conduct of sages and worthy men, and what the world desires.”

29.06 Zhi grew furious. “Come here, Qiu! People who can be steered by profit and admonished with words are ignorant ordinary folk. My size and beauty, which please those who see me, are the gifts of my parents. Would I not know them without your praise? I have heard that those who praise others to their faces enjoy disparaging them behind their backs. By offering me a city and a multitude you seek to manage me with profit, keeping me like an ordinary person. How could such a position last? No city is greater than the world. Yao and Shun possessed it, yet their descendants have no land in which to plant an awl. Tang and Wu became Sons of Heaven, but their lines were later extinguished. Was this not because the prize was so great?

29.07 “I have heard that in antiquity animals were many and people few. People nested in trees to escape them, gathering acorns and chestnuts by day and roosting at night. They were called the people of the Nest-builder. Before people knew clothing, they stored firewood in summer to warm themselves in winter: these were the people who knew how to nourish life. In Shennong’s age they lay down at ease and rose in peace. They knew their mothers, not their fathers; lived among deer; ploughed for food and wove for clothes; and had no thought of harming one another. This was the flourishing of utmost virtue. But the Yellow Emperor could not sustain virtue. He fought Chiyou on the plain of Zhuolu until blood flowed for a hundred li. Yao and Shun established hosts of ministers; Tang banished his ruler and King Wu killed Zhou. Since then the strong have oppressed the weak and the many abused the few. From Tang and Wu onward they have all promoted disorder.

29.08 “Now you cultivate Wen and Wu’s Way and control the world’s arguments to teach later generations. In your long robe and narrow belt, with false words and counterfeit actions, you confuse rulers and seek wealth and rank. No robber is greater than you. Why does the world not call you Robber Qiu instead of calling me Robber Zhi? You sweet-talked Zilu into following you, made him remove his tall cap and long sword, and taught him until everyone said that Kong Qiu could stop violence and wrongdoing. In the end Zilu attempted to kill Wei’s ruler, failed, and his body was minced at the eastern gate. Your teaching did not bring him through.

29.09 “Do you call yourself a worthy scholar or a sage? You were twice expelled from Lu, your traces erased in Wei, reduced to extremity in Qi, besieged between Chen and Cai, with nowhere in the world to place yourself. You taught Zilu into that slaughter. You have neither secured yourself nor helped others. What value has your Way? No one is more honoured than the Yellow Emperor, yet even he could not preserve virtue and shed blood for a hundred li at Zhuolu. Yao lacked kindness; Shun lacked filial devotion; Yu was withered on one side; Tang banished his ruler; Wu attacked Zhou; Wen was imprisoned at Youli. These six are exalted by the world, yet examined closely they let profit confuse their genuineness and forced themselves against their dispositions. Their conduct is deeply shameful.

29.10 “Among the world’s worthies are Boyi and Shuqi, who refused Guzhu’s throne and starved on Mount Shouyang, leaving their flesh and bones unburied. Bao Jiao adorned his conduct and condemned the world, then died clasping a tree. Shentu Di was not heard when he remonstrated, so carried a stone into the river and became food for fish and turtles. Jie Zitui was so loyal that he cut flesh from his thigh to feed Duke Wen; when Wen later neglected him, he left in anger and burned to death embracing a tree. Weisheng agreed to meet a woman beneath a bridge. She did not come; the water rose, but he stayed, clasped a pillar and died. These six are no different from a dog sacrificed, a pig carried off by a current, or a beggar clutching his gourd. All were caught by reputation and treated death lightly, without attending to the root of nourishing their lives.

29.11 “As for loyal ministers, none are more praised than Prince Bigan and Wu Zixu. Zixu was cast into the river, Bigan had his heart cut out. The world calls them loyal ministers but ends by laughing at them. From the earlier examples down to these two, none deserves esteem. If you persuade me with affairs of ghosts, I cannot know them. If with human affairs, they amount to no more than what I have already heard and understood.

29.12 “Let me tell you about human dispositions. Eyes want beauty, ears want sounds, the mouth wants flavours, and purpose and vitality want fulfilment. The longest life is a hundred years, a middling one eighty, a

shorter one sixty. Subtract illness, wasting, bereavement, worry and calamity, and only four or five days a month remain for open laughter. Heaven and earth are without limit, but human death comes in its time. A time-bound instrument lodged within the limitless passes suddenly, like a fine horse across a gap. Those who cannot satisfy their purposes and nourish their lives do not understand the Way. All your words are things I reject. Hurry away and say no more! Your Way is frantic, anxious, crafty and false. It cannot preserve genuineness. Why discuss it?"

29.13 Confucius bowed twice and hurried out. Mounting the carriage, he missed the reins three times. His eyes were dazed and unseeing, his face like dead ash. Bent over the crossbar, head lowered, he could scarcely breathe. Outside Lu's eastern gate he met Liuxia Ji. "I have not seen you for several days. Your carriage and horses look travel-worn. Have you visited Zhi?" Confucius looked up and sighed, "Yes." "And did he oppose you, as I said?" "Yes. I have cauterised myself without illness. I rushed to stroke a tiger's head and plait its whiskers, and scarcely escaped its jaws."

29.14 Zizhang asked Man Gou De, "Why not cultivate your conduct? Without conduct you are not trusted; without trust, not employed; without employment, not benefited. Consider reputation or calculate profit, and righteousness is truly right. Even setting reputation and profit aside and returning to the heart, surely a scholar cannot go a day without cultivating conduct?" Man Gou De replied, "The shameless become rich, and those widely trusted become eminent. Great reputation and profit seem to lie in shamelessness and being trusted. Thus, judged by reputation and profit, being trusted is what matters. Set both aside and return to the heart: a scholar's conduct is to hold to what is natural in him."

29.15 Zizhang said, "Jie and Zhou were Sons of Heaven and possessed the world's wealth. Yet tell a lowly fellow that he behaves like them and he looks ashamed and resents it: even petty people despise them. Confucius and Mo Di were poor commoners, yet tell a chief minister that he behaves like them and he changes expression and protests his unworthiness: worthy men truly honour them. Being Son of Heaven does not necessarily make one noble, nor poverty and common birth make one base. The distinction lies in the goodness or badness of conduct."

29.16 Man Gou De replied, "Small thieves are imprisoned; great thieves become lords, and righteous scholars gather at their gates. Duke Huan, Xiaobai, killed his elder brother and took his sister-in-law, yet Guan Zhong served him. Tian Chang killed his ruler and stole his state, yet Confucius accepted silk from him. In argument they despised such men; in action they submitted to them. Their words and conduct fought within their breasts. Is that not contradiction? A book says: 'Who is bad and who good? The successful become the head; the unsuccessful, the tail.'"

29.17 Zizhang said, "Without proper conduct there will be no order between close and distant kin, no righteousness between high and low, no precedence between elder and younger. How then will the five bonds and six positions be distinguished?" Man Gou De said, "Yao killed his eldest son and Shun exiled his half-brother: was that the order of kinship? Tang expelled Jie and Wu killed Zhou: was that righteousness between high and low? Wang Ji became heir and the Duke of Zhou killed his elder brother: was that precedence of age? The Confucians fabricate speeches and the Mohists love everyone equally. Where are the distinctions of the five bonds and six positions?

29.18 "Besides, you pursue reputation and I pursue profit. The realities of reputation and profit do not accord with principle or stand examination by the Way. Let us submit our dispute to Unbound. He says: 'The petty man sacrifices himself for wealth; the gentleman sacrifices himself for reputation. They differ in how they alter their feelings and change their nature, but alike abandon what they should preserve and sacrifice themselves for what they should not pursue.' Therefore it is said: 'Do not be a petty man: turn back and follow what is heavenly in you. Do not be a gentleman: follow heaven's pattern. Whether crooked or straight, regard your heavenly limit. Look in every direction and rise or subside with the time. Whether right or wrong, hold the circular pivot. Complete your own purpose alone and wander with the Way. Do not twist your conduct or

force righteousness to completion, lest you lose what you are doing. Do not rush towards wealth or sacrifice yourself to success, lest you abandon what is heavenly in you.'

29.19 "Bigan's heart was cut out and Zixu's eyes were gouged: the disasters of loyalty. Upright Gong testified against his father and Weisheng drowned: the troubles of trustworthiness. Baozi dried up where he stood and Shenzi would not defend himself: the injuries of purity. Confucius did not see his mother and Kuangzi did not see his father: the failures of righteousness. These stories, handed down from antiquity and repeated in later times, show how men intent on correct words and unwavering conduct bore their calamities and met their troubles."

29.20 Insatiable asked Knower of Harmony, "No one fails to pursue reputation and profit. When a man is rich, others gather around him; gathering, they submit; submitting, they honour him. Being served and honoured is the way to long life, bodily ease and a happy mind. You alone disregard it. Do you lack understanding, or understand but lack the power to act, or insist upon correctness without allowing yourself to stray?"

29.21 Knower of Harmony replied, "Here is someone judging his contemporaries and neighbours as exceptional men who rise above ordinary ways, yet he has no settled standard by which to examine ancient and present times or distinguish right and wrong. He changes with custom. People abandon what matters most and discard what is most honoured in order to do what they do. How far that is from a way to long life, bodily ease and a happy mind! They do not examine bodily suffering and tranquil ease in the body, nor fearful alarm and joyful delight in the heart. They know how to act but not why they act. Thus even a Son of Heaven with the world's wealth cannot escape calamity."

29.22 Insatiable said, "Wealth benefits people in every way. It brings the utmost beauty and power, beyond what the consummate person or worthy man can reach. It appropriates others' courage for its strength, their plans for its intelligence, their virtue for its goodness. Without possessing a state, its owner is revered like a ruler and father. Sounds, beauty, flavours and power delight the heart without instruction and ease the body without an example. Desire and aversion, avoidance and pursuit need no teacher. They are human nature. Though everyone condemn me, who can renounce them?"

29.23 Knower of Harmony replied, "The wise act with regard for the people and do not exceed the measure. Having enough, they do not compete; having no use for more, they do not seek it. When they lack enough, they seek it in every direction without considering themselves greedy. When they have surplus, they refuse more, even declining the world, without considering themselves pure. Purity and greed are not determined by external pressure: they return to examine the measure within. They may be Son of Heaven without using rank to belittle people, rich in the whole world without making playthings of them. Considering troubles and reversals, and the harm to their nature, they refuse rather than accept, not to win praise.

29.24 "Yao and Shun ruled as emperors and were harmonious, not because they imposed benevolence on the world, but because they did not injure life for a fine reputation. Shan Juan and Xu You could have been emperors but refused, not through empty modesty, but because they would not injure themselves through affairs. All sought benefit and declined harm. The world calls them worthy, and that name may be theirs, but it was not for reputation that they acted."

29.25 Insatiable replied, "Insisting on that reputation, they torment their bodies, deny themselves sweetness and restrict nourishment merely to stay alive. That is only prolonged illness and hardship without dying." Knower of Harmony said, "Balance brings good fortune; excess brings harm. This holds for everything, but especially wealth. The rich fill their ears with bells, drums, pipes and flutes, their mouths with fattened animals and rich wines, stimulating their desires until they forget their work: this is disorder. Drowning in inflated self-importance, they are like someone carrying a heavy load uphill: this is suffering. Coveting wealth for comfort

and power to exhaust its possibilities, they drown in indulgence when at rest and swell with pride when their bodies flourish: this is disease.

29.26 “Seeking wealth and profit, they remain full as though their ears were blocked, unaware of retreat, increasingly arrogant and unable to stop: this is disgrace. They accumulate more than they can use, clutch it to their breasts and will not release it; their hearts are burdened with anxiety, yet they seek increase without end: this is worry. At home they suspect thieves who rob or demand; outside they fear bandits. They surround their homes with towers and barriers and dare not travel alone: this is fear. These six are the world’s greatest harms, yet they forget them and fail to examine them. When trouble comes, they would exhaust their nature and wealth to recover just one untroubled day, but cannot obtain it. No reputation is gained, no true benefit found. To entangle the mind and body in striving for these things: is it not delusion?”

Explanation of the chapter

The confrontation between Confucius and Robber Zhi overturns customary assignments of moral respectability. Its verbal violence and grotesque elements resist reading as the calm exposition of an ethical doctrine. Satire tests the vocabulary of prestige, virtue, and persuasion when faced with someone who refuses its premises.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

The chapter may disturb readers through its excesses; this discomfort should not be erased in order to manufacture a comforting philosophy. Nor should every assertion of a transgressive character be accepted without criticism. Interpretation must distinguish the success of a rhetorical demolition from the truth of whatever alternative seems to replace it.

Textual collation

The attacks on Confucius and the rulers belong to characters’ polemical speeches, not verified historical biography. The sequence Boyi, Shuqi, Bao Jiao, Shentu Di, Jie Zitui and Weisheng contains six men, in agreement with the numeral in the received text. Wuyue (無約) is here interpreted as the allegorical interlocutor Unbound; punctuation leaves the beginning of his voice open to discussion. Wuzu and Zhihe are rendered through their meanings, Insatiable and Knower of Harmony. The criticism in 乃至於棄其所為而殉其所不為 concerns sacrificing what is proper to oneself, rather than asserting that both characters would be alike in non-action. Lifespan figures and the robber’s allegations are parts of his argument, not the editor’s medical or historical assertions.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 盜跖 (Wikisource, oldid 2327633).

29.01-29.13: 孔子與柳下季為友; **29.14-29.19:** 子張問於滿苟得; **29.20-29.26:** 无足問於知和.

30. On Swords

Shuo jian | 說劍

Chapter text

30.01 King Wen of Zhao once delighted in swords. More than three thousand swordsmen lodged as his guests and crowded both sides of his gate. Day and night they fought before him; more than a hundred were killed or wounded each year, yet he never tired of it. After three years the state was weakened and the other lords began plotting against it.

30.02 Crown Prince Kui was troubled. He told his attendants, “Whoever can persuade the king and put an end to these swordsmen shall receive a thousand units of precious metal.” They replied, “Zhuangzi should be able to.” The prince sent men to offer him the reward. Zhuangzi refused it but accompanied the messengers. “What do you wish to teach Zhou, prince, that you offer me a thousand units?” The prince replied, “I have heard of your wisdom and discernment. I respectfully sent the gift for your attendants. Since you refuse it, how dare I speak further?”

30.03 Zhuangzi said, “I hear that you want to use me to end the king’s delight. If I address him and offend his wishes, failing your purpose, I shall be punished and killed. What use would the money be to me then? If I persuade him and fulfil your purpose, what could I ask of Zhao that I would not obtain?” “True,” said the prince, “but the king receives only swordsmen.” “Good. I am skilled with the sword.” “Yet the swordsmen he receives have tangled hair, projecting side-whiskers, drooping caps with coarse tassels, coats short behind, fierce eyes and challenging speech. This pleases him. If you appear in a scholar’s robe, everything will go against you.” “Then prepare a swordsman’s outfit for me.”

30.04 After three days the outfit was ready. Zhuangzi appeared before the prince, who introduced him to the king. The king awaited him with drawn blade. Zhuangzi entered the hall without hurrying and did not bow. “What do you wish to teach me,” asked the king, “that you had the prince announce you?” “I hear that you delight in swords, and so I have come to see you about swords.” “What can yours subdue?” “One man every ten paces, without interrupting my advance for a thousand li.” The king was delighted. “You have no rival in the world!” Zhuangzi said, “A swordsman shows an opening, invites an advantage, starts after his opponent and arrives before him. I would like to demonstrate.” “Rest at your lodging,” said the king. “Wait for my command. I will arrange a contest and summon you.”

30.05 For seven days the king tested his swordsmen; more than sixty were killed or wounded. He selected five or six, had them stand with their swords below the hall, and summoned Zhuangzi. “Today you will try your swords against one another.” “I have long awaited it,” said Zhuangzi. “What length of weapon do you use?” “Any length will do. But I have three swords, for you to choose among. Let me first describe them, then demonstrate.” “I wish to hear about them.” “There is the Son of Heaven’s sword, the feudal lord’s sword and the commoner’s sword.”

30.06 “What is the Son of Heaven’s sword?” “Its point is Yanxi and Shicheng; its edge, Qi and Mount Dai; its spine, Jin and Wei; its guard, Zhou and Song; its sheath, Han and Wei. The peoples of the four borders embrace it, the four seasons wrap it, the Bohai Sea surrounds it, and Mount Chang girds it. The five phases regulate it; punishments and virtue direct it. Yin and yang open it, spring and summer hold it, autumn and winter wield it. Thrust forward, it meets nothing ahead; raised, nothing above; lowered, nothing below; turned, nothing on either side. Above it cuts the floating clouds; below it severs the earth’s bonds. Used once, it rectifies the lords and the world submits. Such is the Son of Heaven’s sword.”

30.07 King Wen looked dazed and lost. “What is the feudal lord’s sword?” “Wise and brave men form its point; pure and incorruptible men its edge; worthy and good men its spine; loyal and discerning men its guard;

outstanding and heroic men its sheath. Thrust forward, it likewise meets nothing ahead; raised, nothing above; lowered, nothing below; turned, nothing at its sides. Above it models itself on round heaven, following the three luminaries; below on square earth, following the four seasons; between, it harmonises the people's wishes and brings peace to the four quarters. Used once, it shakes like thunder. Within the borders, everyone submits and obeys the ruler's commands. Such is the feudal lord's sword."

30.08 "What is the commoner's sword?" "It belongs to men with tangled hair and projecting whiskers, drooping caps with coarse tassels, coats short behind, fierce eyes and challenging speech. They strike at one another before you, cutting necks above and opening livers and lungs below. That is the commoner's sword. They are no different from fighting cocks: one morning their lives end, without use to the state's affairs. You occupy the Son of Heaven's position but delight in the commoner's sword. I venture to consider it beneath you."

30.09 The king took him by the hand and led him up into the hall. The steward served a meal, and the king walked around it three times. Zhuangzi said, "Sit at ease, Great King, and settle your breath. My discourse on swords is finished." King Wen did not leave the palace for three months, and the swordsmen all took their own lives in their quarters.

Explanation of the chapter

A ruler fascinated by sword fighting is confronted with a description of weapons and forms of greatness on a very different scale. Zhuangzi uses the language that attracts his interlocutor to shift the horizon of attention. The scene suggests a persuasive technique: it begins not with condemnation from outside but with a transformation of an existing desire's frame.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

Scholars note that this chapter does not fit the philosophical tendencies of the Inner Chapters as readily as some others do. It is better to acknowledge that singularity than to turn court rhetoric into a uniform doctrine of Dao. Our commentary therefore asks both what the speech achieves within the story and what, if any, general standards may legitimately be inferred from it.

Textual collation

The scene is a political narrative, not a verified event in Zhuangzi's biography. Jin is retained as units of precious metal rather than imposing Legge's silver. The three swords shift the discussion from duelling to government; they are not three material weapons. All five components and their territorial and social correspondences are preserved. The final expression 服斃 is difficult: the traditional reading of the swordsmen taking their own lives is given without adding an unstated motive. The ending prevents the tale from being described as a bloodless pacification.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 說劍 (Wikisource, oldid 2327634).

30.01-30.05: 昔趙文王喜劍; **30.06:** 天子之劍何如; **30.07:** 諸侯之劍何如; **30.08:** 庶人之劍何如; **30.09:** 王乃牽而上殿.

31. The Old Fisherman

Yu fu | 漁父

Chapter text

31.01 Confucius was wandering in the forest of Ziwei and rested upon the Apricot Terrace. His disciples read while he played the zither and sang. Before the tune was half finished, an old fisherman left his boat and approached. His beard and eyebrows were white, his hair loose and his sleeves hanging. He came up the bank, stopped on dry ground, rested his left hand on his knee and his right beneath his chin, and listened. When the music ended, he beckoned to Zigong and Zilu, who came together.

31.02 Pointing to Confucius, the stranger asked, “What does that man do?” “He is a gentleman of Lu,” answered Zilu. “What is his clan?” “Kong.” “What does this Kong concern himself with?” Zilu did not answer; Zigong said, “By disposition he follows loyalty and trustworthiness, in conduct benevolence and righteousness. He refines rites and music and orders human relationships, loyally serving the rulers above and transforming the ordinary people below, seeking to benefit the world. Such are his concerns.” “Is he a ruler with territory?” “No.” “An assistant to a lord or king?” “No.” The stranger laughed and turned away. “Benevolent, certainly. But I fear he will not preserve himself. He torments his heart and exhausts his body, endangering his genuineness. Alas, how far he is from the Way!”

31.03 Zigong reported this. Confucius put aside his zither and rose. “Could he be a sage?” He went down in search of him. At the water’s edge, the fisherman was taking his pole to push off. Seeing Confucius, he turned and stood facing him. Confucius stepped back, bowed twice and approached. “What do you seek?” asked the stranger. “Earlier you left after a few words. I am unworthy and did not understand them. I have come humbly to listen, hoping to hear even your slightest utterance and receive the rest of your help.” “How greatly you love learning!” Confucius bowed twice again. “From my youth I have studied, and now I am sixty-nine. I have not heard the utmost teaching. How could I fail to empty my heart?”

31.04 The stranger said, “Like follows like, and like sounds answer one another: this is heaven’s pattern. Let me explain what I have and examine what occupies you. Your concerns are human affairs. Son of Heaven, feudal lords, great officers and common people: when these four set themselves right, there is the beauty of order. When they leave their positions, no disorder is greater. Let officials manage their offices and people attend to their work; then none encroaches upon another.

31.05 “Fields neglected, houses leaking, clothing and food insufficient, taxes unpaid, wives and concubines at odds, elders and young without order: these are the common people’s concerns. Ability unequal to the charge, official business ungoverned, conduct impure, subordinates careless and idle, achievements lacking, rank and salary insecure: these are the great officers’ concerns. A court without loyal ministers, a state in confusion, craftsmen lacking skill, tribute inadequate, spring and autumn audiences late, and disobedience to the Son of Heaven: these are the feudal lords’ concerns. Yin and yang out of harmony, cold and heat out of season to the harm of things, lords violent and disorderly, attacking and plundering each other and destroying the people, rites and music unregulated, resources exhausted, relationships neglected, and the population in disorder: these concern the Son of Heaven and his officials.

31.06 “Yet you hold neither the high authority of sovereign, lord or royal official nor the lower office of a minister with assigned duties. Nevertheless you take it upon yourself to refine rites and music and order relationships so as to transform the people. Are you not excessively busy? There are also eight defects in people and four calamities in affairs which must be examined.

31.07 “To busy yourself with what is not your business is meddling. To press forward when no one heeds you is importunity. To speak in anticipation of another’s wishes is sycophancy. To speak without distinguishing

right and wrong is flattery. To enjoy talking of others' faults is slander. To break friendships and divide kin is destructiveness. To use deceptive praise to ruin and malign others is malice. To accommodate both sides without regard for good or bad, adapting your speech to steal what you desire, is treachery. These eight defects disturb others outwardly and injure oneself inwardly. A gentleman will not befriend their bearer, nor an enlightened ruler employ him.

31.08 "As for the four calamities: delighting in great undertakings, changing established ways to capture a name for achievement, is grasping ambition. Monopolising knowledge and affairs, encroaching on others and acting for oneself, is greed. Seeing faults without correcting them and persisting more fiercely when admonished is obstinacy. Approving those who agree with oneself and condemning those who disagree, even when they are good, is conceit. These are the four calamities. Only when you remove the eight defects and cease practising the four calamities can instruction begin."

31.09 Confucius sighed sadly, bowed twice and rose. "I was twice driven from Lu; my traces were erased in Wei; the tree was cut down over me in Song; I was besieged between Chen and Cai. I do not know what I did wrong to meet these four persecutions." The stranger's expression changed with pity. "How hard it is for you to understand! A man feared his shadow and disliked his footprints, so he ran away from them. The more steps he took, the more prints he left; the faster he ran, the less his shadow left him. Thinking himself still too slow, he ran without rest until he exhausted his strength and died. He did not know that shade would quiet the shadow and stillness would stop the footprints. What extreme foolishness!

31.10 "You examine benevolence and righteousness, investigate sameness and difference, observe changes of movement and stillness, regulate giving and receiving, order likes and dislikes, and harmonise joy and anger. Yet you have scarcely escaped. Carefully cultivate yourself and guard your genuineness. Return things and people to their own concerns, and you will be unburdened. Instead, you neglect cultivating yourself and seek the answer in others. Is that not turning outward?"

31.11 Confucius said gravely, "May I ask what you call genuineness?" "Genuineness is pure sincerity at its utmost. Without purity and sincerity, one cannot move people. Forced weeping, however mournful, carries no grief; forced anger, however stern, carries no awe; forced affection, however smiling, carries no harmony. True sorrow grieves without a sound; true anger inspires awe before expression; true affection harmonises before a smile. When genuineness is within, its spirit moves outward. That is why it is valued.

31.12 "In human relations it appears as affectionate filial care towards parents, loyal integrity towards a ruler, enjoyment in drinking together, and grief in mourning. Loyalty centres on accomplishing the task; drinking on enjoyment; mourning on grief; serving parents on their comfort. The beauty of accomplishment does not require a single pattern of action. In caring for parents, what matters is their comfort, not disputing the means; in drinking, enjoyment, not selecting utensils; in mourning, grief, not questioning ritual. Rites are made by worldly custom; genuineness is received from heaven, spontaneous and not to be altered. The sage therefore follows heaven, values genuineness and is not confined by custom. The fool does the reverse: unable to follow heaven, anxious about people, ignorant of genuineness, he drifts with custom and is never complete. How regrettable that you were early immersed in human artifice and heard the Great Way so late!"

31.13 Confucius bowed twice and rose. "Meeting you today is like a gift of good fortune from heaven. If you would not be ashamed to accept me as your servant and teach me personally, may I ask where you live? I would receive instruction and complete my study of the Great Way." The stranger replied, "I have heard: accompany those with whom you can travel to the subtle Way. With those who cannot travel with you and do not know the Way, take care not to associate, and you will avoid fault. Make your effort. I am leaving you, I am leaving!" He pushed off and departed among the reeds.

31.14 Yan Yuan brought the carriage around and Zilu offered the mounting strap, but Confucius did not turn. Only when the ripples settled and the pole could no longer be heard did he dare mount. Zilu asked beside the

carriage, “I have served you a long time and never seen you show such awe. Rulers of ten thousand or a thousand chariots meet you as an equal, and even then you retain an aloof bearing. Today a fisherman stood upright with his pole while you bent like a sounding stone, bowing whenever you answered. Was that not excessive? Your disciples are astonished. What entitled him to it?”

31.15 Confucius leaned upon the crossbar and sighed. “How hard you are to change, You! You are immersed in ceremonial forms, yet your crude, narrow heart remains. Come, I will tell you. Not respecting an elder is a failure of ritual; not honouring a worthy person is a failure of benevolence. Without being a consummate person, one cannot truly place oneself below others; if one’s deference is not sincere, one does not attain genuineness and continually injures oneself. Alas, no harm to people exceeds a lack of benevolence, and you claim it for yourself! The Way is that through which all things proceed. Losing it, they die; obtaining it, they live. Affairs opposed to it fail; those following it succeed. The sage therefore honours the Way wherever it is found. That fisherman may be said to possess it. How could I dare not respect him?”

Explanation of the chapter

The meeting with an old fisherman introduces a critical voice directed against conventions of reputation and public conduct. The exchange with Confucius tests the difference between a life guided by signals of approval and one seeking an authenticity less dependent on them. Yet the fisherman's authority is also a narrative construction that deserves scrutiny.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

It is not enough to replace deference to an official teacher with obedience to a marginal character. The scene is most interesting when it exposes the way any authority may claim legitimacy through role and speech. Our reading focuses on the difficulty of judging who truly understands a situation, without ascribing a universally valid theory of teaching to the anecdote.

Textual collation

Zhēn (真) is rendered as genuineness, not propositional truth or subjective certainty. The speech retains the political hierarchy of its four positions; no retrospective egalitarianism is imposed on it. The eight defects and four calamities are preserved in full. In the final speech, 下人 is understood as placing oneself below others rather than making others submit, a reading that differs from Legge’s and fits Confucius’s reverence. Statements about preserving life belong to the character’s argument and are not guarantees of health or success.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 漁父 (Wikisource, oldid 2327635).

31.01-31.03: 孔子遊乎緇帷之林; **31.04-31.08:** 同類相從; **31.09-31.10:** 孔子愀然而歎; **31.11-31.12:** 請問何謂真; **31.13:** 孔子又再拜而起; **31.14-31.15:** 顏淵還車.

32. Lie Yukou

Lie Yukou | 列禦寇

Chapter text

32.01 Lie Yukou was travelling to Qi, but turned back halfway. He met Bohun Maoren, who asked, “Why have you turned back?” “I became afraid.” “What frightened you?” “I ate at ten soup shops, and five of them served me before the other customers.” “Why should that frighten you?” Lie Yukou said, “When the sincerity within is not released from self-consciousness, it shows in the body as a radiance. Its outward appearance overawes people, making them slight the noble and the old, and bringing trouble upon its possessor. A soup seller only trades in food and broth. His surplus is small, his profit slight and his authority negligible. Yet even he treats me in this way. What, then, of a ruler with ten thousand chariots? His body is wearied by his state, his understanding exhausted by its affairs. He will entrust me with responsibilities and demand results. That is why I was afraid.” Bohun Maoren said, “Well observed! But stay where you are, and people will gather around you.”

32.02 Not long afterwards Bohun Maoren visited him. Shoes filled the space outside his door. Bohun Maoren stood facing north, rested his chin upon his staff and remained there for a while. Then, without speaking, he went out. The attendant told Liezi, who picked up his shoes and ran barefoot to the gate. “Master, you have come. Will you not give me some medicine for my condition?” Bohun Maoren replied, “Enough! I told you that people would gather around you, and they have. It is not that you can make them gather, but that you cannot prevent them from gathering. What use is this display of unusual qualities that stirs their admiration? Such influence will inevitably stir you in return and shake the roots of your natural endowment. There is nothing worthwhile in it. Those who associate with you will not warn you. Their little words are poison to a person. Neither awakening nor understanding: how could you help one another mature? The skilful labour; the knowledgeable worry. Those without such abilities seek nothing. They eat their fill and wander, floating like an unmoored boat. Empty, they wander.”

32.03 Huan, a man of Zheng, recited his lessons in the country of the Qiu clan. After only three years he became a Confucian scholar. As a river moistens the land for nine li around, his influence benefited the three branches of his family. He led his younger brother to become a Mohist. The Confucian and the Mohist disputed, and their father supported the follower of Mo Di. After ten years Huan killed himself. His father dreamed of him saying, “It was I who made your son a Mohist. Why did you never recognise the good I did? Now I have become like the fruit of a cypress in autumn.”

32.04 What fashions things does not repay people for their personal claims, but for what is heavenly in them. It was that which enabled the other to become what he became. To believe that one’s own efforts make one different from others, and therefore to despise one’s parent, is like the people of Qi who fight with one another at the well from which they all drink. Hence the saying: “Everyone in the present age is a Huan.” From this it follows that those who possess virtue do not claim to know it. How much less would those who possess the Way! The ancients called this suffering “the punishment for fleeing Heaven.”

32.05 The sage rests in what offers a proper resting place and does not rest in what does not. Ordinary people rest in what offers no proper resting place and fail to rest in what does.

32.06 Zhuangzi said, “Knowing the Way is easy; refraining from talking about it is difficult. To know and not speak is to proceed towards Heaven. To know and speak is to proceed towards the human. The ancients followed the heavenly, not the human.”

32.07 Zhu Pingman learned how to kill dragons from Zhili Yi. He spent his household's wealth of a thousand measures of gold on the training. After three years he had mastered the art, but there was nowhere to put his skill to use.

32.08 The sage does not insist upon what others deem indispensable, and therefore has no warfare within. Ordinary people insist upon what is not indispensable and are consequently full of warfare. Once they follow this warfare, every undertaking becomes a pursuit. To rely upon warfare is to perish.

32.09 The understanding of a petty person never gets beyond gifts, letters and memoranda. Such a person wears out the vital spirit on cramped and shallow matters, yet hopes to encompass the Way and things, and the formless emptiness of the Great One. Thus confused among the reaches of space and time, burdened by bodily form, this person does not know the Great Beginning. The consummate person returns the vital spirit to what has no beginning and delights in the obscurity of the land where nothing exists. Like water flowing through the formless, it spreads into the Great Purity. How sad! You exercise understanding over matters as fine as a hair and do not know the great tranquillity.

32.10 Cao Shang of Song went as the king of Song's envoy to Qin. He set out with a few carriages. The king of Qin was pleased with him and gave him another hundred. On returning to Song he met Zhuangzi and said, "Living in a poor quarter and a narrow alley, weaving sandals in distress, with a withered neck and a yellow face: that is not my strong point. Winning over the ruler of ten thousand chariots at a single audience and returning with a hundred carriages: that is what I excel at." Zhuangzi said, "When the king of Qin is ill, he summons physicians. Someone who opens an abscess or drains a boil receives one carriage. Someone who licks his haemorrhoids receives five. The lower the treatment, the greater the reward. Have you been treating his haemorrhoids? Otherwise, how did you get so many carriages? Go away!"

32.11 Duke Ai of Lu asked Yan He, "If I make Zhongni the mainstay of my government, will my state recover?" Yan He replied, "That would be dangerous indeed! Zhongni adds decoration and paint to feathers that are already adorned. He conducts affairs with flowery speeches, taking branches for the essential thing. He distorts people's nature to instruct them and does not recognise the untrustworthiness of what he does. He takes his own mind as his source and his own spirit as ruler. How could he be fit to stand above the people? Is he suitable for you? Should you give him the people's sustenance? You would be mistaken. To make people abandon what is genuine and learn what is artificial is not the way to guide them. For the sake of later generations, it would be better to leave him alone. Such government would be difficult!"

32.12 To bestow benefits upon people and never forget having done so is not Heaven's way of giving. It is bargaining, which does not deserve recognition. Even when worldly affairs confer it, the spiritual does not recognise it. External punishments employ metal and wood; internal punishments employ agitation and excess. When petty people incur external punishments, metal and wood interrogate them. When they incur internal punishments, yin and yang consume them. Only a genuine person can be free of both external and internal punishment.

32.13 Confucius said, "The human heart is more treacherous than mountains and rivers and harder to know than Heaven. Heaven at least has its seasons, spring, autumn, winter and summer, and its times of dawn and dusk. Human beings conceal deep feelings behind an imposing exterior. Some appear sincere but are grasping; some have abilities but seem unworthy; some appear accommodating but have far-reaching designs; some look firm but are pliable; some seem slow but are impetuous. Thus those who rush towards righteousness as though thirsting for it may flee it as though it were burning them."

32.14 "Therefore the exemplary person sends someone far away and observes their loyalty; employs them nearby and observes their respect; assigns them complicated work and observes their ability; questions them suddenly and observes their understanding; sets an urgent deadline and observes their reliability; entrusts them with wealth and observes their humanity; tells them of danger and observes their constancy; gives them wine

until they are drunk and observes their inclinations; places them among varied company and observes their conduct. Once these nine tests have been applied, an unworthy person is disclosed."

32.15 At his first appointment Zheng Kaofu bowed his head. At his second he bent his back. At his third he stooped and walked close along the wall. Who would dare not follow such restraint? An ordinary fellow, by contrast, strides arrogantly after his first appointment, dances in his chariot after his second, and after his third calls his father's brothers by their personal names. How could such conduct accord with Tang Yao and Xu You?

32.16 Nothing does greater harm than making virtue an intentional possession, so that the mind grows a discriminating eye. When that eye turns inward in self-approval, it brings ruin. There are five forms of harmful virtue, of which self-centred virtue is foremost. What is self-centred virtue? Being pleased with one's own conduct and denigrating whatever one does not practise.

32.17 There are eight extremes that lead to adversity, three practices that secure advancement, and six repositories in the person. Beauty, a fine beard, height, size, strength, elegance, bravery and daring: to surpass others in all eight is to invite adversity. Following and accommodating others, bending low to rise high, and being anxiously afraid of falling short of others: these three obtain advancement. Understanding that reaches outwards, courage that provokes resentment, humanity and righteousness that bring demands: these also have their consequences. One who penetrates the nature of life is extraordinary; one who reaches only knowledge resembles others. One who comprehends the great allotment follows it; one who comprehends the lesser allotments meets them as they come.

32.18 A man who had received ten carriages after an audience with the king of Song boasted of them to Zhuangzi and treated him like a child. Zhuangzi said, "By the river lived a poor family who earned their food by weaving rushes. The son dived into a deep pool and found a pearl worth a thousand measures of gold. His father told him, 'Bring a stone and smash it! A pearl of that value must have lain under the chin of a black dragon in a ninefold depth. You could only have obtained it while the dragon was asleep. Had it awakened, what shred of you would have remained?' The state of Song is deeper than that pool, and its king fiercer than that dragon. You obtained your carriages because he was asleep. Should he awaken, you will be ground to powder."

32.19 Someone invited Zhuangzi to take office. He answered the envoy, "Have you seen a sacrificial ox? They dress it in embroidered cloth and feed it grass and beans. But when they lead it into the great ancestral temple, can it become an unattended calf again, however much it wishes to?"

32.20 As Zhuangzi was about to die, his disciples wished to give him an elaborate burial. He said, "Heaven and earth will be my inner and outer coffins; the sun and moon my paired discs of jade; the stars my pearls; the myriad things my funeral gifts. Is my burial equipment not complete? What could you add?" The disciples said, "We are afraid that crows and kites will eat you, Master." Zhuangzi replied, "Above ground I shall be food for crows and kites; below ground, food for ants and mole crickets. To take from the former and give to the latter: how partial!"

32.21 To level things with what is not level produces no true level. To verify things with what is not verified produces no true verification. Clear-sighted discrimination becomes the servant of things; spiritual responsiveness verifies them. That mere discrimination cannot surpass such responsiveness has long been so. Yet the foolish rely on what they see to impose themselves on others. Their achievement remains external. Is that not sad?

Explanation of the chapter

Stories associated with Lie Yukou revisit fame, vulnerability, and the difficulty of controlling what others project onto a person. They invite distinction between an actual capacity and the public signs meant to certify

it. Reflections on death and burial also resist the desire to impose solemn significance on what cannot ultimately be avoided.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

Because this is a composite chapter, changes in tone must not disappear into an artificial synthesis. Our proposed common question is what is lost when one's public image becomes something to manage incessantly. The response is not a command to despise society but an inquiry into dependency on spectators and expectations.

Textual collation

The complete succession of stories and maxims is retained without manufacturing a single continuous argument. In the opening, 先饋 means being served before others; being served before payment is not added. 遁天之刑 is read as punishment for fleeing the heavenly, not escape from Heaven’s punishment. Huan’s Confucian position is distinguished from his brother’s Mohism. The enumerations of five vices, eight extremes, three practices and six repositories are not artificially completed: only the first vice is expressly developed and the subsequent arrangement is difficult. The nine tests attributed to Confucius belong to the source, not to a recommended modern protocol. The ending contrasts discrimination with spiritual responsiveness; it does not anticipate a scientific theory of verification. 金 is rendered as measures of gold without modern monetary equivalents.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 列禦寇 (Wikisource, oldid 2755182).

32.01-32.02: 列御寇之齊; **32.03:** 鄭人緩也; **32.04:** 夫造物者之報人也; **32.05:** 聖人安其所安; **32.06:** 知道易; **32.07:** 朱泙漫學屠龍; **32.08:** 聖人以必不必; **32.09:** 小夫之知; **32.10:** 宋人有曹商者; **32.11:** 魯哀公問乎顏闔; **32.12:** 施于人而不忘; **32.13-32.14:** 凡人心險於山川; **32.15:** 正考父一命而傴; **32.16:** 賊莫大乎德有心; **32.17:** 窮有八極; **32.18:** 人有見宋王者; **32.19:** 或聘於莊子; **32.20:** 莊子將死; **32.21:** 以不平平.

33. All under Heaven

Tianxia | 天下

Chapter text

33.01 There are many in the world who cultivate particular methods and arts, and each believes that nothing can improve upon what they have accomplished. Where, then, is what the ancients called the art of the Way? The answer is: “Nowhere is it absent.” From what does spiritual efficacy descend? From what does illumination emerge? The birth of the sage and the accomplishment of the king both have their source in the One.

33.02 One who does not depart from the source is called a heavenly person. One who does not depart from the finest essence is called a spiritual person. One who does not depart from the genuine is called a consummate person. One who takes Heaven as source, virtue as root and the Way as gateway, and discerns the signs of transformation, is called a sage. One who takes humanity as kindness, righteousness as principle, ritual as conduct and music as harmony, and is warm, compassionate and humane, is called an exemplary person. Laws establish distinctions, names provide standards, comparisons supply tests and examination determines decisions: one, two, three and four, by these procedures the officials order their ranks. Regular work, food and clothing, reproduction and the accumulation of stores, care for the old, the weak, orphans and widows, so that everyone is sustained: these are the principles of the people’s livelihood.

33.03 How complete the ancients were! They matched spiritual illumination, accorded with the purity of Heaven and Earth, nourished the myriad things and harmonised the world. Their benefits reached the common people. They understood the fundamental patterns and attended to the smallest measures. Through the six directions and the four quarters, in great and small, fine and coarse, their operation was everywhere. Much of what they made clear in rules and measures survives in ancient laws and histories transmitted through the generations. The scholars and cultivated gentlemen of Zou and Lu can explain much of what survives in the Odes, Documents, Rites and Music. The Odes express aspirations; the Documents record affairs; the Rites express conduct; Music expresses harmony; the Changes express yin and yang; the Spring and Autumn Annals express names and the distinctions of rank. Their methods were scattered throughout the world and established in the central states. The hundred schools sometimes cite and explain them.

33.04 Then the world fell into great disorder. Worthies and sages were obscured, and the Way and virtue ceased to be united. Many people seized upon one insight and delighted in it. They were like ears, eyes, nose and mouth: each has its own clarity but cannot perform the others’ functions. So with the hundred schools and their many skills: each has its strength and its occasional use, but none is comprehensive or all-embracing. They are people of a single corner. They divide the beauty of Heaven and Earth, dissect the patterns of the myriad things and scrutinise the completeness of the ancients. Few can encompass the beauty of Heaven and Earth or measure up to spiritual illumination. Thus the Way of inward sageliness and outward kingship has become dark and obstructed, unable to emerge. Everyone makes a method out of what they themselves desire. How sad! The hundred schools go forward without returning and will surely never unite. Later students, unfortunately, will not see the purity of Heaven and Earth or the great whole of the ancients. The art of the Way will be torn apart by the world.

33.05 To leave no extravagance to later ages, squander nothing upon things, avoid ostentation in rules and measures, correct oneself with the measuring line and prepare for the world’s emergencies: something of the ancient art of the Way lay in this. Mo Di and Qin Guli heard of it and delighted in it. They carried its practice too far and subjected themselves to excessive restraint. They composed arguments Against Music and called for Economy in Expenditure. They would not sing during life or wear mourning clothes for the dead. Mozi extended care to all and sought mutual benefit; he opposed fighting and his teaching rejected anger. He was

eager to learn and widely informed, yet differed from the former kings and rejected their ancient rites and music.

33.06 The Yellow Emperor had the music of the Xianchi, Yao the Dazhang, Shun the Dashao, Yu the Daxia and Tang the Dahu. King Wen had the music of the Biyong; King Wu and the Duke of Zhou composed the Wu. Ancient funeral rites distinguished noble and humble and higher and lower ranks. The Son of Heaven had seven layers of inner and outer coffins; the feudal lords five; great officers three; scholars two. Mozi alone would neither sing in life nor wear mourning clothes for the dead. He made a paulownia coffin three cun thick, without an outer coffin, the standard. To teach others this seems to show no care for them; to practise it oneself surely shows no care for oneself. This does not by itself destroy Mozi's teaching. Yet to sing while condemning singing, to weep while condemning weeping, to take delight while condemning delight: is that consistent with human feeling? His life is strenuous and his burial scant; his Way is excessively austere. It produces anxiety and sorrow and is difficult to practise. I fear it cannot be the Way of the sage. It opposes the hearts of the people and the world cannot bear it. Even if Mozi alone can bear it, what is to become of everyone else? Separated from the world, he is far from true kingship.

33.07 Mozi praised the example of Yu: "When Yu controlled the flood, he opened channels for the rivers, connecting the lands of the four border peoples and the nine regions. There were three hundred great rivers, three thousand tributaries and innumerable smaller streams. Yu personally handled his basket and spade and joined the waterways of the world. His calves lost their flesh and his shins their hair. Heavy rain bathed him and fierce winds combed him as he established the myriad states. Yu was a great sage, yet this was how he exhausted his body for the world." Thus later Mohists mostly wore skins or coarse cloth and wooden or straw sandals. They laboured day and night without rest and took self-imposed hardship as their highest standard, saying, "Anyone who cannot do this does not follow Yu's Way and is not worthy of being called a Mohist."

33.08 The disciples of Xiangli Qin and the followers of Wuhou, together with southern Mohists such as Ku Huo, Yi Chi and Denglingzi, all recited the Mohist Canon. Yet they disagreed through divergent and ingenious interpretations and called one another dissident Mohists. They attacked one another over hardness and whiteness, sameness and difference, and answered each other with incompatible arguments about odd and even. Each regarded its great master as a sage, wished to serve him as representative and hoped to become his successor. To this day the matter remains undecided. The intentions of Mo Di and Qin Guli were right, but their conduct was not. It would leave later Mohists competing only in self-torment, with fleshless calves and hairless shins. In disorder it takes the highest place, in good order the lowest. Nevertheless, Mozi truly cared for the world. He pursued what he could not obtain and did not abandon it even when worn to a skeleton. What a man of ability!

33.09 Not to be burdened by custom, ornamented by possessions, careless towards others or hostile to the multitude; to wish the world peace so that people's lives may be preserved; to stop once both oneself and others have enough, and thereby make the heart clear: something of the ancient art of the Way lay in this. Song Xing and Yin Wen heard of it and delighted in it. They wore a distinctive cap shaped like Mount Hua. In dealing with things they began from distinguishing and making room for them. They spoke of the heart's capacity and called it the heart's conduct. Through gentleness they brought people together in harmony and sought to make this the guiding principle throughout the world. To suffer an insult without feeling disgraced, to rescue people from quarrels, forbid aggression and put weapons to rest, and save the age from war: with these teachings they travelled everywhere, persuading those above and instructing those below. Even when the world would not accept them, they kept speaking insistently and would not desist. Thus it was said: "Disliked above and below, they insist upon being seen."

33.10 They did too much for others and too little for themselves. "Let us have five sheng of cooked grain; that will suffice." The teacher feared he might not eat his fill; even when the disciples went hungry, they did not forget the world. Day and night they worked without rest, saying, "We must preserve life!" How lofty the

ambitions of these saviours of the world! They said, “The exemplary person does not pursue harsh scrutiny or lend the self to things.” They thought it better to stop than to make clear what brought no benefit to the world. Outwardly, their teaching forbade aggression and put weapons to rest; inwardly, it kept desires few and shallow. In great and small, fine and coarse, their practice went precisely this far and no further.

33.11 Impartial and without faction, adaptable and without private interest, resolutely without a fixed master; to approach things without dividing them in two, not turn back upon deliberation or make plans through knowledge, not choose among things but go along with them all: something of the ancient art of the Way lay in this. Peng Meng, Tian Pian and Shen Dao heard of it and delighted in it. They began with equalising the myriad things. “Heaven can cover things but cannot support them; Earth can support them but cannot cover them. The great Way can encompass them but cannot discriminate among them.” They knew that everything has what it can and cannot do. Hence: “Selection is not comprehensive; instruction does not reach everything; the Way leaves nothing out.”

33.12 Shen Dao therefore abandoned knowledge and discarded the self, following what could not be avoided. Indifferent and detached among things, he took this as the pattern of the Way. He said that knowing is not knowing, depreciating knowledge and then injuring it. Unconstrained and unwilling to take responsibility, he laughed at the world’s esteem for worthy people. Unrestrained in conduct, he condemned its great sages. Rounded and smoothed, he turned with things, abandoning right and wrong so long as he could avoid harm. He did not take deliberation as his teacher or concern himself with what came before or after, but stood loftily apart. Pushed, he moved; dragged, he followed, like a whirlwind revolving, a feather turning or a millstone rolling. Whole and without blame, he committed no fault in movement or stillness and incurred no guilt. Why? Things without knowledge have no trouble from setting up a self and no burden from using understanding. Their movement and stillness do not depart from the pattern, and throughout life they win no praise. Thus he said that one should become like a thing without knowledge; worthies and sages were of no use, for a clod of earth does not lose the Way. The eminent laughed together: “Shen Dao’s Way is not the conduct of a living person but the principle of a dead one. It is merely strange.”

33.13 Tian Pian was similar. He studied with Peng Meng and acquired the teaching of not teaching. Peng Meng’s teacher said, “The ancient people of the Way went no further than affirming nothing and denying nothing. Their bearing was like a sudden wind. How could it be expressed in words?” They constantly opposed others, were not appreciated, and could not avoid partiality and fragmentation. What they called the Way was not the Way, and what they pronounced right did not escape being wrong. Peng Meng, Tian Pian and Shen Dao did not know the Way. Nevertheless, they had all heard something of it.

33.14 To regard the root as the finest essence and things as coarse, accumulation as insufficiency, and to dwell calmly and alone with spiritual illumination: something of the ancient art of the Way lay in this. Guan Yin and Lao Dan heard of it and delighted in it. They established their teaching in constant nonbeing and being, making the Great One its master. Softness, weakness, humility and lowliness were its outward signs; emptiness that did not injure the myriad things was its substance.

33.15 Guan Yin said, “When the self has no fixed dwelling, the forms of things disclose themselves. Move like water, be still like a mirror, respond like an echo. Indistinct, as though absent; quiet, as though clear. Whoever becomes one with things is harmonious; whoever grasps them loses them. Never go ahead of others, but always follow them.” Lao Dan said, “Know the masculine, keep to the feminine, and be the ravine of the world. Know the white, keep to disgrace, and be the valley of the world.” Everyone else takes the first place; he alone takes the last. He says, “Receive the world’s dirt.” Everyone else chooses fullness; he alone chooses emptiness. He stores nothing and therefore has more than enough, standing firm in that abundance. In his conduct he is unhurried and does not waste himself; without contrived action, he laughs at cleverness. Everyone else seeks good fortune; he alone bends to remain whole, saying, “It is enough to avoid blame.” He takes depth as root and simplicity as rule. “The rigid will break; the sharp will be blunted.” Always making

room for things and not diminishing others, he may be called consummate. Guan Yin and Lao Dan: broad and great genuine persons of antiquity!

33.16 Indistinct and silent, without form; transformation without constancy: death and life, Heaven and Earth together, spiritual illumination in motion! Vaguely, where is it going? Suddenly, where does it arrive? The myriad things are all spread out, yet none is sufficient as a final refuge. Something of the ancient art of the Way lay in this. Zhuang Zhou heard of it and delighted in it. In remote and marvellous stories, extravagant sayings and words without boundaries, he gave himself freedom without becoming partisan or presenting a one-sided view. He thought the world submerged in muddiness, unfit for solemn speech. He used goblet words to let discourse flow, weighted words to lend it credibility and borrowed words to broaden it. Alone he came and went with the vital spirit of Heaven and Earth, yet did not look down upon the myriad things. He did not condemn people through right and wrong, and so could live among ordinary customs. His writings are extraordinary yet accommodating and harmless; his language uneven yet strange and worth contemplating. His abundance cannot be exhausted. Above he wanders with what fashions things; below he befriends those who put life and death outside themselves, without beginning or end. His treatment of the root is broad, open, deep and free; his approach to the source is fitting and reaches upwards. Yet in responding to transformations and freeing himself among things, his principles remain inexhaustible and his coming cannot be stripped away. Dim and obscure, they have not been fully explored.

33.17 Hui Shi had many methods, and his writings filled five carriages. His Way was confused and contradictory, his words missed their mark. In analysing things he said: “The greatest has nothing outside it: call it the Great One. The smallest has nothing inside it: call it the Small One.” “What has no thickness cannot be piled up, yet extends a thousand li.” “Heaven is as low as Earth; mountains are level with marshes.” “The sun reaches noon and declines; things are born and die.” “A great similarity differs from a small similarity: this is called small similarity and difference. The myriad things are entirely similar and entirely different: this is called great similarity and difference.” “The south has no limit and has a limit.” “I set out for Yue today and arrived yesterday.” “Linked rings can be separated.” “I know the centre of Heaven: it is north of Yan and south of Yue.” “Care for the myriad things universally: Heaven and Earth form one body.”

33.18 With such sayings Hui Shi made himself prominent in the world and displayed his skill in debate. The world’s disputers joined him with delight. They said: “An egg has feathers.” “A chicken has three legs.” “Ying contains the whole world.” “A dog can be a sheep.” “Horses have eggs.” “A tadpole has a tail.” “Fire is not hot.” “A mountain has a mouth.” “A wheel does not tread upon the ground.” “The eye does not see.” “Pointing does not reach.” “Arrival does not end.” “A tortoise is longer than a snake.” “A square is not square.” “A compass cannot make a circle.” “A mortise does not enclose its tenon.” “The shadow of a flying bird has never moved.” “However swift an arrowhead, there is a time when it neither moves nor rests.” “A puppy is not a dog.” “A yellow horse and a black ox are three.” “A white dog is black.” “An orphan foal never had a mother.” “Take half of a rod one chi long each day, and in ten thousand generations it will not be exhausted.” With these sayings the disputers responded to Hui Shi, endlessly throughout their lives.

33.19 Huan Tuan and Gongsun Long were among these disputers. They adorned people’s minds and altered their thoughts. They could defeat people’s words but could not win their hearts: this was the enclosure of the disputers. Hui Shi daily used his knowledge in argument with others, especially to produce marvels alongside the disputers of the world. This was his foundation. Yet in his talk he considered himself the most worthy. “How magnificent Heaven and Earth are!” Hui Shi maintained his assertive strength but lacked the art of the Way.

33.20 In the south there was an unusual man named Huang Liao. He asked why Heaven does not fall, why Earth does not sink, and the causes of wind, rain, thunder and lightning. Hui Shi answered without declining and replied without deliberating. He gave explanations of all things, talking without rest, multiplying words without end. Still he thought them too few and added further marvels. He took contradicting others as

substance and sought fame through defeating them, so he did not fit in with the multitude. Weak in virtue and strong in dealing with things, his path was narrow and dark.

33.21 Viewed from the Way of Heaven and Earth, Hui Shi's ability was like the busy labour of a mosquito or a gadfly. What use was it to things? To bring even one capacity to fulfilment would have been worthwhile; to value the Way more highly would have brought him close. But Hui Shi could not find peace in this. He scattered himself among the myriad things without satisfaction and ended with a reputation for skill in debate. Alas for his talent! Diffused abroad, it attained nothing. He pursued the myriad things without returning. It was like trying to exhaust an echo with his voice or racing his own shadow. How sad!

Explanation of the chapter

The final chapter surveys different thinkers and intellectual movements. Its classifications show that the collection itself inhabits a world of debate and alternatives rather than a philosophy reducible to one founder's voice. Surveying schools is already an act of interpretation: deciding what belongs to each tradition requires adopting a standpoint.

Philosophical interpretation and limits

The book's ending should not neutralize the plurality this chapter displays. Our reading proposes two cautions: do not turn each school into a caricature, and do not let the search for unity erase substantive differences. This last section tests every global interpretation of Zhuangzi, including ours. A reading unable to recognize these tensions will have ceased to attend to its object.

Textual collation

The chapter is a retrospective and evaluative classification of schools, not a neutral history. Both criticism and admiration of Mozi are preserved. In the account of Yu, 名川 means rivers, not mountains; rain bathes and wind combs. Sayings attributed to Lao Dan retain the form transmitted here rather than being harmonised with another *Tao Te Ching* version. Guan Yin is the keeper of the pass, not the later Buddhist figure. The three kinds of words connect with chapter 27. The paradox list includes “horses have eggs”, present in the Chinese text but absent from the Legge transcription consulted; deliberately problematic formulations are not converted into scientific assertions. Following Legge, 丁子 is rendered as tadpole, although its identification is disputed. 鑿 and 枘 are read as mortise and tenon, not chisel and handle. Some Mohist group names and several phrases concerning Shen Dao and Hui Shi allow alternative segmentation. A possible reading is retained without claiming definitive resolution.

Locations in the Chinese text

Chinese text: 天下 (Wikisource, oldid 2327636).

33.01-33.04: 天下之治方術者多矣; **33.05-33.08:** 不侈於後世; **33.09-33.10:** 不累於俗; **33.11-33.13:** 公而不當; **33.14-33.15:** 以本為精; **33.16:** 芴漠无形; **33.17-33.21:** 惠施多方.

After reading

Cook Ding in chapter 3 does not acquire his skill by applying a general command to every encounter. He recognises articulations and, on reaching a difficult place, pauses, attends and reduces his movement. Ease does not exclude caution. The craftspeople, swimmers and archers of chapter 19 extend the problem, but do not justify equating every skill with wisdom. A procedure may work within its craft and prove insufficient outside it. Attention to the conditions of a practice matters as much as admiration for its results.

Comparison between chapters 1 and 20 prevents uselessness from becoming a recipe. A tree that no one can exploit escapes the axe; a bird unable to cackle may be slaughtered. The scene changes, and so does what protects. These narratives matter not because they reverse the useful and useless once and for all, but because they prevent classification from replacing attention to the situation. Freedom to wander does not mean possessing a standpoint immune to every circumstance.

Chapter 2 questions the partiality of distinctions and the sufficiency of winning an argument. Chapter 27 makes language mobile: borrowed words, weighty words and words that change with the occasion. Chapter 33 classifies schools again, from a standpoint of its own. Read together, they do not command the abandonment of every distinction, but ask how distinctions are constructed and what they leave out. This commentary also classifies. Recognising that is a condition of its usefulness, not an exemption from responsibility.

The mourning scenes in chapters 6 and 18 do not make a manual of insensibility either. In some, characters alter funeral conventions; in another, Zhuangzi acknowledges grief before explaining his song. Transformation makes it possible to think differently about loss, but does not turn another person’s suffering into an error we should correct for them. The difference between a philosophical narrative and a universal instruction matters especially when the subject is illness, death or vulnerability.

In politics, distrust of domestication and institutions in chapters 9 and 10 does not merge without tension into the discourses on government and hierarchy in chapter 13. The collection preserves differing voices and strategies. Not everything can be made to express one founder, and not every disagreement must be repaired by a reader’s synthesis. Sometimes understanding means recognising an incompatibility without hiding it and asking what experience or concern sustains each position.

The journey therefore ends without a list of commands. Its result may be more precise and less spectacular: noticing when a measure has been confused with the world, a skill with the whole of knowledge, or an interpretation with the text’s final voice. The words of this version and its commentaries have limits too. Returning to passages, comparing readings and preserving questions that do not fit allow the Zhuangzi to remain an interlocutor rather than an authority manufactured to suit our answers.

Sources and attribution

These references distinguish historical editions from digital working copies. Bracketed numbers in the collations refer to this list.

[1] Guo Qingfan, comp. *Zhuangzi jishi* (莊子集釋). Changsha: Sixian jiangshe, 1894. Reference for the received textual tradition and collected commentary; a complete facsimile collation of the printed edition is not claimed.

[2] Legge, James, trans. *The Texts of Taoism*: *The Writings of Kwang-tze*. *The Sacred Books of the East*, vols. XXXIX and XL. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891. The historical, public-domain translation underlying this reading version.

[3] Wikisource. 莊子, digital transcription of the received thirty-three-chapter text. Working copy identified by each traditional chapter title and by the incipits in the concordance. Consulted 7 November 2026.

[4] Digital copies of Legge: The Anarchist Library, Zhuang Zhou, Zhuangzi; Ratmachines, Chuang Tzu, James Legge Translation. Consultation copies used when preparing the corpus, not substitutes for identifying the historical edition of 1891.

[5] Guo Qingfan. *Zhuangzi jishi*, juan 3 shang, 大宗師第六. Guo Xiang’s commentary, Cheng Xuanying’s subcommentary and glosses transmitted in Lu Deming’s Shiwen. Digital transcription: ChineseClassic, content 469. Consulted for the located decisions at 06.02, 06.04, 06.21 and 06.22, not as independent verification of the entire book.

Wikisource: Chinese text by chapter

Legge: digital copy at The Anarchist Library

Legge: digital copy at Ratmachines

Zhuangzi jishi: commentary on chapter 6

Explanations and philosophical interpretations are retained from Juan Segurola's original commentaries. The primary text occupies a separate section. Collation notes are editorial observations: they identify a decision without making a debatable reading the only possible one.