NATURALISM AND MORAL EXPERTISE IN THE *ZHUANGZI*

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I. NATURALISM AND NORMATIVITY IN THE ZHUANGZI

Although there has been a wide variety of interpretation in the secondary literature on the text known as the *Zhuangzi*[1], three general interpretive themes emerge among Anglophone commentators – mysticism, skepticism, and relativism.[2] The earliest scholars (perhaps too heavily influenced by the Herbert Giles translation) tended to read Zhuangzi as a mystic concerned with various religious themes. Interpretations of the 1960s and 1970s (Chan 1963; Watson 1968; Creel 1970) helped to continue this mystical line of analysis, although they tended to associate it with personal reflection rather than religious dogma. As Creel saw it, the *Zhuangzi* addresses how one can improve one's own life through contemplation. He argued that it was such mystical lines of "contemplative" Daoism that led rulers to seek out Daoist advisors because, "[contemplative practices] gave to the Daoist a calm and poise that contrasted sharply with the hurly-burly of the times" (1970, 44). This, according to Creel, led to the migration towards Daoism among many young, ambitious thinkers, as it could provide them a position in a ruler's court. However, such devotees were not adopting Daoism in order to contemplate and, thus, directed Daoism into a more normative direction, which Creel referred to as the "purposive" aspects of early Daoism, which is best represented by other Daoist texts.

Major scholarship done in the 1980s (Graham 1981) and 1990s (Hansen 1992; Kjellberg and Ivanhoe 1996) helped shift the contemplative focus towards skepticism,

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[1] I follow conventions in referring to the purported author of the first seven "Inner" chapters as Zhuangzi, and the text which bears his name as the Zhuangzi (cf. Coutinho 2004; Lin 2003; Roth 1993).
[2] Difficulties in interpretation have been attributed to the Zhuangzi's multiple authorship (Mair 1994; Graham 2001; Ziporyn 2009), its idiosyncratic use of the ancient Chinese (Wu 2006; Ziporyn 2009), and its origins in an oral tradition (Mair 1994). Thus, any effort to situate Zhuangzi's writings within a western framework will face a number of conceptual, cultural, and historical difficulties which threaten to stultify philosophical consideration. Chief among these are the interpretive troubles which surround the text. The abstrusity of the Zhuangzi has been well documented in recent literature, with numerous explanations offered for interpretive quandaries presented by the text. As Bryan Van Norden describes, "the Zhuangzi acts almost like a Rorschach test: different interpreters see different things in it, and what they see there often reveals more about their own preoccupations than about the Zhuangzi itself" (Van Norden 1996, 247). Others have suggested further that such tendencies might demonstrate a fundamental inaccessibility for the modern reader, as if the content of the Zhuangzi is uniquely impenetrable. However, it seems odd to level such claims toward this text alone, since many other Chinese classics possess many of the same qualities which allegedly make the Zhuangzi so recondite.

language, subjectivism, and relativism. Much of the major work done over the last few decades has followed one of these main readings. As Hansen wrote in 2003 in response to some challenges of his reading, "Recent years have witnessed a sea change in *Zhuangzi* interpretations… Today, it is more common for a work on Zhuangzi to discuss skepticism or relativism than mysticism… [Yet] Traditionalists are loathe to exchange the loveable, comic-strip religious mystic for a skeptical linguistic philosopher" (Hansen 2003, 128). The choice, Hansen suggests, is falsely dichotomized into viewing Zhuangzi as either a guru or a skeptic. Hansen argues for a reconciliation of the contemplative and purposive themes in the text through careful consideration of its "political anarchism," "relativist theory of language," and its "skeptical epistemology." The result, according to Hansen, is a set of practical implications for personal wisdom.

This background is significant to those who find ethical motifs in the pages of the *Zhuangzi*, particularly once the passages considered influenced by Yangism are left aside. After all, mystics are often "completely indifferent" (cf. Creel 1970, 4) to moral notions, relativists believe that "discourse is the *real* authority," (Hansen 1992, 210), and skepticism is often completely "ethically inadequate" (Eno 1996, 143) when it comes to offering normative prescriptions. So, it seems, such readings are inevitably locked into either an amoral or non-moral view of the text. By contrast, there has recently been an uptick in the number of interpretations which emphasize the normativity and/or the naturalism of the text, especially when the definition of naturalism is loosened in such a way that it is not automatically associated with outright scientism.[3] Such a reading might shore-up the *Zhuangzi* against charges of amoralism and non-moralism, as well as resolve a few long-standing puzzles associated with the text – the most prominent of which is its advice to "forget morality" and "follow nature." At first blush, such an overt disjunct would seem to run counter to the brand of naturalism I wish to advance – with its commitments to moral cognitivism and moral realism. However, something of a natural normativity may yet be found in the *Zhuangzi*, a normativity which hangs on a kind of pluralism that is too quickly mistaken for vulgar relativism.[4] In what follows, I attempt to show how the insight one gleans from a naturalistic and normative reading of the *Zhuangzi* can be made to support a unique vision of moral expertise.

There is a raft of research already exploring the proto-ethical motifs within the

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[3] This sort of association stems from a particular, and perhaps uncharitable, reading of Quine's 1968 paper, "Epistemology Naturalized" (cf. Capps 1996). Zhuangzi's suspicion of method would certainly resist such a methodological naturalism, but resolving this issue is outside the scope of this paper and the naturalism I have in mind is of the ontological & moral varieties. My use of 'naturalism' will refer to positions that seek "the source of normativity in the natural realm" (Lee 2005, 2), and sketching the broad strokes which lead to such a position will be the focus of the first part.

[4] Hansen's distinction between normative human *dàos* and natural *dàos* that are "constant" echoes the alleged disjunct between forgetting morality and following nature. For examples of the pluralistic natural normativity I have in mind, see Philippa Foot (2001), Martha Nussbaum (1986), and David Wong (2006 and 1984).

text – motifs such as *aporia*, attunement, and embodiment. Taken together, I believe these notions provide a leaping off point for a naturalized account of Zhuangzian normativity. It has been said that, "[t]he irritating sayings of Zhuangzi sting us like a gadfly until we awaken and empty our set, pet perspectives. Once we get over the shock, we shall find Zhuangzi, if not easy to understand, at least understandable" (Wu 2006, 63). As such, the text holds up an ethics of "aporetics," in which, "One acts on the basis of what one does not know, what one cannot control, what one cannot contain, rather than fixed rules, determinate principles, or clear imperatives" (Lusthaus 2003, 164). The *aporia* of the Socratic elenchus, for instance, is both an epistemic and a normative call to inquiry and Plato's philosophical exemplar could be characterized as one who frees herself and others from impediments to intellectual progress. *Aporia* is a call to philosophize with others and seek to remove delusions in them, and in oneself, dialectically (cf. Broadie 2014). In this way, any ethical action resulting from *aporia* is always already provisional, as well as contextual.

Being "at ease" in <u>any</u> context, however, could require skillful attunement, which is probably the most recognizable theme in the *Zhuangzi*, especially in its discussions of *wúwéi* and *zìrán*. It may be tempting to see this as a non-natural, spiritual moral notion: "It is easy to see how this picture of skillful spontaneity constitutes a spiritual as well as moral ideal: total awareness brings spiritual equanimity by means of perfect attunement between a person and her surroundings" (Barrett 2011, 686; emphasis added). But, it is also possible to see it more naturalistically as a sort of "poetics of normativity," a view which emphasizes the use of language in the text and "rests on the Daoist understanding of the Way as the ultimate source of normativity" (Lee 2014, 43). Under such a reading, the language of the *Zhuangzi* is implicitly normative precisely because it is poetic, as in the original sense of Greek *poiesis* – or "bringing forth" – and the norms described therein are those of attunement with "t*he workings of the Way itself in Nature*" (43).[5]

As we see in the knack passages of the *Zhuangzi*, those who possess supremely attuned skill pay deep attention to the body. As Edward Slingerland puts it, "[W]oodshops and kitchens… revealed to [Zhuangzi] artisans and butchers, ferryman and draftsman, whose effortless ease and responsiveness to the world could serve as a model for his disaffected fellow intellectuals" (Slingerland 2014, 143).[6] Perhaps the trick for Zhuangzi, as Slingerland suggests, involves quieting the reflective mind, or "cool cognition," in order to let the more automatic "hot-cognition" of the body take over (cf. Slingerland 2003; 2014). It is clear Slingerland sees this as a normative connection with somatic marker theory. Unfortunately, he does not attempt any analysis of the Homeric conception of *hormē* (impulse), from which somatic marker theory derives its use of the Latin *conatus*, within a larger discussion of the

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[5] Lee's account echoes the Aristotelean assertion that *poiesis* is an imitation of *physis*, however, Lee offers little account of the prescriptions of "attunement."

[6] It could also help in clarify Robert Eno's position regarding the amoralism of Cook Ding's "spirit-like impulses" and Lee Yearley's "transcendent drives" (cf. Eno 1996; Yearley 1996). Likewise, Dewey's discussion of single-mindedness in *Democracy and Education* (1916) resonates with the Homeric notion of conflicting impulses.

psychological struggle to act ethically. Doing so would reveal that the early Greeks couched such struggles not in Platonic terms of "reason" versus "desire" (*logos* vs. *thumos*), but rather one between rival impulses. Such an insight could assist in demonstrating the "practical intelligence" of impulses within hot cognition (Barnouw 2004). The normative aspects of such an idea seem obvious when one recognizes the reconciliation of bodily impulse with intelligence as a type of "cultivation of the sentient body as a central tool of self-perfection, a key to better perception, action, virtue, and happiness" (Shusterman 2004, 33).

Bringing these ideas – *aporia*, attunement, and embodiment – together presents several continuities to which naturalism could commit: 1) a continuity between human intelligence and nature's intelligibility in which intelligence is seen as a metabolic process, 2) an ontological continuity which turns on the concept of organic interaction between human beings and their surroundings, wherein actions and events are part of the same ontology, and 3) a continuity in which there is no sharp division between facts and values. Of course, Chinese thought in general has for some time now been associated naturalistic views, under a variety of names. As F.W. Mote described it in 1971, "the genuine Chinese cosmogony is that of organismic process, meaning that all of the parts of the entire cosmos belong to one organic whole and that they all interact as participants in one spontaneously self-generating life process" (19). Similarly, Roger Ames and David Hall have associated Chinese cosmology with what they call *ars contextualis* (a contextualizing art) and Daoist cosmology, specifically, with what they call a "focus-field" model (Ames and Hall 2003). Joseph Needham has referred to classical Chinese cosmology as "organic naturalism" (Needham 1954) and Tu Wei-Ming has underscored the importance of motifs such as continuity, wholeness, and dynamism in Chinese organicism, which he described as a vision of "all modalities of being [as] organically connected… integral parts of a continuous process of cosmic transformation" (1989, 75). Understanding this, he explained, is to recognize the normative point that "'all things are my companions'… that we are consanguineous with nature. But as humans, we must make ourselves worthy of such a relationship," through our own transformations (75, 78). Such personal transformation, in the *Zhuangzi*, is tantamount to what one might call self-cultivation through the growth of personal efficacy.

However, one might be tempted to see the normative upshot of Chinese naturalism to be something akin to "ask[ing] what might be right about other perspectives because it encourages us to suspend judgment, to accept other moralities on their own terms" (Wong 2006, 110; emphasis added). David Wong has tied this to his own particular brand of pluralistic relativism: What ["forget morality" means] is that we should not make the respect for rules the primary foundation of respect for human beings. We should cultivate the part of us that spontaneously identifies with others, the state of consciousness in which the boundaries between self and others fall away… The idea is that once we are able to suspend looking at people through our evaluative categories, we will be able to accept them for what they are, see them as beings like ourselves, and care for them as we care for ourselves (1984, 208).

This has likewise been the overarching goal of David Wong's work on what he calls "natural moralities" which turns on a specifically irrealist notion of value (2006).[7] However, the point Wong seeks to establish about taking others on their own terms seems deficient in reference to the *Zhuangzi*.[8] On the vulgar relativist's reading, the point might seem to be that all terms are ultimately interchangeable. For the mystical interpretation, the implication would be something like unifying all terms under one "heavenly" perspective. Under the skeptical view, it might mean eliminating terms altogether. However, given the holistic points the text makes about continuity, attunement, the pipings of heaven, earth, and man, and the interpenetration of opposites, what sense would it make to say that any perspective has "its own terms," cut off and discreet from all others? Although Wong's gives a nod to such perspectivist concerns, his main aim is to address value conflicts in everyday experience and the moral ambivalence they can precipitate. For him, moral ambivalence – echoing Richard Rorty's "ironic tolerance" – exists wherever one party recognizes the reasonableness of another's moral counterclaims.[9] However, this does not jibe with much of what one finds in the *Zhuangzi*. For one thing, ambivalence and tolerance, when carried to their logical conclusions, act as epistemic insulators against alternative points of view, not taking them seriously, which is a stance that may undermine pluralism.

As an alternative, one could see the frequency with which the *Zhuangzi* puts its lessons into the mouths of non-conventional characters – the poor, the physically deformed, and the socially outcast – as stressing the sort of open-mindedness that "actively welcomes suggestions and relevant information from all sides" (Dewey 1916, MW 9:174). This sort of habit of thought, comes from a kind of inquiry in everyday practice which is endemic to naturalism – *i.e.* the process of building up a repertoire of actions that may return one to the "flow of experience."[10] James Behuniak, for one, has connected the sort of inquiry put forth in John Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (1916) with the story of Cook Ding's *dào* in the third chapter [*Yǎngshēngzhǔ*] of the *Zhuangzi*. As Dewey explained it, responding to the uncertainty of a problematic situation, such as the intricacies of butchering an ox, is brought about by the desire, which all organisms share, to alleviate indeterminacy. This natural way of dealing with the facts which arise in a problematic situation is

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[7] Jung H. Lee recently has called David Wong's reference to the *Zhuangzi* into question for importing "extra-traditional suppositions" that are "highly problematic textually" (Lee 2014, 38). For one thing, the Chinese character he relied upon to make his case [cí, 慈] appears infrequently in the Zhuangzi and never in the sense to which David Wong puts it. Lee attributes this textual imposition to Wong's commitments to Confucianism and communitarianism, which holds water when compared to *Analects* 7:22, "Even when walking in the company of two other men, I am bound to be able to learn from them. The good points of the one I copy; the bad points of the other I correct in myself" (Lau 1979).

[8] There are likewise attempts to unite the upshots of these three readings. (cf. Hansen 2003; Kjellberg and Ivanhoe 1996).

[9] Cf. Kwang-Sae Lee's "Rorty and Chuang Tzu: Anti-representationalism, Pluralism and Conversation" (1996) *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 23 (2).

[10] Several authors have associated Zhuangzi's thought with this view of experience as "flow." (cf. Fraser 2014; Slingerland 2014; Jochim 1998)

always in terms of value, *i.e.* these facts either have positive or negative instrumental value with regard to escaping indeterminacy, by returning one to the flow of experience. According to the naturalist, value *is* a product of this type of inquiry, and, ipso facto, inquiry is inherently normative.[11] In short, the naturalists saw no need to institute a firm distinction between facts and values; instead, they suggested the difference be viewed as one of degree, not of kind.

Behuniak, rightly I think, ties this sort of open-mindedness to normativity and the Deweyan notion of "ends-in-view," but I would suggest that the normative emphasis be placed on the naturalism, not the instrumentalism, in this type of inquiry. This can help answer critics like Eno, who see the "field of flux" presented in the *Zhuangzi* as an opportunity for a *dào* practitioner to pursue whatever end they so choose, even "butchering people" instead of oxen (Eno 1996, 142).[12] Of course, it is true that Dewey saw ends-in-view as instrumentally valuable, but he also saw them as normative in a second sense insofar as they build up a "fund of experience" that he liked to call "growth" (in a quasi-technical usage). Stating, as Behuniak does, that "Dao-learning must be cultivated *in situ* and become what it is as it goes along," does not fully address Eno's worry because a clever instrumentalist might very well fall into the sort of practices about which Eno worries (Behuniak 2010, 171).[13] The sort of activity Dewey had in mind should not be understood linearly, in terms of singular inputs leading to singular outputs (as Behuniak acknowledges), but rather as an emergent property that could stem from various combinations of inputs or lead to a cascading chorus of outputs.[14] Growth, then, is a non-linear process. It is not something for which one can shrewdly aim and, thus, is not at all a teleological matter.

To illustrate non-teleological types of progress we might consider the following contrasting examples. First, imagine two people who are riding together in a car when one asks the other if progress is being made. The only context in which such a question even makes sense is one in which there is some definite destination in view. If one does not know where one is going, then how can one ascertain if progress is being made? This notion of progress is linear, and hangs on outdated teleological notions. Linear progress is quantifiable only in terms of some desired end-state, of getting "from here to there." Alternatively, imagine two musicians learning the principles of jazz music for the first time. In this scenario, one could just as easily ask

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[11] Dewey's understanding of open-mindedness could also be an answer to the difficulties faced by Wong's pluralistic relativism. As he wrote, "the elimination of conflict is, I believe, a hopeless and self-contradictory ideal… It is not the sheer amount of conflict, but the conditions under which it occurs that determine its value" (Dewey 1894, EW 4:210-211; quoted in Eldridge).

[12] This could likewise be seen as a counterclaim to those who interpret Zhuangzi's "flow" as intrinsically valuable (Jochim 1998), a position Behuniak seems to lean towards in places: "[Eno's] critique misfires: for the moment that he criticizes dao-practice as a means only, he is no longer criticizing dao-practice at all" (166).

[13] I believe this is one way in which a distinction between Zhuangzi's praxeology and that of the diplomat school, or *Zonghengjia*, associated with figures like Guiguzi.

[14] Dewey's brief article "The Reflex-Arc Concept in Psychology" is one example of this sort of thinking.

the other whether or not progress was being made, but this time any answer in the affirmative would indicate an increase in general aptitude for improvisation, not a quantity measurable against a particular and final end. There are many examples of this sort of non-linear ends-in-view within other disciplines, *e.g.* nutrition in the health sciences, market stability in economics, bio-diversity in the environmental sciences, etc.

Understanding growth non-linearly entails pluralism insofar as one must "learn to listen, speak, and act with others in mutual understanding, a mutual understanding that can recognize and honor genuine differences," instead of ironically tolerating them in moral ambivalence (Bernstein 1987, 522; quoted in Eldridge). So, when new problematic situations arise, those who have achieved such non-linear growth will be able to play "around" the problem just as a skilled jazz musician could play around the notes on a page. According to the *Zhuangzi*, this is what a genuine person in their truest natural state would do. And, according to Dewey, growth is a sort of expertise… those who possess it are able to <u>adjust</u> to novel situations, improvising accordingly. In Zhuangzi's words. A man like this could commit an error and not regret it, could meet with success and not make a show. A man like this could climb the high places and not be frightened, could enter the water and not get wet, could enter the fire and not get burned. His knowledge was able to climb all the way up to the Way like this (Watson 1968, 77)

It is best to understand this sort of genuineness as a type of authentic resilience, which William Callahan has called an "untrammeled" quality (Callahan 1998, 184-5) and Daniel Coyle has compared to the Nietzschean *Übermensch* (Coyle 1998, 201). The "knack" for overcoming difficulties would have been a highly valued kind of expertise in Warring States China. And, the moral skill required to thrive in such a context would turn on cultivating a truly pluralistic open-mindedness that might lead one "to treat those who disagree… even profoundly…as those from whom we may learn, and in so far, as friends" (Dewey 1988, 228).

II. MORAL EXPERTISE IN THE ZHUANGZI

The *Zhuangzi*, of course, is filled with stories of expertise of various stripes. In the very least, the skillful butchers, woodcutters, swimmers, ferrymen, and fishermen the text holds up can be said to offer something of a philosophy of action, if not a full-fledged praxeology.[15] This is one reason that the concept *zìrán* [自然] – often translated as "spontaneity," "naturalness," or "just-so-ness" – is so central to getting a handle on its textual themes and continues to challenge readers by presenting something of an *aporetic* normative imperative to cultivate oneself. As Kuang-Ming Wu has stated,
It is most natural to speak as Zhuangzi spoke about naturalness. For naturalness always strangely stings us at our backs. Naturalness pulls us backward, convincing us

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[15] The difference turns on whether one takes action to be a matter of *dào* working <u>through</u> the agent, or if the agent is acting intentionally.

that we <u>must</u> decrease our self-pomposity and become ourselves as we naturally are (Wu 2006, 63).

Inspiration for this sort of normative interpretation comes, in part, from Graham's work on the *Zhuangzi*, which presented the person of the *dào* as one who has overcome the rigid, "verbally formulated codes which other philosophical schools present as the 'Way of the sage' or the 'Way of the former kings'" – and in any particular situation is able to hi…immediately and with unsullied clarity of vision… on that single course which fits no rules but it is the inevitable one. This course, which meanders, shifting direction with varying conditions like water finding its own channel, is the Tao**,** the 'Way,' from which Taoism takes its name; it is what patterns the seeming disorder of change and multiplicity, and all things unerringly follow… How am I to train the Power in me so that I am prompted to act without the aid of reasons, ends, moral and prudential principles? By cultivating the spontaneous energies… (Graham 2001, 6-7).

What this passage describes sounds a lot like moral expertise, although not the sort typically presented within western frameworks of virtue ethics or intellectualist ethics (*i.e.* deontological and consequentialist). On the one hand, the sort of supreme skill (or "knack"), that Graham identifies as fitting inevitably within the situation, cannot be understood as the acme of Aristotelean *phronesis* without significant Greek presuppositions being made about propositional knowledge and human flourishing – and these are clearly unavailable in the *Zhuangzi*. More importantly, any phronetic model of moral expertise would necessitate some account of the "unity of the virtues" – a longstanding theoretical difficulty among contemporary virtue theorists (Jones and Schroeter 2012, 218). On the other hand, it is also obvious that the *Zhuangzi* presents nothing whatsoever like an intellectualist moral theory from which deontological or consequentialist notions of moral expertise could be derived.   The intellectualist model also presents two further shortcomings. First, there is the problem of finding a completely unified moral theory under which moral facts could be subsumed. Second, and particularly relevant to Zhuangzi's critique of Confucianism and Mohism, there is the problem of having to study the philosophical application of moral theories (or disputation) in order to become an expert (Jones and Schroeter 2012, 218).

Thus, in order to see how the *Zhuangzi* could be connected to any consideration of moral expertise, one must look for an alternative to these phronetic and intellectualist models. Because Graham takes the discussion on "*shì*" and "*fēi*" (this, not-this) in the *Qíwùlùn* chapter as the lynchpin for understanding the entire work, it will be useful to start there before turning attention to the knack passages themselves. The *Qíwùlùn* shows us how to avoid the confusion which arises when "this" and "not-this" dissolve into one by seeking "clarity," or míng [明]. As Graham puts it, the ideal observer who acts from *wúwéi* in this manner, […] can do so only at one moment and in one way; by attending to the situation until it moves him, he discovers the move which is 'inevitable' (*pu te yi* [sic.], the one in which he 'has no alternative') <u>like </u>a physical reflex. But he hits on it only if he perceives with perfect <u>clarity</u>, as though in a mirror. (Graham 1983, 9; emphasis added)

This position is what the *Zhuangzi* calls *daòshū* [道樞], commonly translated as

the pivot/hinge/axis of *dào*, a place, "Where neither It nor Other finds its opposite… When once the axis is found at the center of the circle there is no limit to responding with either, on the one hand no limit to what is *it*, on the other no limit to what is not" (Graham 2001, 53). According to Graham, the axis is the central position from which one can witness distinctions dissolving into an alternating wax and wane of a singular Dao. Only from this position is the kind of effortless action of *wúwéi* really possible – through spontaneity, or *zìrán* [自然].

Robin Wang, in her excellent work on the history of *yīnyáng* (2012), has shown the intimate connection of these two ideas – *daòshū* and *zìrán* – with *yīnyáng* practices. The only necessary explanation [for the Chinese conception of circular cosmic motion] is an account of what happens inside that circle and what sustains that movement. This is what the *Zhuangzi* called the axis of the *Dao* in all motions. The explanation for this eternal generation is the fact that the *Dao* itself contains yin and yang… The assumption that order and generation are implicit in the fabric of being is most apparent within the concept of *ziran*… Yinyang is the source and manifestation of *ziran* (Wang 2012, 52-3). Wang continues by pointing out that spontaneity is not simply an emergent, indeterminate, and natural cosmological continuity, but is likewise a principle of action rooted in "mysterious efficacy" [*xuándé* 玄德] which imparts a strategy [*shù* 術] for achieving harmony [*hé* 和] (Wang 2012, 54-5). With regard to martial arts, she suggests "the central point of this strategy is working with the power of the unseen" in order to "find the pulse of the rhythm of change" (2012, 150). With regard to self-cultivation, she acknowledges, "Thinking develops through bodily refinement" (186) and connects this "holistic process" specifically with the *Zhuangzi's* concept of the "genuine" person [*zhēnrén* 真人].

On Graham's view of the "*dào* axis," the truly illuminated person would respond with the most appropriate strategy among any number of efficacious responses to the "openings" or "closings" (to borrow Watson's phrasing) of the situation, and would do so without any deliberation. But, the *Zhuangzi* also offers a variety of titles for such a person, oscillating between [*zhìrén* 至人] the "ultimate person," [*shénrén* 神人] the "holy person," [*shèngrén* 聖人] the "sagely person," and [*zhēnrén*] the "true/genuine person." While the common, and commonsensical, belief is that this variety in terms is just a result of multiple-authorship and therefore likely best read synonymously. Yet, it strikes me as odd that other texts, also considered the handiwork of multiple authors, tend to use a singular term consistently – *e.g.* the *Laozi's* use of *shèngrén* (cf. Lau 1963, 14; Hansen 1992, 201). Perhaps attunement with *dào* is best understood as multiply realizable? That would certainly jibe with my pluralistic reading. Robin Wang quotes the *Huangdi Neijing* to distinguish three sorts of ideal person, "by how they deal with yinyang: true people can master yinyang, utmost people can harmonize yinyang, and worthy people know to follow yinyang" (187). Another possibility could involve viewing such notions as what western ethicists refer to as "thick" moral concepts, which could fit nicely with the *Zhuangzi's* own take on the "limits of philosophy" (Williams 1985, 140-142, 150-152). As Williams states it,

[One] cannot stand quite outside the evaluative interests of the community he is

observing, and pick up the concept simply as a device for dividing up in a rather
strange way certain neutral features of the world… The sympathetic observer can
follow the practice of the people he is observing; he can report, anticipate, and even
take part in discussions of the use they make of their [thick] concept. But…he may
not be ultimately identified with the use of the concept: it may not really be his…. (142).

The so-called "lodged" [*yu*] and "goblet" [*zhi*] words, used by and referenced in the
Zhuangzi, are reasonable candidates for such a comparison with [thick] concepts.
Moreover, a careful consideration of the importance of these types of concepts for the
Zhuangzi's manner of presentation could support Lee's "poetics of normativity," as
presented in my opening.[16]

Addressing such possible anchor points for comparison is where the knack
passages become relevant. Despite their differences in occupation, the characters in
these passages are each chasing the same thing: *dào*, which is, as Cook Ding puts it, a
"step beyond using one's hands effectively." The character used in the Cook Ding
story is *jì* [技], which could also be translated as craft, talent, or ability.[17] It is similar
in meaning to *shù* [術], commonly translated as art/strategy. [18] In the *Dáshēng*
chapter, Carver Qing claims not to have any "artistic avenue" (*shù*) beyond not
wasting his vital energies worrying about the outside world and the rewards external
to his task.[19] Each craftsman claims to follow *dào*, not possess it. This should be
compared with two other stories from the *Dáshēng* – the cicada catcher and the old
swimmer. The former claims to have a *dào* [*yǒu dào* 有道], which turns out to
involve forgetting everything else but cicada wings; the latter says he has none [*wú
dào* 無道], but admits to having developed over the many years something of a
second nature for swimming in treacherous waters. It seems evident, then that while
dào practices are diverse they share a stake in some larger notion of efficacy. Wang
draws all such practical wisdom "based on softness, emptiness, nonaction, and
spontaneity," under a general heading: *dàoshù*, or "*dào* strategy" [not to be confused
with Graham's *dàoshū*, or "*dào* axis"] (Wang 2012, 127). She states, the *shu* of the
Dao is fitting one's environment so well one forgets that it is even there… From the
[*dàoshù*] point of view…morality is not about the dichotomy of right versus wrong or
good versus bad, but rather aligning one's activities with the force and propensity of
the natural world (128-9).

This is a much more naturalistic expression of the clarity one finds at the center of
the *dào* axis. As Wang puts it elsewhere, *dào* strategy emerged from yinyang practices

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[16] For a discussion of lodged and goblet words see Kuang-ming Wu (1990, 370).

[17] Literally, "ability to use one's knowledge or hands effectively in doing something" (Ren
2008, 273).

[18] "The original meaning was 'road' later its meaning was extended to technique" (Ren 2008,
604). In modern Chinese the two are combined to form a compound *jìshù*, meaning
technique/technology.

[19] Carver Qing's statements and Confucius' remarks about the ferryman in the same chapter
bear some resemblance to MacIntyre's discussion of "internal goods" within a practice.
(MacIntyre 1984).

which saw knowledge, "as closely connected with the body…not just in conscious decisions but also in an embodied responsiveness to the world" (186; emphasis added).

I do agree with Graham that the author(s) of the *Zhuangzi* believed this type of clarity and spontaneity had been leveled down by the disputations and conventions of other "philosophical schools." However, I would suggest that the best way to recover such clarity is not by achieving some theoretical state of the enlightened ideal observer, but rather through a normativity of attunement with nature – albeit an attunement which always-already includes the human elements in one's "environing field."[20] Graham's illuminated actor, as a kind of ideal observer, appears to be the sort of person who could find the inevitable action in every situation, and this would run contra the pluralistic points in the text highlighted above. Such an expert, on Graham's take, seems to reinstitute the philosophical pronouncements about the efficacy against which the *Zhuangzi* so vehemently rails. Similarly, both the phronetic and intellectualist models of moral expertise, "share the assumption that expertise is primarily about the capacity reliably to deliver action-guiding verdicts that will settle what we are to do in particular circumstances" (Jones and Schroeter 2012, 219). However, taking the pluralistic points of the *Zhuangzi* to heart, one need not see moral action/judgment as a tidy, all-or-nothing sort of affair. Rather, it might be seen as a messy, tentative, and inherently incomplete endeavor:

Given that the world of value is complex and the capacities needed to navigate in it many and various, it is more realistic to expect that such human moral expertise as exists would take patchwork form rather than the idealized form hypothesized in the simple statement of the two models (Jones and Schroeter 2012, 223). Yet, that need not lead to the conclusion that there is no such thing as moral expertise or that "anything goes" when it comes to moral evaluation. Rather, we might see moral expertise as shared, generalized, and piecemeal in something of "multi-stranded, domain limited" field of experts (Jones and Schroeter 2012, 223).[21] Stated differently, moral expertise might best be characterized as a product of crowd-sourcing. When it comes to non-moral expertise, we have become quite comfortable with such an idea. In many complex activities – such as driving an automobile – we not only take for granted a generalized field of competency, but indeed <u>expect</u> a certain level of expertise. Teaching someone to drive for the first time, especially in a crowded city during peak rush hour, can highlight just how much we take for granted expertise in an emergent relationship between commonplace experts. The teacher's stake in driving expertise is

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[20] This way of stating the continuity between humans with their environments is employed by Paul Kurtz in expounding on Dewey's use of the phrase "environing field" found in the latter's *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938, LW 12:152). In the *Zhuangzi,* this is best illustrated in the beginning of the second chapter, wherein it is explained that the pipings of earth, man, and nature (*tīan*) resonate from the blowing of the same wind. There is likewise an obvious comparison to be made with Hall's and Ames' description of Daoist cosmology as a "focus-field" relationship (Ames and Hall 2003).

[21] Comparisons could be made with MacIntyre's view of practice, as constituted by a tradition of practitioners in a field. The types of virtues which can be found within these practices are "thick" in the sense that they are context dependent (cf. MacIntyre 1984).

in constant negotiation and co-adjustment with the expertise of the others on the scene. Perhaps this could be another way to make sense of the multiplicity of efficacious exemplars (*i.e.* ultimate person, holy person, sagely person, and genuine person) presented in the text. Since, a plausible response to the problem of how to identify who has expertise abandons the thought that expertise is shown only or primarily in all-in judgments about rightness and instead looks for more piece-meal context dependent expertise with particular thick moral concepts, such as 'honest' and 'respectful', rather than with thin concepts such as 'right' and 'ought.' (Jones and Schroeter 2012, 219)

Such a field of commonplace expertise seems to be the point of the knack passages presentation of such a wide variety of efficacious *dàoshù*. Perhaps the lesson to be gleaned is that artisans like Cook Ding, Wheelwright Bian, and Carver Qing each has tapped into the same broad field of expertise through the perfection of his craft, though none is actually in possession of that broader expertise. In such a way, it could be argued, "knack" is domain limited, but nonetheless able to guide one towards *dàoshù*. Simply put, "knack" is *dào*-tracking. This could be the reason the *Zhuangzi* works so hard to put its lessons into the mouths of the unconventional.[22] The syncretist thirty-third chapter of the *Zhuangzi* perhaps puts it best:

Many are the men in the world who apply themselves to doctrines and policies, and each believes he has something that cannot be improved upon. What in ancient times was called the "art of the Way" [*dàoshù*] – where does it exist? I say, there is no place it does not exist (Watson 1968, 362). As I have attempted to show, expertise in the *Zhuangzi* can be seen as a property of a natural, public field – one in which an actor must constantly learn to adapt to continuous changes in circumstances. As such, the *dào* practitioner finds herself in a constant state of moral aporia. The means for living well, it seems, involves fully attuning with the rhythms of one's environment and embodying these in one's own actions.

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[22] Throughout the text, there are stories of physically deformed figures, particularly crippled men and crooked trees, which exhibit the highest virtue because they rest at ease within their own nature – *e.g.,* Hui Shi's tree in Chapter One, the Holy-tree and Sage-tree in Chapter Four, the madman Jie Yu and the numerous instances of criminal amputees in Chapter Five.

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