

The
Complete Works
of
Zhuangzi



Translated by Burton Watson

OUTLINE OF EARLY CHINESE HISTORY

(Dates and entries before 841 BCE are traditional)

BCE	<i>Dynasty</i>		
2852		Culture	{ Fu Xi, inventor of writing, fishing, trapping
2737		Heroes	{ Shennong, inventor of agriculture, commerce
2697			{ Yellow Emperor
2357		Sage Kings	{ Yao
2255	Xia		{ Shun
2205	Dynasty		{ Yu, virtuous founder of dynasty
1818			{ Jie, degenerate terminator of dynasty
1766			{ King Tang, virtuous founder of dynasty
[ca. 1300]	Shang		{ [Beginning of archaeological evidence]
1154	or Yin		{ Zhou, degenerate terminator of dynasty
	Dynasty		
	Three		
	Dynasties		
1122			{ King Wen, virtuous founder of dynasty
1115		Western	{ King Wu, virtuous founder of dynasty
		Zhou	{ King Cheng, virtuous founder of dynasty
			{ (Duke of Zhou, regent to King Cheng)
878	Zhou		{ King Li
781	Dynasty		{ King You
771			{ King You
722			{ Spring and Autumn period (722–481)
			{ Period of the “hundred philosophers” (551–ca. 233):
551		Eastern	{ Confucius, Mozi, Laozi (?), Mencius, Zhuangzi,
		Zhou	{ Hui Shi, Shang Yang, Gongsun Long, Xunzi, Han Feizi
403			{ Warring States period (403–221)
4th to 3rd			{ Extensive wall-building and waterworks by Qin
cent.			{ and other states
249	Qin		{ Lu Buwei, prime minister of Qin
221	Dynasty		{ The First Emperor, Li Si, prime minister
214	(221–207 BCE)		{ The Great Wall completed

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1

FREE AND EASY WANDERING

In the northern darkness there is a fish and his name is Kun.¹ The Kun is so huge I don't know how many thousand *li* he measures. He changes and becomes a bird whose name is Peng. The back of the Peng measures I don't know how many thousand *li* across, and when he rises up and flies off, his wings are like clouds all over the sky. When the sea begins to move,² this bird sets off for the southern darkness, which is the Lake of Heaven.

The *Universal Harmony*³ records various wonders, and it says: "When the Peng journeys to the southern darkness, the waters are roiled for three thousand *li*. He beats the whirlwind and rises ninety thousand *li*, setting off on the sixth-month gale." Wavering heat, bits of dust, living things blown about by the wind—the sky looks very blue. Is that its real color, or is it because it is so far away and has no end? When the bird looks down, all he sees is blue, too.

If water is not piled up deep enough, it won't have the strength to bear up a big boat. Pour a cup of water into a hollow in the floor, and bits of trash will sail on it like boats. But set the cup there, and it will stick fast, for the water is too shallow and the boat too large. If wind is not piled up deep enough, it won't have the strength to bear up great wings. Therefore when the Peng rises ninety thousand *li*, he must have the wind under him like that. Only then can he mount on the back of the wind, shoulder the blue sky, and nothing can hinder or block him. Only then can he set his eyes to the south.

The cicada and the little dove laugh at this, saying, "When we make an effort and fly up, we can get as far as

1. *Kun* means fish roe. So Zhuangzi begins with a paradox—the tiniest fish imaginable is also the largest fish imaginable.

2. Probably a reference to some seasonal shift in the tides or currents.

3. Identified variously as the name of a man or the name of a book. Probably Zhuangzi intended it as the latter and is poking fun at the philosophers of other schools who cite ancient texts to prove their assertions.

the elm or the sapanwood tree, but sometimes we don't make it and just fall down on the ground. Now how is anyone going to go ninety thousand *li* to the south!"

If you go off to the green woods nearby, you can take along food for three meals and come back with your stomach as full as ever. If you are going a hundred *li*, you must grind your grain the night before; and if you are going a thousand *li*, you must start getting the provisions together three months in advance. What do these two creatures understand? Little understanding cannot come up to great understanding; the short-lived cannot come up to the long-lived.

How do I know this is so? The morning mushroom knows nothing of twilight and dawn; the summer cicada knows nothing of spring and autumn. They are the short-lived. South of Chu there is a caterpillar that counts five hundred years as one spring and five hundred years as one autumn. Long, long ago there was a great rose of Sharon that counted eight thousand years as one spring and eight thousand years as one autumn. They are the long-lived. Yet Pengzu⁴ alone is famous today for having lived a long time, and everybody tries to ape him. Isn't it pitiful!

Among the questions of Tang to Qi we find the same thing.⁵ In the bald and barren north, there is a dark sea, the Lake of Heaven. In it is a fish that is several thousand *li* across, and no one knows how long. His name is Kun. There is also a bird there, named Peng, with a back like the Mount Tai and wings like clouds filling the sky. He beats the whirlwind, leaps into the air, and rises up ninety thousand *li*, cutting through the clouds and mist, shouldering the blue sky, and then he turns his eyes south and prepares to journey to the southern darkness.

The little quail laughs at him, saying, "Where does he think *he's* going? I give a great leap and fly up, but I never get more than ten or twelve yards before I come down fluttering among the weeds and brambles. And that's the best kind of flying, anyway! Where does he think *he's* going?" Such is the difference between big and little.

4. Said to have lived to an incredible old age. See p. 46, n. 12.

5. The text may be faulty at this point. The *Beishanlu*, a work written around 800 CE by the monk Shenqing, contains the following passage, said by a Tang commentator on the *Beishanlu* to be found in the *Zhuangzi*: "Tang asked Qi, 'Do up, down, and the four directions have a limit?' Qi replied, 'Beyond their limitlessness there is still another limitlessness.'" But whether this passage was in the original *Zhuangzi* or whether, if it was, it belongs at this point in the text, are questions that cannot be answered.

Therefore a man who has wisdom enough to fill one office effectively, good conduct enough to impress one community, virtue enough to please one ruler, or talent enough to be called into service in one state, has the same kind of self-pride as these little creatures. Song Rongzi⁶ would certainly burst out laughing at such a man. The whole world could praise Song Rongzi and it wouldn't make him exert himself; the whole world could condemn him and it wouldn't make him mope. He drew a clear line between the internal and the external and recognized the boundaries of true glory and disgrace. But that was all. As far as the world went, he didn't fret and worry, but there was still ground he left unturned.

Liezi⁷ could ride the wind and go soaring around with cool and breezy skill, but after fifteen days he came back to earth. As far as the search for good fortune went, he didn't fret and worry. He escaped the trouble of walking, but he still had to depend on something to get around. If he had only mounted on the truth of Heaven and Earth, ridden the changes of the six breaths, and thus wandered through the boundless, then what would he have had to depend on?

Therefore I say, the Perfect Man has no self; the Holy Man has no merit; the Sage has no fame.⁸

Yao wanted to cede the empire to Xu You. "When the sun and moon have already come out," he said, "it's a waste of light to go on burning the torches, isn't it? When the seasonal rains are falling, it's a waste of water to go on irrigating the fields. If you took the throne, the world would be well ordered. I go on occupying it, but all I can see are my failings. I beg to turn over the world to you."

Xu You said, "You govern the world and the world is already well governed. Now if I take your place, will I be doing it for a name? But name is only the guest of reality—will I be doing it so I can play the part of a guest? When the tailorbird builds her nest in the deep wood, she uses no more than one branch. When the mole drinks at the

6. Referred to elsewhere in the literature of the period as Song Jian or Song Keng. According to the last section of the *Zhuangzi*, he taught a doctrine of social harmony, frugality, pacifism, and the rejection of conventional standards of honor and disgrace.

7. Lie Yukou, a Daoist philosopher frequently mentioned in the *Zhuangzi*. The *Liezi*, a work attributed to him, is of uncertain date and did not reach its present form until the third or fourth centuries CE.

8. Not three different categories but three names for the same thing.

river, he takes no more than a bellyful. Go home and forget the matter, my lord. I have no use for the rulership of the world! Though the cook may not run his kitchen properly, the priest and the impersonator of the dead at the sacrifice do not leap over the wine casks and sacrificial stands and go take his place.”⁹

9. Or following another interpretation, “the priest and the impersonator of the dead do not snatch his wine casks and chopping board away from him and take his place.”

Jian Wu said to Lian Shu, “I was listening to Jie Yu’s talk—big and nothing to back it up, going on and on without turning around. I was completely dumbfounded at his words—no more end than the Milky Way, wild and wide of the mark, never coming near human affairs!”

“What were his words like?” asked Lian Shu.

“He said that there is a Holy Man living on faraway Gushe Mountain, with skin like ice or snow and gentle and shy like a young girl. He doesn’t eat the five grains but sucks the wind, drinks the dew, climbs up on the clouds and mist, rides a flying dragon, and wanders beyond the four seas. By concentrating his spirit, he can protect creatures from sickness and plague and make the harvest plentiful. I thought this all was insane and refused to believe it.”

“You would!” said Lian Shu. “We can’t expect a blind man to appreciate beautiful patterns or a deaf man to listen to bells and drums. And blindness and deafness are not confined to the body alone—the understanding has them, too, as your words just now have shown. This man, with this virtue of his, is about to embrace the ten thousand things and roll them into one. Though the age calls for reform, why should he wear himself out over the affairs of the world? There is nothing that can harm this man. Though floodwaters pile up to the sky, he will not drown. Though a great drought melts metal and stone and scorches the earth and hills, he will not be burned. From his dust and leavings alone, you could mold a Yao or a Shun! Why should he consent to bother about mere things?”

A man of Song who sold ceremonial hats made a trip to Yue, but the Yue people cut their hair short and tattooed their bodies and had no use for such things. Yao brought order to the people of the world and directed the government of all within the seas. But he went to see the Four Masters of the faraway Gushe Mountain, [and when he got home] north of the Fen River, he was dazed and had forgotten his kingdom there.

Huizi¹⁰ said to Zhuangzi, “The king of Wei gave me some seeds of a huge gourd. I planted them, and when they grew up, the fruit was big enough to hold five piculs. I tried using it for a water container, but it was so heavy I couldn’t lift it. I split it in half to make dippers, but they were so large and unwieldy that I couldn’t dip them into anything. It’s not that the gourds weren’t fantastically big—but I decided they were of no use, and so I smashed them to pieces.”

Zhuangzi said, “You certainly are dense when it comes to using big things! In Song there was a man who was skilled at making a salve to prevent chapped hands, and generation after generation his family made a living by bleaching silk in water. A traveler heard about the salve and offered to buy the prescription for a hundred measures of gold. The man called everyone to a family council. ‘For generations we’ve been bleaching silk, and we’ve never made more than a few measures of gold,’ he said. ‘Now, if we sell our secret, we can make a hundred measures in one morning. Let’s let him have it!’ The traveler got the salve and introduced it to the king of Wu, who was having trouble with the state of Yue. The king put the man in charge of his troops, and that winter they fought a naval battle with the men of Yue and gave them a bad beating.¹¹ A portion of the conquered territory was awarded to the man as a fief. The salve had the power to prevent chapped hands in either case; but one man used it to get a fief, while the other one never got beyond silk

10. The logician Huizi who, as Waley pointed out, in the *Zhuangzi* “stands for intellectuality as opposed to imagination.”

11. Because the salve, by preventing the soldiers’ hands from chapping, made it easier for them to handle their weapons.

bleaching—because they used it in different ways. Now you had a gourd big enough to hold five piculs. Why didn't you think of making it into a great tub so you could go floating around the rivers and lakes, instead of worrying because it was too big and unwieldy to dip into things! Obviously you still have a lot of underbrush in your head!"

Huizi said to Zhuangzi, "I have a big tree called a *shu*. Its trunk is too gnarled and bumpy to apply a measuring line to, its branches too bent and twisty to match up to a compass or square. You could stand it by the road, and no carpenter would look at it twice. Your words, too, are big and useless, and so everyone alike spurns them!"

Zhuangzi said, "Maybe you've never seen a wildcat or a weasel. It crouches down and hides, watching for something to come along. It leaps and races east and west, not hesitating to go high or low—until it falls into the trap and dies in the net. Then again there's the yak, big as a cloud covering the sky. It certainly knows how to be big, though it doesn't know how to catch rats. Now you have this big tree, and you're distressed because it's useless. Why don't you plant it in Not-Even-Anything Village or the field of Broad-and-Boundless, relax and do nothing by its side, or lie down for a free and easy sleep under it? Axes will never shorten its life, nothing can ever harm it. If there's no use for it, how can it come to grief or pain?"

DISCUSSION ON MAKING ALL THINGS EQUAL

Ziqi of South Wall sat leaning on his armrest, staring up at the sky and breathing—vacant and far away, as though he'd lost his companion.¹ Yan Cheng Ziyou, who was standing by his side in attendance, said, "What is this? Can you really make the body like a withered tree and the mind like dead ashes? The man leaning on the armrest now is not the one who leaned on it before!"

Ziqi said, "You do well to ask the question, Yan. Now I have lost myself. Do you understand that? You hear the piping of men, but you haven't heard the piping of earth. Or if you've heard the piping of earth, you haven't heard the piping of Heaven!"

Ziyou, "May I venture to ask what this means?"

Ziqi said, "The Great Clod belches out breath, and its name is wind. So long as it doesn't come forth, nothing happens. But when it does, then ten thousand hollows begin crying wildly. Can't you hear them, long drawn out? In the mountain forests that lash and sway, there are huge trees a hundred spans around with hollows and openings like noses, like mouths, like ears, like jugs, like cups, like mortars, like rifts, like ruts. They roar like waves, whistle like arrows, screech, gasp, cry, wail, moan, and howl, those in the lead calling out *yeee!*, those behind calling out *yuuu!* In a gentle breeze they answer faintly, but in a full gale the chorus is gigantic. And when the fierce wind has passed on, then all the hollows are empty again. Have you never seen the tossing and trembling that goes on?"

Ziyou said, "By the piping of earth, then, you mean simply [the sound of] these hollows, and by the piping of

1. The word "companion" is interpreted variously to mean his associates, his wife, or his own body.

man, [the sound of] flutes and whistles. But may I ask about the piping of Heaven?”

2. Heaven is not something distinct from earth and man, but a name applied to the natural and spontaneous functioning of the two.

Ziqi said, “Blowing on the ten thousand things in a different way, so that each can be itself—all take what they want for themselves, but who does the sounding?”²

3. Reading *dan* instead of *yan*.

Great understanding is broad and unhurried; little understanding is cramped and busy. Great words are clear and limpid,³ little words are shrill and quarrelsome. In sleep, men’s spirits go visiting; in waking hours, their bodies hustle. With everything they meet they become entangled. Day after day they use their minds in strife, sometimes grandiose, sometimes sly, sometimes petty. Their little fears are mean and trembly; their great fears are stunned and overwhelming. They bound off like an arrow or a crossbow pellet, certain that they are the arbiters of right and wrong. They cling to their position as though they had sworn before the gods, sure that they are holding on to victory. They fade like fall and winter—such is the way they dwindle day by day. They drown in what they do—you cannot make them turn back. They grow dark, as though sealed with seals—such are the excesses of their old age. And when their minds draw near to death, nothing can restore them to the light.

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. Let it be! Let it be! [It is enough that] morning and evening we have them, and they are the means by which we live. Without them, we would not exist; without us, they would have nothing to take hold of. This comes close to the matter. But I do not know what makes them the way they are. It would seem as though they have some True Master, and yet I find no trace of him. He can act—that is certain. Yet I cannot see his form. He has identity but no form.

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? I should delight in all parts, you say? But there must be one I ought to favor more. If not, are they all of them mere servants? But if they all are servants, then how can they keep order among themselves? Or do they take turns being lord and servant? It would seem as though there must be some True Lord among them. But whether or not I succeed in discovering his identity, it neither adds to nor detracts from his Truth.

Once a man receives this fixed bodily form, he holds on to it, waiting for the end. Sometimes clashing with things, sometimes bending before them, he runs his course like a galloping steed, and nothing can stop him. Is he not pathetic? Sweating and laboring to the end of his days and never seeing his accomplishment, utterly exhausting himself and never knowing where to look for rest—can you help pitying him? I'm not dead yet! he says, but what good is that? His body decays, his mind follows it—can you deny that this is a great sorrow? Man's life has always been a muddle like this. How could I be the only muddled one, and other men not muddled?

If a man follows the mind given him and makes it his teacher, then who can be without a teacher? Why must you comprehend the process of change and form your mind on that basis before you can have a teacher? Even an idiot has his teacher. But to fail to abide by this mind and still insist on your rights and wrongs—this is like saying that you set off for Yue today and got there yesterday.⁴ This is to claim that what doesn't exist exists. If you claim that what doesn't exist exists, then even the holy sage Yu couldn't understand you, much less a person like me!

Words are not just wind. Words have something to say. But if what they have to say is not fixed, then do they really say something? Or do they say nothing? People suppose that words are different from the peeps of baby birds, but is there any difference, or isn't there? What does the Way rely on,⁵ that we have true and false? What do words rely on, that we have right and wrong? How can the Way go away and not exist? How can words exist and

4. According to the last section of the *Zhuangzi*, this was one of the paradoxes of the logician Huizi.

5. Following the interpretation of Zhang Binglin. The older interpretation of yin here and in the following sentences is, "What is the Way hidden by," etc.

not be acceptable? When the Way relies on little accomplishments and words rely on vain show, then we have the rights and wrongs of the Confucians and the Mohists. What one calls right, the other calls wrong; what one calls wrong, the other calls right. But if we want to right their wrongs and wrong their rights, then the best thing to use is clarity.

Everything has its “that,” everything has its “this.” From the point of view of “that,” you cannot see it; but through understanding, you can know it. So I say, “that” comes out of “this,” and “this” depends on “that”—which is to say that “this” and “that” give birth to each other. But where there is birth, there must be death; where there is death, there must be birth. Where there is acceptability, there must be unacceptability; where there is unacceptability, there must be acceptability. Where there is recognition of right, there must be recognition of wrong; where there is recognition of wrong, there must be recognition of right. Therefore the sage does not proceed in such a way but illuminates all in the light of Heaven.⁶ He, too, recognizes a “this” but a “this” that is also “that,” a “that” that is also “this.” His “that” has both a right and a wrong in it; his “this,” too, has both a right and a wrong in it. So, in fact, does he still have a “this” and “that”? Or does he, in fact, no longer have a “this” and “that”? A state in which “this” and “that” no longer find their opposites is called the hinge of the Way. When the hinge is fitted into the socket, it can respond endlessly. Its right, then, is a single endlessness, and its wrong, too, is a single endlessness. So I say, the best thing to use is clarity.

To use an attribute to show that attributes are not attributes is not as good as using a nonattribute to show that attributes are not attributes. To use a horse to show that a horse is not a horse is not as good as using a non-horse to show that a horse is not a horse;⁷ Heaven and earth are one attribute; the ten thousand things are one horse.

6. *Tian*, which for Zhuangzi means Nature or the Way.

7. A reference to the statements of the logician Gongsun Long, “A white horse is not a horse” and “Attributes are not attributes in and of themselves.”

What is acceptable we call acceptable; what is unacceptable we call unacceptable. A road is made by people walking on it; things are so because they are called so. What makes them so? Making them so makes them so. What makes them not so? Making them not so makes them not so. Things all must have that which is so; things all must have that which is acceptable. There is nothing that is not so, nothing that is not acceptable.

For this reason, whether you point to a little stalk or a great pillar, a leper or the beautiful Xishi, things ribald and shady, or things grotesque and strange, the Way makes them all into one. Their dividedness is their completeness; their completeness is their impairment. No thing is either complete or impaired, but all are made into one again. Only the man of far-reaching vision knows how to make them into one. So he has no use [for categories] but relegates all to the constant. The constant is the useful; the useful is the passable; the passable is the successful; and with success, all is accomplished. He relies on this alone, relies on it and does not know he is doing so. This is called the Way.

But to wear out your brain trying to make things into one without realizing that they are all the same—this is called “three in the morning.” What do I mean by “three in the morning”? When the monkey trainer was handing out acorns, he said, “You get three in the morning and four at night.” This made all the monkeys furious. “Well, then,” he said, “you get four in the morning and three at night.” The monkeys all were delighted. There was no change in the reality behind the words, and yet the monkeys responded with joy and anger. Let them, if they want to. So the sage harmonizes with both right and wrong and rests in Heaven the Equalizer. This is called walking two roads.

The understanding of the men of ancient times went a long way. How far did it go? To the point where some of them believed that things have never existed—so far, to

the end, where nothing can be added. Those at the next stage thought that things exist but recognized no boundaries among them. Those at the next stage thought there were boundaries but recognized no right and wrong. Because right and wrong appeared, the Way was injured, and because the Way was injured, love became complete. But do such things as completion and injury really exist, or do they not?

8. Zhao Wen was a famous lute (*qin*) player. But the best music he could play (i.e., complete) was only a pale and partial reflection of the ideal music, which was thereby injured and impaired, just as the unity of the Way was injured by the appearance of love—that is, man’s likes and dislikes. Hence, when Mr. Zhao refrained from playing the lute, there was neither completion nor injury.

9. The logicians Huizi and Gongsun Long spent much time discussing the relationship between attributes such as “hard” and “white” and the thing to which they pertain.

10. Following Yu-lan Fung and Fukunaga, I read *fu* instead of *wen*.

11. He accepts things as they are, though to the ordinary person attempting to establish values, they appear chaotic and doubtful and in need of clarification.

There is such a thing as completion and injury—Mr. Zhao playing the lute is an example. There is such a thing as no completion and no injury—Mr. Zhao not playing the lute is an example.⁸ Zhao Wen played the lute; Music Master Kuang waved his baton; Huizi leaned on his desk. The knowledge of these three was close to perfection. All were masters, and therefore their names have been handed down to later ages. Only in their likes were they different from him [the true sage]. What they liked, they tried to make clear. What he is not clear about, they tried to make clear, and so they ended in the foolishness of “hard” and “white.”⁹ Their sons, too, devoted all their lives to their fathers’¹⁰ theories but, till their death, never reached any completion. Can these men be said to have attained completion? If so, then so have all the rest of us. Or can they not be said to have attained completion? If so, then neither we nor anything else has ever attained it.

The torch of chaos and doubt—this is what the sage steers by.¹¹ So he does not use things but relegates all to the constant. This is what it means to use clarity.

Now I am going to make a statement here. I don’t know whether or not it fits into the category of other people’s statements. But whether it fits into their category or whether it doesn’t, it obviously fits into some category. So in that respect, it is no different from their statements. However, let me try making my statement.

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

beginning to be a beginning. There is being. There is nonbeing. There is a not yet beginning to be nonbeing. There is a not yet beginning to be a not yet beginning to be nonbeing. Suddenly there is being and nonbeing. But between this being and nonbeing, I don't really know which is being and which is nonbeing. Now I have just said something. But I don't know whether what I have said has really said something or whether it hasn't said something.

There is nothing in the world bigger than the tip of an autumn hair, and Mount Tai is little. No one has lived longer than a dead child, and Pengzu died young.¹² Heaven and earth were born at the same time I was, and the ten thousand things are one with me.

We have already become one, so how can I say anything? But I have just *said* that we are one, so how can I not be saying something? The one and what I said about it make two, and two and the original one make three. If we go on this way, then even the cleverest mathematician, much less an ordinary man, can't tell where we'll end. If by moving from nonbeing to being, we get to three, how far will we get if we move from being to being? Better not to move but to let things be!

The Way has never known boundaries; speech has no constancy. But because of [the recognition of a] "this," there came to be boundaries. Let me tell you what the boundaries are. There is left, there is right, there are theories, there are debates,¹³ there are divisions, there are discriminations, there are emulations, and there are contentions. These are called the Eight Virtues.¹⁴ As to what is beyond the Six Realms,¹⁵ the sage admits it exists but does not theorize. As to what is within the Six Realms, he theorizes but does not debate. In the case of the *Spring and Autumn*,¹⁶ the record of the former kings of past ages, the sage debates but does not discriminate. So [I say,] those who divide fail to divide; those who discriminate fail to discriminate. What does this mean, you ask? The sage

12. The strands of animal fur were believed to grow particularly fine in autumn; hence "the tip of an autumn hair" is a cliché for something extremely tiny. Pengzu, the Chinese Methuselah, appeared on p. 2.

13. Following the reading in the Cui text.

14. Many commentators and translators try to give the word *de* some special meaning other than its ordinary one of "virtue" in this context. But I believe Zhuangzi is deliberately parodying the ethical categories of the Confucians and Mohists.

15. Heaven, earth, and the four directions, that is, the universe.

16. Perhaps a reference to the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, a history of the state of Lu said to have been compiled by Confucius. But it may be a generic term referring to the chronicles of the various feudal states.

embraces things. Ordinary men discriminate among them and parade their discriminations before others. So I say, those who discriminate fail to see.

The Great Way is not named; Great Discriminations are not spoken; Great Benevolence is not benevolent; Great Modesty is not humble; Great Daring does not attack. If the Way is made clear, it is not the Way. If discriminations are put into words, they do not suffice. If benevolence has a constant object, it cannot be universal.¹⁷ If modesty is fastidious, it cannot be trusted. If daring attacks, it cannot be complete. These five all are round, but they tend toward the square.¹⁸

Therefore understanding that rests in what it does not understand is the finest. Who can understand discriminations that are not spoken, the Way that is not a way? If he can understand this, he may be called the Reservoir of Heaven. Pour into it and it is never full, dip from it and it never runs dry, and yet it does not know where the supply comes from. This is called the Shaded Light.¹⁹

So it is that long ago Yao said to Shun, "I want to attack the rulers of Zong, Kuai, and Xuao. Even as I sit on my throne, this thought nags at me. Why is this?"

Shun replied, "These three rulers are only little dwellers in the weeds and brush. Why this nagging desire? Long ago, ten suns came out all at once, and the ten thousand things were all lighted up. And how much greater is virtue than these suns!"²⁰

Nie Que asked Wang Ni, "Do you know what all things agree in calling right?"

"How would I know that?" said Wang Ni.

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

"How would I know that?"

"Then do things know nothing?"

"How would I know that? However, suppose I try saying something. What way do I have of knowing that if I say I know something I don't really not know it? Or what way do I have of knowing that if I say I don't know

17. Reading *zhou* instead of *cheng*.

18. All are originally perfect but may become "squared," that is, impaired, by the misuses mentioned.

19. Or according to another interpretation, "the Precious Light."

20. Here virtue is to be understood in a good sense, as the power of the Way.

something I don't really in fact know it? Now let me ask *you* some questions. If a man sleeps in a damp place, his back aches and he ends up half paralyzed, but is this true of a loach? If he lives in a tree, he is terrified and shakes with fright, but is this true of a monkey? Of these three creatures, then, which one knows the proper place to live? Men eat the flesh of grass-fed and grain-fed animals, deer eat grass, centipedes find snakes tasty, and hawks and falcons relish mice. Of these four, which knows how food ought to taste? Monkeys pair with monkeys, deer go out with deer, and fish play around with fish. Men claim that Maoqiang and Lady Li were beautiful; but if fish saw them, they would dive to the bottom of the stream; if birds saw them, they would fly away; and if deer saw them, they would break into a run. Of these four, which knows how to fix the standard of beauty for the world? The way I see it, the rules of benevolence and righteousness and the paths of right and wrong all are hopelessly snarled and jumbled. How could I know anything about such discriminations?"

Nie Que said, "If you don't know what is profitable or harmful, then does the Perfect Man likewise know nothing of such things?"

Wang Ni replied, "The Perfect Man is godlike. Though the great swamps blaze, they cannot burn him; though the great rivers freeze, they cannot chill him; though swift lightning splits the hills and howling gales shake the sea, they cannot frighten him. A man like this rides the clouds and mist, straddles the sun and moon, and wanders beyond the four seas. Even life and death have no effect on him, much less the rules of profit and loss!"

Ju Que said to Zhang Wuzi, "I have heard Confucius say that the sage does not work at anything, does not pursue profit, does not dodge harm, does not enjoy being sought after, does not follow the Way, says nothing yet says something, says something yet says nothing, and wanders beyond the dust and grime. Confucius himself regarded

these as wild and flippant words, though I believe they describe the working of the mysterious Way. What do you think of them?”

Zhang Wuzi said, “Even the Yellow Emperor would be confused if he heard such words, so how could you expect Confucius to understand them? What’s more, you’re too hasty in your own appraisal. You see an egg and demand a crowing cock, see a crossbow pellet and demand a roast dove. I’m going to try speaking some reckless words, and I want you to listen to them recklessly. How will that be? The sage leans on the sun and moon, tucks the universe under his arm, merges himself with things, leaves the confusion and muddle as it is, and looks on slaves as exalted. Ordinary men strain and struggle; the sage is stupid and blockish. He takes part in ten thousand ages and achieves simplicity in oneness. For him, all the ten thousand things are what they are, and thus they enfold one another.

“How do I know that loving life is not a delusion? How do I know that in hating death I am not like a man who, having left home in his youth, has forgotten the way back?

“Lady Li was the daughter of the border guard of Ai.²¹ When she was first taken captive and brought to the state of Jin, she wept until her tears drenched the collar of her robe. But later, when she went to live in the palace of the ruler, shared his couch with him, and ate the delicious meats of his table, she wondered why she had ever wept. How do I know that the dead do not wonder why they ever longed for life?

“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 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! Confucius and you both are

21. She was taken captive by Duke Xian of Jin in 671 BCE and later became his consort.

dreaming! And when I say you are dreaming, I am dreaming, too. Words like these will be labeled the Supreme Swindle. Yet after ten thousand generations, a great sage may appear who will know their meaning, and it will still be as though he appeared with astonishing speed.

“Suppose you and I have had an argument. If you have beaten me instead of my beating you, then are you necessarily right, and am I necessarily wrong? 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 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 know the answer. Shall we wait for still another person?

“But waiting for one shifting voice [to pass judgment on] another is the same as waiting for none of them.²² Harmonize them all with the Heavenly Equality, leave them to their endless changes, and so live out your years. What do I mean by harmonizing them with the Heavenly Equality? Right is not right; so is not so. If right were really right, it would differ so clearly from not right that there would be no need for argument. If so were really so, it would differ so clearly from not so that there would be no need for argument. Forget the years; forget distinctions. Leap into the boundless and make it your home!”

Penumbra said to Shadow, “A little while ago you were walking, and now you’re standing still; a little while ago

22. I follow the rearrangement of the text suggested by Lü Huiqing. But the text of this whole paragraph leaves much to be desired, and the translation is tentative.

you were sitting, and now you're standing up. Why this lack of independent action?"

Shadow said, "Do I have to wait for something before I can be like this? Does what I wait for also have to wait for something before it can be like this? Am I waiting for the scales of a snake or the wings of a cicada? How do I know why it is so? How do I know why it isn't so?"²³

23. That is, to ordinary men the shadow appears to depend on something else for its movement, just as the snake depends on its scales (according to Chinese belief) and the cicada on its wings. But do such causal views of action really have any meaning?

Once Zhuang Zhou dreamed he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know he was Zhuang Zhou. Suddenly he woke up, and there he was, solid and unmistakable Zhuang Zhou. But he didn't know if he were Zhuang Zhou who had dreamed he was a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming he was Zhuang Zhou. Between Zhuang Zhou and a butterfly, there must be *some* distinction! This is called the Transformation of Things.

3

THE SECRET OF CARING FOR LIFE

Your life has a limit, but knowledge has none.¹ 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! If you do good, stay away from fame. If you do evil, stay away from punishments. Follow the middle; go by what is constant and you can stay in one piece, keep yourself alive, look after your parents, and live out your years.

Cook Ding was cutting up an ox for Lord Wenhui.² At every touch of his hand, every heave of his shoulder, every move of his feet, every thrust of his knee—zip! zoop! He slithered the knife along with a zing, and all was in perfect rhythm, as though he were performing the dance of the Mulberry Grove or keeping time to the Jingshou music.³

“Ah, this is marvelous!” said Lord Wenhui. “Imagine skill reaching such heights!”

Cook Ding laid down his knife and replied, “What I care about is the Way, which goes beyond skill. When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years I no longer saw the whole ox. And now—now I go at it by spirit and don’t look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop, and spirit moves where it wants. I go along with the natural makeup, strike in the big hollows, guide the knife through the big openings, and follow things as they are. So I never touch the smallest ligament or tendon, much less a main joint.

“A good cook changes his knife once a year—because he cuts. A mediocre cook changes his knife once a

1. The chapter is very brief and would appear to be mutilated.

2. Identified as King Hui of Wei, who appeared on p. 5.

3. The Mulberry Grove is identified as a rain dance from the time of King Tang of the Shang dynasty, and the Jingshou music, as part of a longer composition from the time of Yao.

month—because he hacks. I’ve had this knife of mine for nineteen years and I’ve cut up thousands of oxen with it, and yet the blade is as good as though it had just come from the grindstone. There are spaces between the joints, and the blade of the knife has really no thickness. If you insert what has no thickness into such spaces, then there’s plenty of room—more than enough for the blade to play about in. That’s why after nineteen years, the blade of my knife is still as good as when it first came from the grindstone.

4. Waley (*Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China*, p. 73) takes this whole paragraph to refer to the working methods of a mediocre carver and hence translates it very differently. There is a great deal to be said for his interpretation, but after much consideration I have decided to follow the traditional interpretation because it seems to me that the extreme care and caution that the cook uses when he comes to a difficult place is also a part of Zhuangzi’s “secret of caring for life.”

5. Probably the ex-Commander of the Right, as he has been punished by having one foot amputated, a common penalty in ancient China. It is mutilating punishments such as these that Zhuangzi has in mind when he talks about the need to “stay in one piece.”

6. Laozi, the reputed author of the *Daodejing*.

“However, whenever I come to a complicated place, I size up the difficulties, tell myself to watch out and be careful, keep my eyes on what I’m doing, work very slowly, and move the knife with the greatest subtlety, until—flop! the whole thing comes apart like a clod of earth crumbling to the ground. I stand there holding the knife and look all around me, completely satisfied and reluctant to move on, and then I wipe off the knife and put it away.”⁴

“Excellent!” said Lord Wenhui. “I have heard the words of Cook Ding and learned how to care for life!”

When Gongwen Xuan saw the Commander of the Right,⁵ he was startled and said, “What kind of man is this? How did he come to lose his foot? Was it Heaven? Or was it man?”

“It was Heaven, not man,” said the commander. “When Heaven gave me life, it saw to it that I would be one-footed. Men’s looks are given to them. So I know this was the work of Heaven and not of man. The swamp pheasant has to walk ten paces for one peck and a hundred paces for one drink, but it doesn’t want to be kept in a cage. Though you treat it like a king, its spirit won’t be content.”

When Lao Dan⁶ died, Qin Shi went to mourn for him, but after giving three cries, he left the room.

“Weren’t you a friend of the Master?” asked Laozi’s disciples.

“Yes.”

“And you think it’s all right to mourn him this way?”

“Yes,” said Qin Shi. “At first I took him for a real man, but now I know he wasn’t. A little while ago, when I went in to mourn, I found old men weeping for him as though they were weeping for a son, and young men weeping for him as though they were weeping for a mother. To have gathered a group like *that*, he must have done something to make them talk about him, though he didn’t ask them to talk or make them weep for him, though he didn’t ask them to weep. This is to hide from Heaven, turn your back on the true state of affairs, and forget what you were born with. In the old days, this was called the crime of hiding from Heaven. Your master happened to come because it was his time, and he happened to leave because things follow along. If you are content with the time and willing to follow along, then grief and joy have no way to enter. In the old days, this was called being freed from the bonds of God.

“Though the grease burns out of the torch, the fire passes on, and no one knows where it ends.”⁷

7. The first part of this last sentence is scarcely intelligible, and there are numerous suggestions for how it should be interpreted or emended. I follow Zhu Guiyao in reading “grease” instead of “finger.” For the sake of reference, I list some of the other possible interpretations as I understand them: “When the fingers complete the work of adding firewood, the fire passes on” (Guo Xiang); “Though the fingers are worn out gathering firewood, the fire passes on” (Yü Yue); “What we can point to are the fagots that have been consumed, but the fire is transmitted elsewhere” (Legge, Fukunaga).

IN THE WORLD OF MEN

Yan Hui went to see Confucius and asked permission to take a trip.¹

“Where are you going?”

“I’m going to Wei.”

“What will you do there?”

“I have heard that the ruler of Wei is very young. He acts in an independent manner, thinks little of how he rules his state, and fails to see his faults. It is nothing to him to lead his people into peril, and his dead are reckoned by swampfuls like so much grass.² His people have nowhere to turn. I have heard you say, Master, ‘Leave the state that is well ordered and go to the state in chaos! At the doctor’s gate are many sick men.’ I want to use these words as my standard, in hopes that I can restore his state to health.”

“Ah,” said Confucius, “you will probably go and get yourself executed, that’s all. The Way doesn’t want things mixed in with it. When it becomes a mixture, it becomes many ways; with many ways, there is a lot of bustle; and where there is a lot of bustle, there is trouble—trouble that has no remedy! The Perfect Man of ancient times made sure that he had it in himself before he tried to give it to others. When you’re not even sure what you’ve got in yourself, how do you have time to bother about what some tyrant is doing?”

“Do you know what it is that destroys virtue and where wisdom comes from? Virtue is destroyed by fame, and wisdom comes out of wrangling. Fame is something to beat people down with, and wisdom is a device for wrangling. Both are evil weapons—not the sort of thing to bring

1. Yan Hui was Confucius’s favorite disciple. Throughout this chapter Zhuangzi refers to a number of historical figures, many of whom appear in the *Analects*, though the speeches and anecdotes that he invents for them have nothing to do with history.

2. Omitting the *guo*, following Xi Tong. But there are many other interpretations of this peculiar sentence.

you succeed. Though your virtue may be great and your good faith unassailable, if you do not understand men's spirits, though your fame may be wide and you do not strive with others, if you do not understand men's minds but instead appear before a tyrant and force him to listen to sermons on benevolence and righteousness, measures and standards—this is simply using other men's bad points to parade your own excellence. You will be called a plager of others. He who plagues others will be plagued in turn. You will probably be plagued by this man.

“And suppose he is the kind who actually delights in worthy men and hates the unworthy—then why does he need you to try to make him any different? You had best keep your advice to yourself! Kings and dukes always lord it over others and fight to win the argument. You will find your eyes growing dazed, your color changing, your mouth working to invent excuses, your attitude becoming more and more humble, until in your mind you end by supporting him. This is to pile fire on fire, to add water to water, and is called ‘increasing the excessive.’ If you give in at the beginning, there will be no place to stop. Since your fervent advice is almost certain not to be believed, you are bound to die if you come into the presence of a tyrant.

“In ancient times Jie put Guan Longfeng to death, and Zhou put Prince Bi Gan to death. Both Guan Longfeng and Prince Bi Gan were scrupulous in their conduct, bent down to comfort and aid the common people, and used their positions as ministers to oppose their superiors. Therefore their rulers, Jie and Zhou, utilized their scrupulous conduct as a means to trap them, for they were too fond of good fame. In ancient times Yao attacked Congzhi and Xuao, and Yu attacked Youhu, and these states were left empty and unpeopled, their rulers cut down. It was because they employed their armies constantly and never ceased their search for gain. All were seekers of fame or gain—have you alone not heard of them? Even the sages cannot cope with men who are after fame or gain, much less a person like you!

“However, you must have some plan in mind. Come, tell me what it is.”

Yan Hui said, “If I am grave and empty-hearted, diligent and of one mind, won’t that do?”

“Goodness, how could *that* do? You may put on a fine outward show and seem very impressive, but you can’t avoid having an uncertain look on your face, anymore than an ordinary man can.³ And then you try to gauge this man’s feelings and seek to influence his mind. But with him, what is called ‘the virtue that advances a little each day’ would not succeed, much less a great display of virtue! He will stick fast to his position and never be converted. Though he may make outward signs of agreement, inwardly he will not give it a thought! How could such an approach succeed?”

“Well then, suppose I am inwardly direct, outwardly compliant, and do my work through the examples of antiquity? By being inwardly direct, I can be the companion of Heaven. Being a companion of Heaven, I know that the Son of Heaven and I are equally the sons of Heaven. Then why would I use my words to try to get men to praise me or to try to get them not to praise me? A man like this, people call The Child. This is what I mean by being a companion of Heaven.

“By being outwardly compliant, I can be a companion of men. Lifting up the tablet, kneeling, bowing, crouching down—this is the etiquette of a minister. Everybody does it, so why shouldn’t I? If I do what other people do, they can hardly criticize me. This is what I mean by being a companion of men.

“By doing my work through the examples of antiquity, I can be the companion of ancient times. Though my words may in fact be lessons and reproaches, they belong to ancient times and not to me. In this way, though I may be blunt, I cannot be blamed. This is what I mean by being a companion of antiquity. If I go about it in this way, will it do?”

3. I follow Ma Xulun in taking this sentence to refer to Yan Hui. The older interpretation of Guo Xiang takes it to mean: “He [the ruler of Wei] puts on a fine outward show and is very overbearing; his expression is never fixed, and ordinary men do not try to oppose him.”

Confucius said, “Goodness, how could *that* do? You have too many policies and plans, and you haven’t seen what is needed. You will probably get off without incurring any blame, yes. But that will be as far as it goes. How do you think you can actually convert him? You are still making the mind⁴ your teacher!”

Yan Hui said, “I have nothing more to offer. May I ask the proper way?”

“You must fast!” said Confucius. “I will tell you what that means. Do you think it is easy to do anything while you have a mind? If you do, Bright Heaven will not sanction you.”

Yan Hui said, “My family is poor. I haven’t drunk wine or eaten any strong foods for several months. So can I be considered as having fasted?”

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

“May I ask what the fasting of the mind is?”

Confucius said, “Make your will one! Don’t listen with your ears, listen with your mind. No, don’t listen with your mind, but listen with your spirit. Listening stops with the ears, the mind stops with recognition, but spirit is empty and waits for all things. The Way gathers in emptiness alone. Emptiness is the fasting of the mind.”

Yan Hui said, “Before I heard this, I was certain that I was Hui. But now that I have heard it, there is no more Hui. Can this be called emptiness?”

“That’s all there is to it,” said Confucius. “Now I will tell you. You may go and play in his bird cage but never be moved by fame. If he listens, then sing; if not, keep still. Have no gate, no opening,⁵ but make oneness your house and live with what cannot be avoided. Then you will be close to success.

“It is easy to keep from walking; the hard thing is to walk without touching the ground. It is easy to cheat when you work for men but hard to cheat when you work for Heaven. You have heard of flying with wings, but you

4. Not the natural or “given” mind but the mind that makes artificial distinctions.

5. Following Zhang Binglin, I read *dou* instead of *du*.

- have never heard of flying without wings. You have heard of the knowledge that knows, but you have never heard of the knowledge that does not know. Look into that closed room, the empty chamber where brightness is born! Fortune and blessing gather where there is stillness. But if you do not keep still—this is what is called sitting but racing around.⁶ Let your ears and eyes communicate with what is inside and put mind and knowledge on the outside. Then even gods and spirits will come to dwell, not to speak of men! This is the changing of the ten thousand things, the bond of Yu and Shun, the constant practice of Fu Xi and Ji Qu.⁷ How much more should it be a rule for lesser men!”
6. The body sits, but the mind continues to race.
7. Mythical sage rulers.
8. A high minister of Chu and a relative of the king. Zigao, duke of She,⁸ who was being sent on a mission to Qi, consulted Confucius. “The king is sending me on a very important mission. Qi will probably treat me with great honor but will be in no hurry to do anything more. Even a commoner cannot be forced to act, much less one of the feudal lords. I am very worried about it. You once said to me, ‘In all affairs, whether large or small, there are few men who reach a happy conclusion except through the Way. If you do not succeed, you are bound to suffer from the judgment of men. If you do succeed, you are bound to suffer from the yin and yang.’⁹ To suffer no harm whether or not you succeed—only the man who has virtue can do that.’ I am a man who eats plain food that is simply cooked, so that no one ever complains of the heat in my kitchens.¹⁰ Yet this morning I received my orders from the king and by evening I am gulping ice water—do you suppose I have developed some kind of internal fever? I have not even gone to Qi to see what the situation is like, and already I am suffering from the yin and yang. And if I do not succeed, I am bound to suffer from the judgment of men. I will have both worries. As a minister, I am not capable of carrying out this mission. But perhaps you have some advice you can give me. . . .”
9. The excitement and worry of success will upset the balance of the yin and yang within the body and bring about sickness.
10. The latter part of the sentence is barely intelligible and the translation tentative. Legge’s interpretation is ingenious though strained: “In my diet I take what is coarse, and do not seek delicacies,—a man whose cookery does not require him to be using cooling drinks.”

Confucius said, "In the world, there are two great decrees: one is fate and the other is duty."¹¹ That a son should love his parents is fate—you cannot erase this from his heart. That a subject should serve his ruler is duty—there is no place he can go and be without his ruler, no place he can escape to between heaven and earth. These are called the great decrees. Therefore, to serve your parents and be content to follow them anywhere—this is the perfection of filial piety. To serve your ruler and be content to do anything for him—this is the peak of loyalty. And to serve your own mind so that sadness or joy does not sway or move it; to understand what you can do nothing about and to be content with it as with fate—this is the perfection of virtue. As a subject and a son, you are bound to find things you cannot avoid. If you act in accordance with the state of affairs and forget about yourself, then what leisure will you have to love life and hate death? Act in this way, and you will be all right.

"I want to tell you something else I have learned. In all human relations, if the two parties are living close to each other, they may form a bond through personal trust. But if they are far apart, they must use words to communicate their loyalty, and words must be transmitted by someone. To transmit words that are either pleasing to both parties or infuriating to both parties is one of the most difficult things in the world. When both parties are pleased, there must be some exaggeration of the good points; and when both parties are angered, there must be some exaggeration of the bad points. Anything that smacks of exaggeration is irresponsible. Where there is irresponsibility, no one will trust what is said, and when that happens, the man who is transmitting the words will be in danger. Therefore the aphorism says, 'Transmit the established facts; do not transmit words of exaggeration.' If you do that, you will probably come out all right.

"When men get together to pit their strength in games of skill, they start off in a light and friendly mood but

11. *Yi*, elsewhere translated as "righteousness."

usually end up in a dark and angry one, and if they go on too long, they start resorting to various underhanded tricks. When men meet at some ceremony to drink, they start off in an orderly manner but usually end up in disorder; and if they go on too long, they start indulging in various irregular amusements. It is the same with all things. What starts out being sincere usually ends up being deceitful. What was simple in the beginning acquires monstrous proportions in the end.

“Words are like wind and waves; actions are a matter of gain and loss. Wind and waves are easily moved; questions of gain and loss easily lead to danger. Hence anger arises from no other cause than clever words and one-sided speeches. When animals face death, they do not care what cries they make; their breath comes in gasps, and a wild fierceness is born in their hearts. [Men, too,] if you press them too hard, are bound to answer you with ill-natured hearts, though they do not know why they do so. If they themselves do not understand why they behave like this, then who knows where it will end?

“Therefore the aphorism says, ‘Do not deviate from your orders; do not press for completion.’ To go beyond the limit is excess; to deviate from orders or press for completion is a dangerous thing. A good completion takes a long time; a bad completion cannot be changed later. Can you afford to be careless?

“Just go along with things and let your mind move freely. Resign yourself to what cannot be avoided and nourish what is within you—this is best. What more do you have to do to fulfill your mission? Nothing is as good as following orders (obeying fate)—that’s how difficult it is!”¹²

Yan He, who had been appointed tutor to the crown prince, son of Duke Ling of Wei, went to consult Ju Boyu.¹³ “Here is this man who by nature is lacking in virtue. If I let him go on with his unruliness, I will endanger the state. If I try to impose some rule on him, I will

12. The phrase *zhiming* can be interpreted as either “following orders” or “obeying fate,” and both meanings are almost certainly intended. Since for Zhuangzi, obeying fate is an extremely easy thing to do, the last part of the sentence is ironic. Throughout this passage Confucius, while appearing to give advice on how to carry out a diplomatic mission, is in fact enunciating Zhuangzi’s code for successful behavior in general.

13. Yan He was a scholar of Lu, Ju Boyu a minister of Wei. The crown prince is the notorious Kuaikui, who was forced to flee from Wei because he plotted to kill his mother. He reentered the state and seized the throne from his son in 481 BCE.

endanger myself. He knows enough to recognize the faults of others, but he doesn't know his own faults. What can I do with a man like this?"

"A very good question," said Ju Boyu. "Be careful, be on your guard, and make sure that you yourself are in the right! In your actions, it is best to follow along with him, and in your mind, it is best to harmonize with him. However, these two courses involve certain dangers. Though you follow along, you don't want to be pulled into his doings, and though you harmonize, you don't want to be drawn out too far. If in your actions you follow along to the extent of being pulled in with him, then you will be overthrown, destroyed, wiped out, and brought to your knees. If in your mind you harmonize to the extent of being drawn out, then you will be talked about, named, blamed, and condemned. If he wants to be a child, be a child with him. If he wants to follow erratic ways, follow erratic ways with him. If he wants to be reckless, be reckless with him. Understand him thoroughly, and lead him to the point where he is without fault.¹⁴

"Don't you know about the praying mantis that waved its arms angrily in front of an approaching carriage, unaware that it was incapable of stopping it? Such was the high opinion it had of its talents. Be careful, be on your guard! If you offend him by parading your store of talents, you will be in danger!

"Don't you know how the tiger trainer goes about it? He doesn't dare give the tiger any living thing to eat for fear it will learn the taste of fury by killing it. He doesn't dare give it any whole thing to eat for fear it will learn the taste of fury by tearing it apart. He gauges the state of the tiger's appetite and thoroughly understands its fierce disposition. Tigers are a different breed from men, and yet you can train them to be gentle with their keepers by following along with them. The men who get killed are the ones who go against them.

"The horse lover uses a fine box to catch the dung and a giant clam shell to catch the stale. But if a mosquito or a

14. Waley (*Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China*, p. 109) translates, "And if you probe him, do so in a part where his skin is not sore," taking the verb *da*, which I have translated as "understand thoroughly," to refer to acupuncture.

fly lights on the horse and he slaps it at the wrong time, then the horse will break the bit, hurt its head, and bang its chest. The horse lover tries to think of everything, but his affection leads him into error. Can you afford to be careless?”

Carpenter Shi went to Qi and, when he got to Crooked Shaft, he saw a serrate oak standing by the village shrine. It was broad enough to shelter several thousand oxen and measured a hundred spans around, towering above the hills. The lowest branches were eighty feet from the ground, and a dozen or so of them could have been made into boats. There were so many sightseers that the place looked like a fair, but the carpenter didn't even glance around and went on his way without stopping. His apprentice stood staring for a long time and then ran after Carpenter Shi and said, “Since I first took up my ax and followed you, Master, I have never seen timber as beautiful as this. But you don't even bother to look, and go right on without stopping. Why is that?”

“Forget it—say no more!” said the carpenter. “It's a worthless tree! Make boats out of it and they'd sink; make coffins and they'd rot in no time; make vessels and they'd break at once. Use it for doors and it would sweat sap like pine; use it for posts and the worms would eat them up. It's not a timber tree—there's nothing it can be used for. That's how it got to be that old!”

After Carpenter Shi had returned home, the oak tree appeared to him in a dream and said, “What are you comparing me with? Are you comparing me with those useful trees? The cherry apple, the pear, the orange, the citron, the rest of those fructiferous trees and shrubs—as soon as their fruit is ripe, they are torn apart and subjected to abuse. Their big limbs are broken off, their little limbs are yanked around. Their utility makes life miserable for them, and so they don't get to finish out the years Heaven gave them but are cut off in mid-journey. They bring it on themselves—the pulling and tear-

ing of the common mob. And it's the same way with all other things.

"As for me, I've been trying a long time to be of no use, and though I almost died, I've finally got it. This is of great use to me. If I had been of some use, would I ever have grown this large? Moreover, you and I are both of us things. What's the point of this—things condemning things? You, a worthless man about to die—how do you know I'm a worthless tree?"

When Carpenter Shi woke up, he reported his dream. His apprentice said, "If it's so intent on being of no use, what's it doing there at the village shrine?"¹⁵

"Shhh! Say no more! It's only *resting* there. If we carp and criticize, it will merely conclude that we don't understand it. Even if it weren't at the shrine, do you suppose it would be cut down? It protects itself in a different way from ordinary people. If you try to judge it by conventional standards, you'll be way off!"

Ziqi of Nanbo was wandering around the Hill of Shang when he saw a huge tree there, different from all the rest. A thousand teams of horses could have taken shelter under it, and its shade would have covered them all. Ziqi said, "What tree is this? It must certainly have some extraordinary usefulness!" But looking up, he saw that the smaller limbs were gnarled and twisted, unfit for beams or rafters, and looking down, he saw that the trunk was pitted and rotten and could not be used for coffins. He licked one of the leaves, and it blistered his mouth and made it sore. He sniffed the odor, and it was enough to make a man drunk for three days. "It turns out to be a completely unusable tree," said Ziqi, "and so it has been able to grow this big. Aha!—it is this unusableness that the Holy Man makes use of!"

The region of Jingshi in Song is fine for growing catalpas, cypresses, and mulberries. But those that are more than one or two arm lengths around are cut down for people who want monkey perches; those that are three or

15. The shrine, or altar of the soil, was always situated in a grove of beautiful trees. So the oak was serving a purpose by lending an air of sanctity to the spot.

16. Following Ma Xulun, I read *mian* (roof) in place of *ming*.

17. Probably a spring sacrifice for the “dispelling (*jie*) of sins,” though there are other interpretations. Sacrifices of animals, and sometimes human beings, were made to the Lord of the River, the god of the Yellow River.

four spans around are cut down for the ridgepoles of tall roofs;¹⁶ and those that are seven or eight spans are cut down for the families of nobles or rich merchants who want side boards for coffins. So they never get to live out the years Heaven gave them but are cut down in mid-journey by axes. This is the danger of being usable. In the Jie sacrifice,¹⁷ oxen with white foreheads, pigs with turned-up snouts, and men with piles cannot be offered to the river. This is something all the shamans know, and hence they consider them inauspicious creatures. But the Holy Man, for the same reason, considers them highly auspicious.

There’s Crippled Shu—chin stuck down in his navel, shoulders up above his head, pigtail pointing at the sky, his five organs on the top, his two thighs pressing his ribs. By sewing and washing, he gets enough to fill his mouth; by handling a winnow and sifting out the good grain, he makes enough to feed ten people. When the authorities call out the troops, he stands in the crowd waving good-bye; when they get up a big work party, they pass him over because he’s a chronic invalid. And when they are doling out grain to the ailing, he gets three big measures and ten bundles of firewood. With a crippled body, he’s still able to look after himself and finish out the years Heaven gave him. How much better, then, if he had crippled virtue!

When Confucius visited Chu, Jie Yu, the madman of Chu, wandered by his gate crying, “Phoenix, phoenix, how has virtue failed! The future you cannot wait for; the past you cannot pursue. When the world has the Way, the sage succeeds; when the world is without the Way, the sage survives. In times like the present, we do well to escape penalty. Good fortune is as light as a feather, but nobody knows how to pick it up. Misfortune is as heavy as the earth, but nobody knows how to stay out of its way. Leave off, leave off—this teaching men virtue! Dangerous, dangerous—to mark off the ground and run! Fool,

fool—don't spoil my walking! I walk a crooked way—don't step on my feet. The mountain trees do themselves harm; the grease in the torch burns itself up. The cinnamon can be eaten, and so it gets cut down; the lacquer tree can be used, and so it gets hacked apart. All men know the use of the useful, but nobody knows the use of the useless!"¹⁸

18. Zhuangzi bases this passage on the somewhat similar anecdote and song of the madman Jie Yu in *Analects* XVIII, 5.

THE SIGN OF VIRTUE COMPLETE

i. As a penalty for some offense.

In Lu there was a man named Wang Tai who had had his foot cut off.¹ He had as many followers gathered around him as Confucius.

Chang Ji asked Confucius, “This Wang Tai who’s lost a foot—how does he get to divide up Lu with you, Master, and make half of it his disciples? He doesn’t stand up and teach, he doesn’t sit down and discuss, yet they go to him empty and come home full. Does he really have some wordless teaching, some formless way of bringing the mind to completion? What sort of man is he?”

Confucius said, “This gentleman is a sage. It’s just that I’ve been tardy and haven’t gone to see him yet. But if I go to him as my teacher, how much more should those who are not my equals! Why only the state of Lu? I’ll bring the whole world along, and we’ll all become his followers!”

Chang Ji said, “If he’s lost a foot and is still superior to the Master, then how far above the common run of men he must be! But if that’s so, then what unique way does he have of using his mind?”

Confucius said, “Life and death are great affairs, and yet they are no change to him. Though heaven and earth flop over and fall down, it is no loss to him. He sees clearly into what has no falsehood and does not shift with things. He takes it as fate that things should change, and he holds fast to the source.”

“What do you mean by that?” asked Chang Ji.

Confucius said, “If you look at them from the point of view of their differences, then there is liver and gall, Chu and Yue. But if you look at them from the point of view of their sameness, then the ten thousand things all are one.

A man like this doesn't know what his ears or eyes should approve—he lets his mind play in the harmony of virtue. As for things, he sees them as one and does not see their loss. He regards the loss of a foot as a lump of earth thrown away.”

Chang Ji said, “In the way he goes about it, he uses his knowledge to get at his mind and uses his mind to get at the constant mind. Why should things gather around *him*?”

Confucius said, “Men do not mirror themselves in running water—they mirror themselves in still water. Only what is still can still the stillness of other things. Of those that receive life from the earth, the pine and cypress alone are best—they stay as green as ever in winter or summer. Of those that receive life from Heaven, Yao and Shun alone are best—they stand at the head of the ten thousand things. Luckily they were able to order their lives and thereby order the lives of other things. Proof that a man is holding fast to the beginning lies in the fact of his fearlessness. A brave soldier will plunge alone into the midst of nine armies. He seeks fame and can bring himself to this. How much more, then, is possible for a man who governs Heaven and earth, stores up the ten thousand things, lets the six parts of his body² be only a dwelling, makes ornaments of his ears and eyes, unifies the knowledge of what he knows, and in his mind never tastes death. He will soon choose the day and ascend far off. Men may become his followers, but how could he be willing to bother himself about things?”

2. The legs, arms, head, and trunk.

Shentu Jia, who had lost a foot, was studying under Bohun Wuren, along with Zichan of Zheng.³ Zichan said to Shentu Jia, “If I go out first, you stay behind, and if you go out first, I'll stay behind.”

3. Zichan (d. 522 BCE) was prime minister of the state of Zheng.

Next day the two of them were again sitting on the same mat in the same hall. Zichan said to Shentu Jia, “If I go out first, you stay behind, and if you go out first, I'll stay behind! Now I will go out. Are you going to stay

behind, or aren't you? When you see a prime minister, you don't even get out of the way—do you think you're the equal of a prime minister?"

Shentu Jia said, "Within the gates of the Master, is there any such thing as a prime minister? You take delight in being a prime minister and pushing people behind you. But I've heard that if the mirror is bright, no dust will settle on it; if dust settles, it isn't really bright. When you live around worthy men a long time, you'll be free of faults. You regard the Master as a great man, and yet you talk like this—it's not right, is it?"

Zichan said, "You, a man like this—and still you claim to be better than a Yao! Take a look at your virtue and see if it's not enough to give you cause to reflect!"

Shentu Jia said, "People who excuse their faults and claim they didn't deserve to be punished—there are lots of them. But those who don't excuse their faults and who admit they didn't deserve to be spared—they are few. To know what you can't do anything about and to be content with it as you would with fate—only a man of virtue can do that. If you play around in front of Archer Yi's target, you're right in the way of the arrows, and if you don't get hit, it's a matter of fate. There are lots of men with two feet who laugh at me for having only one. It makes me boil with rage, but I come here to the Master's place, and I feel calmed down again and go home. I don't know whether he washes me clean with goodness or whether I come to understand things by myself. The Master and I have been friends for nineteen years, and he's never once let on that he's aware I'm missing a foot. Now you and I are supposed to be wandering outside the realm of forms and bodies, and you come looking for me inside it⁴—you're at fault, aren't you?"

Zichan squirmed, changed his expression, and put a different look on his face. "Say no more about it," he said.

In Lu there was a man named Shushan No-Toes who had had his foot cut off. Stumping along, he went to see Confucius.

4. Following Wang Maohong's suggestion, I reverse the position of *nei* and *wai*.

“You weren’t careful enough!” said Confucius. “Since you’ve already broken the law and gotten yourself into trouble like this, what do you expect to gain by coming to me now?”

No-Toes said, “I just didn’t understand my duty and was too careless of my body, and so I lost a foot. But I’ve come now because I still have something that is worth more than a foot and I want to try to hold on to it. There is nothing that heaven doesn’t cover, nothing that earth doesn’t bear up. I supposed, Master, that you would be like heaven and earth. How did I know you would act like this?”

“It was stupid of me,” said Confucius. “Please, sir, won’t you come in? I’d like to describe to you what I have learned.”

But No-Toes went out.

Confucius said, “Be diligent, my disciples! Here is No-Toes, a man who has had his foot cut off, and still he’s striving to learn so he can make up for the evil of his former conduct. How much more, then, should men whose virtue is still unimpaired!”

No-Toes told the story to Lao Dan. “Confucius certainly hasn’t reached the stage of a Perfect Man, has he? What does he mean coming around so obsequiously to study with you?⁵ He is after the sham illusion of fame and reputation and doesn’t know that the Perfect Man looks on these as so many handcuffs and fetters!”

Lao Dan said, “Why don’t you just make him see that life and death are the same story, that acceptable and unacceptable are on a single string? Wouldn’t it be good to free him from his handcuffs and fetters?”

No-Toes said, “When Heaven has punished him, how can you set him free?”

Duke Ai of Lu said to Confucius, “In Wei there was an ugly man named Ai Taituo. But when men were around him, they thought only of him and couldn’t break away, and when women saw him, they ran begging to their fathers and mothers, saying, ‘I’d rather be this gentleman’s

5. The meaning is doubtful. I follow Guo Xiang in taking it to be a reference to the legend that Confucius went to Laozi for instruction.

concubine than another man's wife!'—there were more than ten such cases, and it hasn't stopped yet. No one ever heard him take the lead—he always just chimed in with other people. He wasn't in the position of a ruler in which he could save men's lives, and he had no store of provisions to fill men's bellies. On top of that, he was ugly enough to astound the whole world, chimed in but never led, and knew no more than what went on right around him. And yet men and women flocked to him. He certainly must be different from other men, I thought, and I summoned him so I could have a look. Just as they said—he was ugly enough to astound the world. But he hadn't been with me more than a month or so when I began to realize what kind of man he was, and before the year was out, I really trusted him. There was no one in the state to act as chief minister, and I wanted to hand over the government to him. He was vague about giving an answer, evasive, as though he hoped to be let off, and I was embarrassed, but in the end I turned the state over to him. Then, before I knew it, he left me and went away. I felt completely crushed, as though I'd suffered a loss and didn't have anyone left to enjoy my state with. What kind of man is he, anyway?"

Confucius said, "I once went on a mission to Chu, and as I was going along, I saw some little pigs nursing at the body of their dead mother. After a while, they gave a start, and all ran away and left her because they could no longer see their likeness in her; she was not the same. In loving their mother, they loved not her body but the thing that moved her body. When a man has been killed in battle and people come to bury him, he has no use for his medals. When a man has had his feet amputated, he doesn't care much about shoes. For both, the thing that is basic no longer exists. When women are selected to be consorts of the Son of Heaven, their nails are not pared and their ears are not pierced. When a man has just taken a wife, he is kept in posts outside [the palace] and is no longer sent on [dangerous] missions.⁶ If so much care is taken to keep

6. The sentence is unclear.

Another interpretation would be: "he is allowed to spend nights at home and is not required to sleep in the officials' dormitory."

the body whole, how much more in the case of a man whose virtue is whole? Now Ai Taituo says nothing and is trusted, accomplishes nothing and is loved, so that people want to turn over their states to him and are afraid only that he won't accept. It must be that his powers are whole, though his virtue takes no form."

"What do you mean when you say his powers are whole?" asked Duke Ai.

Confucius said, "Life, death, preservation, loss, failure, success, poverty, riches, worthiness, unworthiness, slander, fame, hunger, thirst, cold, heat—these are the alternations of the world, the workings of fate. Day and night they change place before us, and wisdom cannot spy out their source. Therefore, they should not be enough to destroy your harmony; they should not be allowed to enter the storehouse of spirit. If you can harmonize and delight in them, master them and never be at a loss for joy; if you can do this day and night without break and make it be spring with everything, mingling with all and creating the moment within your own mind—this is what I call being whole in power."

"What do you mean when you say his virtue takes no form?"

"Among level things, water at rest is the most perfect, and therefore it can serve as a standard. It guards what is inside and shows no movement outside. Virtue is the establishment of perfect harmony. Though virtue takes no form, things cannot break away from it."

Some days later, Duke Ai reported his conversation to Min Zi.⁷ "At first, when I faced south and became ruler of the realm, I tried to look after the regulation of the people and worried that they might die. I really thought I understood things perfectly. But now that I've heard the words of a Perfect Man, I'm afraid there was nothing to my understanding—I was thinking too little of my own welfare and ruining the state. Confucius and I are not subject and ruler—we are friends in virtue, that's all."

7. A disciple of Confucius.

* * *

8. Originally the text probably had some other phrase at this point referring to the walk, back, or lips of normal men, which dropped out and was replaced by the phrase from the parallel sentence that follows.

Mr. Lamé-Hunchback-No-Lips talked to Duke Ling of Wei, and Duke Ling was so pleased with him that when he looked at normal men, he thought their necks looked too lean and skinny.⁸ Mr. Pitcher-Sized-Wen talked to Duke Huan of Qi, and Duke Huan was so pleased with him that when he looked at normal men, he thought their necks looked too lean and skinny. Therefore, if virtue is preeminent, the body will be forgotten. But when men do not forget what can be forgotten but forget what cannot be forgotten—that may be called true forgetting.

So the sage has his wanderings. For him, knowledge is an offshoot, promises are glue, favors are a patching up, and skill is a peddler. The sage hatches no schemes, so what use has he for knowledge? He does no carving, so what use has he for glue? He suffers no loss, so what use has he for favors? He hawks no goods, so what use has he for peddling? These four are called Heavenly Gruel. Heavenly Gruel is the food of Heaven, and if he's already gotten food from Heaven, what use does he have for men? He has the form of a man but not the feelings of a man. Since he has the form of a man, he bands together with other men. Since he doesn't have the feelings of a man, right and wrong cannot get at him. Puny and small, he sticks with the rest of men. Massive and great, he perfects his Heaven alone.

Huizi said to Zhuangzi, "Can a man really be without feelings?"

Zhuangzi: "Yes."

Huizi: "But a man who has no feelings—how can you call him a man?"

Zhuangzi: "The Way gave him a face; Heaven gave him a form—why can't you call him a man?"

Huizi: "But if you've already called him a man, how can he be without feelings?"

Zhuangzi: "That's not what I mean by feelings. When I talk about having no feelings, I mean that a man doesn't

allow likes or dislikes to get in and do him harm. He just lets things be the way they are and doesn't try to help life along."

Huizi: "If he doesn't try to help life along, then how can he keep himself alive?"

Zhuangzi: "The Way gave him a face; Heaven gave him a form. He doesn't let likes or dislikes get in and do him harm. You, now—you treat your spirit like an outsider. You wear out your energy, leaning on a tree and moaning, slumping at your desk and dozing—Heaven picked out a body for you and you use it to gibber about 'hard' and 'white'!"⁹

9. On "hard" and "white," see p. 12, n. 9. Zhuangzi's description of Huizi is rhymed in the original.

THE GREAT AND VENERABLE TEACHER

He who knows what it is that Heaven does, and knows what it is that man does, has reached the peak. Knowing what it is that Heaven does, he lives with Heaven. Knowing what it is that man does, he uses the knowledge of what he knows to help out the knowledge of what he doesn't know and lives out the years that Heaven gave him without being cut off midway—this is the perfection of knowledge.

However, there is a difficulty. Knowledge must wait for something before it can be applicable, and that which it waits for is never certain. How, then, can I know that what I call Heaven is not really man and what I call man is not really Heaven? There must first be a True Man¹ before there can be true knowledge.

1. Another term for the Daoist sage, synonymous with the Perfect Man or the Holy Man.

What do I mean by a True Man? The True Man of ancient times did not rebel against want, did not grow proud in plenty, and did not plan his affairs. 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.

The True Man of ancient times slept without dreaming and woke without care; he ate without savoring; and his breath came from deep inside. The True Man breathes with his heels; the mass of men breathe with their throats. Crushed and bound down, they gasp out their words as though they were retching. Deep in their passions and desires, they are shallow in the workings of Heaven.

The True Man of ancient times knew nothing of loving life, knew nothing of hating death. He emerged without delight; he went back in without a fuss. He came briskly, he went briskly, and that was all. He didn't forget where he began; he didn't try to find out where he would end. He received something and took pleasure in it; he forgot about it and handed it back again. This is what I call not using the mind to repel the Way, not using man to help out Heaven. This is what I call the True Man.

Since he is like this, his mind forgets;² his face is calm; his forehead is broad. He is chilly like autumn, balmy like spring, and his joy and anger prevail through the four seasons. He goes along with what is right for things, and no one knows his limit. Therefore, when the sage calls out the troops, he may overthrow nations, but he will not lose the hearts of the people. His bounty enriches ten thousand ages, but he has no love for men. Therefore he who delights in bringing success to things is not a sage; he who has affections is not benevolent; he who looks for the right time is not a worthy man; he who cannot encompass both profit and loss is not a gentleman; he who thinks of conduct and fame and misleads himself is not a man of breeding; and he who destroys himself and is without truth is not a user of men. Those like Hu Buxie, Wu Guang, Bo Yi, Shu Qi, Ji Zi, Xu Yu, Ji Tuo, and Shentu Di—all of them slaved in the service of other men, took joy in bringing other men joy, but could not find joy in any joy of their own.³

This was the True Man of old: his bearing was lofty and did not crumble; he appeared to lack but accepted nothing; he was dignified in his correctness but not insistent; he was vast in his emptiness but not ostentatious. Mild and cheerful, he seemed to be happy; reluctant, he could not help doing certain things; annoyed, he let it show in his face; relaxed, he rested in his virtue. Tolerant,⁴ he seemed to be part of the world; towering alone, he could be checked by nothing; withdrawn, he seemed to prefer to

2. Reading *wang* instead of *zhi* in accordance with Wang Maohong's suggestion.

3. According to legend, these were men who either tried to reform the conduct of others or made a show of guarding their own integrity. All either were killed or committed suicide.

4. Following the Cui text, which reads *guang*.

5. There are many different interpretations of the words used to describe the True Man in this paragraph. I have followed those adopted by Fukunaga.

6. As Fukunaga pointed out, this paragraph, which describes the Daoist sage as a ruler who employs penalties, rites, wisdom, and virtue, seems out of keeping with Zhuangzi's philosophy as expressed elsewhere. Fukunaga suggests that it is an addition by a writer of the third or second centuries BCE who was influenced by Legalist thought.

7. Since Zhuangzi elsewhere uses *Tian* or Heaven as a synonym of the Way, this passage has troubled commentators. Some would emend the order of the words to read "If a man is willing to regard his father as Heaven" or would substitute *ren* for *Tian*, that is, "If a man is willing to regard another man as his father."

8. Or perhaps the meaning is "So if it makes my life good, it must for the same reason make my death good."

cut himself off; bemused, he forgot what he was going to say.⁵

He regarded penalties as the body, rites as the wings, wisdom as what is timely, virtue as what is reasonable. Because he regarded penalties as the body, he was benign in his killing. Because he regarded rites as the wings, he got along in the world. Because he regarded wisdom as what is timely, there were things that he could not keep from doing. Because he regarded virtue as what is reasonable, he was like a man with two feet who gets to the top of the hill. And yet people really believed that he worked hard to get there.⁶

Therefore his liking was one, and his not liking was one. His being one was one, and his not being one was one. In being one, he was acting as a companion of Heaven. In not being one, he was acting as a companion of man. When man and Heaven do not defeat each other, then we may be said to have the True Man.

Life and death are fated—constant as the succession of dark and dawn, a matter of Heaven. There are some things that man can do nothing about—all are a matter of the nature of creatures. If a man is willing to regard Heaven as a father and to love it, then how much more should he be willing to do for that which is even greater!⁷ If he is willing to regard the ruler as superior to himself and to die for him, then how much more should he be willing to do for the Truth!

When the springs dry up and the fish are left stranded on the ground, they spew one another with moisture and wet one another down with spit—but it would be much better if they could forget one another in the rivers and lakes. Instead of praising Yao and condemning Jie, it would be better to forget both of them and transform yourself with the Way.

The Great Clod burdens me with form, labors me with life, eases me in old age, and rests me in death. So if I think well of my life, for the same reason I must think well of my death.⁸

You hide your boat in the ravine and your fish net⁹ in the swamp and tell yourself that they will be safe. But in the middle of the night, a strong man shoulders them and carries them off, and in your stupidity, you don't know why it happened. You think you do right to hide little things in big ones, and yet they get away from you. But if you were to hide the world in the world, so that nothing could get away, this would be the final reality of the constancy of things.

You have had the audacity to take on human form, and you are delighted. But the human form has ten thousand changes that never come to an end. Your joys, then, must be uncountable. Therefore, the sage wanders in the realm where things cannot get away from him, and all are preserved. He delights in early death; he delights in old age; he delights in the beginning; he delights in the end. If he can serve as a model for men, how much more so that which the ten thousand things are tied to and all changes alike wait for!

The Way has its reality and its signs but is without action or form. You can hand it down, but you cannot receive it; you can get it, but you cannot see it. It is its own source, its own root. Before Heaven and earth existed, it was there, firm from ancient times. It gave spirituality to the spirits and to God; it gave birth to Heaven and to earth. It exists beyond the highest point, and yet you cannot call it lofty; it exists beneath the limit of the six directions, and yet you cannot call it deep. It was born before Heaven and earth, and yet you cannot say it has been there for long; it is earlier than the earliest time, and yet you cannot call it old.

Xiwei got it and held up heaven and earth.¹⁰ Fu Xi got it and entered into the mother of breath. The Big Dipper got it and from ancient times has never wavered. The Sun and Moon got it and from ancient times have never rested. Kanpi got it and entered Kunlun. Pingyi got it and wandered in the great river. Jian Wu got it and lived in the great mountain.¹¹ The Yellow Emperor got it and ascended to

9. Following Yu Yue's interpretation.

10. The figures in this paragraph all are deities or mythical beings, but the myths to which Zhuangzi refers are in many cases unknown, so that the translation is tentative in places.

11. Kanpi is the god of the mythical Kunlun Mountains of the west; Pingyi is the god of the Yellow River; and Jian Wu is the god of Mount Tai.

12. The Yellow Emperor and Zhuan Xu are legendary rulers. The Queen Mother of the West is an immortal spirit who lives in the far west. Yuqiang is a deity of the far north. Pengzu's life span as given here extends, by traditional dating, from the twenty-sixth to the seventh centuries BCE.

13. Fu Yue is frequently mentioned as a minister to the Shang ruler Wuding (traditional dates 1324–1266 BCE), but little is known of the legend that he ascended to the sky and became a star.

14. Following Wen Yiduo's suggestion, I reverse the position of *shou* and *gao*.

15. That is, that which transcends the categories of life and death can never be said to have lived or died; only that which recognizes the existence of such categories is subject to them.

the cloudy heavens. Zhuan Xu got it and dwelled in the Dark Palace. Yuqiang got it and stood at the limit of the north. The Queen Mother of the West got it and took her seat on Shaoguang—nobody knows her beginning, nobody knows her end. Pengzu got it and lived from the age of Shun to the age of the Five Dictators.¹² Fu Yue got it and became minister to Wuding, who extended his rule over the whole world; then Fu Yue climbed up to the Eastern Governor, straddled the Winnowing Basket and the Tail, and took his place among the ranks of stars.¹³

Nanpo Zikui said to the Woman Crookback, "You are old in years, and yet your complexion is that of a child. Why is this?"

"I have heard the Way!"

"Can the Way be learned?" asked Nanpo Zikui.

"Goodness, how could that be? Anyway, you aren't the man to do it. Now there's Buliang Yi—he has the talent of a sage but not the Way of a sage, whereas I have the Way of a sage but not the talent of a sage. I thought I would try to teach him and see if I could really get anywhere near to making him a sage. It's easier to explain the Way of a sage to someone who has the talent of a sage, you know. So I began explaining and kept at him for three days,¹⁴ and after that he was able to put the world outside himself. When he had put the world outside himself, I kept at him for seven days more, and after that he was able to put things outside himself. When he had put things outside himself, I kept at him for nine days more, and after that he was able to put life outside himself. After he had put life outside himself, he was able to achieve the brightness of dawn, and when he had achieved the brightness of dawn, he could see his own aloneness. After he had managed to see his own aloneness, he could do away with past and present, and after he had done away with past and present, he was able to enter where there is no life and no death. That which kills life does not die; that which gives life to life does not live.¹⁵ This is the kind of thing it is: there's nothing it doesn't send off, nothing it doesn't

welcome, nothing it doesn't destroy, nothing it doesn't complete. Its name is Peace-in-Strife. After the strife, it attains completion."

Nanpo Zikui asked, "Where did you happen to hear this?"

"I heard it from the son of Aided-by-Ink, and Aided-by-Ink heard it from the grandson of Repeated-Recitation, and the grandson of Repeated-Recitation heard it from Seeing-Brightly, and Seeing-Brightly heard it from Whispered-Agreement, and Whispered-Agreement heard it from Waiting-for-Use, and Waiting-for-Use heard it from Exclaimed-Wonder, and Exclaimed-Wonder heard it from Dark-Obscurity, and Dark-Obscurity heard it from Participation-in-Mystery, and Participation-in-Mystery heard it from Copy-the-Source!"¹⁶

Master Si, Master Yu, Master Li, and Master Lai were all four talking together. "Who can look on nonbeing as his head, on life as his back, and on death as his rump?" they said. "Who knows that life and death, existence and annihilation, are all a single body? I will be his friend!"

The four men looked at one another and smiled. There was no disagreement in their hearts, and so the four of them became friends.

All at once, Master Yu fell ill. Master Si went to ask how he was. "Amazing!" said Master Yu. "The Creator is making me all crooked like this! My back sticks up like a hunchback, and my vital organs are on top of me. My chin is hidden in my navel, my shoulders are up above my head, and my pigtail points at the sky. It must be some dislocation of the yin and yang!"

Yet he seemed calm at heart and unconcerned. Dragging himself haltingly to the well, he looked at his reflection and said, "My, my! So the Creator is making me all crooked like this!"

"Do you resent it?" asked Master Si.

"Why no, what would I resent? If the process continues, perhaps in time he'll transform my left arm into a rooster. In that case I'll keep watch during the night. Or

16. Reading *nishi* instead of *yishi* for the last name. But these names are open to a variety of interpretations. The whole list, of course, is a parody of the filiations of the other schools of philosophy.

perhaps in time he'll transform my right arm into a cross-bow pellet, and I'll shoot down an owl for roasting. Or perhaps in time he'll transform my buttocks into cart-wheels. Then, with my spirit for a horse, I'll climb up and go for a ride. What need will I ever have for a carriage again?

"I received life because the time had come; I will lose it because the order of things passes on. Be content with this time and dwell in this order, and then neither sorrow nor joy can touch you. In ancient times this was called the 'freeing of the bound.' There are those who cannot free themselves because they are bound by things. But nothing can ever win against Heaven—that's the way it's always been. What would I have to resent?"

Suddenly Master Lai grew ill. Gasping and wheezing, he lay at the point of death. His wife and children gathered round in a circle and began to cry. Master Li, who had come to ask how he was, said, "Shoo! Get back! Don't disturb the process of change!"

Then he leaned against the doorway and talked to Master Lai. "How marvelous the Creator is! What is he going to make out of you next? Where is he going to send you? Will he make you into a rat's liver? Will he make you into a bug's arm?"

Master Lai said, "A child, obeying his father and mother, goes wherever he is told, east or west, south or north. And the yin and yang—how much more are they to a man than father or mother! Now that they have brought me to the verge of death, if I should refuse to obey them, how perverse I would be! What fault is it of theirs? The Great Clod burdens me with form, labors me with life, eases me in old age, and rests me in death. So if I think well of my life, for the same reason I must think well of my death. When a skilled smith is casting metal, if the metal should leap up and say, 'I insist on being made into a Moyo!¹⁷ he would surely regard it as very inauspicious metal indeed. Now, having had the audacity to take on human form once, if I should say, 'I don't want to be

17. A famous sword of King Helü (r. 514–496 BCE) of Wu.

anything but a man! Nothing but a man!’ the Creator would surely regard me as a most inauspicious sort of person. So now I think of heaven and earth as a great furnace, and the Creator as a skilled smith. Where could he send me that would not be all right? I will go off to sleep peacefully, and then with a start, I will wake up.”

Master Sanghu, Mengzi Fan, and Master Qinzhang, three friends, said to one another, “Who can join with others without joining with others? Who can do with others without doing with others? Who can climb up to heaven and wander in the mists, roam the infinite, and forget life forever and forever?” The three men looked at one another and smiled. There was no disagreement in their hearts, and so they became friends.

After some time had passed without event, Master Sanghu died. He had not yet been buried when Confucius, hearing of his death, sent Zigong to assist at the funeral. When Zigong arrived, he found one of the dead man’s friends weaving frames for silkworms, while the other strummed a lute. Joining their voices, they sang this song:

Ah, Sanghu!
 Ah, Sanghu!
 You have gone back to your true form
 While we remain as men, O!

Zigong hastened forward and said, “May I be so bold as to ask what sort of ceremony this is—singing in the very presence of the corpse?”

The two men looked at each other and laughed. “What does this man know of the meaning of ceremony?” they said.

Zigong returned and reported to Confucius what had happened. “What sort of men are they, anyway?” he asked. “They pay no attention to proper behavior, disregard their personal appearance and, without so much as changing the expression on their faces, sing in the very presence of the

corpse! I can think of no name for them! What sort of men are they?"

"Such men as they," said Confucius, "wander beyond the realm; men like me wander within it. Beyond and within can never meet. It was stupid of me to send you to offer condolences. Even now they have joined with the Creator as men to wander in the single breath of heaven and earth. They look on life as a swelling tumor, a protruding wen, and on death as the draining of a sore or the bursting of a boil. To men such as these, how could there be any question of putting life first or death last? They borrow the forms of different creatures and house them in the same body. They forget liver and gall, cast aside ears and eyes, turning and revolving, ending and beginning again, unaware of where they start or finish. Idly they roam beyond the dust and dirt; they wander free and easy in the service of inaction. Why should they fret and fuss about the ceremonies of the vulgar world and make a display for the ears and eyes of the common herd?"

Zigong said, "Well then, Master, what is this 'realm' that you stick to?"

Confucius said, "I am one of those men punished by Heaven. Nevertheless, I will share with you what I have."

"Then may I ask about the realm?"¹⁸ said Zigong.

Confucius said, "Fish thrive in water, man thrives in the Way. For those that thrive in water, dig a pond, and they will find nourishment enough. For those that thrive in the Way, don't bother about them, and their lives will be secure. So it is said, the fish forget one another in the rivers and lakes, and men forget one another in the arts of the Way."

Zigong said, "May I ask about the singular man?"

"The singular man is singular in comparison to other men, but a companion of Heaven. So it is said, the petty man of Heaven is a gentleman among men; the gentleman among men is the petty man of Heaven."

* * *

18. The word *fang*, which I have translated as "realm," may also mean "method" or "procedure," and Confucius's answer seems to stress this latter meaning.

Yan Hui said to Confucius, “When Mengsun Cai’s mother died, he wailed without shedding any tears; he did not grieve in his heart; and he conducted the funeral without any look of sorrow. He fell down on these three counts, and yet he is known all over the state of Lu for the excellent way he managed the funeral. Is it really possible to gain such a reputation when there are no facts to support it? I find it very peculiar indeed!”

Confucius said, “Mengsun did all there was to do. He was advanced beyond ordinary understanding, and he would have simplified things even more, but that wasn’t practical. However, there is still a lot that he simplified. Mengsun doesn’t know why he lives and doesn’t know why he dies. He doesn’t know why he should go ahead; he doesn’t know why he should fall behind. In the process of change, he has become a thing [among other things], and he is merely waiting for some other change that he doesn’t yet know about. Moreover, when he is changing, how does he know that he really is changing? And when he is not changing, how does he know that he hasn’t already changed? You and I, now—we are dreaming and haven’t waked up yet. But in his case, though something may startle his body, it won’t injure his mind; though something may alarm the house [his spirit lives in], his emotions will suffer no death. Mengsun alone has waked up. Men wail and so he wails, too—that’s the reason he acts like this.

“What’s more, we go around telling one another, I do this, I do that—but how do we know that this ‘I’ we talk about has any ‘I’ to it? You dream you’re a bird and soar up into the sky; you dream you’re a fish and dive down in the pool. But now when you tell me about it, I don’t know whether you are awake or whether you are dreaming. Running around accusing others¹⁹ is not as good as laughing, and enjoying a good laugh is not as good as going along with things. Be content to go along and forget about change, and then you can enter the mysterious oneness of Heaven.”

19. Following Xi Tong, I read *ze* instead of *shi*, but the sentence is obscure and there are many interpretations.

20. A recluse of the time of Emperor Yao. He appeared on p. 3.

Yi Erzi went to see Xu You.²⁰ Xu You said, “What kind of assistance has Yao been giving you?”

Yi Erzi said, “Yao told me, ‘You must learn to practice benevolence and righteousness and to speak clearly about right and wrong!’”

“Then why come to see *me*?” said Xu You. “Yao has already tattooed you with benevolence and righteousness and cut off your nose with right and wrong.²¹ Now how do you expect to go wandering in any faraway, carefree, and as-you-like-it paths?”

“That may be,” said Yi Erzi. “But I would like, if I may, to wander in a little corner of them.”

“Impossible!” said Xu You. “Eyes that are blind have no way to tell the loveliness of faces and features; eyes with no pupils have no way to tell the beauty of colored and embroidered silks.”

Yi Erzi said, “Yes, but Wuzhuang forgot her beauty, Juliang forgot his strength, and the Yellow Emperor forgot his wisdom—all were content to be recast and remolded.²² How do you know that the Creator will not wipe away my tattoo, stick my nose back on again, and let me ride on the process of completion and follow after you, Master?”

“Ah—we can never tell,” said Xu You. “I will just speak to you about the general outline. This Teacher of mine, this Teacher of mine—he passes judgment on the ten thousand things, but he doesn’t think himself righteous; his bounty extends to ten thousand generations, but he doesn’t think himself benevolent. He is older than the highest antiquity, but he doesn’t think himself long-lived; he covers heaven, bears up the earth, carves and fashions countless forms, but he doesn’t think himself skilled. It is with him alone I wander.”

Yan Hui said, “I’m improving!”

Confucius said, “What do you mean by that?”

“I’ve forgotten benevolence and righteousness!”

“That’s good. But you still haven’t got it.”

21. Tattooing and cutting off the nose were common punishments.

22. Judging from the context, Wuzhuang and Juliang must have been noted for their beauty and strength, respectively. Perhaps the former is the same as the beautiful Maoqiang mentioned on p. 15. All these persons forgot themselves in the Way and were remolded by the Creator.

Another day, the two met again, and Yan Hui said, “I’m improving!”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I’ve forgotten rites and music!”

“That’s good. But you still haven’t got it.”

Another day, the two met again, and Yan Hui said, “I’m improving!”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I can sit down and forget everything!”

Confucius looked very startled and said, “What do you mean, sit down and forget everything?”

Yan Hui said, “I smash up my limbs and body, drive out perception and intellect, cast off form, do away with understanding, and make myself identical with the Great Thoroughfare. This is what I mean by sitting down and forgetting everything.”

Confucius said, “If you’re identical with it, you must have no more likes! If you’ve been transformed, you must have no more constancy! So you really are a worthy man after all!²³ With your permission, I’d like to become your follower.”

Master Yu and Master Sang were friends. Once, it rained incessantly for ten days. Master Yu said to himself, Master Sang is probably having a bad time, and he wrapped up some rice and took it for his friend to eat. When he got to Master Sang’s gate, he heard something like singing or crying and someone striking a lute and saying:

Father?

Mother?

Heaven?

Man?

It was as though the voice would not hold out and the singer were rushing to get through the words.

Master Yu went inside and said, “What do you mean—singing a song like that!”

23. Zhuangzi probably intends a humorous reference to Confucius’s words in *Analects* VI, 9: “The Master said, ‘What a worthy man was Hui!’”

“I was pondering what it is that has brought me to this extremity, but I couldn’t find the answer. My father and mother surely wouldn’t wish this poverty on me. Heaven covers all without partiality; earth bears up all without partiality—heaven and earth surely wouldn’t single me out to make me poor. I try to discover who is doing it, but I can’t get the answer. Still, here I am—at the very extreme. It must be fate.”

FIT FOR EMPERORS AND KINGS

Nie Que was questioning Wang Ni. Four times he asked a question, and four times Wang Ni said he didn't know. Nie Que proceeded to hop around in great glee and went and told Master Puyi. Master Puyi said, "Are you just now finding *that* out?"¹ The clansman Youyu was no match for the clansman Tai.² The clansman Youyu still held on to benevolence and worked to win men over. He won men over all right, but he never got out into [the realm of] 'not-man.' The clansman Tai, now—he lay down peaceful and easy; he woke up wide-eyed and blank. Sometimes he thought he was a horse; sometimes he thought he was a cow. His understanding was truly trustworthy; his virtue was perfectly true. He never entered [the realm of] 'non-man.'"³

Jian Wu went to see the madman Jie Yu. Jie Yu said, "What was Zhong Shi telling you the other day?"⁴

Jian Wu said, "He told me that the ruler of men should devise his own principles, standards, ceremonies, and regulations, and then there will be no one who will fail to obey him and be transformed by them."

The madman Jie Yu said, "This is bogus virtue! To try to govern the world like this is like trying to walk the ocean, to drill through a river, or to make a mosquito shoulder a mountain! When the sage governs, does he govern what is on the *outside*? He makes sure of himself first, and then he acts. He makes absolutely certain that things can do what they are supposed to do, that is all. The bird flies high in the sky where it can escape the danger of stringed arrows. The field mouse burrows deep down under the

1. On Nie Que and Wang Ni, see pp. 14–15. Master Puyi is probably the same as Master Piyi, who appears elsewhere in the *Zhuangzi* as Wang Ni's teacher. According to commentators, Nie Que's delight came from the fact that he had finally realized that there are no answers to questions.

2. "The clansman Youyu" is the sage ruler Shun, the ideal of the Confucian philosophers. "The clansman Tai" is vaguely identified as a ruler of high antiquity.

3. The existence of a category "not-man" depends on the recognition of a category "man." Shun could get no further than the category "man"; hence he never reached the realm of "not-man." Tai, on the other hand, was able to transcend all such categories.

4. Jian Wu and Jie Yu appeared on p. 4. Nothing is known about Zhong Shi. I follow Yu Yue in taking *ri* to mean "the other day."

sacred hill where it won't have to worry about men digging and smoking it out. Have you got less sense than these two little creatures?"

Tian Gen was wandering on the sunny side of Yin Mountain. When he reached the banks of the Liao River, he happened to meet a Nameless Man. He questioned the man, saying, "Please may I ask how to rule the world?"

The Nameless Man said, "Get away from me, you peasant! What kind of a dreary question is that! I'm just about to set off with the Creator. And if I get bored with that, then I'll ride on the Light-and-Lissome Bird out beyond the six directions, wandering in the village of Not-Even-Anything and living in the Broad-and-Borderless field. What business⁵ do you have coming with this talk of governing the world and disturbing my mind?"

But Tian Gen repeated his question. The Nameless Man said, "Let your mind wander in simplicity, blend your spirit with the vastness, follow along with things the way they are, and make no room for personal views—then the world will be governed."

Yangzi Ju⁶ went to see Lao Dan and said, "Here is a man swift as an echo, strong as a beam, with a wonderfully clear understanding of the principles of things, studying the Way without ever letting up—a man like this could compare with an enlightened king, couldn't he?"

Lao Dan said, "In comparison with the sage, a man like this is a drudging slave, a craftsman bound to his calling, wearing out his body, grieving his mind. They say it is the beautiful markings of the tiger and the leopard that call out the hunters, the nimbleness of the monkey and the ability of the dog to catch rats⁷ that make them end up chained. A man like this—how could he compare with an enlightened king?"

Yangzi Ju, much taken aback, said, "May I venture to ask about the government of the enlightened king?"

5. I follow the traditional interpretation, though in fact no one has succeeded in determining the meaning of this character for certain. Other interpretations are "How do you have the leisure to come," etc., or "What is this dream talk that you come with about governing the world," etc.

6. Perhaps meant to be identified with the hedonist philosopher Yang Zhu.

7. Reading *liu* in accordance with the parallel passage in sec. 12.

Lao Dan said, “The government of the enlightened king? His achievements blanket the world but appear not to be his own doing. His transforming influence touches the ten thousand things, but the people do not depend on him. With him there is no promotion or praise—he lets everything find its own enjoyment. He takes his stand on what cannot be fathomed and wanders where there is nothing at all.”

In Zheng there was a shaman of the gods named Ji Xian. He could tell whether men would live or die, survive or perish, be fortunate or unfortunate, live a long time or die young, and he would predict the year, month, week,⁸ and day as though he were a god himself. When the people of Zheng saw him, they dropped everything and ran out of his way. Liezi went to see him and was completely intoxicated. Returning, he said to Huzi,⁹ “I used to think, Master, that your Way was perfect. But now I see there is something even higher!”

Huzi said, “I have already showed you all the outward forms, but I haven’t yet showed you the substance—and do you really think you have mastered this Way of mine? There may be a flock of hens, but if there is no rooster, how can they lay fertile eggs? You take what you know of the Way and wave it in the face of the world, expecting to be believed! This is the reason men can see right through you. Try bringing your shaman along next time and letting him get a look at me.”

The next day Liezi brought the shaman to see Huzi. When they had left the room, the shaman said, “I’m so sorry—your master is dying! There’s no life left in him—he won’t last the week. I saw something very strange—something like wet ashes!”

Liezi went back into the room, weeping and drenching the collar of his robe with tears, and reported this to Huzi.

Huzi said, “Just now I appeared to him with the Pattern of Earth—still and silent, nothing moving, nothing

8. The ancient ten-day week.

9. The Daoist philosopher Liezi appeared on p. 3. Huzi is his teacher.

10. Virtue here has the sense of vital force. Compare *Book of Changes, Xici 2*: “The Great Virtue of Heaven and Earth is called life.”

11. The language of this whole passage is, needless to say, deliberately mysterious. The term “Good One” may have some relation to the passage in the *Changes, Xici 1*: “The succession of the yin and yang is called the Way. What carries it on is goodness.”

12. Following Ma Xulun’s emendation and interpretation.

13. According to commentators, the three forms of the abyss in the order given here correspond to the third, first, and second of Huzi’s manifestations.

standing up. He probably saw in me the Workings of Virtue Closed Off.¹⁰ Try bringing him around again.”

The next day the two came to see Huzi again, and when they had left the room, the shaman said to Liezi, “It certainly was lucky that your master met me! He’s going to get better—he has all the signs of life! I could see the stirring of what had been closed off!”

Liezi went in and reported this to Huzi.

Huzi said, “Just now I appeared to him as Heaven and Earth—no name or substance to it, but still the workings, coming up from the heels. He probably saw in me the Workings of the Good One.¹¹ Try bringing him again.”

The next day the two came to see Huzi again, and when they had left the room, the shaman said to Liezi, “Your master is never the *same*! I have no way to physiognomize him! If he will try to steady himself, then I will come and examine him again.”

Liezi went in and reported this to Huzi.

Huzi said, “Just now I appeared to him as the Great Vastness Where Nothing Wins Out. He probably saw in me the Workings of the Balanced Breaths. Where the swirling waves¹² gather, there is an abyss; where the still waters gather, there is an abyss; where the running waters gather, there is an abyss. The abyss has nine names, and I have shown him three.¹³ Try bringing him again.”

The next day the two came to see Huzi again, but before the shaman had even come to a halt before Huzi, his wits left him and he fled.

“Run after him!” said Huzi, but though Liezi ran after him, he could not catch up. Returning, he reported to Huzi, “He’s vanished! He’s disappeared! I couldn’t catch up with him.”

Huzi said, “Just now I appeared to him as Not Yet Emerged from My Source. I came at him empty, wriggling and turning, not knowing anything about ‘who’ or ‘what,’ now dipping and bending, now flowing in waves—that’s why he ran away.”

After this, Liezi concluded that he had never really begun to learn anything.¹⁴ He went home and, for three years, did not go out. He replaced his wife at the stove, fed the pigs as though he were feeding people, and showed no preferences in the things he did. He got rid of the carving and polishing and returned to plainness, letting his body stand alone like a clod. In the midst of entanglement he remained sealed, and in this oneness he ended his life.

14. That is, he had reached the highest stage of understanding.

Do not be an embodier for fame; do not be a storehouse of schemes; do not be an undertaker of projects; do not be a proprietor of wisdom. Embody to the fullest what has no end and wander where there is no trail. Hold on to all that you have received from Heaven, but do not think you have gotten anything. Be empty, that is all. The Perfect Man uses his mind like a mirror—going after nothing, welcoming nothing, responding but not storing. Therefore he can win out over things and not hurt himself.

The emperor of the South Sea was called Shu [Brief]; the emperor of the North Sea was called Hu [Sudden]; and the emperor of the central region was called Hundun [Chaos]. From time to time, Shu and Hu came together for a meeting in the territory of Hundun, and Hundun treated them very generously. Shu and Hu discussed how they could repay his kindness. “All men,” they said, “have seven openings so they can see, hear, eat, and breathe. But Hundun alone doesn’t have any. Let’s try boring him some!”

Every day they bored another hole, and on the seventh day Hundun died.