

## EPITEMIC PERSPECTIVISM AND LIVING WELL IN THE THOUGHT OF NIETZSCHE AND ZHUANGZI

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*Abstract: Nietzsche and Zhuangzi offer epistemological views of perspectivism that inform a normative conception of living well. Perspectivism for both thinkers point to the limits of human knowledge, in that both thinkers deny the possibility of attaining knowledge traditionally considered important to living well. Both also endorse a notion of the good life that takes the value of knowledge to be restricted. Nietzschean perspectivism devalues the pursuit of knowledge that does not pertain to human interests. Zhuangist perspectivism devalues the pursuit of knowledge that does not facilitate attainment of the normative Way. I respond to Berry's therapeutic reading of Nietzsche in order to argue that Nietzsche rejects knowledge that does not speak to human interests. I also draw upon Ivanhoe and Berkson's reading of Zhuangzi's epistemology to argue that his perspectivism informs a view of the good life that values intuitive knowledge and its employment of the natural mechanism (tian ji), over the pursuit of theoretical knowledge, which includes asking grand questions about the workings and origin of the universe.*

Nietzsche and Zhuangzi (莊子) each offer an analysis on the nature of perspectives in order to answer the epistemological question of how humans know anything. Both thinkers believe perspectives constrain the possibilities of what humans are capable of knowing, and they suggest that the cognitive capacities of humans play an essential role in circumscribing the possibilities for what is knowable. In this sense, each thinker is a skeptic about knowledge concerning the answers to certain questions. The thinkers in this study believe such knowledge is unimportant toward the goal of living well. In their respective views of the good life, they deny the importance of knowledge traditionally considered important to their respective philosophical opponents. The readings of Nietzsche and Zhuangzi presented reveal the epistemological basis which unpins their respective normative commitments to

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pursue knowledge relevant to their views of the good life.

I will attempt to put my reading of Nietzsche in dialogue with a recent reading by Jessica Berry which identifies the Ancient Greek Skeptical influences on Nietzsche's thought. Berry's therapeutic reading understands Nietzsche as indebted to ancient Greek *Skepticism*. She argues that Nietzschean health, like the Skeptical notion of health, entails *ataraxia*, or peace of mind, which results from the suspension of judgment. According to Berry, Nietzsche does not assert philosophical views of his own, but rather, makes arguments in order to show their equipollent nature. I will argue Berry overstates the degree to which Nietzsche's thought is concerned with suspending judgment. A significant component of Nietzsche's normative project involves his taking a stand against positions that accept the two-world hypothesis. Nietzsche ultimately dissolves knowledge which fails to pertain to the particular interests, goals, and purposes of human beings.

I will also draw upon two readings of Zhuangzi's epistemology in order to elucidate how his perspectivism informs his normative project. Zhuangzi believes that perspectives which rely on right (*shi* 是) and wrong (*fei* 非) are unable to deliver individuals to the truth. P.J. Ivanhoe and Mark Berkson have pointed out that Zhuangzi is a skeptic insofar as he denies that language and concepts are able to correctly capture the normative Way (*dao* 道). Given Zhuangzi's view that language and concepts are unable to deliver individuals to *the Way*, he also dissolves grand questions about the workings and origin of the universe, such as where the universe comes from, what it is ultimately like, or how it is that organisms operate as they do. Such knowledge about these questions is harmful because its pursuit is counter to his normative goal, which is the pursuit of the path leading to the normative Way. Zhuangzi's Daoist alternative encourages individuals to orient themselves to an experiential and intuitive knowledge of the Way, which ceases to rely on linguistic-conceptual perspectives.

### I. Nietzsche and Perspectivism

Henceforth, my dear philosophers, let us be on guard against the dangerous old conceptual fiction which posited a "pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject": let us guard against the snares of such contradictory concepts as "pure reason," "absolute spirituality," "knowledge in itself": these always demand that we should think of an eye which is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which

alone seeing becomes seeing *something*, are supposed to be lacking; these always demand of the eye an absurdity and a nonsense. There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective “knowing”; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our “concept” of this thing, our “objectivity,” be (Nietzsche 2000b: 555).

If we read Nietzschean perspectivism in terms of an epistemological view (Clark 1990, Nehamas 1985), then we can understand Nietzsche as drawing out an analogy between the bodily act of seeing and the phenomenological act of knowing (Leiter, 1994: 343-344; Leiter, 2002: 271-272). This analogy is important, for it highlights the way in which “seeing” is always from a particular point of view; it is from some particular perspective that individuals know something. In the same way that we always perceive an object from a particular physical standpoint or location—from a certain angle or distance, for instance—we know an object or phenomenon from a particular conceptual perspective, namely from a set of interests, goals, and purposes. In addition, the more visual perspectives from which we have observed the object—for instance, the more angles from which we can see the object—the better our notion of what the object is like, in the same way that the more conceptual perspectives we apply to an object or phenomenon, the better our conception will be of it. Furthermore, just as there are an infinite number of possible visual perspectives, there are also an infinite number of possible conceptual perspectives, since there are a limitless number of interpretive interests which guide human knowing. Finally, just as there are certain factors that can distort the visual perspective of a particular object—such as being far away from the object or there being another object obstructing our view—there are analogous factors which distort perspective, such that certain interpretive interests confuse rather than clarify the nature of the object or phenomenon at hand.

Berry has recently offered a reading of Nietzsche’s thought which attempts to explore his view of perspectivism in connection to the Ancient Greek Skeptical tradition (Berry, 2011). She reads perspectivism in terms of an epistemological method which is Skeptical in character. It is not an epistemological theory per se, but rather a model that generates equipollent arguments. She understands the perspectivist position to facilitate the Skeptical method since it “undermines the attempt to secure justification for all theses” (Ibid.: 111). Perspectivism is meant to give support to the Skeptical idea that on any given philosophical position, arguments are equipollent; that is, there are equally persuasive arguments on both

sides of a given issue, such that there is no proper way to decide which side is superior. This view of perspectivism seems to deepen an understanding of why, on any given issue, there exist equipollent arguments. The basic fact that philosophical arguments are often equally persuasive lends credibility to the view that the appropriate response is to suspend judgment on these questions, as the Sceptics endorse (Ibid.: 37). The Sceptics oppose themselves to the Dogmatists, who take stands on positions, and for this reason, cease to investigate further once they have determined an answer to a given question. Berry's reading suggests that Nietzsche, like the Sceptic, does not endorse philosophical views, but rather, makes arguments in order to show their equipollent nature. All the while, Sceptics never cease to inquire into questions of philosophical import. In fact, according to Berry, Sceptics are the only ones who continue to inquire into questions, since those who are not Sceptics decide on a position and thereby cease looking into the matter in question any further (Ibid.: 36).

Berry's reading of Nietzsche is pertinent to the present study because she offers a reading in which Nietzsche endorses a normative notion of health that follows from his epistemological view of perspectivism. The Sceptics define health more specifically in terms of peace of mind (*ataraxia*), a state of calm that results from suspension of judgment (*epoche*) (Berry, 2011, 33-41). Berry also relates Nietzschean health to Democritus' related notion of *euthymia*, a state of balance or symmetry, which Berry in turn associates with Nietzsche's notion of cheerfulness (Berry, 2011: 156-167).

Berry and I agree that Nietzsche's view of perspectivism, as an epistemological view, informs a normative project. Berry characterizes this normative project as a notion of health. The notion of health that Berry describes in terms of *ataraxia* and *euthymia* is, to some degree, present in Nietzsche's thought. However, Berry's reading of Nietzsche suggests that he asserts no claims of his own; the only critical project Nietzsche has is to remove the dogmatic beliefs of individuals. Nietzsche, on this reading, is not attempting to disabuse individuals of their belief in the importance of objective or *noumenal* knowledge, as I argue here. In addition, Berry's reading implies that there is no positive aspect to Nietzsche's philosophical project, that is, he does not replace existing moral evaluations with a new set of normative standards. On my reading of Nietzsche's normative project, Nietzsche advances philosophical positions that are responsive to the cognitive capacities and practical needs of humans.

While Berry is correct to think that Nietzsche is concerned with health,

defined in terms of averting dogmatism, she overstates the degree to which he is advocating *ataraxia* and *euthumia*, which result from suspension of judgment. Given that Nietzsche advocates certain philosophical positions, the suspension of judgment endorsed by the ancient Skeptics is incompatible with Nietzsche's overall view of health. On my view, Nietzsche is only interested in the pursuit of knowledge that is relevant to human concerns. If Nietzsche is only interested in knowledge that serves human purposes, he is closer to a Dogmatist than a Skeptic in his endorsement of certain kinds of knowledge over others. And indeed, Nietzsche appears to be dogmatic in his flat rejection of the "two-world" hypothesis, the metaphysical view there is both an apparent world and a real world.

According to Nietzschean perspectivism, interests guide human perception, and rather than deny their importance, we should become more aware of how they inform our ways of relating to and knowing the world. This belief is in direct contrast to the competing view he attributes to Platonism and Kantianism, that the version of reality that is most real, the "true world," must be free from these human interests. In the chapter "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable" from *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche lays out an historical progression of positions regarding the "two-world" hypothesis. He attributes the first three on the list to Platonism, Christianity, and Kantianism respectively:

1. The true world—attainable for the sage, the pious, the virtuous. He lives in it; *he is it*....
2. The true world—unattainable for now, but promised for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man ("for the sinner who repents.")....
3. The true world—unattainable, indemonstrable, unpromising; but the very thought of it—a consolation, an obligation, an imperative.... (Nietzsche, 1968: 485).

The second set of positions speaks to a distinct change in our high regard for the so-called "true world." These three stages shed light on how Nietzsche understands his view as different from Kant's epistemological view in particular.

4. The true world—unattainable? At any rate, unattained. And being unattained, also *unknown*. Consequently, not consoling, redeeming, or obligating: how could something unknown obligate us? ....
5. The "true" world—an idea which is no longer good for anything, not even obligating—an idea which has become useless and superfluous—*consequently*, a refuted idea: let us abolish it! ....

6. The true world we have abolished. What world remains? The apparent world perhaps? But no! *With the true world, we have also abolished the apparent one....* (Nietzsche 1968: 485-486).

There is little doubt that Nietzsche understands his own philosophy as belonging to the fourth, fifth, and sixth stages. Nietzsche, like Kant, characterizes *noumenal* knowledge as “unknown” (stage 4), but unlike Kant, it is on the grounds that *noumenal* knowledge is unknown that renders it in some sense “refuted” (stage 5) since “it is no longer good for anything.” In placing himself at the sixth and final stage, Nietzsche wishes to abolish what he calls the “true” world, a reality that transcends this one, against which our world is a mere copy, appearance or merely phenomenal (Schacht, 1995, 47-48). He sets his own thought against those philosophers and religious thinkers throughout history who, due to their hostility to certain features of our world, posit the existence of another reality which is superior and more real than the world revealed to us by the senses. It was only because the true world was set over and against our world that the human world was taken to be merely apparent. With the abolition of a true world that is separable from the actual world, the actual world is no longer seen as apparent, and comes to be recognized as the only reality. Nietzsche writes, “What is ‘appearance’ for me now? Certainly not the opposite of some essence: what could I say about any essence except to name the attributes of its appearance! Certainly not a dead mask that one could place on an unknown x or remove from it!” (Nietzsche, 1974: 116).

Insofar as Nietzsche’s “one world” view is opposed to the “two-world” hypothesis, he is not suspending judgment about what he considers to be the true world. Like the Dogmatist, and quite unlike the Skeptic, Nietzsche argues in favor of a “one world” view over its “two-world” counterpart.

Berry is right to note that Nietzsche does not rule out the possibility that objects and phenomena could be quite different than how we perceive them through our human filters. Her reading is correct insofar as it suggests that Nietzsche takes a non-dogmatic stand regarding whether humans can know about what the world is like independent of human ways of seeing. Nietzsche believes that “essences” and “things-in-themselves” are inaccessible to humans. It is a world in which any reference to the human is wholly absent; its disconnection to the human renders it useless and therefore of little concern to humans (Poellner, 1995: 83-85; Leiter, 2002: 18-19). Even as Berry is right to think that Nietzsche

does in fact suspend judgment on the question of whether humans can access “essences” or “things in themselves,” her reading of Nietzsche overlooks the degree to which the epistemological position of perspectivism is incompatible with the “two-world” hypothesis. In “How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fable” Nietzsche closes off the possibility and desirability of talking about the essences of things independent of its appearances. If the import of perspectivism is to highlight the value of human interests, purposes and goals, then the world that is inaccessible to humans is reduced to irrelevance.

Also contrary to Berry’s reading, I understand Nietzsche’s “one world” view to also be a call to pursue knowledge, an important ingredient in the positive aspect of Nietzsche’s philosophical vision. Rather than pursue knowledge that is independent of human concerns the goal is to expand human forms of knowledge (Schacht 1996; Babich, 1999). Nietzsche’s epistemology is concerned with developing different ways of knowing from different conceptual frames. For any given inquiry, there will be a group of perspectives which yield different but overlapping insights, while there will also be a group of perspectives that are either irrelevant or otherwise unhelpful, and consequently discarded. The practical outcome of perspectivism resembles the process by which the knowledge seeking enterprise establishes and develops a vast web of knowledge. A separate analogy associated with Otto Neurath that Nietzsche himself does not employ—in which the development of knowledge is likened to the construction of a boat out at sea—illustrates the upshot of Nietzschean perspectivism (Leiter 2002: 274-276). We always begin an inquiry from the facts we already know, and we decide which planks to fix and which to stand on, based on specific purposes and practical needs, in the same way that we employ different perspectives in order to achieve different purposes. Importantly, all knowledge is “Neurathian,” in the sense that it is ultimately up for revision in light of new evidence.

Those who, like Nietzsche, wish to overturn the “two-world” hypothesis understand that this interpretation of the world has fabricated a transcendent world of its own making in its pursuit of the “good as such,” free from human perspectives. Nietzsche explains in the Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*:

Let us not be ungrateful to [dogmatic philosophy], although it must certainly be conceded that the worst, most durable, and most dangerous of all errors so far was a dogmatist’s error—namely Plato’s invention of pure spirit and the good as such. But now that is overcome, now that Europe is breathing freely again after

this nightmare and at least can enjoy a healthier—sleep, we, *whose task is wakefulness itself*, are the heirs of all that strength which has been fostered by the fight against this error. To be sure, it meant standing truth on her head and denying *perspective*, the basic condition of all life, when one spoke of spirit and the good as Plato did (Nietzsche 2000a: 193).

Nietzsche likens our current state of affairs to a bad dream. Those philosophers he refers to as “dogmatic” are not criticized, as Berry’s reading might have it, for taking a stand on a philosophical issue. Nietzsche attacks the dogmatists for failing to realize the conceptual mistake they have made in giving highest value to a *noumenal* or transcendental world in which human ways of knowing are denied. Nietzsche’s new philosophers, “whose task is wakefulness itself,” will lead individuals along pursue knowledge that meets the practical needs of humanity.

## II. Zhuangzi and Perspectivism

Your life has a limit but knowledge has none. If you use what is limited to pursue what has no limit, you will be in danger. If you understand this and still strive for knowledge, you will be in danger for certain! (Watson 1968: 50, Zhuangzi 3/1). Unlike in Nietzsche’s corpus, the word ‘perspective’ does not appear in the *Zhuangzi*. In his second essay, however, there are passages that when taken together suggest the view that all knowing that employs language and concepts is perspectival knowing. Zhuangzi is ultimately skeptical of all such theoretical knowledge, and he encourages individuals to rely on an experiential and intuitive knowledge that humans can access by harmonizing with nature (*tian* 天).

Regarding the sense in which Zhuangzi is a skeptic, commentators have fallen into one of two broad camps. The first camp offers a reading in which skepticism is used as a purely as a method for the purpose of disorienting individuals, with the hope that they might be reoriented. Bryan Van Norden (Van Norden 1996), Lisa Raphals (Raphals 1996), and Eric Schwitzgebel (Schwitzgebel 1996) have advanced this reading. According to Van Norden, Zhuangzi employs therapeutic skepticism in order to make the heart-mind of individuals “empty,” so that they can in turn “listen with their *qi* (energies 氣)” (Van Norden 1996: 258). Insofar as Van Norden thinks that therapeutic skepticism can disorient and reorient individuals, the method can radically change the way individuals think, feel, and perceive. The therapeutic skeptical reading suggests, then, that the function of Zhuangzi’s



epistemology is to remove the dogmatic belief of conventional morality in individuals.

P.J. Ivanhoe (Ivanhoe 1996) and Mark Berkson (Berkson 1996) belong to the second camp who have argued that Zhuangzi is a skeptic insofar as he denies that language is able to correctly capture the normative Way (*dao*). Ivanhoe adds that, for Zhuangzi, even conceptual thought cannot represent the Way (Ivanhoe 1996, 196-202; see also Sun 1953, 138). Zhuangzi is a moderate skeptic, in the sense that he believes that individuals are incapable of using perspectives that rely on language and concepts to know the normative Way.

A reading of Zhuangzi as a moderate skeptic does not conflict with also believing that Zhuangzi has a normative project, albeit one that is somewhat different than the therapeutic skepticism sketched above that has been ascribed to Zhuangzi. Ivanhoe and Berkson do in fact argue that Zhuangzi's normative project is therapeutic in the same sense as Van Norden does, namely, that it enables individuals to disabuse themselves of social inculcations in order to allow their natural inclinations to emerge. The difference between the moderate skeptical readings of Ivanhoe and Berkson, and the therapeutic skeptical reading of Van Norden, is that the moderate reading denies that skepticism is being used merely as a method that facilitates Zhuangzi's normative project. Ivanhoe and Berkson argue that moderate skepticism, as a substantive view, informs Zhuangzi's normative project. I endorse the moderate skeptical reading over the methodological skeptical reading, since the former can account for the skepticism about language and conceptualization pervasive throughout the *Zhuangzi*.

More recently, Berkson has given an analysis of Zhuangzi's skepticism toward death in the *Zhuangzi*, a skepticism that encourages the suspension of judgment about what individuals can know about what happens after death. Berkson argues that "Zhuangzi's skepticism reminds us that we simply do not, and cannot, know what happens after death" and that this uncertainty has a therapeutic quality, in that "it helps to break us of certain habits such as acting on the false certitudes of senses, language, and judgments (e.g. those regarding the badness of death)" (Berkson, 2011: 193). Berkson's recent reading, insofar as it reads Zhuangzi as ultimately dissolving philosophical questions, is a significant component to a moderate reading that takes language and concepts as unable to track the Way.

I will argue that as part of his view of perspectivism, Zhuangzi advocates a moderate skepticism in which individuals are encouraged to dissolve grand questions, such as those concerning where the universe comes from, what it is

ultimately like, or how it is that organisms operate as they do. According to Zhuangzi, it is harmful to pursue such theoretical knowledge, even if individuals could in principle discover it. Such knowledge is harmful because its pursuit is counter to his normative goal, which is the pursuit of the path leading to the normative Way. Zhuangzi's Daoist alternative encourages individuals to orient themselves to an intuitive knowledge of the Way, by employing what he calls in one passage the natural mechanism. When individuals employ the natural mechanism, they cease to rely on linguistic-conceptual perspectives.

Despite that all humans share in the same human perspective (Watson 1968, 45-46; Zhuangzi 2/67-70), different individuals have different perspectives on issues pertaining to "what is so" or "what is not so," or what is right (*shi*) or wrong (*fei*). Zhuangzi believes that engaging in debates cannot settle disputes of right and wrong. In a passage from the chapter "Discussion on Making All Things Equal," Zhuangzi asks his readers to suppose that two people are having an argument. Zhuangzi writes,

If you have beaten me instead of my beating you, then are you necessarily right (*shi*) and am I necessarily wrong (*fei*)? If I have beaten you instead of your beating me, then am I necessarily right and are you necessarily wrong? Is one of us right and the other wrong? Are both of us right or are both of us wrong? If you and I don't know the answer, then other people are bound to be even more in the dark. Whom shall we get to decide what is right? Shall we get someone who agrees with you to decide? But if he already agrees with you, how can he decide fairly? Shall we get someone who agrees with me? But if he already agrees with me, how can he decide? Shall we get someone who disagrees with both of us? But if he already disagrees with the both of us, how can he decide? Shall we get someone who agrees with both of us? But if he already agrees with both of us, how can he decide? Obviously, then, neither you nor I nor anyone else can decide for each other (Watson 1968: 48; Zhuangzi 2/85-90).

In this passage, Zhuangzi denies of the possibility of discovering the truth by engaging in philosophical debates by deploying arguments or by finding the right arbiters (Carr and Ivanhoe 2000; Liu 2006: 40-41). This is due to the fact that perspectives are incommensurable; when two parties engage in argument, it is not clear who is right, since each is employing a different perspective.

Suppose, then, that a Confucian and Mohist scholar were arguing over the appropriate length of time a son should mourn over his father's death (Graham 1983: 4-5). Both sides agree that the relevant concept to answering this question is

righteousness or duty (*yi* 義). The problem is that that the Confucians and Mohists disagree about the nature of righteousness. While the Confucians define righteousness as appropriate behavior based on status or position, the Mohists define it as what is most beneficial (*li* 利) to the state. It was according to the Confucian understanding of righteousness that a son should mourn the death of his father into the third year. But given the Mohist understanding, mourning for such a long period is unrighteous, since the Mohists saw mourning as useless ritual that fails to promote a well ordered state. Sons should be growing food during that time, not mourning.

Zhuangzi believes that there are no criteria independent of one's own linguistic-conceptual perspective to determine who is right and who is wrong. If, as a third party, I agree with the Mohist position, I am merely showing that I find the Mohist's arguments persuasive and the particular perspective that informs it appealing. It does not guarantee, however, that my view is right.

In several passages from "Discussion on Making All Things Equal," Zhuangzi employs moral language that relies upon the use of words that are demonstrative pronouns in the Classical Chinese (Graham 1969-1970: 142). The Chinese term *shi* can be a demonstrative pronoun meaning "this," and it is often paired with *bi* (彼), which means "that." Importantly, each of these terms is relative to the speaker. A teacher will naturally refer to "this lectern" she is standing next to, while a student near the back of the room would likely refer to "that lectern" (Van Norden 2011: 145-146).

As mentioned earlier, *shi* can also mean "right," and it is paired with its opposite, *fei*, meaning "wrong." Zhuangzi juxtaposes the two pairs of words involving the word *shi* in order to suggest that ethical evaluations such as right and wrong are just as dependent on perspective as the distinction between "this" and "that." If you and I stand at different places and occupy different physical locations, my "here" will be your "there." In the same way, if two people inhabit different perspectives, arguments are futile, for what is *shi*, or right, for me may be *fei*, or wrong, for you.

For Zhuangzi, those who believe that discursive knowledge can deliver them to the path leading to the Way are deceived. He likens their delusion to a dream state. Zhuangzi's deluded man who dreams but does not know that he is dreaming represents the ordinary person with conventional views. Zhuangzi says,

He who dreams of drinking wine may weep when morning comes; he who dreams of weeping may in the morning go off to hunt. While he is dreaming, he does not know that it is a dream, and in his dream he may even try to interpret a dream. Only after he wakes does he know it was a dream. And someday there will be a great awakening when we know that this is all a great dream. Yet the stupid believe they are awake, busily and brightly assuming they understand things, calling this man ruler, that one herdsman—how dense! (Watson 1968: 47-48; Zhuangzi 2/81-83)

Zhuangzi thinks that one tendency among the deluded is to think that the pursuit of knowledge can help us with the question of how to lead a life of value. Discursive knowledge of the world—for instance, that this person is a “ruler,” and that person a “shepherd”—shows that they are knowledgeable about the world of human conventions, a world predicated on language and conceptualization (Mollgaard 2007: 19). But Zhuangzi emphasizes that such a world is merely human contrivance. If individuals employ language and concepts to describe what the normative Way is like, they are doomed to fail from the start.

Zhuangzi believes that that language and conceptualization are unable to deliver individuals to the Way, and a significant component of his moderate skeptical position commits him to dissolve grand questions. This position is best expressed in a story from “Autumn Floods,” where a conversation between a Kui, millipede and snake illustrate the relative unimportance of having an answer to the question of how animals move the way they do (Watson 1968: 183-184; Zhuangzi 17/53-60).

The Kui—a one legged bird in Chinese mythology—is curious as to how the millipede is capable of walking on his ten thousand legs. The millipede then proceeds to ask the snake how it is able to move so fast even though it has no legs at all. Both the millipede and snake reply that their movement simply requires that they employ their natural mechanism (*tian ji* 天機), which does not involve knowledge of how the apparatus works. The natural mechanism, as a kind of intuitive knowledge, allows individuals to attune themselves to the spontaneous forces that make possible attainment of the normative Way.

The story highlights the unimportance of making greater sense of how biological organisms operate and why it is that they are assembled the way they are. Zhuangzi sees the answers to questions such as, “how are humans able to walk so efficiently on two legs?” and “why are people born with two legs?” as

inconsequential to the pursuit of the normative Way (*dao*). Zhuangzi suggests here that his Daoist alternative can only be reached when individuals dissolve grand questions and pursue intuitive knowledge that relies on the natural mechanism (*tian ji*) as its guide.

Zhuangzi undermines confidence in the value of asking grand questions. In the opening passage of the “The Turning of Heaven,” for instance, Zhuangzi undermines our confidence that we can know about the workings of the universe (Watson 1968: 154; Zhuangzi 14/1-4). Zhuangzi asks the reader such questions as, “Does Heaven turn? Does the earth sit still? Do sun and moon compete for a place to shine? Who masterminds all this? Who pulls the strings? Who, resting inactive himself, gives the push that makes it go this way?” Zhuangzi asks these questions in order to show that we cannot really know with certainty. Like Nietzsche, Zhuangzi suggests that grand questions about the nature and workings of the universe cannot be answered with much certainty.

In his “Discussion on Making All Things Equal” (Watson 1968: 37-38, Zhuangzi 2/13-18), Zhuangzi also expresses uncertainty specifically about the origins of the human emotions as well as the workings of the self as a functioning unit: “Joy, anger, grief, delight, worry, regret, fickleness, inflexibility, modesty, willfulness, candor, insolence—music from empty holes, mushrooms springing up in dampness, day and night replacing each other before us, and no one knows where they sprout from.” He speculates that a True Master (*zhen zai* 真宰) might be “pulling the strings,” in designing and organizing the structure of the universe. But despite the fact that we might be able to infer the existence of a True Master, at the same time, we cannot establish with certainty that it exists, since humans cannot see his form. “He can act—that is certain. Yet I cannot see his form. He has identity, but no form.”

Zhuangzi then goes on to what part of the body is the “True Lord” (*zhen jun* 真君), that is, which part controls the others in its organic functioning. “The hundred joints, the nine openings, the six organs, all come together and exist here [as my body]. But which part should I feel closest to?” On this question, Zhuangzi is also uncertain as to the answer. Is it just one part? Is it all the parts? Do they take turns being Lord? At the end of the passage, Zhuangzi asserts that “whether I succeed in discovering his true identity or not, it neither adds nor detracts from his Truth.”

We might understand Zhuangzi’s position that we shouldn’t speculate about the origins or workings of the universe broadly, or of the functioning of human and animal forms more specifically, to be related to the point he makes about the

debates of the Confucians and Mohists. As we saw in the example above, both the Mohist and Confucian philosophies employ methods of analysis that attempt to capture what abstract concepts, like righteousness, mean. The different perspectives each school brings to bear on the question of the meaning of righteousness is partial and limited. The attempt to establish the meaning of righteousness is counterproductive to the achievement of the Daoist Way (*dao*). As an important component of his moderate skepticism, Zhuangzi would say that asking questions about the workings of the universe, or the origins of the human emotions, similarly detracts from the pursuit of the normative Way. The kind of knowledge that is gained by having answers to grand questions is unhelpful and even counterproductive to the Daoist pursuit of the normative Way. In order to attain their goal, aspirants of the Way can employ the natural mechanism (*tian ji*) to tap into an intuitive knowledge that delivers them to the normative Way. This intuitive knowledge precludes knowledge that derives from linguistic-conceptual perspectives. It is for this reason that Zhuangzi encourages individuals to dissolve questions about why where the universe, and everything in it, comes from and why it operates as it does.

While the aim in this study has been to highlight a key structural similarity between perspectivism and normative health in the thought of Nietzsche and Zhuangzi, there is little doubt that at the level of details their respective visions are quite dissimilar. Ivanhoe has already noted what I take to be the fundamental difference in Nietzsche's and Zhuangzi's respective versions of perspectivism and health (Ivanhoe 1993: 645). Nietzsche is an ethical antirealist: that is, he denies the objective existence of normative facts. It is his view of antirealism that makes possible his further goal of undermining and clearing away all traditional notions of value. He challenges other free spirits to fashion new values that counter Christian morality and religion, with its distinctive notions of good and evil.

Zhuangzi, on the other hand, is an ethical realist who believes that certain normative properties are built into the structure of the cosmic order. He believes in the existence of these normative facts, in spite of all of his doubt about the possibility of conceiving them in language or even in thought. Zhuangzi, like other ancient Chinese thinkers, sought to answer the question of how individuals find a way or path (*dao*) that ensures an optimally natural and harmonious way of life. Zhuangzi is no exception in believing that his normative ideal reflects objective features of reality; he believes that his Way, as the absolute truth, is the aim or ideal toward which we ought to strive, but he is also committed to the notion that we can

have no conceptual knowledge of this absolute truth. Zhuangzi is similar to Nietzsche in believing that we must undermine and clear away traditional modes of thinking, but he differs from Nietzsche because he thinks that that beneath these social forms is an underlying normative pattern that we can access once these conventional ways of thinking and living have been cleared away.

Despite the fundamental dissimilarities that exist between them at the level of specific details, it is also interesting to note that both thinkers invoke similar imagery in their respective philosophical accounts. In their accounts of perspectivism, Nietzsche and Zhuangzi both rely on the analogy between physical and conceptual perspectives. Both liken phenomenological seeing to conceptual seeing. This is significant for both thinkers, since both employ the analogy to make light of the radically different ways of knowing that subjects can inhabit, as well as in order to show the surprising degree of incommensurability that can exist across different perspectives.

Both thinkers of this study also liken the delusional thinking of the philosophers of their day to a dream state (see Wu 1986), in which they have invented a world of their own human contrivance. Nietzsche views those philosophers who endorse the two-world hypothesis to have fallen into a serious conceptual error, while Zhuangzi regards the Mohists and Confucians who attempt to establish theoretical knowledge as hopelessly deluded. The fabricated worlds of their philosophical opponents ultimately serve as an obstacle to a more optimal way of life.

Above all, in addition to the specific similarities, and despite the fundamental differences, we must not overlook the ways in which both Nietzsche and Zhuangzi reveal a similar position with respect to their views on the nature of perspectives. This epistemological position in turn informs a normative vision. Insofar as Nietzsche and Zhuangzi dissolve certain questions that are irrelevant to bringing about a life of value, the thinkers of this study advocate a notion of the good life that preclude the counterproductive pursuit of certain kinds of knowledge.

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