



universität
wien

MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

“The Masterpiece that is *Zhuangzi*”

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2021 / Vienna 2021

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears
on the student record sheet:

UA 066 941

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Masterstudium Philosophie UG2002

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Doz. Mag. Dr. Arno Böhler

Abstract Deutsch

Wie geht man mit einem so vielschichtigen Werk wie dem *Zhuangzi* um? Diese Frage hat Gelehrte und Übersetzer wieder und wieder beschäftigt. Um diese Frage zu beantworten, halten wir es für nötig, einige Schlüsselaspekte zu berühren, die sich auf die Struktur und den Stil des Textes beziehen, wobei unser Ziel nicht darin besteht, eine erschöpfende Textanalyse des *Zhuangzi* zu liefern, sondern vielmehr eine umfassende Darstellung, die eine bessere Positionierung unserer Lektüre des *Zhuangzi* inmitten der Vielzahl von Lesarten, denen dieser Text bereits unterworfen wurde, ermöglicht. Um uns mit den verschiedenen Positionen bzw. akademischen Herangehensweisen auseinanderzusetzen, verweisen wir auf die historisch-philosophische Analyse von Møllgard, Helsing sowie Möller und D'Ambrosio, die die meisten akademischen Lesarten des *Zhuangzi* als anachronistisch, wenn nicht eisegetisch gegenüber seinem Inhalt empfinden. Wie Brook Ziporyn lehnen auch wir den Perspektivismus bei der Lektüre des *Zhuangzi* ab. Vielmehr versuchen wir, den *Zhuangzi* als philosophischen Daoistischen Text zu lesen. Dabei ist die Übung "Learning How to Read", wie sie Pierre Hadot für antike philosophische Texte vorschreibt, ausgesprochen nützlich. Um unseren Leser mit dem Daoistischen Denken vertraut zu machen, arbeiten wir seine grundlegenden Prinzipien und besonderen Eigenschaften heraus. Zur aktiven Teilnahme an unserer hermeneutischen Lektüre von Passagen aus dem *Zhuangzi* sowie aus dem *Daodejing*, der anderen Säule des philosophischen Daoistischen Denkens, geben wir dem Leser das nötige Werkzeug in die Hand. Unsere Lesart des *Zhuangzi* soll die fortlaufende Diskussion prägen, indem man aufzeigt, inwiefern dieses philosophische Werk für uns heute noch relevant und bedeutsam ist. Wie wir in unserer Thesis zu zeigen versuchen werden, berührt *Zhuangzi* den Kern von etwas, das so schwer fassbar ist wie die Natur und das Leben selbst und sich daher dem Verständnis entzieht. Um diesen thematischen Kern in seiner ganzen Tiefe zu erforschen, lautet unsere Frage: Wie wäre es, wenn wir den Text *Zhuangzi* als eine Geste verstehen oder eine Form von Geschenk ansehen – „The Secret of Caring for Life“, wie der Titel seines dritten Kapitels andeutet – und als solches annehmen? Nach unserer Auffassung ist dies die grundlegendste Dimension des *Zhuangzi*. Um das aufzuzeigen, folgen wir keiner bestimmten Methode, sondern versuchen vielmehr, beständig auf den unausgesprochenen Logos des Textes fokussiert zu bleiben – auf die Sichtweise, aus der das Buch geschrieben wurde, wie Grondin meinte. Indem wir dazu Guyings Perspektive einnehmen, ist es unser Bestreben, die grundlegende Bedeutung folgender zwei Aspekte im *Zhuangzi* hervorzuheben: das Verständnis der Bedingungen des Lebens in ihrer Selbstentstehung und die Rolle, die der Herz-Geist des Menschen in diesem Verständnis spielen kann. Hierfür wird Helsing's heilsames moralpsychologisches Schema bei der Lektüre des *Zhuangzi*, als diese potentiell therapeutische Reise von einem fixierten Herz-Geist (*chengxin* 成心) zu einem wandernden Herz-Geist (*youxin* 遊心), in den Mittelpunkt unseres Essays gestellt. Um die Essenz des Textes zu erfassen, ist unser Essay der eigentliche Destillationsprozess des *Zhuangzi*!

Abstract English

How is one to go about with a multifaceted work as *Zhuangzi*? Time and again, this question has occupied scholars and translators. To answer this question, we deem it necessary to touch upon certain key aspects, relating to the structure and style of the text. In doing so, our aim is not to provide an exhaustive textual analysis of the *Zhuangzi*, but rather a comprehensive account, which will then allow for a better positioning of our reading of *Zhuangzi* amidst the multiplicity of readings this text has already been subjected to. To evaluate the various stances adopted by scholars so far, we refer to Møllgard's, Helsing's as well as Möller's and D'Ambrosio's historical-philosophical analysis, who find most of the academic readings of *Zhuangzi* being anachronistic, if not eisegetic, towards its content. Like Brook Ziporyn, we too reject perspectivism in reading the *Zhuangzi*. Much more, we attempt to read *Zhuangzi* as a philosophical Daoist text. In this, the exercise *Learning How to Read*, as prescribed by Pierre Hadot when it comes to ancient philosophical texts, is more than useful. To familiarize our reader with Daoist thinking, we elaborate on its fundamental principles and distinct qualities. We provide thus, our reader with the necessary tools, to ensure his/her active participation on our hermeneutic reading of passages from the *Zhuangzi* as well as from the *Daodejing*, the other pillar of philosophical Daoist thought. Our reading of *Zhuangzi* is aspiring to form the ongoing discussion in terms of highlighting the ways in which this philosophical work is relevant and meaningful to us still today. As we will try to show in our thesis, *Zhuangzi* touches the core of something so elusive as nature and living itself and therefore, defies understanding. To explore this thematic core in all its profoundness, our question then would be: what if *Zhuangzi* could be seen as a gesture for imparting us a gift, *The Secret of Caring for Life*, as the title of his third chapter suggests, and be received as such? In writing this essay, this is exactly what we would like to find out! That is, what is fundamental about *Zhuangzi*. While embracing Guying's perspective, our general aspiration is to highlight the overall significance of the following two aspects in the *Zhuangzi*: the understanding of the conditions of life in their self-emergence and the role that the heart-mind of human beings can play in this understanding. For this, Helsing's beneficial moral psychology scheme in reading the *Zhuangzi*, as this potentially therapeutic journey from a fixed heart-mind (chengxin 成心) to a wandering heart-mind (youxin 遊心), is granted center-stage position in our essay. As odd as it may sound, to achieve this goal, we do not follow a specific methodology. We rather try to remain steadily focused on the *inexplicit logos* of the text, the view in respect to which the book was composed, as Grondin would say. To capture the essence of the text, our essay is the very distillation process of the *Zhuangzi*!

Master Thesis Outline

Short Introduction - The Author & the Work under his Name	5
I. The Zhuangzi & the Daoist Tradition	6
1.1. Distinguishing Philosophical from Religious Taoism	8
1.2. Attempts to Chart Philosophical Daoism - Our Response	10
II. The Text Zhuangzi	18
2.1. The Structure of Zhuangzi: Our Interpretive Stance & Methodological Approach	18
2.2. On the Cusp Between Philosophy and Literature: The Style of Zhuangzi	21
III. How to Read the Zhuangzi	25
3.1. Zhuangzi as a Polyphonic Composition	26
3.2. Knowledge and the Merits of Uselessness	28
3.3. Cacophony arising from the Banks of Philology	35
3.3.1. An Exercise Meant for the Treasurers of Ecstasies	36
IV. The Taoist Art to Read the Zhuangzi	40
4.1. The All-Encompassing as much as Elusive Dao	40
4.2. The Principle of Wuwei	44
4.3. Heaven and Man	48
4.3.1. Functions of the Heart-Mind in an Ever-Changing World	52
4.3.2. Solving the Riddle of the Absence of Self	56
4.4. The Sign of Virtue Complete	59
4.5. The Ten Thousand Things	63
4.6. Oneness of Things and the Love of the Tao (which is the Love of Things)	65
4.6.1. Wandering Heart-Mind: An Existential Mode of Play	67
4.6.2. The Mirror of Heaven and Earth – The Glass of the Ten Thousand Things	70
4.6.3. Love and Injuries on the Way	72
V. The Sacred as a Key to Understanding	73
Works Cited	79

A Short Introduction - The Author & the Work under his Name

“Not much is known about Zhuang Zhou (ca. 369–286 B.C.E.), who was also called Zhuangzi (‘Master Zhuang’), the ostensible author of this work of the same name.”, Brook Ziporyn admits (*Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings* 8). In the same passage, coming from the Introduction of Ziporyn’s book, we come across the following lively description about *Zhuangzi* and its author:

Encountering Zhuangzi opens a window into a world of enlivening confusions, taunting misdirections, surreal grotesqueries, merciless satire, virtuoso reasonings, insouciant despair, mischievous fallacies, morbid exuberances, impudent jokes, and jolting non sequiturs, which nonetheless has the most profoundly consequential things to say about the gravest human problems of living, dying, and knowing. Who is this man? What is this book? (10)

A short biographical sketch of Zhuangzi is found in the Historical Records (*Shiji* 史記) of 104 BCE, as it was attempted by Sima Qian (died c. 87 BCE), the “Grand Historian” of the Han dynasty (206 BC–220 AD) (Kohn, *Zhuangzi* 1; Ames and Ware). According to that biographical sketch, his full name was Zhuang Zhou 莊周, coming from the state of Meng 盟 (in modern Henan) and held a minor official post at Qiyuan, his home state. He lived during the rule of Kings Hui of Liang 梁惠王 (r. 370-319) and Xuan of Qi 齊宣王 (r. 319-301) and therefore was a contemporary of Mencius 孟子 (372-289), an eminent Confucian philosopher known as China’s “Second Sage” (meaning second in importance after Confucius himself),¹ the dialectician Hui Shi 惠施 (380-305), and the poet Qu Yuan 屈原 (343- 278) (Kohn, *Zhuangzi* 2). In accordance to Qian’s biographical sketch Zhuangzi’s teachings were influenced primarily from those of Laozi (Master Lao or Old Master), the first philosopher of Chinese Daoism and the alleged author of the *Daodejing*, a primary Daoist writing.² Zhuangzi’s perspective nevertheless was considered much broader by Qian. Moreover,

¹ About Mencius, see Van Norden’s “Mencius”.

² For a biographical sketch of Laozi, see reference in *Britannica Encyclopedia* by Roger T. Ames and others.

Zhuangzi maintained a critical view against the Confucians and the Mohists³ (followers of Mozi) (Ames and Ware; Hansen, “Zhuangzi”).

Aside from this short biographical reference, if can infer anything about Zhuangzi’s life and personality, the only source of information we have about him is the book that goes by his name (Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings* 9; Ames and Ware; Hansen, “Zhuangzi”). The stories that we find there about Zhuangzi are mostly of anecdotal character – “less factual than rhetorical”, Ziporyn tries to warn us (9). What makes Zhuangzi so fascinating, according to one of Ziporyn’s pyrotechnical descriptions, is “the convergence of apparently contradictory identities of Zhuangzi: acerbic mystic, subtle rustic, bottom dweller and high flyer, unassuming rebel, abstruse jester, frivolous sage.” (9) It is almost as if “Zhuangzi refuses to let himself be completely known ... But at the same time he shows himself to us ... all the more vivid and evocative for its staunch evasion of ultimate knowability or definitive identity.” (10)

We are confident that Zhuangzi’s enigmatic personality, an inspiration for many of the scholars studying him so far, will shine in all its magnificence through our essay as well!

I. The Zhuangzi & the Daoist Tradition

Despite the fact that Zhuangzi until recently is relatively unknown to the West in comparison to Laozi and his work, *Daodejing*,⁴ Zhuangzi has had a significant influence on the Daoist philosophical tradition. To point to this fact, Hansen on his article on Daoism wrote: “Traditionally traced to the mythical Laozi ‘Old Philosopher,’ Philosophical Daoism owes more to ‘philosopher Zhuang’ (Zhuangzi).”⁵ For H. G. Creel (140) on *What is Taoism?*, *Zhuangzi* “contains our finest exposition of Taoist thinking”. Although we wouldn’t necessarily compare between the historical impact that these two authors respectively have had

– Laozi and Zhuangzi, we receive such comments as the above made about Zhuangzi as a

³ For more information about Mohism, see Fraser Chris’ “Mohism”.

⁴ *Daodejing* is the most translated book in the world after the Bible (Cooper 12).

⁵ See reference on Daoism by Hansen on Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/daoism/>.

sign of the great influence he has had upon the Daoist tradition. Ultimately, the *Zhuangzi* is considered as one of “the definitive texts of Daoism” (Ames and Ware).

Following we will present our reader with some historical information on the development of the Daoist tradition and attempt to refer to the ambiguous relationship between Daoist philosophy and Daoist religion, as they historically emerged. In this way, we hope to highlight some crucial aspects of philosophical Daoism as well. While referring to the Daoist tradition, modern Chinese scholars employ two distinct terms — *daojia* 道家 and *daojiao* 道教 (Chan). According to Chan, *daojia* is used to refer to the teachings associated with Laozi and Zhuangzi, whereas *daojiao* almost invariably refers to the Daoist religion. The Encyclopedia of Taoism also refers to the differentiation between *daojia* and *daojiao* and attributes it to “the new significance the word dao 道 acquires through *Daodejing*, *Zhuangzi*, and other such texts” (Robinet, “daojia” 6-7). In early Chinese literature Dao was being used, in order to delineate the right or proper way of functioning on an ethical or political context. This is the meaning that the Dao was initially ascribed in the intellectual life of early China (Chan).

Against this backdrop, the concept of Dao in the *Daodejing* will acquire a much deeper meaning as the ultimate source of the cosmos and all beings and will be considered therefore as the paradigm for the ideal ethical and political life (Chan; Robinet, “daojia” 7). Ever since then, “[r]uling oneself (zhishen 治身)” and “ruling the state (zhiguo 治国)” have been “two important and constituent parts of Daoist thinking” (Guying 3). Whilst examining some of the most prominent Daoist thinkers though, we may come to notice some minor differences in their thought, giving rise to what we may describe as *the finer nuances* of Daoist thinking.

According to the corresponding lexical entry by the Encyclopedia of Daoism, *daojia* originally meant “Lineage(s) of the Way” and began with Laozi and Zhuangzi 莊子 (Robinet, “daojia” 5). Nevertheless, the term *daojia* has been a topic of debate amongst scholars, because the meaning of the term *jia* (“school” or “lineage”) literally implies that its proponents belonged to the same lineage. The available historical data point to the direction that *daojia* was not a school; this is why certain scholars argue that this classification must be “an *ex post facto* creation”, arguing that Laozi and Zhuangzi were “independent thinkers”, says Robinet (5). Nonetheless, as we will show in our upcoming chapters, there are not only

similarities between the *Zhuangzi* and the *Daodejing*, but even several passages coming from the *Zhuangzi* are nearly identical with those coming from the *Daodejing*, a fact which requires due consideration, when it comes to examining the actual relationship between the two authors and their schools of thought.

For the most part, the basic features of what we demarcate as philosophical Daoism are found both in *Daodejing* and in *Zhuangzi* as well as in texts from the Warring States period such as the *Neiye* (Inner Training) and *Xinshu* 心術 (Arts of the Heart) and the *Daoyuan* 道原 (Dao, the Origin), to mention but a few (5). Also, in the centuries to come, several other texts of the *daojia* tradition will follow like the *Huainanzi* from the Han Dynasty period, *Liezi*, and other Taoist classics from the Six Dynasties and the Tang periods, to refer to the most influential ones (5-6). Which are then the features that characterize philosophical Daoist thinking as such? one could ask.

To answer to this question, one needs first of all to try and distinguish philosophical Daoism from religious Daoism. Only then, in our view, it will be possible to dive deeper into what we termed as the finer nuances of the Daoist thinking and ponder over the most fundamental aspects characterizing this thinking as such.

1.1. Distinguishing Philosophical from Religious Taoism

“In the kaleidoscopic firmament of Taoism there is one relatively fixed star: the term tao 道.”, Creel maintains, “[b]ut ... not every Chinese philosophy that uses the term is Taoist, for in fact they all do.” (139) Creel mentions then that although the philosophical term *tao* appears for the first time in the Confucian *Analects*, “it was never regarded as a substance, like the tao of the Taoists.”⁶ (139-140) What is more, according to Creel, for several other, traditionally considered as religious branches of Taoist thinking, if there is *one relatively fixed star* (other

⁶ In Chapter 21 of *Daodejing*, Laozi is speaking directly of the essence of the Dao. An excerpt of this chapter we can see below:

The action of Dao on creatures is just indistinct, just confusing.
Confusing! and indistinct!, within it
exists image. Indistinct! and confusing!,
within it exists things. Obscure! and
dark!, within it exists essence.
Its essence is extremely real
and true. Within it exists
truth.

Coming from *A Minimalist Translation of Dao De Jing by Lao Zi*
by Bruce R. Linnell (<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/49965/49965-h/49965-h.htm>)

than that of the tao), that is their main aim being to reach immortality (142). At this point, Creel draws the line and distinguishes this kind of Taoism, which is known as “Neo-Taoism” and as “religious Taoism”, from philosophical Taoism. The goal in these sets of tradition was to become a *hsien* 仙, a Taoist immortal (142).

“In Chinese works written as early as the first century B. C., we find its practices called *hsien tao* 仙道, ‘the way of the *hsien*.’” Creel suggests calling this doctrine ‘Hsien Taoism,’ to distinguish it from philosophical Taoism (143). Creel explains that the term “Neo-Taoism” for many other authors like Pelliot⁷ has been synonymous with the quest for immortality (142- 143). Fung Yu-Lan though in his book *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* identifies this as “religious Taoism”, whereas in “Neo-Taoism” he sees the emergence of a new Taoist philosophy.⁸ Despite the divergence of opinions on the exact nature of the religious movement of Taoism, Creel alleges that it cannot be considered as a school either, for it “was in itself complex and various, including both ignorant religious fanatics and highly cultivated scholars” (142).

Bringing our focus again back to philosophical Taoism, the term *daoia* originates in the Historical Records (*Shiji* 史記) in the early second century BCE and used thereafter by doxographers to refer to groups of texts of the preimperial period (up to 221 BC), but also as a synonym for contemporary masters of self-cultivation and the pursuit of immortality in the Han dynasty; “we must suppose there was some link between early texts and contemporary masters in the Han mind”, T.H. Barrett concludes (8). Creel presents us also with his version of how the historical shift from philosophical Taoism to the Taoist religion must have occurred (145). Even though, as we will see in the upcoming passage, Creel is using another terminology than the terms mentioned previously (*daoia* and *daoiao*) to refer to the different streams of Taoist thought and practice.

However, the main demarcation criterion in order to categorize these Taoist streams for Creel too remains the same, and that is, whether or not the Taoist philosophy was involved in their formation or not:

During the Han dynasty those seeking immortality gradually took over the name of

⁷ Paul Pelliot, “Meoutseu ou les doutes leves,” in *T'oung Pao*, XIX (Leyden, 1920), 414-415, n. 385.

⁸ Concerning these two references, see Creel’s footnote 33, p. 142-143.

Taoism (perhaps for the respectability it afforded) and much of the jargon of ‘purposive’ Taoism,⁹ but they did not take over Taoist Philosophy. In Latter Han times Hsien Taoists took over Buddhist practices to develop a popular Taoist religion. Although there was some miscegenation Taoist philosophers have commonly considered the quest for immortality to be fatuous or worse, and some Hsien Taoists have reciprocated the lack of cordiality. The evidence for this hypothesis is voluminous. (145)

Creel then goes on to describe several episodes of this historical discord between philosophical Daoists and religious Daoists. It is not necessary to refer further into this topic for the needs of this essay. As a last remark to conclude this subchapter, we could say that regardless of what the actual relationship of those two thinkers, Laozi and Zhuangzi, with religion and religious thinking might have been, both of these thinkers became deified in the centuries to come.

From the second century AD onwards several Daoist-inspired religious leaders, the Celestial Masters, were worshiping a deity known as Lord Dao (Laojun 老君), a deified version of the ancient thinker Laozi, who supposedly granted them with healing powers, nominated them as celestial masters (tianshi 天師), and provided them with guidance on how to form successful communities (Kohn, *Zhuangzi* 112). Some centuries later, Zhuangzi was elevated to the highest ranking of Daoist sage (90), when *Zhuangzi* was recognized as one of the *Chinese Classics* (canonic scripture, jing 經) with an imperial proclamation by Emperor *Xuanzong* of *Tang*. (D’ Ambrosio and Moeller 11) The honorific title awarded to *Zhuangzi* by the emperor was *Authentic Scripture of Southern Florescence* (Nánhuá zhēnjīng 南華真經) (Csikszentmihalyi 27). During the *Tang Dynasty*, under the reign of the emperor *Xuanzong*, Taoism became the official religion of the country.¹⁰ It was the emperor’s belief that Daoism would help in establishing harmonious relationships in-between his subjects and, for a while, he was right. This historical time is still considered one of the most prosperous and stable in the history of China and the high point of the *Tang Dynasty*.

⁹ One of the streams of philosophical Taoism according to Creel.

¹⁰ From Ancient History Encyclopedia, an article on Taoism by Emily Marc.

Overall, concerning the historical development of the Daoist tradition (including both philosophy and religion), we could say that to have a clear perspective does not seem to be an easy task. This task becomes even more difficult, when we consider the fact that some of the basic aspects of philosophical Daoism such as *non-purposive* and *contemplative* are found in religious Daoism also (Robinet, “*daoia*” 7). Needless to say, the Daoist thinking is not to be confused with religious thinking and/or belief.¹¹ Our work will be mainly focused on the text *Zhuangzi* and its philosophical study as such. One could ask then, whether *daoia* could be perceived as *philosophical* or not. In spite of this historical dispute concerning the identity of this text, on this matter we would certainly agree with Robinet that “Zhuangzi and the Taoist saint are neither pro- nor antiphilosophical. They dwell in an open space where one thinks without being caught up in thought, and sees in a multifaceted ‘perspectivist’ way” (7).

This thinking “without being caught up in thought” in our view is a distinctive quality of the Daoist thinking, as derived from the fundamental principles of Daoism, which facilitates this multifaceted way of receiving the meaning of the text. Therefore, it will serve as a means for us to approach and read the text of *Zhuangzi*. Otherwise, in our view, it will not be possible to appreciate this work in the way it was written and meant by its authors.

1.2. Attempts to Chart Philosophical Daoism – Our Response

Reading the different Taoist philosophical works, Creel traces different aspects, whose importance in his view is central to chart philosophical Daoism. According to this set of aspects that for Creel are of high relevance as far as philosophical Daoism is concerned, *Zhuangzi* is being seen as “contemplative”, whereas the *Daodejing* or *Lao Tzu* (as *Daodejing* is also called), as “purposive”. The *contemplative* aspect is also recognized in the *Daodejing*, but it is not considered so prevalent in *Daodejing* as in the *Zhuangzi* (Creel 142). Creel justifies this characterization of *Lao Tzu* as *purposive*, because, as he asserts, in opposition to the almost anarchistic political views of *Zhuangzi*, in *Daodejing* there are several references to kings, feudal lords and ministers as to how they can rule in accordance with the Dao. “When Laozi 老子 talks about the dao 道 of government, he speaks simultaneously about the way to rule oneself ... For Liezi 列子 and Zhuangzi 庄子, however, the basic question is how to regulate oneself.”, says Guying (4).

¹¹ Laozi writes in Chapter 72: “When they lose their sense of awe, people turn to religion” (Mitchell 72).

According to Kohn, “The sage in the *Daode jing* is ideally the ruler, who rests in non-action (*wuwei*)¹² and lets the currents of the world flow freely through him. Having attained a purity of cosmic dimension, both sage and world attain a calm and tranquil oneness with the Dao” (“Mysticism” 121). In the *Zhuangzi*, Kohn recognizes this “more ecstatic mode”, as she characterizes it, or even “a more psychological mode” of non-action (*wuwei*), that is “a characteristic of spontaneity (*ziran*), the main quality of the embodied Dao” (“Mysticism” 121, “wuwei” 1067). Kohn maintains that the ideas of Zhuangzi himself is “a continuation of the thought of the *Daode jing* with certain major developments” (“Zhuangzi” 1298). Nevertheless, she still sees a contrast between the two texts when it comes to matters of social governance,¹³ because in her view Zhuangzi “thoroughly rejects involvement with government and reinterprets non-action (*wuwei*) as a mental state to be realized by the individual instead of as a political doctrine” (“Zhuangzi” 1298).

It might be that the passages from *Daodejing* referring to matters of seemingly political nature do not sound the same radical as those coming from *Zhuangzi* (where Zhuangzi is even scolding whomever has the illusion that he or she can rule the world). But, as we are about to show, Zhuangzi does not negate the possibility that the world can be governed in accordance with the Dao. In this sense, what appears as a difference of perspective between the two authors might in hindsight turn out to be not an essential matter. As an example of Zhuangzi’s views on this topic, we will cite a passage from Zhuangzi’s Chapter 7 *Fit for Emperors and Kings*:

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! ... What business 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

¹² The notion of *wuwei* appears for the first time in the *Daodejing* (Kohn, “wuwei” 1067). See upcoming chapters for a detailed explication of this term.

¹³ “In contrast to the *Daode jing*, *Zhuangzi* is not concerned with society but finds the individual mind of central importance”, says Kohn (“Zhuangzi” 1298).

the vastness, follow along with things the way they are, and make no room for personal views—then the world will be governed.” (Watson 228-229)

It is not that Zhuangzi is denying the possibility of the world being governed, as we already mentioned. On the contrary, he recognizes this governing of the world only as a coming-about of a natural order of things.

In the *Zhuangzi*, there seems to be an inextricable link between a human being and the world itself, a distinct kind of connectedness between the human mind and the world, that could also be described as a special kind of rootedness of every human being’s heart-mind (xin 心) in the world.¹⁴ That is the reason why Zhuangzi places the source of natural order into the human being itself and not on the outer. Likewise, for Zhuangzi the main cause preventing this natural order from unfolding lies not so much in the outer attitudes of man towards the world as much as in the inner attitudes of man towards life. The regulation of the heart-mind is the one leading to regulation of the world as a whole for Zhuangzi and not the other way around. This is the reason why Zhuangzi is being seen as *contemplative* by Creel.

If we turn now to Laozi, we will discover that his views are not all that different when it comes to this intrinsic link of connectedness between the human mind and the world as this distinct kind of connectedness of every human being’s with the world. In Chapter 23 of *Daodejing* we read: “Open yourself to the Tao, then trust your natural responses; and everything will fall into place” (Mitchell 23). It is on this context that we should understand the exhortations of Laozi towards the leaders of his time:

Why should the lord of the country
flit about like a fool?
If you let yourself be blown to and fro,
you lose touch with your root.
If you let restlessness move you,
you lose touch with who you are. (Mitchell 26)

¹⁴ As we will see below, the heart-mind (xin 心), as the organ of mental and affective life, plays a central role in Zhuangzi’s philosophy, that is known also as a school of the heart (Guying 4)

we read in *Daodejing*'s Chapter 26. About the importance of being “rooted” in the Tao, the root of all things according to Laozi, we find another passage in Chapter 54 of *Daodejing*:

Whoever is planted in the Tao
will not be rooted up

.....

Let the Tao be present in your life
and you will become genuine.

.....

Let it present in your country
and your country will be an example
to all the countries in the world.

.....

How do I know this is true?
By looking inside myself. (Mitchell 54)

Returning now once more to Creel's argument on philosophical Daoism and the way he classifies Zhuangzi as “contemplative” and Laozi as “purposive”, on no account would we agree with Creel's view that *Daodejing* is “less concerned with the vision of the tao as the great whole, and more with the tao as a technique of control” (Creel 142). We would also disagree with Kohn's suggestion that for Laozi non-action was equivalent to a “political doctrine” (Kohn, “Zhuangzi” 1298). To support our claim, we will cite again a passage from Laozi, which in our view is self-evident of Laozi's views on this matter. We read therefore in *Daodejing*'s Chapter 29 the following excerpt:

Do you want to improve the world?
I don't think it can be done.

The world is sacred.

It can't be improved.

If you'll tamper with it, you will ruin it.

If you treat it like an object, you'll lose it. (Mitchell 29)

As for the difference in tone between Zhuangzi and Laozi, when they make references on issues pertaining to the ruling of society, apart from the overall difference we observe amongst the literary styles of these two texts, one could explain this dissonance also by examining it from a historical point of view. Even though very little solid historical information about the obscure figure of Laozi is there, we know for sure that if this historical figure indeed existed, this was with almost absolute certainty before Zhuangzi's (ca. 369–286 B.C.E) time. He either predated or lived at the same time with Confucius (6th century BC) or was born somewhere around the beginning of the *Warring States Period* (481/403 BCE - 221 BCE), but certainly before Zhuangzi. *Zhuangzi* was written during the late *Warring States Period* (Cartwright).

As the name implies, the *Warring States Period*, was a time of increasing violence, division and vicious battles between the different states, because of the power vacuum that had been created after the ostensibly ruling house of Zhou had lost its authority. In addition to these horrific circumstances, there were growing antagonisms for military and state reforms. "This situation gave birth to the phenomenon known as the *baijia*, *The Hundred Schools*: the flourishing of many schools of thought, each articulating its own conception of a return to a state of harmony" (Coutinho; emphasis added). In fact, this is the other name for this period, *The Hundred Schools of Thought*, which began from the time of Confucianism and signified the classical period in Chinese philosophical thought (Augustyn et. al.).

This period could be divided into two historical periods: *Spring and Autumn Period* (771 to 476 BC) and the *Warring States Era* (481/403 BCE - 221 BCE) as a whole. *Daoism* was of course one of these schools of thought that flourished during this time and which most certainly became an expression of a vision to "return to a state of harmony". Even though with almost certainty Daoism does not originate during this historical time.¹⁵ Our speculation

¹⁵ "Traditionally scholars have traced the first 'Daoist spirit' back to 'proto-Daoist' hermits who crop up sporadically in the *Analects*, confronting Confucius and his disciples as they traveled to or fled from various rulers."¹⁶ (Hansen, "Daoism")

about the seeming divergence between Laozi and Zhuangzi would then be the following. On the one hand, it wouldn't be hyperbole to suggest that Laozi not only must have lived closer to the time where Dao was considered solely according to its initial meaning (as the right or the proper way to deal with an issue of ethical or political nature), since historically he was the initiator of Dao's deeper meaning (as the source of everything and to where everything should return), but even maybe, in a time, where the political and military conflicts were not of such an extent as in the time of Zhuangzi. Because, on the other hand, what appears to be an anticonventional attitude towards authority on Zhuangzi's side maybe has more to do with a rejection on his part of the general political atmosphere of his time and not so much with an anarchist political tendency of his own.

Victor H. Mair, in our view, is referring to Zhuangzi's position in an appropriate way, so that Zhuangzi's views cannot be misinterpreted:

Master Chuang strenuously opposed the formal mechanisms of government. In his view, the best way to govern is through no government at all. In this, he agreed with the Old Masters, but for different reasons. The Old Masters were deeply concerned with governance, but advocated a minimalist policy simply because they felt that the more government there was the less effective it would be ... Lest he be misinterpreted, it is questionable whether Master Chuang's position is tantamount to anarchy, and he was by no means in favor of violence. It was not Master Chuang's business to describe what sort of governing apparatus there should be; his purpose was to tell us what government should not do. (Mair XII)

As a final conclusion for this subchapter, we might as well mention that due to the centrality of both *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* in philosophical Daoism, the existing commonalities between Laozi's and Zhuangzi's philosophy will also be taken into account, whenever we deem it to be appropriate for the purposes of this essay. This we will attempt by referring directly to the two texts. Notwithstanding, this shall not be a matter of classification, but a matter of what is really being said and how this is meant by the two authors. As we are about to show, Laozi's figures of thought may even serve as a vehicle for us to unravel *Zhuangzi*'s underlying central thought.

It goes without saying that a substantial part of this essay will be devoted to the exploration of the Taoist thinking and its special foci of attention. Because how else are we going to grasp Zhuangzi's original thought, if not through gaining better understanding of Daoism's fundamental principles? As mentioned previously, the distinctive qualities of Daoist thinking then, derived from those principles, will become then much clearer, for us not only to grasp, but also to actively follow while reading this text. According to Hadot, "Learning How to Read" is also one of the practices that go together with a specific kind of philosophical thinking (*Philosophy as a Way of Life* 101). For, as Hadot explains, in ancient philosophy theoretical discourse was not simply a stand-alone activity (*What is ancient philosophy?* 3). On the contrary, one could say that it served multiple purposes¹⁶ with the most important of these being the "self-realization" and "improvement" of the student (Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* 102).

One should not underestimate thus the importance that the Daoist thinking has for the decipherment of the meaning of *Zhuangzi*. For, as we will show below, it belongs essentially to the core of the central thought of the text. There is a certain amount of effort involved therefore, to familiarize oneself with this kind of thinking, its distinct qualities and its fundamental principles, which act as an underlay for this work. Becoming acquainted with this almost "otherworldly" philosophical universe (at least for most of us) that is Daoism will not merely inform the theoretical understanding of the reader.

The practice of reading itself, while treated in this way, will rather train us, sharpen our awareness in specific ways, and equip us in such a manner that, to use a figure of speech, its effect will feel like having a strange kind of stethoscope in our hands. This instrument, which will be our awareness indeed, but this time tuned slightly differently than what we are used to, while studying philosophical texts, will help us find, where the "pulse" of this peculiar form of philosophy lies. To check the heart rate of a school of the heart definitely sounds like the soundest idea and I believe that Zhuangzi himself would really appreciate that!

¹⁶ According to Hadot,

In all philosophical schools, the goal pursued in these exercises is self-realization and improvement. All schools agree that man, before his philosophical conversion, is in a state of unhappy disquiet. Consumed by worries, torn by passions, he does not live a genuine life, nor is he truly himself. All schools also agree that man can be delivered from this state. He can accede to genuine life, improve himself, transform himself, and attain a state of perfection. It is precisely for this that spiritual exercises are intended. (*Philosophy as a Way of Life* 102)

Prior to explicating *Zhuangzi*'s fundamental figures of thought, we firstly need to provide our reader with a comprehensive account of some of the most pressing issues concerning this text, its structure and its style, so that they do not impose a hindering to our closer investigation of the text later. By this chance, we will present our methodological approach and stress upon certain topics, which we find of key importance.

II. The Text *Zhuangzi*

2.1. The Structure of *Zhuangzi*: Our Interpretive Stance & Methodological Approach

Given now what we know about *Zhuangzi*'s textual history, Guo Xiang (252 – 312 C.E.) has been its first major commentator and editor of what is known as the standard edition of *Zhuangzi*, after he reduced the text from its earliest version of 52 chapters to 33 chapters (Fung 205-206). According to the standard version, the text consists of thirty-three chapters

divided into three groups: Inner Chapters (neipian 內篇; chapters 1–7), Outer Chapters (waipian 外篇; 8–22), and Miscellaneous Chapters (zapian 雜篇; 23–33) (Kohn, “Zhuangzi” 1297).

Out of these thirty-three chapters of *Zhuangzi*, not all chapters are attributed to Zhuangzi himself though. *Zhuangzi* is considered a compilation of Zhuangzi's and others' writings at the pinnacle of the Classical period in China (5th–3rd century BC) (Hansen “Zhuangzi”). Apart from some minor exceptions,¹⁷ in accordance with scholarly consensus, only the first seven chapters, the Inner Chapters, are considered to be authentic and written by Zhuangzi (Robinet, “daoia” 5). This fact has led some scholars to suggest the study and interpretation of *Zhuangzi* under the unifying perspective of its compiler and editor, Guo Xiang, who definitely treated the text as a single coherent whole, rather than under the prism of the obscure figure of Zhuangzi, of whom not much solid historical evidence is there (Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings* 11).

As previously mentioned, the only references we have about the historical figure of

¹⁷ Exceptions like the opinion we come across in the entry of Stanford Encyclopedia about the genuineness of the first chapters of *Zhuangzi*: “To be strict, however, despite the prevalence of the opinion, there is nothing resembling a convincing argument that Zhuangzi wrote all eight of the so called ‘inner chapters.’” (Hansen, “Daoism”)

Zhuangzi come from two sources: from the Historical Records (*Shiji* 史記) of 104 BCE, where we find a short biographical sketch of Zhuangzi (Kohn, *Zhuangzi* 1; Ames and Ware) and from the *Zhuangzi* itself (Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings* 1; Ames and Ware, Hansen “Zhuangzi”), the stories of which about Zhuangzi are mostly of anecdotal character. Depending solely on those two sources of information surely does not make it easier for us to infer Zhuangzi’s views on any given matter, let alone “reconstruct” Zhuangzi’s overall vision in such a consistent manner, which would then permit us to choose a reliable stance to interpret the text.

Some of Zhuangzi’s prominent scholars like A.C. Graham, Liu as well as some traditional commentators such as Wang Fuzhi, suggest treating each section of the text independently (Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings* 11). “Analyzing the *Zhuangzi* beyond the traditional chapter division with a focus on styles and contents of its various chapters, A. C. Graham has identified several textual layers that outline the heterogeneous teachings of several ‘Daoist’ philosophical schools.” (Kohn, *Zhuangzi* 8) Liu Xiaogan on the other hand, has another vision concerning the different layers of the text, being supposedly represented by different philosophical schools. Instead of six schools and layers, he sees three (Kohn, *Zhuangzi* 8).

This approach to study the different sections of the text separately, in Ziporyn’s view, places these authors in the other extreme of the spectrum rather than the approach that favors the all-unifying perspective of Zhuangzi, as it was rendered by its first major compiler and editor Guo Xiang. The third and last alternative as far as the structure of the text and his subsequent interpretative stance are concerned, as being suggested by Ziporyn, is to treat the Outer Chapters as well as the Miscellaneous Chapters “as various *receptions and responses* to the main text: commentaries, extensions, ruminations, domestications, and developments building upon the themes of the Inner Chapters” (Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings* 11).

Not far from Ziporyn’s view, Møllgaard finds that, despite of some inconsistencies between the different chapters of *Zhuangzi*, one may even use the later chapters to elucidate Zhuangzi’s original thought (Møllgaard 12). “In these cases, the *Zhuangzi* is the first and best commentary on *Zhuangzi*.”, says Møllgaard (12). This sums up also our approach concerning the structure of the text: we will treat the Outer as well as the Miscellaneous

Chapters as maybe the most important commentary of the Inner Chapters. Furthermore, when it comes to texts of ancient philosophy and especially to such a multifaceted work such as *Zhuangzi*, we agree with Møllgaard that one must first consider its *scopus*, the central thought of the text, in order to position its different elements in the right order and thus, decipher its real meaning (13). Borrowing Grondin's words, Møllgaard maintains that this amounts to the "inexplicit logos" of the text or "the view with respect to which the book was composed (Grondin: 1994, p. 43)", which will in turn help us bring out its conceptual coherence (Møllgaard 13).

The view with respect to which *Zhuangzi* was composed will lie at the center of our efforts and simultaneously serve as the main goal of this essay. Moving one step closer in this direction, a methodological approach, which we also appreciate, similar to Møllgaard's comes from the book "Genuine Pretending: On the Philosophy of *Zhuangzi*" by Hans-Georg Moeller and Paul J. D' Ambrosio. These authors try in a sense to reconstruct the "spirit" of the text (in Hegelian terms) or in Chinese terms, as applied by Chen Guying (2012), the *jingshen* 精神¹⁸ of the text.¹⁹ We will attempt something similar with *Zhuangzi*, we wouldn't translate this term as 'spirit' though. Instead, we would prefer to refer to the *jingshen* as the essence of the text and to treat *Zhuangzi's* processing as a distillation process. To capture the essence of this text will be one of the main goals of this essay, to put it in our own words.

This essence is meant of course metaphorically as this particular "fragrance" billowing out of *Zhuangzi*, this fine nuance of philosophical Daoism that is *Zhuangzi*, to return to our former analogy. The *inexplicit logos* running through *Zhuangzi* in our view is identical with the *jingshen* of the text, as meant by Guying. Guying makes two references, which in our view are relevant to the essence of the text. Firstly, Guying mentions that the distinct focus of the *Zhuangzi* lies "on expounding and propagating life", on understanding the conditions and explaining the circumstances of life (Guying 3). We may call this aspect of decisive importance in the *Zhuangzi* also as *the secret of caring for life*, as the title of the third Inner

¹⁸ Jing 精– essence, qi 氣(炁) – vital energy, shen 神– spirit, "are three of the main notions shared by Taoism and Chinese culture alike. They are often referred to as the Three Treasures (sanbao 三寶) ... The ideas and practices associated with each term, and with the three terms as a whole, are complex and vary considerably in different contexts and historical periods." (Catherine Despeux, p. 562)

¹⁹ Interestingly, Chen Guying, in his book *The Philosophy of Life – A New Reading of Zhuangzi*, notices that "[w]ith respect to Chinese Classical philosophy, the term *jingshen* 精神, or 'spirit,' originates in the *Zhuangzi*" (3).

Chapter of the *Zhuangzi* implies.

Second, Guying emphasizes the crucial role that the heart plays in Zhuangzi's school of thought, expressing the *jingshen* of the text. "When Zhuangzi talks about the heart, he wants to elucidate the functions of thinking and the mind: the activity of the spirit in the heart,²⁰ which creates a person's spiritual life, and the function of thinking in the heart, which establishes a person's mental life" (Guying 3). The regulation of one's heart, in Zhuangzi's philosophy, is "the fundamental basis" for a government guided by the Dao (4). This is also the reason why Guying denotes Zhuangzi's philosophy as *a school of the heart* (4). In essence, we agree with these two basic aspects as presented by Guying as representing what is fundamental about the *Zhuangzi*.

To uncover the significance of these two aspects in the Zhuangzian philosophy will be of primary importance for our work. In this sense, our attempt is similar to that of Chen Guying. Our methodology to achieve our goal is going to differ than that of Guying, who in accordance to the *jingshen* of the text is commenting on the different chapters of the *Zhuangzi* in a sequence, one-after-another. In writing this text, we are not going to follow any pre-given recipe, based on any specific scheme or order. It is our conviction that by treating seemingly disparate, single units of the text will allow the essence of the text to emerge, and vice versa, by bringing out the essence of *Zhuangzi*, its *jingshen*, will allow us to throw light on different sections of the text.

Through this distillation process of *Zhuangzi* that is our essay, our general aspiration is to highlight the significance that these two aspects have in the *Zhuangzi*: understanding the conditions of life in their self-emergence and the role that the heart-mind of the human beings can play in that understanding. Following, we will share a few more information about the style of the *Zhuangzi* and show what is the reason behind our particular reading of this text.

2.2. On the Cusp Between Philosophy and Literature: The Style of *Zhuangzi*

Zhuangzi's structure or the meagre amount of information we have regarding the identity of the original person named Zhuangzi are not the greatest ordeals one is confronted with, while attempting to closely study this text. Throughout its history, the

²⁰ *Shen* 神 as "spirit" or "spiritual consciousness" (Kirkland 771). The term "[s]hen evolved from the original sense of 'divinity' and outer and inner 'spirits' into the designation of a single force, whose connotations includethose of psychic essence and even of 'soul.' To some extent, shen applies to anything that exists within the cosmosbut has no material aspect, such as deities and human thought.", says Despeux (563).

Zhuangzi has inspired a great number of traditional commentaries and given rise to various interpretations, i.e., viewpoints of understanding. (Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings* 14) We can imagine therefore what a tremendous task it is for a non-Chinese speaker to keep track of this on-going dialogue of undiminished interest about *Zhuangzi*, a text that has been read at least over the past two millennia alongside its commentaries as well.

One of the factors which makes *Zhuangzi* all-the-more difficult to understand, is that in this work one comes across several passages, the interpretation of which cannot be clearly defined. Being confronted with the gigantic work of translating *Zhuangzi* in English, Watson was also of the view that, since the interpretation of several passages is not definite and this for multiple reasons, we cannot speak of a definitive translation either (Watson 65-66). As a natural consequence then, “[e]very translator who takes up the text will produce his own *Zhuangzi*, and the more that are available for the reader to enjoy and compare, the better” Watson wrote (66).

Our personal approach will be, out of a wide variety of translations of the *Zhuangzi* in English, each time to choose the version that we think suits best what the author meant to say according to the *jingshen* or essence of the text. Furthermore, as many commentators have observed about the *Zhuangzi*, it makes use of a vast variety of literary and rhetorical devices and genres, invoking “different modes of reading ranging from poetic revealing to logical rumination and humoristic relaxation” (D’ Ambrosio and Moeller 10). That being said, *Zhuangzi*’s writing style is one of the major obstacles for the understanding of this work or, shall we say, one of the greatest sources of delight for its readers, as even several of his translators admit?²¹

Ziporyn, in his article *Zhuangzi as Philosopher*,²² maintains that *Zhuangzi*’s style is “decidedly unlike that of any previous Chinese thinker”. The plethora of literary genres employed by *Zhuangzi*—prose poems, fables, puns, jokes, unanswered questions and

²¹ “Reading the *Chuang Tzu*, even after the hundredth time, gives me pure pleasure and helps me to relax in times of stress and anxiety”, wrote one of its translators in English, Victor H. Mair (XII). For, as he explains, “[t]he main reason I fell in love with the *Chuang Tzu* so long ago, and *why* my fascination with the book has only increased over the years, is the sheer literary attraction of this strange and wonderful collection of Taoist writings” (XII).

²² The article *Zhuangzi as Philosopher* by Brook Ziporyn published in Hackett Publishing Website: <https://www.hackettpublishing.com/zhuangziphil>.

riddles, satire and sarcasm, imaginary dialogues, spiritual exercises, didactic verses, aphorisms, the usage of images, to mention but a few “and a number of other literary genres we have still not identified and understood” (Møllgaard 6)—make him not only stand out in comparison to other Chinese thinkers. Its writing style sets *Zhuangzi* apart from most of the philosophical texts we are aware of.

Accounting for this feature may lead one to treat *Zhuangzi* as a literary work. This “fascinating collection of essays, tales and anecdotes” not only “presents many difficult problems of interpretation”, but it has also led some of its translators like Victor H. Mair to consider it “primarily as a work of literature” and not as a philosophical one (Mair, p. XI).²³ In support of his claim, Mair was also referring to the noted Sinologist, Burton Watson, about the same. Watson, who like Mair has translated the *Zhuangzi* in English, had described *Zhuangzi* as one of the greatest poems of ancient China (Watson 55):

As has already been suggested, *Zhuangzi*, though he writes in prose, uses words in the manner of a poet, particularly in the lyrical descriptions of the Way or the Daoist sage, where meaning often takes second place to sound and emotive force. In the broader sense of the word, his work is in fact one of the greatest poems of ancient China.

sinologist Watson was noting (55). But did Watson consider the literary aspect of *Zhuangzi* of primary importance like Mair?

Judging from Watson’s Introduction of *Zhuangzi*, this does not seem to be the case. There one can find Watson’s references on the translation of certain key philosophical terms in the work of *Zhuangzi* (67-70). Furthermore, Watson’s commenting on *Zhuangzi*’s anticonventional attitude towards the value systems of his time, helps us understand how this basic philosophical attitude of *Zhuangzi* is being expressed as an absurd usage of language in the text.²⁴ In this sense, in our view, Watson recognizes the primacy of the philosophical

²³ “To ignore the poetics of the *Chuang Tzu* by treating it simply as a piece of philosophical prose would do it a grave injustice” (Mair, p. XII).

²⁴ Watson acknowledges,

Zhuangzi, as I have said, rejects all conventional values, and as a result, like so many mystical writers, he rejects the conventional values of words as well, deliberately employing them to mean the opposite of what they ordinarily mean in order to demonstrate their essential meaninglessness. When an author does this, he of course invites misunderstanding, no matter how dazzling the literary effect he achieves. This is what has happened to *Zhuangzi*. (51)

attitude over Zhuangzi's literary choices and not the other way around. Even if someone would take literally the statement of Watson that in the passages about the Dao and the Daoist Sage, "meaning often takes second place to sound and emotive force" against the backdrop of Zhuangzi's lyrical descriptions, this would not necessarily confirm Mair's claim that Zhuangzi should be considered as "primarily a work of literature" (Mair XI), as aforementioned.

On the opposite, as we will show in the upcoming chapter, concepts as the Dao or the Daoist sage with their apophatic character as well as the other Daoist fundamental principles with their elusive character mold the writing style of the *Zhuangzi*. As part of this work, our efforts will revolve around throwing light on the Taoist thinking as such and its special foci of attention as well the fundamental principles derived from this thinking. In this way, we hope to highlight the inner necessity behind the writing style of this philosophical work. For it is hard to comprehend under which sort of premise a highly influential text such as *Zhuangzi* that has greatly shaped Daoism, one of the two most significant religious/philosophical systems in China together with Confucianism (Hansen, "Daoism"), could be perceived solely as a literary text.²⁵ Other than that, while reading *An Outline of Chinese Literature I*, we find out that:

In the first stage, that of the pre-Qin, there was no complete separation between literature, history and philosophy, or between poetry, music and dancing. This was the basic pattern of literature at that time. The Book of Odes, Songs of Chu, Analects, Mencius, Laozi (Daodejing) and Zhuangzi are all representative works of this stage. (Xingpei 30)

It seems that at the time that *Zhuangzi* was written, there was no clear distinction between philosophy and literature. At this point, it is necessary to bring our focus on issues related with the reading of the *Zhuangzi* in general.

²⁵ "Chuang Tzu is, first and foremost, a literary text and consequently should not be subjected to excessive philosophical analysis ... The Chuang Tzu is a monument of Chinese literature; it is in this light that we should read and interpret it" (Mair, XIV).

III. How to Read the *Zhuangzi*

Zhuangzi stands out as a monumental work in China's intellectual history not only because of the sophistication and variety of its literary forms, but mostly, thanks to the vastness and depth of its multidimensional content:

The *Zhuangzi* is a particularly complex and rich work, and therefore its multidimensionality is especially obvious and relevant ... The reader is constantly drawn back and forth between different interpretations of the text, finding it difficult to settle down for long with any one in particular, except perhaps for an ongoing hermeneutic of “rambling without destination”.

wrote Hans-Georg Moeller and Paul J. D' Ambrosio in this respect (11). While reading the *Zhuangzi*, the reader's interest is ignited in so many different ways and pulled into so many directions and yet, the need to adopt a specific interpretation of the text, while analyzing the *Zhuangzi*, especially in the academic world, in many cases has been synonym to adhering to a particular perspective while reading it. “There has been considerable diversity of opinion in understanding *Zhuangzi* as a philosopher, somewhat exacerbated by recent attempts by Western readers to fit him into a familiar Occidental philosophical category.”, says Ziporyn (*Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings* 19).

Brook Ziporyn has devoted special attention to perspectivism in studying the *Zhuangzi*. In the passage *The Mutual Implication of Perspectives* as a part of his article *Zhuangzi as Philosopher* Brook Ziporyn shows that just by entertaining a specific perspective into things, *ipso facto* the existence of other perspectives too is implied (Ziporyn, “*Zhuangzi as Philosopher*”). Referring to the gnoseological considerations from the *Zhuangzi* on the nature of assertion,²⁶ Ziporyn justifies his claim that *Zhuangzi* was “a simple perspectival relativist”, in the sense that for him all assertions were relative to some perspective.

Another passage, where Ziporyn makes a rather extended reference on this matter is the subchapter *Multiple Perspectives of the Inner Chapters*, a part of the Introduction of his

²⁶ See *Zhuangzi*, Chapter 2 *Discussions on Making Things Equal*: “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.” (Watson, 105)

Translation of *Zhuangzi*. Ziporyn wonders: “Is Zhuangzi, as represented in the Inner Chapters, a mystic? A skeptic? A metaphysical monist? A spirit-body dualist? An intuitionist? A theist? A deist? An agnostic? A relativist? A fatalist? A nihilist? A linguistic philosopher? An existentialist? Or perhaps a poet uncommitted to any particular philosophical position?” (*Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings* 19) Ziporyn then follows the ingenious strategy of quoting passages from *Zhuangzi* that in turn confirm all those diverse philosophical positions he mentioned in the beginning of his syllogism.

“This list could be extended.”, acknowledges Ziporyn (20). “But it is obvious that many of these positions seem to be starkly opposed or at least incompatible. Does Zhuangzi somehow really combine them all?”, is the question then for Ziporyn (20). Moreover, “[a]re all these positions just thrown together incoherently? Or is there some coherent way to integrate all these different strands into one vision?”, Ziporyn asks later on (20). While exhorting his reader to read his more philosophical text *Zhuangzi as Philosopher*, Ziporyn is optimistic that “the delicious experience of grappling with and being jostled about by this text will allow readers to come to their own conclusions about it—and then perhaps to question those conclusions and try out some others” (20).

Overall, we could agree that “[t]he wide range of views of Zhuangzi stem from the style of the text and the ways it has figured in China’s intellectual history as well as the ways it was caught up in the modern interaction between China and the modern, scientific West”, as Hansen maintains, while referring to the competing interpretive narratives about the *Zhuangzi* (Hansen, “Zhuangzi”). As far as our philosophical reading of the *Zhuangzi* is concerned, we find the analogical description of the *Zhuangzi* as polyphonic composition, as rendered by Hans-Georg Moeller and Paul J. D’ Ambrosio, most interesting (D’ Ambrosio and Moeller 11). On a closer look, the analogy given by these authors about the *Zhuangzi* will serve as a vehicle for us to place our unique reading of the *Zhuangzi* on the firmament of viewpoints around the understanding of this masterful work so far.

3.1. *Zhuangzi* as a Polyphonic Composition

To point to the multidimensionality of the *Zhuangzi*, Hans-Georg Moeller and Paul J. D’ Ambrosio in the Introductory Chapter of their work “Genuine Pretending: On the Philosophy of the *Zhuangzi*” turn to an interesting analogy: that of music. These authors render not only

every single chapter of *Zhuangzi*, but also every little passage included in *Zhuangzi*'s chapters—be it an individual narrative, a dialogue or a merely poetic passage—as polyphonic and maintain that the “key” one picks to study a passage of the *Zhuangzi* originates in a specific reading of the same (11).²⁷

The “key” that these authors choose is the *humoristic key*, as also given away by the title of their book. The “often acknowledged yet philosophically neglected *humoristic key*” (11) is in their view of high relevance to the Zhuangzian way of philosophizing, acquiring thus a central position in their reading. In their attempt thus to reconstruct the jingshen 精神 of the text, the authors follow a comprehensive hermeneutic which they call *humoristic hermeneutic* (13), represented by the emblematic figure of the genuine pretender,²⁸ a key figure in the authors' reading of *Zhuangzi*.

Another key is the *propositional* one, which in the authors' view arises out of conventional philosophical methodologies that tend to “isolate or abstract certain positions, arguments or viewpoints from within” the *Zhuangzi*, resulting thus in ascribing “several isms to it or some of its sections” (D'Ambrosio and Moeller 11). As the authors allege, the propositional key has been one of the most predominant paradigms of academically interpreting Zhuangzi (D'Ambrosio and Moeller 13). Møllgaard was also pointing to the purely formal questioning many of us follow, as a method to read and understand Chinese thought: “We ask, for instance, is Zhuangzi a relativist? Is he a realist, a pragmatist, or an antirationalist?” (5). For Møllgaard though, this questioning when applied to thinkers such as Zhuangzi is bound to fail in grasping what is it that specifically motivates the thinker, his central thought. More seriously still, “it has not been proved that the specific set of problems that constitutes modern philosophical discourse also constitutes philosophy as such” (5).

²⁷ “The multidimensionality of the *Zhuangzi* allows for readings of the same passages in different keys and with different foci of attention.” (D'Ambrosio and Moeller 11)

²⁸ To explicate what the figure of genuine pretender signifies, we are going to cite an excerpt from D'Ambrosio and Moeller's work:

[W]hat our oxymoron genuine pretending is supposed to convey first and foremost—namely, that something or someone, on the one hand assumes a role that it (or he/she) is not really. But, on the other hand, it (or he/she) thereby does not act in any way falsely, hypocritically, or in deviation from any authentic essence, since there is no such essence to begin with ... Genuine pretending is real, but not determining; it neither violates nor constructs identity ... [G]enuine pretending is thereby associated with what may be called an existential mode of play. (3)

This way of thinking – technical philosophy, as Møllgaard calls it using Faure’s words,²⁹ is for Møllgaard but an indication of the professionalization of philosophy, which in our times is in danger of turning into methodologism, warns Møllgaard (5). A strict philosophical analysis of Zhuangzi is undividedly focused on the propositional level is being rejected by Møllgaard as *anachronistic* (7). Moreover, Carl Joseph Helsing’s examinations of earlier approaches in the *Zhuangzi* scholarship are also illuminating.³⁰ Helsing finds that these approaches to study the *Zhuangzi* fail to capture the essence of this text for they are too strongly linguistic “and these result in viewing the text as antirationalist mysticism, linguistic and moral relativism, or skill-based skepticism” (556). “It is not possible to identify one single statement or ism as the final verdict of the *Zhuangzi*.”, Hans-Georg Moeller and J. D’Ambrosio state (14).

Moeller and D’Ambrosio make a special reference to the *sacred key* as one of the most fundamental ways to read and understand *Zhuangzi*: “Read in this ‘sacred key,’ the text is seen as providing a profound, all-encompassing vision of the world. (D’Ambrosio and Moeller 11) The sacred key and the subsequent foci of attention derived from that will be granted center-stage position in our essay. Before our delving into the exact meaning of the sacred key in our reading of *Zhuangzi*, it is important to make some remarks on how to allow the meaning of *Zhuangzi* to unfold.

3.2. Knowledge & the Merits of Uselessness

Before moving further, we would like to make a remark on how contemporary interpretations can be anachronistic or even eisegetic up to a certain degree towards an ancient text like the *Zhuangzi*. This of course is directly related to the way one reads the *Zhuangzi*. Moeller and D’Ambrosio admit that the threat of this occurring is almost imminent due to the fact that any contemporary interpretation must unavoidably depart from a specific, current semantic

²⁹ Møllgaard says,

Technical philosophy is a particular ritual performed in the academic world, repeating the same structures over and over again in a quasi-obsessive manner’ (Faure 2004: 47), and there is no reason why this particular obsession should be imposed on *Zhuangzi* ... This proliferation of genres and images suggests that literary reading, not philosophical analysis, is best suited to bring out the thought of *Zhuangzi* (Hoffmann 2001). For *Zhuangzi* employs what Pascal Quignard (1995) calls “speculative rhetoric,” a mode of thought that cannot be understood by philosophical analysis but only by reading. We elude the essential task of reading *Zhuangzi* by solving philosophical puzzles, chasing the phantom objects of historical reconstruction, constructing contrasting typologies, and playing with the infinite complexities of deconstruction.

³⁰ Either from an epistemic or from a moral-psychological point of view.

framework, in order to reconstruct the past meaning of the ancient philosophical text and introduce it thus in a meaningful way to the contemporary on-going academic discourse.

As long as one departs from a specific semantic framework, the imposition of the scholars' perspective on the text seems inescapable. In this way, the text may be introduced in a "meaningful" way to the contemporary academic community. But this would mean that the text is made accessible and thus, readable within a pregiven context of thinking, an environment and culture of discussion. The language used in this setup as well as the vocabulary involved, the ways of negotiating or arguing about or against things, the types of thinking are rather stemming from this academic context and are not so much related to the text that is being studied in the first place, not to mention the distinct philosophic view of the author who wrote the text.

In the process of doing so, we may end up draining the text from its essence, the way it was actually meant and the specific significance it had for its authors. As we will show, in the particular case of the *Zhuangzi*, this approach would not only be wrong for the reasons just mentioned. Our stance is that *Zhuangzi* is a meaningful text for us still today not simply as philosophers, but much more as human beings. The relevance of the *Zhuangzi* has to do, as mentioned in the previous chapters, with a deeper understanding of the conditions of life as they self-emerge, and the regulation of the mind needed for this understanding to take place. This is one of the main reasons why it becomes imperative for us not to abide by any specific theoretical framework on our studying *Zhuangzi*, as unimaginable as this may sound. Is this at all possible, while one still uses words?

The unintelligibility of such an attempt—the commitment to be uncommitted towards any theoretical framework and yet, neither opportunistic, nor indulging into any wishful thinking whatsoever—should not deter us from the pursuing of our task. Before the dread of sheer uncertainty and the sense of lack of orientation,³¹ in no way should we feel disheartened or scared. After all, *Zhuangzi* is the master of navigating through situations of pure not-knowingness, so why don't we let him take the lead instead?

To truly appreciate the *Zhuangzi*, one needs to find oneself in a rather special kind of

³¹ Zhuangzi says, "A little confusion can alter the sense of direction; a great confusion can alter the inborn nature." (Watson 247) This is what the *Zhuangzi* is about – the alteration of our inborn nature, as we will also show in the upcoming part of our essay. Maybe this is one of the reasons behind the baffling writing style of this text as well. Our personal stance, therefore, is that we cannot shy away from confusing situations in our studying the *Zhuangzi*, but rather embrace them. Otherwise, the appreciation of this work may never occur.

mental alertness, which in our view can be described perfectly by the following *Zen Koan*:³²

Above, not a tile to cover the head;
Below, not an inch of ground for the foot.³³

Only in this way one will be able to embark upon this peculiar journey with Zhuangzi as one's guide!³⁴ In fact, Zhuangzi, in Chapter 22 *Knowledge Wandered North*, has already extended his invitation for us to roam around with him, if we wish to, on a literally unheard-of realm:

Why don't you try wandering with me to the Palace of Not-Even-Anything—identity and concord will be the basis of our discussions, and they will never come to an end, never reach exhaustion. Why not join with me in inaction, in tranquil quietude, in hushed purity, in harmony and leisure? Already my will is vacant and blank. I go nowhere and don't know how far I've gotten. I go and come and don't know where to stop. I've already been there and back, and I don't know when the journey is done. I ramble and relax in unbordered vastness; Great Knowledge enters in, and I don't know where it will ever end. (Watson 573)

The ephemeral, both fleeting and limiting, and all the same, broad and boundless nature of knowledge, as presented by Zhuangzi, reminds us of the sensitivity condition on knowledge as it was described by Robert Nozick in 1981 on his *Philosophical Explanations*. In this definition, knowledge serves a means for tracking the truth. According to Nozick, knowledge is this justified true belief that maintains its sensitivity to appear and then subside,

³² Heine and Wright mention the following about *Koan*:

The term *kōan* (C. *kung-an*, literally 'public cases') refers to enigmatic and often shocking spiritual expressions based on dialogical encounters between masters and disciples that were used as pedagogical tools for religious training in the Zen (C. *Ch'an*) Buddhist tradition. This innovative practice is one of the best-known and most distinctive elements of Zen Buddhism ... are generally appreciated today as pithy, epigrammatic, elusive utterances that seem to have a psychotherapeutic effect in liberating practitioners from bondage to ignorance, as well as for the way they are contained in the complex, multileveled literary form of *kōan* collection commentaries. (Heine and Wright 3)

³³ Alan Watts, p. viii.

³⁴ "Zhuangzi's language is sometimes compared to the language of Chan/Zen, and just as Zhuangzi is often said to negate language, it is often said that Chan/Zen teachings are beyond words." (Møllgard 79)

according to the circumstances. The alternation between Identity and Concord, between what is and what is not, which never comes to an end, leaves no doubt that this journey with Zhuangzi is going to be everlasting...

An infinite journey may however involve small recesses, moments of repose. At least, Zhuangzi would not mind letting you rest in the realm of *Not-Even-Anything* to take a nap under the shade of a useless tree,³⁵ an ideal inhabitant of this plain plane. We read now a passage from the story of the useless tree coming from the First Inner Chapter *Free and Easy Wandering*:

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? (Watson 93)

The story of the useless tree can be read in so many ways that is not easy to fix our gaze upon a certain direction in our searching for orientation, when it comes to deciphering its meaning. One of the most important aspects of this story, one could say, is that there is a kind of merit in one's being useless. This sounds somewhat counterintuitive based on what we know from our experience: the purposive element accompanies our undertakings, our mental activities included. No matter how much we strive for this cause, for the understanding of *what is*, our departure point remains somehow fixed. Our past experience and what we already encountered so far – nothing less, nothing more – is what keeps us rather entangled into the realm of things:

Alas, the men of this world are no more than travelers, stopping now at this inn, now at that, all of them run by “things.” They know the things they happen to encounter but not those that they have never encountered. They know how to do the things they can do, but they can't do the things they don't know how to do. Not to know, not to be able to do — from these, mankind can never escape. And yet there are those who struggle to

³⁵ About the Story of the Useless Tree coming from the First Inner Chapter of *Zhuangzi*, see upcoming paragraphs.

escape from the inescapable — can you help but pity them? Perfect speech is the abandonment of speech; perfect action is the abandonment of action. To be limited to understanding only what is understood — this is shallow indeed! (Watson 584-585)

Our state of knowledge is thus imperfect, expressing rather a limited aspect of things. Now, if from this limited point of view this limited knowledge is taken as something absolute, the intrinsic value of the world and the natural strength of self-emerging life, which certainly does

not arise from or depend on our views, might be overlooked. What we already know encloses our mindset into a specific scheme of things. As we will see further on though, while examining Helsing's reading of *Zhuangzi*, the world may also be perceived as “an open-ended, multi-form process of continually changing possibility” (571). All that is required is “to let one's perspective be shaped by the open interplay of experience” and this, apart from any egoic interests (571). In this sense, our endeavours and how we use our knowledge are not aimed at specific end-results, but rather maintain a character of openness towards life itself.

George Bataille in his work *Theory of Religion* makes some very interesting observations, when it comes to the utility of things and the purposive element in our efforts. While taking the tools as a characteristic example, George Bataille goes so far as to say that “[t]he tool has no value in itself ... but only in relation to an anticipated result ... This is one of the most remarkable and most fateful aberrations of language. The purpose of the tool's use always has the same meaning as the tool's use: a utility is assigned to it in turn and so on.” (28) This reference to the absurdity of our language, as far as the tools' use and purpose are concerned, reminds us of another *Zen Koan*, which in our view could be illuminating in this sense:

What happens to my fist [noun-object] when I open my hand?

While referring to this Koan, Alan Watts very successfully recognizes in our view how arbitrary our grammatical conventions are, because they determine “what experiences shall be called objects and what shall be called events or actions” (Watts 5). In my “fist” (noun-object), there is an action (me-clenching my hand) already being involved and therefore, hidden by the formal character of our language:

The object miraculously vanishes because an action was disguised by a part of speech usually assigned to a thing! In English the differences between things and actions are clearly, if not always logically, distinguished, but a great number of Chinese words do duty for both nouns and verbs—so that one who thinks in Chinese has little difficulty in seeing that objects are also events, that our world is a collection of processes rather than entities. (Watts 5)

Bataille then continues, “The absurdity of an endless deferral only justifies the equivalent absurdity of a true end, which would serve no purpose.” (28-29) By functioning as mere ends (in the sense of *telos*-purpose), the tool-objects seem on the one hand, to introduce a chasm into the continuity of the world, which in this sense does not appear as an integrated whole. “The object”, George Bataille continues, “has a meaning that breaks the undifferentiated continuity, that stands opposed to immanence or to the flow of all that is – which it transcends.”

(29) One could even claim that tools act as an art of compensation for problem situations, where no other solution seems to be at hand; in such situations of literal *Ausweglosigkeit*,³⁶ the tools come in handy.

“Only a world in which the beings are indiscriminately lost is superfluous, serves no purpose, has nothing to do and means nothing: it only has a value in itself, not with a view to something else, this other thing for still another and so on.”, insists Bataille (29). This state of imperfect knowledge, we find ourselves in, even though it is being expressed as “a view to something else, this other thing for still another and so on”, as Bataille was writing, when experienced as something absolute, overlooks this intrinsic value of the world and the natural strength of life, which certainly does not arise from or depend on our views, as I mentioned earlier.

The ‘true’ end, as described by Bataille, by not being subject to any sense of purpose, intentionality or usefulness, reintroduces the “continuous being, lost in the world like water lost in water: or else, if it were a being as distinct as a tool, it would no longer be a ‘true

³⁶ The word *Ausweglosigkeit* literally means that there is no other way out and is generally used in the sense of hopelessness.

end” (29). This ‘true end’ reminds us of the Tao, which according to Laozi is “beyond all value” – “[i]ts net covers the whole universe, and though its meshes are wide, it doesn’t let a thing slip through” (Mitchell 62, 73). Our mind, similar to a net or a sieve, is trying to grasp to totality of what is; should this knowledge in its utility be treated as something absolute, as a ‘true end’, well, in this case the Tao escapes us – we become “run” by things, as Zhuangzi was mentioning above. This meaning, the intrinsic value of life slips away like water through our own hands.

It is also worth mentioning that Zhuangzi’s overall approach towards knowledge is that it cannot be an end in itself in a person’s life. We read in the beginning of Chapter 3 *The Secret of Caring for Life* by Zhuangzi: “Your life has a limit, but knowledge has none. If you use what is limited to pursue what has no limit, you will be in danger. If you understand this and still strive for knowledge, you will be in danger for certain!”³⁷ (Watson 155) “Be wary of what is within you; block off what is outside you, for much knowledge will do you harm” (Watson 292). It seems that Zhuangzi’s philosophy is not aiming at knowledge:

Those in ancient times who wished to keep themselves alive did not use eloquence to ornament their knowledge. They did not use their knowledge to make trouble for the world; they did not use their knowledge to make trouble for Virtue. Loftily they kept to their places and returned to their inborn nature. Having done that, what more was there for them to do? The Way has no use for petty conduct; Virtue has no use for petty understanding. Petty understanding injures Virtue; petty conduct injures the Way. Therefore it is said, Rectify yourself, that is all. When joy is complete, this is called the fulfillment of ambition. (Watson 417-418)

Now we may ask ourselves: which is this complete joy Zhuangzi is speaking about? The answer for Zhuangzi is simple: “You should find the same joy in one condition as in the other and thereby be free of care, that is all.” (Watson 419) Laozi, on the other hand, in Chapter 65, mentions, “The ancient Masters didn’t try to educate people, but kindly taught them to not-know.” (Mitchell 65) Therefore, to return back to the analogy of the useless tree, it might be

³⁷ “Zhuangzi advises that we do not exhaust our life (wusheng), that is to say, our limited human life, in the pursuit of knowledge and fame, which will dangerously entangle us in the outer (wai) world of man (ren)” (Møllgard 48).

worth it from time-to-time to treat our so-called knowledge as such: to “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”, as Zhuangzi suggests (Watson 93). This is the merit of plain uselessness, according to Zhuangzi.

Purposelessness was also highly appreciated by him. There is an allegorical story given by Zhuangzi, coming from Outer Chapter 12 *Heaven and Earth*, which in our view points to how precious purposelessness can be:

The Yellow Emperor went wandering north of the Red Water, ascended the slopes of Kunlun, and gazed south. When he got home, he discovered he had lost his Dark Pearl. He sent Knowledge to look for it, but Knowledge couldn't find it. He sent the keen-eyed Li Zhu to look for it, but Li Zhu couldn't find it. He sent Wrangling Debate to look for it, but Wrangling Debate couldn't find it. At last he tried employing Shapeless, and Shapeless found it.

The Yellow Emperor said, “How odd! — in the end it was Shapeless who was able to find it!” (Watson 314)

Furthermore, speaking of the sage, Zhuangzi writes “The sage hatches no schemes, so what use has he for knowledge?” (187) “He discards knowledge and purpose and follows along with the reasonableness of Heaven.” (407) This special kind of *reasonableness* arising out of purposelessness we are going to inquire in the coming subchapters by studying some of the fundamental figures of thought in the *Zhuangzi*. Before that though, we need to ask ourselves some pressing questions about the feasibility of our attempt.

3.3. Cacophony arising from the Banks of Philology

“On Reading Zhuangzi”, the first chapter of his book *An Introduction to Daoist Thought – Action, Language and Ethics in Zhuangzi*, Eske Møllgaard was wondering whether we, as scholars, can at all understand Zhuangzi (Møllgaard 1). Møllgaard agreed with Sloterdijk (1993) that the study of Asian Thought is largely excluded from what is considered to be academic thought in the West. The only disciplines where Asian Thought has survived are fields such as Sinology and Indology. From the perspective of those fields, as is mostly the case, the concerns dealt with in the actual texts of Asian Thought are treated mainly as

philological and not as philosophical (Møllgaard 1).

This is why Eske Møllgaard considers the current fields of Sinology and Indology as barren fields for the fecundity of philosophical thought and in this sense, he legitimately shows the Asian Thought's being *in exile*, when it comes to the examination of texts of such profundity as *Zhuangzi* (Møllgaard 1). Referring to the work of the orientalist, Møllgaard uses Sloterdijk's pointed, witty description:

they can, as a matter of course, cite the thesis that not-knowing *avidya* is the matter from which reality is made" – or, as Zhuangzi says, that "non-knowing is profound, knowing is superficial" – and "they handle the 'great sayings' of the East, like trusted Bank employees move gold bars around in the security vaults under the Bahnhofsstraße in Zyrich (Sloterdijk, 1993: 218). (Møllgaard 1)

That is the reason why, to describe such orientalists, Sloterdijk uses the name "book-keepers of the ecstasies", as imported from Persia, India and China, says Møllgaard (1). Møllgaard asks himself then, "[b]ut what if we aspire, perhaps unreasonably so, to be more than book-keepers of ancient wisdom? What if we want to *understand* what is said in the entries of our scholarly works?" (1) He concedes, "[h]ere we, as scholars, run up against the limits of scientific understanding." (1)

3.3.1. An Exercise Meant for the Treasurers of Ecstasies. Following the example of Sloterdijk, to further elucidate this point, we are going to cite a few phrases from the *Zhuangzi* and then, ask ourselves about their real meaning. These quotes from the *Zhuangzi* come from the translation of Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*. Beginning from the second Inner Chapter *Discussion on Making All Things Equal*, where we find the following passage:

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! (Watson 8)

The question we could then ask ourselves is the following: do we perceive, i.e., experience,

our own emotional states in the same transitory manner as described by Zhuangzi?

To put it differently, while using Zhuangzi's words, do we really experience our emotions and feelings as *music from empty holes* without knowing *where they sprout from* or do we usually take them as a legitimate expression of our needs, wants and concerns in actual situations, as an immediate reflection of our moods and/or psychological condition or even interpret them as a sign of a character trait, a direct expression of our personality? When our whole life's experience consists of such moments as the latter ones described, one cannot help but wonder about the exact meaning of this passage by Zhuangzi.

Someone could now object to that saying that there are also cases where we find that our emotional states and our subsequent behavior are not really representative of whom we truly are. Still most of us do not experience the own emotional as well as mental states in this detached and dispassionate way as depicted by Zhuangzi on this passage — as *mushrooms springing up in dampness*. This is the reason why by no stretch of the imagination could we picture of a human being that would really be able to experience the own emotional states as well as others' in this manner. Because, were we to relate it to an actual human being, this very description of Zhuangzi would run up exactly against the very idea of what we consider as *human*.

Another objection that could be raised here is that such remarks by Zhuangzi belong to the sphere of mere imagination, poetic expressions without any further relation or connection to reality. Perhaps even signs of eccentricity of a personality of such magnitude as Zhuangzi! From my point of view though, before one adopts such a viewpoint, one should first inquire in which ways (and if at all) *Zhuangzi* is consistent as a whole. A task relevant to this would be to try and find out if there is any fundamental idea, i.e., a core thought, underlying the *Zhuangzi*, which could in turn be useful for us to explicate such perplexing passages. For I agree with Møllgaard that “to discover the conceptual coherence in Zhuangzi ... we must first consider its *scopus*, the central thought of the text” (Møllgaard 13).

Moving closer in the direction of unraveling the central thought of the text, a short citation from the first Inner Chapter *Free and Easy Wandering* will follow: “the Perfect Man has no self” (Watson 3). In *Zhuangzi* there are plenty of passages referring to the self or in fact, to the loss of the self. Before referring to further passages like this, I would like to make a remark on the last two passages we have cited from *Zhuangzi* and ponder over their possible

connection, when these two are examined together. Our first citation concerned the own emotions, their impermanence and permanent alternation. According to my analysis above, the reason why we fail to perceive them as so a transitory phenomenon as meant by Zhuangzi is because we tend to link them with a certain sense of self that we carry within.

In other words, it is due to this particular salience of our emotional states and their givenness as an integral part of our sense of self which makes it impossible for us to perceive them otherwise. Perhaps this is why Zhuangzi in the end of this passage is calling upon us: “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.” (Watson 101) Zhuangzi himself gives us a clue, which rather confirms our point. Turning now to our second citation from the first Inner Chapter—the Perfect Man has no self—we may wonder: could the self, or rather, the loss of self, be the connection, the missing link, we are out on the look for?

While contemplating on the first citation, we were unable to imagine of a human being that experiences oneself and others in such a—phenomenally non-human—way and now, in the second citation, Zhuangzi not only ascertains that there is such a human being, but also maintains that he/she has no self. That is, the “Perfect Man”. Could this unimaginable, unthought-of, human being, whatever is meant by the name “Perfect Man”, be what we have been searching all long? It is for sure worthwhile to explore from this scope further passages related to the self or, to be more accurate, to the loss of the self. Prior to this though, it would be useful to see how this being—the Perfect Man—is being referred upon in other translations: “the ultimate man has no self” from Victor Mair’s (5) translation, “the perfected person has no self” according to Møllgaard (127), “the Consummate Person has no fixed identity” from Brook Ziporyn’s translation (*Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings* 26), “The Perfect man has no (thought of) self” according to James Legge’s translation.³⁸

We could say, on the one hand, that Møllgaard’s and Ziporyn’s key terms (“perfected”, “consummate”) could implicitly be expressing a progression on one’s attaining perfection of character rather than pointing to a state of completeness that is already there, as the terms “perfect” and “ultimate” by the other authors seem to imply. On the other hand, Ziporyn and

³⁸ For the translation by James Legge, one can visit the Chinese text Project homepage: <https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/enjoyment-in-untroubled-ease>

Legge with their choice of phrasing, each one in his own way, indirectly show that there might be a relevance between the perfection of character and the (lack of) self-identification and/or the thought processes which are linked to it.³⁹ Different nuances⁴⁰ of meaning arise depending on the translation one follows.

The question then emerging is whether the central thought of the text, its *scopus*, is heavily depending on such fine differentiations caused by the translation's work or not. To eliminate this danger, on the one side, a thorough examination of different translations is necessary. A further examination of passages referring to the loss of self would surely be precious for the purposes of our work, on the other side. That is, to distinguish which of the aspects noted above truly belong to the *scopus* of this work and which not. For we are confident that no matter what the implications of the different choices of phrasing made by the translators may be, this may not suffice for our navigation through a text of such complexity such as *Zhuangzi*.

More than anything else, our orientation needs to remain firmly fixed towards the uncovering of the central axis of this work. Needless to say, this task cannot be achieved all at once. Rather what are aiming at here is from different angle points to showcase to our reader what is of real relevance for the central thought of *Zhuangzi* and from our point of view, to point to appropriate means of "grappling with and being jostled about by this text", as Ziporyn was suggesting (*Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings* 20). This is exactly what this subchapter is about: an exercise, perhaps even a trial, to see if (at all) we can understand the *Zhuangzi*, as Møllgard was also wondering.⁴¹

For us to carry out this task successfully, it is most urgent to take a pause, look into some of the basic principles of Taoism and reflect on the Taoist thinking, its distinct modes of thought and understanding. Because, as we will show below, there is an internal reason

³⁹ It is not simply that the perfect person or the consummate person lacks a self; such a person has no thought of a fixed self, i.e., a fixed identity.

⁴⁰ From Merriam Webster Dictionary (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nuance>):

The history of "nuance" starts in Latin with the noun *nubes*, meaning "cloud." "Nubes" floated into Middle French as *nue*, also meaning "cloud," and "nue" gave rise to *nuer*, meaning "to make shades of color." "Nuer" in turn produced "nuance," which in Middle French meant shade of color. English borrowed "nuance" from French, with the meaning "a subtle distinction or variation," in the late 18th century. That use persists today. Additionally, "nuance" is sometimes used in a specific musical sense, designating a subtle, expressive variation in a musical performance (such as in tempo, dynamic intensity, or timbre) that is not indicated in the score.

⁴¹ "But what if we aspire, perhaps unreasonably so, to be more than book-keepers of ancient wisdom? What if we want to *understand* what is said in the entries of our scholarly works?" (Møllgard 1)

pertaining to the Taoist thinking as such, which most certainly informs the style of the *Zhuangzi*, attaching special importance to its different passages. This special importance of the different passages of *Zhuangzi*, as derived from the fundamental principles of Daoism, may not be visible at first sight to the reader of the text. To lend perspicuity to this underlying network of connections, while examining them from the scope Zhuangzi's original thought, is one of the major tasks of our essay.

As a matter of fact, to read the *Zhuangzi* for us is a task that can be accomplished only in harmony with the Taoist thinking and its special foci of attention and this is what we are going to attempt in the upcoming part of the essay! In this sense, after we have provided our reader with detailed background information on Zhuangzi's thinking, it will be possible for us to complete the exercise of this subchapter as well.

IV. The Daoist Art to Read the *Zhuangzi*

The Daoist thought focuses more on ways of finding oneself in the world rather than on explanations about the nature of the world. These special foci of attention in the text of *Zhuangzi* include fundamental attitudes towards life such as genuineness or authenticity, emptiness or refinement, detachment, simplicity, purity, spontaneity, wuwei (non-action or in a sense, natural action), stillness, constancy of will or steadfastness, mirroring, transformation, oneness, nothingness. These basic attitudes may at first be expressed as inner dispositions, but later on may also be reflected outwards as firm attitudes or even crystallize as distinct modes of being in the living experience of a person.

It goes without saying that the Daoist foci of attention do not merely function at a discursive level, neither do they simply represent ideals of the Daoist thought. Their distinct function on this type of philosophy is rather interwoven with its fundamental principles and figures of thought. To illuminate their meaning and therefore, to highlight their special significance, as a first step, we will elaborate on some of Daoism's fundamental principles.

4.1. The All-Encompassing as much as Elusive Dao

The concept of Dào originally meant *way*, *guideline*, *method* on an ethical or political context. As we mentioned earlier, through the works of Laozi and Zhuangzi, the term will

take on a new meaning of deeper significance as the “Ultimate Truth”, that is “primal” being “the source of everything” and to which everything returns (Robinet, “daoia” 6). Dao is a concept so central from which Daoism or Taoism derives its name, and yet, in the Taoist literature is often being described as dark or mysterious (*hsüan* 玄) (Watts 18). This characterization of the Tao is first being used in the *Daodejing*⁴² to describe the depth, utter impenetrability and the profound mystery of the Dao. Following we are going to cite Chapter 21 from Laozi’s *Daodejing*:

The Master keeps her mind
always at one with the Tao;
that is what gives her her radiance.

The Tao is ungraspable.
How can her mind be at one with it?
Because she doesn’t cling to ideas.

The Tao is dark and unfathomable.
How can it make her radiant?
Because she lets it.

Since before time and space were, the Tao is.
It is beyond *is* and *is not*.
How do I know this is true?
I look inside myself and see. (Mitchell 21)

Zhuangzi says, “Come, I will tell you about the Perfect Way. The essence of the Perfect Way is deep and darkly shrouded; the extreme of the Perfect Way is mysterious and hushed in silence.” (Watson 291) While trying to show the futility of trying to know the Dao, Zhuangzi makes the following description: “Dark and undifferentiated chaos—to the end of life, none

⁴² For more information on the notion of *hsüan* 玄, see entry in Encyclopaedia Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/hsuan>.

will depart from it. But if you try to know it, you have already departed from it. Do not ask what its name is; do not try to observe its form. Things will live naturally and of themselves.” (Watson 298)

“Hsüan is, of course, a metaphorical darkness”, says Alan Watts, “not the darkness of night, of black as opposed to white, but the sheer inconceivability which confronts the mind when it tries to remember the time before birth, or to penetrate its own depths.” (18) “[H]ushed in silence”, we read before from Zhuangzi, “beyond *what is* and *what is not*”, from Laozi; therefore, how can the mind grasp it? To render this sense of inconceivability of the Dao, Laozi as well Zhuangzi, when referring to the Dao, they mostly do it in an apophatic way.⁴³

In *Zhuangzi*, one can even find direct renderings from *Daodejing* especially from the passages where Laozi refers to the Dao in negative terms, such is the case with Chapter 22 *Knowledge Wandered North* from the *Zhuangzi*, while referring to the Dao and the Daoist Sage, where we find several sentences which are identical or nearly identical with sentences from *Daodejing*, the work of Laozi. There we find the following passages: “Those who know (the Dao) do not speak; those who speak do not know. Therefore, the sage practices the teaching that has no words.” (Watson 177) In Chapter 56 of *Daodejing* we find the following sentence “Those who know don’t talk. Those who talk don’t know.” (Mitchell 56)

It seems that, when it comes to the enigmatic Dao or Tao and its elusive nature, words are failing to depict it and yet, as we just saw, the two authors speak of it-of course, indirectly-in an almost identical manner. In the first Chapter of *Daodejing*, we are being reassured: “The tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.” (Mitchell 1) In Zhuangzi’s Chapter 22 we read, “The Way⁴⁴ cannot be brought to light; its virtue cannot be forced to come.” and also “[In the case of the Way,] there is no trace of its coming, no limit to its going. Gateless, roomless, it is airy and open as the highways of the four directions.” (Watson 177, 180) In Chapter 56 of *Daodejing* we are invited to “[b]e like the Tao. It can’t be approached or withdrawn from, benefited or harmed, honored or brought into disgrace.” (Mitchell 56)

⁴³ “Both texts favour an apophatic approach that was entirely absent in the other teachings of their time.” (Robinet, “daoia” 6)

⁴⁴ The translation of Dào as the Way is very often preferred as an option for an English translation, in order to depict the meaning of this vague term. In our upcoming paragraphs we will try to clarify this meaning also from a historical point of view.

This negative or apophatic character of the Dao is also characterizing the Daoist sage: “He who practices the Way (meaning the Dao) does less every day, does less and goes on doing less until he reaches the point where he does nothing; and yet there is nothing that is not done.” (Watson 177) In *Daodejing*, Chapter 2, we find the following verse: “Therefore the Master acts without doing anything and teaches without saying anything.” (Mitchell 2) Wuwei 無為, “do nothing”, is found for the first time in *Daodejing* and is coupled several times with the phrase wu buwei 無不為, “and there will be nothing that is not done”. (Kohn, “wuwei” 1067) This is a quality of the sage (*shengren*) but also of the ideal ruler (1067).

According to the lexical entry of the term *shengren* (聖人) from the Encyclopedia of Daoism, the *Daodejing* often alludes to the sage by this term (Robinet, “shengren” 879). “In the *Zhuangzi*, the first source to describe the saint in detail, he is called *shengren*, *zhenren* (Real Man),⁴⁵ *shenren* (Divine Man),⁴⁶ or *zhiren* 至人 (Accomplished Man)⁴⁷.” (Robinet, “shengren” 879-880) These descriptions of the Daoist Sage from the *Zhuangzi* have had a great influence on the later Taoist tradition. Robinet continues to say that next to his negative or apophatic aspect, the saint plays a positive role in the stories we find in *Zhuangzi*: “he is the answer to all the questions that *Zhuangzi* asks and leaves unanswered.” (880)

Having said that, it is not difficult to imagine the overarching implications for the language and the overall style of a text, when concepts so peculiar as the *Dào* and the Daoist sage are being encompassed in the text. Understanding the particularities involved in this will facilitate our comprehension of *Zhuangzi* as well as our active engagement with this text and our subsequent participation on the on-going discussion about the text. Concepts so central as the *Dao* or the Daoist sage do not only greatly shape the writing style of *Zhuangzi*, but also demand a special kind of mental alertness from the reader of the text. “For it is really impossible to appreciate what is meant by the Tao without becoming, in a rather special sense, stupid.”⁴⁸ mentions Watts (19). Or, without this “supremely intelligent

⁴⁵ Or also Genuine Man.

⁴⁶ We could also translate it as Spiritual Man.

⁴⁷ According to the *Glossary of Essential Terms* by Ziporyn *zhi* is a crucial term in the *Zhuangzi* and is synonymous with “discernment”, “understanding”, “knowing consciousness” (Ziporyn 239). That is, the ability to distinguish what is “right” from what is “wrong”, *what is* from *what is not*.

⁴⁸ “I am like an idiot, my mind is so empty.”, Chapter 20 Laozi.

responsiveness”, as A. C. Graham (186–187) describes the “Taoist art of living” and thinking, we may as well add.

This may sound paradoxical, but “[t]he Tao is accessible only to the mind which can practice the simple and subtle art of *wu-wei*, which, after the Tao, is the second most important principle of Taoism.” (Watts 19)

4.2. The Principle of Wuwei

The *wuwei* therefore is not simply a quality of the Daoist sage or the ideal ruler in a theoretical sense; neither should it be seen as a practice solely meant for Daoist practitioners. Because of the centrality of this principle in the philosophy of Daoism, it is imperative to try and understand *wuwei* in depth and if possible, even try to apply it in practice, while studying the *Zhuangzi*. Only in this way, in our view, we will be able to remain in close proximity to the core of this philosophy and thus, learn to truly appreciate what is being said and meant in the *Zhuangzi*. Wuwei is usually meant as non-interference with the natural way of things and processes unravelling in the world around us. (Kohn, “wuwei” 1067) Helsing explains, “[t]he idea of wuwei is often translated as ‘effortless action,’ but a more direct translation might be ‘without acting for the sake of a fixed goal.’” (570)

The principle of *wuwei* can be applied into anything we do, including the reading and understanding of a text. This is what Robinet meant, when she wrote: “one thinks without being caught up in thought”, as aforementioned. The question now for us is: how can we maintain such a mindset, while reading the *Zhuangzi*? Perhaps one of the most crucial and therefore, decisive steps, so as to achieve this state of mind, is, from the outset of our efforts, to consciously refrain from adhering to any semantic framework of reference, while studying the *Zhuangzi*. In the following passage, Alan Watts tries in his own manner to give us a sense of how self-alienating would be such an intellectual approach towards a Taoist text: “So long as the conscious intellect is frantically trying to clutch the world in its net of abstractions, and to insist that life be bound and fitted to its categories, the mood of Taoism will be incomprehensible; and the intellect will wear itself out.” (19)

How odd this may sound, if we consider our deeply rooted conviction that our intellect can be sharpened, our mind strengthened, only by the means of intellectual activity itself! Is there something eluding us from the Taoist mood, as described by Alan Watts? In Chapter 48,

Laozi says,

In the pursuit of knowledge,
everyday something is added.
In the practice of the Tao,
every day something is dropped.

Less and less do you need to force things,
Until finally you arrive at non-action.
When nothing is done,
nothing is left undone.

True mastery can be gained
By letting things go their own way.
It can't be gained by interfering. (Mitchell 48)

What does Zhuangzi have to say about that? Citing from the second Inner Chapter “Equalizing Assessments of Things”, as it was translated by Ziporyn:

If we follow whatever has so far taken shape, fully formed,⁴⁹ in our minds, making that our teacher, who could ever be without a teacher? The mind comes to be what it is by taking possession of whatever it selects out of the process of alternation—but does that mean it has to truly understand that process? The fool takes something up from it too. But to claim that there are any such things as “right” and “wrong” before they come to be fully formed in someone’s mind in this way—that is like saying you left for Yue today and arrived there yesterday. This is to regard the nonexistent as existent. The existence of the nonexistent is beyond the understanding of even the divine sage-king Yu—so what possible sense could it make to someone like me? (*Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings* 31)

⁴⁹ This is how Ziporyn translates the term *cheng* 成. We add also the lexical entry for CHENG from the Glossary of Ziporyn: Completion, Taking Shape, Accomplishment, Fullness, Maturity, Success, Formation, Fully-Formed, Perfection; opposed to *kui* , lacking, waning (of the moon), incomplete, or to *hui*, to destroy.

We can already sense the ironic tone of Zhuangzi in different moments of this passage. Adding now another translation of the same by Victor H. Mair:

If we follow our prejudices and take them as our guide, who will not have such a guide? Why should only those who are intelligent make such mental choices for themselves? The foolish do the same thing. If one claims that right and wrong exist before they are established in the mind, that is like saying one sets out for Viet today but arrived there yesterday. To do so is to make something out of nothing. Even Holy Yü couldn't make something out of nothing. How could I alone do so? (Mair 14)

If we examine both of the excerpts above, translations of the same passage, we observe that “whatever has so far taken shape, fully formed, in our minds” expressed by the term *chengxin* in *Zhuangzi* has been translated as prejudice by Mair. Helsing (560) translates this term as *fixed heart-mind*, a term that from now on we will use as well. According to Zhuangzi therefore, a fixed heart-mind does not foster understanding!

Eske Møllgaard understands *cheng* as a form of “technical” action that is motivated by an increasing “drive towards completion” (47). This mindset that was predominant in the time of Zhuangzi, the Warring States era, was heavily criticized by him. (47) From several passages of the *Zhuangzi*, we realize that Zhuangzi does not favor this technical way of action, reflecting thus the *Zeitgeist* of his time, that is aimed towards, fixated upon, a certain end result. About this topic, one can find a characteristic story in the *Zhuangzi*, where a gardener is refusing to learn how to use a watering machine, which would surely help him do his work with “very little effort and producing excellent results” (Watson 325):

The gardener flushed with anger and then said with a laugh, “I’ve heard my teacher say, where there are machines, there are bound to be machine worries; where there are machine worries, there are bound to be machine hearts. With a machine heart in your breast, you’ve spoiled what was pure and simple, and without the pure and simple, the life of the spirit knows no rest. Where the life of the spirit knows no rest, the Way will cease to buoy you up. It’s not that I don’t know about your machine—I would be

ashamed to use it!” (Watson 326)

What is noteworthy about this episode is the direct relationship that the gardener sees between the use of machines and the mechanical functioning of the heart-mind. From his point of view, a mechanical heart bound to mechanical worries implies that on a given matter one either tries to avert or to press for a specific turn of events. This mechanical functioning of the heart-mind, as we will see in the next passage from the *Zhuangzi*, does not only go against the natural way of things, the Dao, but it can even turn out to be “a dangerous thing” for the life of a person. (Watson 155)

Zhuangzi tries to warn us:

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? (Watson 155)

As long as real understanding is not there, it may even be dangerous to take the prejudiced mind as one’s guide:

If we were to follow the judgments of the predetermined mind, who would be left alone and without a teacher? Not only would it be so with those who know the sequences (of knowledge and feeling) and make their own selection among them, but it would be so as well with the stupid and unthinking. For one who has not this determined mind, to have his affirmations and negations is like the case described in the saying, ‘He went to Yue today, and arrived at it yesterday.’ It would be making what was not a fact to be a fact. But even the spirit-like Yu could not have known how to do this, and how should one like me be able to do it? (Legge)

The “right” or “wrong” therefore does not refer to issues of moral sense, but what is rather meant here by the *rights* and *wrongs*, are the affirmations and negations, as Legge calls them in his translation, that may arise from a mind already fixated upon an already predecided,

preconceived set of truth, that does not arise from real understanding and which does not necessarily reflect a real grasp of things:

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. (Watson 105-106)

Referring to this passage from Zhuangzi, Pierre Hadot finds a common aspect between the sage of Zhuangzi and the philosopher as described by Plato in *Theaetetus*: “He who is used to ‘embrace the whole world in his gaze’⁵⁰ finds mankind’s possessions small indeed.” (Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* 206) The questions that arise then are, what is meant by *mankind’s possessions* and how does the illumination of all in the light of Heaven take place? What is the relationship between the two fields of human activity, that of man and that of Heaven?

4.3. Heaven and Man

Zhuangzi recognizes the existence of two realms: the realm of man (*ren* 人) and that of Heaven (*tian* 天). (Møllgard 57) The realm of man (*ren*) is the field of action (*wei*), which coincides with the realm of things (*wu*), “for things are the constructed objects of human action, speech, and understanding”, says Møllgard (57). “In order to live, mankind must ‘humanize’ the world”, Hadot says, “in other words transform it, by action as well as by perception, into an ensemble of ‘things’ useful for life. Thus, we fabricate the objects of our worry, quarrels, social rituals, and conventional values. This is what *our* world is like; we no longer see the world *qua* world.” (Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* 258)

Møllgard describes the experience of the *world qua world*, as meant by Hadot, in the following manner:

⁵⁰ *Theaetetus*, 174e.

The world qua world is not an object extended in space – it is not a thing – but the ceaseless coming-into-being of things, and we neglect the coming-into-being of things when we fabricate our world of things. Zhuangzi brings to view the world qua world before it is humanized and turned into the world of man (ren), which is Zhuangzi's technical term for humanity fallen into the realm of things. (Møllgard 14)

It is not that Zhuangzi disagrees with the usage of things.⁵¹ On the contrary, especially for maintaining life, things do have their importance:

He who wants to nourish his body must, first of all, turn to things. And yet it is possible to have more than enough things and for the body still to go unnourished. He who has life must, first of all, see to it that it does not leave the body. And yet it is possible for life never to leave the body and still fail to be preserved. The coming of life cannot be fended off; its departure cannot be stopped. How pitiful the men of the world, who think that simply nourishing the body is enough to preserve life!" (Watson 473)

And yet it is possible for life never to leave the body and still fail to be preserved, Zhuangzi was mentioning, which is to say that the utilization of resources, the use of things, does not necessarily bring about the preservation of life. While referring to this previous passage, Chen Guying translates it as follows "when the body has not been left by life and yet the life has already perished." and then he explains: "Though the body is healthy and strong, the mind is perhaps inferior or shattered. Even if the outer form seems to be in good shape, it may, in fact, be a walking corpse—so, obviously life is not limited to matter and to nourishment of the body." (149)

In the *Zhuangzi* we find several passages that highlight the importance of having a clear mind by properly using the intellect as discriminatory faculty:

Great understanding is broad and unhurried; little understanding is cramped and busy.

⁵¹ In Outer Chapter 11 *Let it Be, Leave it Alone*, we find the following description: "What is lowly and yet must be used—things." (Watson 302)

Great words are clear and limpid; 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. (Watson 99-101)

This baffling description of this scattered mental condition that is prevalent in the common, *all-too-human* mind and the dissipation of life energy that goes with it may strike us as odd! We may ask ourselves, if this is not a kind of exaggeration on Zhuangzi's part or if this observation by Zhuangzi is not referring but to particular cases of individuals that do not reflect humanity as a whole. Instead of giving a direct answer to this question, we will rather try to delve deeper into the causes of such a mental state and thus, show why Zhuangzi thinks that this state of mind is prevalent in humanity, in the world of men.

How one utilizes one's mind, something that usually goes unnoticed, is from Zhuangzi's point of view central for the preservation of life. Life in which sense? is the next question arising. Other than the realm of man, Zhuangzi refers to the realm of Heaven as closely linked with the preservation of life. In Zhuangzi's work, according to Ziporyn, Heaven represents "the spontaneous and agentless creativity that brings forth all beings", "its action is effortless and purposeless." (Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings* 237) That being said, the realm of Heaven in the *Zhuangzi* has to do with the inexhaustible movement of self-emerging life and the experiencing of the world *qua* world.

"Both the Daode jing and the Zhuangzi stress the necessity of following the natural order of the Dao and of Nourishing Life (yangsheng 养生), maintaining that this is sufficient for one's own well-being.", Robinet mentions ("daoia" 6). As we saw above, nourishing life (*yangsheng*) does not simply pertain to the realm of things. It is on the mental level that one

should turn away from things (resulting from any kind of action or fabrication-*wei*), that one should revert from any form of *chengxin* (fixed heart-mind), as we explained in the previous subchapters. Hence the need for “a radical reorientation of the heart-mind”, that Helsing (571) is speaking about and which comes as a natural result, when one follows the principle of *wuwei*. “Understanding in fixed terms blinds the heart-mind to the vibrant multiplicity and complexity of the world. Instead of constantly striving for fixation (*cheng*) or acting for the sake of specific goals (*wei*), the heart-mind must learn to operate in circumstances of uncertainty.”, says Helsing (571).⁵²

For Zhuangzi, “understanding that rests in what it does not understand is the finest.” (Watson 115) Again, this may sound oxymoron, because usually what we do not understand is a rather a cause for restlessness – surely not for stillness! This being said, we consider it helpful to refer to Zhuangzi to highlight how he himself describes this mental state. We will cite first from the Inner Chapter 4 *In the World of Men*:

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.⁵³ 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,⁵⁴ the bond of Yu and Shun, the constant practice of Fu Xi and Ji Qu.⁵⁵ How much more should it be a rule for lesser men! (Watson 149)

Thus, one cannot help but wonder, a resting mind, especially in what it does not understand – is this at all possible? By empty chamber is meant the empty heart-mind that is

⁵² “We must separate ourselves from the world qua world in order to live daily life, but we must separate ourselves from the ‘everyday’ world in order to rediscover the world qua world.”, Hadot was mentioning (*Philosophy as a Way of Life* 258).

⁵³ “The body continues to sit, but the mind continues to race”, Watson comments (167).

⁵⁴ The concept of the “ten thousand things” or “myriad things” 萬物 (*wanwu*) is one of the most fundamental concepts of philosophical Daoism. “‘Myriad things’ is a collective name that refers to all of the existing entities in the universe.” (Hsu 3) We will examine it closely in the upcoming chapters.

⁵⁵ Mythical sage rulers (Watson 168).

functioning as a source of inner stillness and illumination. The heart plays a very special role in the philosophy of Zhuangzi indeed:

The ancients believed that the ability to think and the functions of the spirit all evolve from the heart. When Zhuangzi talks about the heart, he wants to elucidate the functions of thinking and the mind: the activity of the spirit in the heart, which creates a person's spiritual life, and the function of thinking in the heart, which establishes a person's mental life. (Guying 3)

The role that Guying attributes to the heart as far as Zhuangzi's philosophy is concerned may sound rather mystifying. Upon a closer examination, we will discover that this is not the case. We spoke before about the restless condition of the common, *all-too-human* mind and asked ourselves whether this refers to the human predicament as such or not. In addition, we referred to an essential aspect of this mental condition. That is, the fixed mind aiming towards completion (*chengxin*). Møllgard refers to this tendency of ours to enclose ourselves in a world of our own making, where the heart is functioning in a rather mechanical way, as "a metaphysical tendency" (14).⁵⁶ This tendency is an apparent sign of a chasm between the realm of man and the realm of Heaven. How does this split come to be? At this point, it will be helpful to refer to Helsing's scheme of beneficial moral psychology of the wandering heart-mind.

4.3.1. Functions of the Heart-Mind in an Ever-Changing World. In a world of constant flux and change, the ability to make distinctions (*bian* 辨), the tendency to fix distinctions and language (*chengxin* 成心), the desire to affirm and negate (*shi/fei* 是非) as well as the need to act for the sake of fixed ends (*wei* 為) may lead to several troubling issues concerning our responsiveness in actual situations (Helsing 556). The understanding arising out of the distinctions already made at some point in the past, in the present may act as an obstruction from perceiving the actual state of things. In this sense, our imperfect knowledge of things, which are in a state of permanent change that is not always easy to pin down, hinders us

⁵⁶ "The neglect of the world through technical mastery is a universal problem.", Møllgard says (14).

rather than helping us acquire a proper grasp of things as demanded by the challenges we are faced with.

Our imperfect state of knowledge may lead us into situations, where our expectations are not met or where our negative anticipations (in the form of worries)⁵⁷ are seemingly confirmed; such situations may in turn become the trigger for tormenting feelings of doubt and uncertainty and anxiety. Even worse, in one of the previous passages we cited from the *Zhuangzi* we remember that using “the mind in strife” leads to the “the deterioration of the heart-mind’s capacity for making meaningful distinctions” (Watson 99-101; Helsing 560), plunging thus the human mind even deeper into a vicious circle of inner conflict. How can one break free of this seemingly endless struggle?

According to Helsing, *Zhuangzi* does not simply present us with the problems arising out of the function of the heart-mind, but also provides us with a selection of therapeutic ideals, the purpose of which is to restore the heart-mind’s capacity to effectively deal with challenging situations as the aforementioned (Helsing 563). For – what we have been talking so far and most probably, what most of us are already familiar with from the own experience, the problems arising out of the function of the heart-mind is only one side of the coin. The other side of the coin, that is, the possibilities offered by the functioning of the heart-mind, in our view, is yet to be explored. “The functions of the heart-mind shape the nature of knowing, providing both possibilities and limitations of human understanding.”, says Helsing (559). This exploration in our view is not to be confined in the sphere of theory and speculative thinking.

So far, we have tried from different angles to show that the core of our topic is inextricably linked with living reality, which in our view but also from *Zhuangzi*’s perspective is not to be reduced to or deduced from theoretical schemes, as we will show below.

If one closely studies the work of *Zhuangzi*, what is noticeable about has to do with *Zhuangzi*’s verdict that the way one perceives and responds to actual living situations does not need to stem from, depart from a finite view of things, especially if this limited view refers to a finite sense of self. Like Helsing, Møllgard makes also his diagnosis of what is the exact problem with the subject, out of which this sense of self arises. Møllgard spots at least

⁵⁷ Which according to *Zhuangzi* can be mechanical, when the heart functions in a mechanical manner (Watson 326).

one commonality between Zhuangzi and Lacan that “the ego (the objectified self, the *ji* or the *wo*) is a kind of mental illness” (129). Similarly to Helsing, apart from the problematic aspects related to the heart-mind in the work of Zhuangzi, Møllgard recognizes the prescription of specific therapies by Zhuangzi such as “fasting of the heart and mind (*xīnzhāi* 心齋)” and “sitting in forgetfulness” (*jìngzuò* 靜坐). (129) Helsing separates the therapeutic ideals offered by Zhuangzi in three major categories: emptying (*xu* 虛), wandering (*you* 遊), and mirroring (*jìng* 鏡). (557)

The exact nature of these therapeutic ideals will be studied progressively in the course of the essay. What is at stake for the current chapter is to refer more generally to the nature of the responsiveness of the subject that is not necessarily motivated by its egoic interests and then, to connect this metaknowledge about the responsiveness of the subject with the two realms of heaven and man, as it is treated by Zhuangzi. The nature of this responsiveness in *Zhuangzi* has troubled Western Philosophers: is successfully responding to an arising situation a matter of *knowing that* or a matter of *knowing how*? (Helsing 558) Most of the scholars examined by Helsing favor the second one over the first. Because in their reading of *Zhuangzi*, adapting to circumstances is seen as a kind of skill. Helsing agrees with Dan Robins though, who argues that “it goes beyond skill” (Robins 11 - 12).

What Helsing sees in Zhuangzi’s work is a *moral psychology* that is mainly concerned with “the emotional virtuosity” and “creative flexibility” needed for “engaging immediate circumstances.” (558) This involvement with the world, that is unobstructed by the phenomena unraveling around us, as a distinct sort of non-involvement, according to Hadot, amounts to perceiving the world as “a *nature* in the etymological sense of the word: *physis*, that movement of growth and birth by which things manifest themselves” (Philosophy as a Way of Life 260). Guying refers to it as *understanding the conditions of life* (3). As mentioned earlier, this is one of the fundamental aspects of the Zhuangzian work, pertaining to the *inexplicit logos* of the text, that captures the essence of this text.

A.C. Graham refers to the Taoist art of living as “supremely intelligent responsiveness” that is exhibited by the sage and yet, criticizes Zhuangzi as antirationalist, because he purports that this responsiveness arises out of a kind of *intuition*. (186–187) While referring to the Stoics, Hadot points to the importance of the relationship of the sage with the cosmos (*What is Ancient Philosophy?* 229). He speaks of the “movement whereby the self resituates

itself within the totality which contains it.” (229) This resituation of the self that Hadot mentions goes along with an opening-up to the immensity of the world, of all that the world is, that is way beyond what a limited sense of self can perceive.

Hadot continues, reciting Marcus Aurelius, “Far from imprisoning the self, this totality allows it to expand throughout infinite space and time: ‘You will open up a vast field for yourself, by embracing the entire universe in your thought.’”⁵⁸ (229-230)

“It is *within ourselves* that we can experience the coming into being of reality and the presence of being. By becoming conscious of one single instant of our lives, one single beat of our hearts, we can feel ourselves linked to the entire immensity of the cosmos, and to the wondrous fact of the world’s existence ... We are born along with the world.” (*Philosophy as a Way of Life* 260)

What are these authors speaking about? Is this a mysterious quality which only the sage can exhibit? The therapeutic ideals given by Zhuangzi, according to Møllgard, “withdraw cathexis from the objectified self and so make possible the emergence of the real self, or that dimension of existence that cannot be objectified as an identifiable, nameable thing but is the spontaneous force of the Other of the realm of man (ren), namely Heaven (tian).” (129)

Reverting to Collingwood’s definition of the term *nature* in the Greek sense, Møllgard (21) recognizes that, “If we must translate tian as “nature” the word should be understood rather in the ancient Greek sense of an alive, intelligent, ceaseless movement of coming-into-being (Collingwood 1960: 3– 13). In this sense nature is not an outer object but rather an inner experience.” This inner experience therefore is not to be confused with any sort of religious experience, in our view, but rather to be seen as a way of becoming aware of otherwise unnoticeable changes in nature and being able to—inwardly and outwardly—adjust accordingly to those changes.

This natural order of things, what Zhuangzi coins as “the reasonableness of Heaven”, as mentioned earlier (Watson 407), which is impossible to decipher, exposes us to the fact of our enclosure into the realm of things. Entertaining closed schemes of things about the world and others around us (in form of ideas, opinions, etc.) may put our well-being in jeopardy, against

⁵⁸ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, IX, 32.

which Zhuangzi is trying to warn us in different passages of his work, because our entanglement in things may potentially be the source of conflict within, resulting thus in our heart-mind's deteriorating.

That is also the real meaning and the inherent value of emptiness: "If a man could succeed in making himself empty and, in that way, wander through the world, then who could do him harm?" (509) "The torch of chaos and doubt—this is what the sage steers by. So he does not use things but relegates all to the constant.⁵⁹ This is what it means to use clarity." (Watson 111) "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.", Watson complements (127).

4.3.2. *Solving the Riddle of the Absence of Self*. Even though the reasons behind the ordinary person's inability to learn how to operate while in uncertainty are not clear, Zhuangzi in several passages clearly points to the difference between the ordinary mind and that of the sage. To underline this difference and make it salient, but also to respond to our question from the subchapter *An Exercise meant for the Bookkeepers of Ecstasy*, we are going to cite the following passage from Zhuangzi's fifth Inner Chapter, *The Sign of Virtue Complete*:

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?"

⁵⁹ See reference of Chang from Brook Ziporyn's Glossary of Essential Terms below:

CHANG 常. Constant, Sustainable. The more common translation as "constant," or even "eternal," can be misleading, for the term also means "common, everyday, ordinary" and at the same time has a distinctive value implication, that is, "normal." Bringing these senses together, it can be rendered as "sustainable" in the sense of what has the value of being capable of being maintained over a long period of time, without exhausting or destroying itself, particularly what can be maintained without special effort—hence a reliable and sustainable course of action. The term (or its cognate, in some versions, heng) is central in the Daodejing, appearing in the first line of the standard current edition of the text, meaning, not "the Way that can be spoken is not the Eternal Way," but something more like, "guiding courses taken as explicit guides cease to provide sustainable guidance." (*Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings* 233)

In our view, there is a deeper meaning in this sense of constancy, which takes the world from the viewpoint of an integrated whole, where literally everything has its place, as we will also show in our upcoming subchapters on *The Thousand Things* and the *Oneness of Things and the Love of the Tao*.

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’!”⁶⁰ (Watson 188-189)

For such a person, bound to the own likes and dislikes, there is only moaning and leaning on what appears as a useful tree—most certainly not resting under its useless shade. Zhuangzi advises us to break away from this tendency by healing the split between Heaven and man:⁶¹ “Do not try to develop what is natural to man; develop what is natural to Heaven. He who develops Heaven benefits life; he who develops man injures life. Do not reject what is of Heaven, do not neglect what is of man, and the people will be close to the attainment of Truth.” (Watson 478)

Møllgard describes this as a “non-technical way of action”, which is “not aimed at completion but carried by the ceaseless flow of life (*sheng*), so that it nourishes life or cares for life (*yangsheng*) in its very movement and avoids the decline of humanity into the world of man (*ren*).” (47) To live *in-between* the two realms undisturbed, an ability which is mastered by the sage, is recognized as the specifically *human* ability by Møllgard (57). In Laozi’s Chapter 11 we find the following verses:

We shape clay into a pot,

⁶⁰ “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.” (Watson 127) Logician Huizi, who used to be a friend of Zhuangzi in real life appears several times in the work of Zhuangzi either as his interlocutor or even as his friendly rival. (Watson 66) In this case, the gibbering about ‘hard’ and ‘white’ refers to the persisting tendency of the scattered state of mind, in trying to make the proper distinctions (*bian* 辨). A tendency which in Zhuangzi’s view reflects the common *all-too-human* mind and therefore, distances Zhuangzi from the theoretical concerns of his friend Huizi, for Zhuangzi is rather concerned with the actual problematic state of the human mind being constantly in strife.

⁶¹ See also Møllgard (21).

But it is the emptiness inside
That holds whatever we want.

.....

We work with being,
But non-being is what we use. (Mitchell 11)⁶²

In Daoist philosophy, “nothingness is *prima facie* the root of being”, says David Chai (235). Concerning the onto-cosmological standing of the Dao in *Zhuangzi*, Chai (81) is concerned with “how to envision the ground of the world in such a way that is neither elusory (i.e., mystical) or dependent upon assumptions (i.e., mythical)”,⁶³ because in his view this is the most optimal way to delineate the fundamentals of the Zhuangzian Philosophy.

To avert the danger of the Dao being conceived of as a transcendental Ultimate, Chai entertains a *meontological* stance and helps us understand the Dao “not as a singularly static source of creation, but as a pure dynamic potentiality” (222); “[m]ῆ-ón (μή-ὄν) is Greek for “not-” or “non-being,” and meontology the inquiry into nonbeing and nothingness.”, says Nelson (292). Nelson describes this attempt of Chai to trace the distinctive meontological difference between ontic nonbeing (*wu* 無) and ontological nothingness (*wuwu* 無無) in the *Zhuangzi*, as a *meontological turn*, which he considers to be groundbreaking as far as the philosophical question of Being in Western metaphysics is concerned (Nelson 292). Similarly, in Møllgard’s view:

[T]he *Zhuangzi* affirms an un-made “ground” as the source of all authentic human action. This “ground”, which is considered to be pure and simple, is also called the uncarved block (*pu*). The image of the uncarved block indicates that state of pure potentiality that *Zhuangzi* wants to retain in human action, so that completion (*cheng*), the aim of technical action, does not end in total closure, and human action can nourish life (*yangsheng*). The uncarved block is not a static substratum but an active force that

⁶² “It is empty yet infinitely capable.”, says Laozi, “The more you use it, the more it produces; the more you talk of it, the less you understand. Hold on to the center.” (Mitchell 5)

⁶³ “The issue of absolutism creeps into the picture once we take the beyond or Ultimate as an entity whose standing is removed from the *is* and *is not*” (Chai 66).

moves human beings along together with everything else, and this movement is also named the Way. The experience of being moved along in this way is the experience of ceaseless self-emerging life (sheng). According to Zhuangzi, human beings lose touch with this moving ground, when they become preoccupied with governing the world through their technical ingenuity. When human beings enclose themselves in a world of their own making, they become obsessed with controlling the outer (wai) world, the world of man (ren), and they lose contact with the inner (nei). (Møllgard 31-32)

In order to avoid that, Zhuangzi urges us to remain in the vicinity of this field of pure potentiality and not-knowingness as much as possible:

Learning means learning what cannot be learned; practicing means practicing what cannot be practiced; discriminating means discriminating what cannot be discriminated. Understanding that rests in what it cannot understand is the finest. If you do not attain this goal, then Heaven the Equalizer will destroy you. (Watson 603)

Laozi also gives the following guiding words to his reader:

Can you step back from your own mind
and thus understand all things?

Giving birth and nourishing,
having without possessing,
acting with no expectations,
leading and not trying to control:
this is the supreme virtue. (Mitchell 10)

4.4. The Sign of Virtue Complete

This is how one safeguards the Way, a task intimately linked to one's own authentic or true nature:

Hence it is said, “Do not by the Human (doing) extinguish the Heavenly (constitution); do not for your (Human) purpose extinguish the appointment (of Heaven); do not bury your (proper) fame in (such) a pursuit of it; carefully guard (the Way) and do not lose it: this is what I call reverting to your True (Nature).” (Legge)

In his essay “Responding to Existence”,⁶⁴ similarly to Zhuangzi, Nancy recognizes a type of responsibility which “faces no one but ourselves” and which he calls *measureless responsibility* (Nancy 289). Nancy defines this responsibility not as “a task assigned to us, but an assignment that constitutes our being.” (296) This measureless responsibility, as described by Nancy, extends into every possible sphere of our existence, literally enveloping the world surrounding us, and is carried by each and every one of us “in an indefinite number of instances, degrees, stages and connections” (297). “Indeed,” Nancy maintains, “each one of us is this subject to such an extent that each one of us is it infinitely, absolutely, well beyond or before all egoism, all individual personality or community.” (297) As we will show further on, in a similar way to Nancy’s measureless responsibility, the task of reverting to one’s own True Nature constitutes our very being in the Daoist philosophical framework.

Brook Ziporyn translates: “Hence, it is said, ‘Do not use the Human to destroy the Heavenly, do not use the purposive to destroy the fated, do not sacrifice what you have attained [from Heaven] for the sake of mere names.’ Hold onto this carefully, for then you can return to what is genuine in you.” (Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings* 93) “[H]e who does not depart from the True is called the Perfect Man.”, translates Watson (p. 859) from Miscellaneous Chapter 33. To “recover your proper essentials and nature 反汝情性 (fan ru qing xing)” (Hsu 8) is also synonymous to one’s attaining perfection, as Legge puts it:

Hence it is said, ‘What is heavenly is internal; what is human is external.’ The virtue (of man) is in what is Heavenly. If you know the operation of what is Heavenly and what is Human, you will have your root in what is Heavenly and your position in Virtue. You will bend or stretch (only) after the (necessary) hesitation; you will have returned to the essential, and may be pronounced to have reached perfection. (Legge, ch. 17)

⁶⁴ Nancy’s essay.

Brook Ziporyn's translation is slightly different but not any less illuminating on the meaning of those very crucial terms for the understanding of Zhuangzi's philosophy, reminding us also of the description we gave previously on the ever-expanding of self-consciousness by Pierre Hadot:⁶⁵

Hence it is said, the Heavenly is internal while the Human is external, and Virtuosity resides in the Heavenly. He who knows which activities are of the Heavenly and which are of the Human roots himself in the Heavenly and positions himself comfortably in whatever he attains from it. Advancing and retreating, shrinking and expanding according to the time, he returns always to the most constrained but can thereby be described as reaching the expanse of the ultimate. (Ziporyn 93)

Having perfected one's virtue is considered to be the most potent state that a human being can ever attain, a "person of utmost potency 至德者 (zhi de zhe)" (Hsu 9):

He who understands the Way is certain to have command of basic principles. He who has command of basic principles is certain to know how to deal with circumstances. And he who knows how to deal with circumstances will not allow things to do him harm. When a man has perfect virtue, fire cannot burn him, water cannot drown him, cold and heat cannot afflict him, birds and beasts cannot injure him. I do not say that he makes light of these things. I mean that he distinguishes between safety and danger, contents himself with fortune or misfortune, and is cautious in his comings and goings. Therefore, nothing can harm him. (Watson 438-439)

This is why such persons are being referred upon as Masters (the ones who have mastered themselves) by Zhuangzi as well as Laozi. In Chapter 12 of Laozi we read:

Colors blind the eye.

Sounds deafen the ear.

⁶⁵ See Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (229).

Flavors numb the taste.
Thoughts weaken the mind.
Desires wither the heart.

The Master observes the world
but trusts his inner vision.
He allows things to come and go.
His heart is open as the sky. (Mitchell 12)

In Inner Chapter 5 *The Sign of Virtue Complete*, Confucius was discussing with one of his disciples, Chang Ji, about a man, Wang Tai, who had lost his foot. On the face of this man Confucius recognizes a great sage and therefore, speaks about him with great reverence: “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.” (Watson 173) In the Outer Chapter 12 *Heaven and Earth* we find the following description on complete purity of man and thus virtue:

Witless, his purity is complete. Achievement, profit, machines, skill—they have no place in this man’s mind! ... Though the world might praise him and say he had really found something, he would look unconcerned and never turn his head; though the world might condemn him and say he had lost something, he would look serene and pay no heed. The praise and blame of the world are no loss or gain to him. He may be called a man of Complete Virtue. I—I am a man of the wind-blown waves. (Watson 328-329)

The man of the wind-blown waves, as opposed to the man of Complete Virtue is bothered about things:

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 body 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? (Watson 175)

4.5. The Ten Thousand Things

“Cloud Chief said, ‘Heavenly Master, it has been hard indeed for me to meet with you—I beg one word of instruction!’

‘Well, then—mind-nourishment!’ said Big Concealment.” (Watson 297)

That is Zhuangzi’s solution for attaining a resting mind – mind-nourishment. This may sound as a strategy to follow towards a given purpose. But it is exactly the opposite of what the name implies⁶⁶ by being directly related to *wuwei* or the mind resting in inaction:

You have only to rest in inaction, and things will transform themselves. Smash your form and body, spit out hearing and eyesight, forget you are a thing among other things, and you may join in great unity with the deep and boundless. Undo the mind, slough off spirit, be blank and soulless, and the ten thousand things one by one will return to the root— return to the root and not know why. (Watson 298)

The passage we just cited, if we compare it to the one from the end of the previous subchapter, we find several similarities. Full of precious hints, both of them could give us a great insight into Zhuangzi’s central thought. At this point, we are going to make an attempt to analyze these passages from the scope of Taoist thinking. First of all, beginning from the end of the second passage (that has just been cited), we see the thematic of the root of everything recurring and how “the ten thousand things”, as Watson calls them, or “the myriad things” as Hsu calls them, “return to the root and not know why” and “transform themselves” (Watson 298). How does “the changing of the ten thousand things” come to be? (Watson 149)

In spite of the not-knowingness why this occurs, what we do know is that this “return to

⁶⁶ See also Watson’s footnote 12 on page 306.

the root” comes about through the *undoing of the mind*, as Zhuangzi says (Watson 298). We have already referred to this distinct connectedness, rootedness of the mind in the world. How one treats one’s mind and senses (‘Let your ears and eyes communicate with what is inside’, ‘Smash your form and body, spit out hearing and eyesight’, ‘put mind and knowledge on the outside’, ‘undo the mind, slough off spirit, be blank and soulless’) – the active regulation of the mind and senses – has a direct impact on the natural order of things and its potential unfolding. It may lead to the myriad transformations (*wan hua* 萬化). (Hsu 15)

Now, if we take into account Zhuangzi’s suggestion “forget you are a thing among other things” (Watson 298), it becomes necessary in our view to elaborate on what is meant by the word *thing* (*wu*), which as will see has further implications in the Zhuangzian philosophy. First of all, we spoke previously about the humanity that has fallen into the realm of things. Therefore, what is meant by “forget you are a thing”? It means to stop identifying ourselves with any sort of closed scheme or defined form. This can happen by not engaging with the activities of the *chengxin*, of the fixed heart-mind. Livia Kohn mentions, “It means to be free in mind and spirit and able to wander about the world with ease and pleasure (*yuanyou*), to engage in an ecstatic oneness with all-thereis.” (“wuwei” 1067) Zhuangzi also says, “This man, with this virtue of his, is about to embrace the ten thousand things and roll them into one ... Why should he consent to bother about mere things?” (Watson 89-90)

The concept of *myriad things* (*wanwu* 萬物) is one of the most fundamental concepts of philosophical Daoism. What is meant by this concept is both living as well as inanimate objects,⁶⁷ because, as Hsu recognizes, the definition of thing (*wu* 物) has been given in the Chapter 19 of the Zhuangzi (2):

All that have faces, forms, voices, colors—these are all mere things. How could one thing and another thing be far removed from each other? And how could any of them be worth considering as a predecessor? They are forms, colors—nothing more. But things have their creation in what has no form, and their conclusion in what has no change. If a man can get hold of this and exhaust it fully, then how can things stand in his way? (Watson 476)

⁶⁷ See discussion on the first footnote of the article “The Authenticity of Myriad Things in the Zhuangzi” by Chiayu Hsu.

Therefore, for Hsu, “‘Myriad things’ is a collective name that refers to all of the existing entities in the universe. ... Finally, the natural course through which the myriad things exist, grow, develop and transform is ‘dao’.” (3) There seems to be an intrinsic relationship between the dao, the ten thousand things and their oneness or with the view of the world as an integrated whole, as was mentioned earlier. For Zhuangzi, “The ten thousand things are really one ... So it is said, You have only to comprehend the one breath that is the world. The sage never ceases to value oneness.” (Watson 561)

4.6. Oneness of Things and the Love of the Tao (which is the Love of Things)

The sage is the one who *can comprehend the one breath that is the world*: “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.” (Watson 120-121) Simplicity (*su* 素) goes hand-in-hand with the oneness (*yi* 一) of things (*wan wu* 萬物) and their ceaseless transformation (*hua* 化), a transformation from which neither man is exempted: “In uncarved simplicity,⁶⁸ the people attain their true nature.”, says the *Zhuangzi* (Watson 258).

One could then ask, “uncarved simplicity” – is this the way to the transformation of man? A man of true brightness and purity who can enter into simplicity, who can return to the primitive through inaction, give body to his inborn nature, and embrace his spirit, and in this way wander through the everyday world—if you had met one like that, you would have had real cause for astonishment. (Watson 328-330)

On the contrary, “Those who destroy themselves in things and lose their inborn nature in the vulgar may be called the upside-down people.”, as the *Zhuangzi* puts it (Watson 419). Reminding us the notion of *chang* (常)⁶⁹ we mentioned earlier, Laozi writes in *Daodejing*, Chapter 39:

⁶⁸ Note by Watson: “the terms *su* and *pu* (uncarved simplicity), appear frequently in the *Daodejing*, for example, ch. XIX. Waley translates them as ‘Simplicity’ and ‘the Uncarved Block,’ respectively.” (261-262)

⁶⁹ Constant, Sustainable.

In harmony with the Tao

.....

all creatures flourish together.

.....

When man interferes with the Tao

the sky becomes filthy,

the earth becomes depleted,

the equilibrium crumbles,

Creatures become extinct. (Mitchell 39)

In Hsu's (6) view, "humans are by no means superior to any other object as they participate unvaryingly in this great stream of constant transformations" in the same way as all other entities do:

When the body of man comes from its special mold, there is even then occasion for joy; but this body undergoes a myriad transformations, and does not immediately reach its perfection; does it not thus afford occasion for joys incalculable? Therefore the sagely man enjoys himself in that from which there is no possibility of separation, and by which all things are preserved. He considers early death or old age, his beginning and his ending, all to be good, and in this other men imitate him; how much more will they do so in regard to That Itself on which all things depend, and from which every transformation arises! (Legge, ch. 6.2.)

In utter simplicity, without any preconception of things or prejudgment, the sage is capable of showing the love necessary for the transformation of things:

That which treats things as things is not a thing. Things that come forth can never precede all other things, because there already were things existing then; and before that, too, there already were things existing—so on without end. The sage's love of mankind, which never comes to an end, is modeled on this principle. (Watson 582-583)

How can the sage do that? By simply forgetting that he is a thing, as mentioned earlier, and thus, by being able to treat things as things, Zhuangzi would say;⁷⁰ through moving from *chengxin* (fixed heart-mind) to *youxin* (wandering heart-mind), Helsing would say.

This is what in our view intrinsically differentiates human beings from the rest of the myriads of things, namely the fact that they possess a heart-mind. Depending on how they utilize the faculties of the own heart-mind, according to the Daoist philosophy, this regulation is not simply being reflected outwards, but it may have an immediate impact on the world as a unified whole. It may lead to the transformation of the myriad things.

4.6.1. Wandering Heart-Mind: An Existential Mode of Play. The capacity to empty one's mind (emptying), according to Helsing is a prerequisite for the other two therapeutic ideals of wandering and mirroring. The emptied (regulated) heart-mind may now become expressed as a wandering heart-mind (*youxin*). Helsing considers the wandering mind-heart as a "practical ideal", which is "central to navigating perilous circumstances" (Helsing 565). The wandering mind-heart is intrinsically related with an existential mode of play (you 遊). This playful attitude of the wandering heart-mind is reflected on how one perceives and uses language and the distinctions made by the same heart-mind, which in this manner is able to happily transgress, i.e., transcend, them.⁷¹ In the Outer Chapter 18, *Supreme Happiness*, we find an episode where:

Zhuangzi's wife died. When Huizi went to convey his condolences, he found Zhuangzi sitting with his legs sprawled out, pounding on a tub and singing. "You lived with her, she brought up your children and grew old," said Huizi. "It should be enough simply not to weep at her death. But pounding on a tub and singing—this is going too far, isn't it?" Zhuangzi said, "You're wrong. When she first died, do you think I didn't grieve like anyone else? But I looked back to her beginning and the time before she was born. Not only the time before she was born, but the time before she had a body. Not only the

⁷⁰ Later on we will explain how the sage's love of things is expressing itself.

⁷¹ "The playful use of language disrupts fixed frameworks of meaning and reorients the heart-mind to the emerging possibilities of experience.", notes Helsing (573).

time before she had a body, but the time before she had a spirit. In the midst of the jumble of wonder and mystery, a change took place and she had a spirit. Another change and she had a body. Another change and she was born. Now there's been another change and she's dead. It's just like the progression of the four seasons: spring, summer, fall, winter.

"Now she's going to lie down peacefully in a vast room. If I were to follow after her bawling and sobbing, it would show that I don't understand anything about fate. So I stopped." (Watson 461)

This story in our view is exemplary of how Zhuangzi is able to transform his views on something so grave and serious as his wife's death and then, carry on unhindered with his life. In Helsing's view, wandering signifies the "enjoyment of transformation and change" (573) "The attitude of play ... releases the heart-mind from fixed frameworks of meaning, reveals new possibilities of experience, and opens the heart-mind to an immanent enjoyment of the world." (573)

And yet, what the sage intuitively knows is that he/she partakes in the very same world with all other things in an equal manner. Therefore, for him/her does not make any sense to put forth his/her own interests first, to decide upon things, to judge or convict others for their wrongdoings: "So the sage harmonizes with both right and wrong and rests in Heaven the Equalizer. This is called walking two roads.", "To know that all things in the world are equal and the same—this is the only way to eliminate the chaos of attack and battle and the harshness of punishment and execution!", "The ten thousand things all come from the same seed, and with their different forms they give place to one another. Beginning and end are part of a single ring, and no one can comprehend its principle. This is called Heaven the Equalizer, which is the same as the Heavenly Equality." (Watson 109, 478, 722-723)

Laozi mentions in Chapter 51:

Every being in the universe
Is an expression of the Tao.
It springs into existence,
Unconscious, perfect, free,

Takes on a physical body,
 Let's circumstances complete it.
 This is why every being
 Spontaneously honors the Tao. (Mitchell 51)

What does it mean for a thing to spontaneously honor the Tao? Spontaneity as the natural way of individuated expression represents one of the main Taoist foci of attention we mentioned previously. Concerning individuated expression, Hsu was wondering, “[H]ow do things operate themselves as ‘selves 自 (zi)’, individuated among innumerable others?” (Hsu 3) He then provides us with the following illuminating answer:

As for the way each thing exists, each is as it is in accordance with ‘spontaneous self-so/self-affirm 自然 (ziran)’. In that case, how do the myriad variegated things achieve spontaneous self-so? Since the variegated multitude of existing things are individually distinct, they ought not to be governed by any specific, fixed, and unified principle, i.e., the Daoist principle of ‘non-action 無為 (wuwei)’. (3)

Through spontaneous expression (*ziran* 自然) one operates as a self (*zi*自), as oneself thus honoring the Tao, acting as an expression of the Tao. In this sense, the term *ziran* 自然 “being so by itself, the way things are by nature”⁷² does not only denote spontaneity, but also naturalness. (Stefon Matt) As we just saw, according to Hsu, this naturalness even goes beyond what we recognize as Daoist principles like that of non-action. For it involves both action as well as non-action and yet, goes beyond the two. Or, shall we say, it simply *IS*?

The world and the interactions that take place in it, regardless of appearances, does not follow/obey to a predetermined course, cannot be described under a specific scheme of things. Even though Tao is being translated as the Way or Course, this does not imply a specific trajectory in space and time, which one could otherwise easily foresee. Laozi therefore mentions in Chapter 30:

⁷² Note by the translator Dominique Hertzner of Guying's work *The Philosophy of Life – A New Reading of the Zhuangzi* (Guying 95).

Whoever relies on the Tao in governing men
 doesn't try to force issues
 or defeat enemies by force of arms.
 For every force there is a counterforce.
 Violence, even well intentioned,
 always rebounds upon oneself.

The Master does his job and then stops.
 He understands that the universe
 is forever out of control,
 and that trying to dominate events
 goes against the current of the Tao.
 Because he believes in himself,
 he doesn't try to convince others.
 Because he is content with himself,
 he doesn't need others' approval.
 Because he accepts himself,
 the whole world accepts him. (Mitchell 30)

“He understands that the universe is forever out of control” sounds rather like a strong impression and rather counterintuitive, if we take into account the regularities and the uniformities we observe in the natural world in general. What is meant by that though? We would say that the universe’s being *forever out of control* does not refer to the natural phenomena as such, but much more to the efforts of the mind to navigate through the world amidst the challenges faced and all the while trying to sustain the edifice of its current beliefs, thoughts and opinions. What do we mean by that? At this point, we will have to make a reference on the mirroring function of the heart-mind, as the third and last therapeutic ideal described by Helsing.

4.6.2. *The Mirror of Heaven and Earth – The Glass of the Ten Thousand Things*. In Outer Chapter 13 *The Way of Heaven*, we find the following passage:

The sage is still not because he takes stillness to be good and therefore is still. The ten thousand things are insufficient to distract his mind—that is the reason he is still. Water that is still gives back a clear image of beard and eyebrows; reposing in the water level, it offers a measure to the great carpenter. And if water in stillness possesses such clarity, how much more must pure spirit. The sage's mind in stillness is the mirror of Heaven and earth, the glass of the ten thousand things. (Watson 346)

The mind of the sage is not distracted by the ten thousand things and the changes that occur. He/she is totally content with the universe being *forever out of control*. Reminding as of the brightness of the empty chamber of the heart, Zhuangzi also mentions: “But I’ve heard that if the mirror is bright, no dust will settle on it; if dust settles, it isn’t really bright.” Nothing can obstruct the brightness of this mirror, that is the self-consciousness of the sage.

One could then ask, “[c]an these men be said to have attained completion?” (Watson 111) Since all beings spontaneously honor the Tao, as we mentioned above, Zhuangzi says: “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.” (111)

Laozi continues in Chapter 51:

The Tao gives birth to all beings,
Nourishes them, maintains them,
Cares for them, comforts them, protects them,
Takes them back to itself,
Creating without possessing,
Acting without expecting,
Guiding without interfering.
That is why the Love of the Tao
Is in the very nature of things. (Mitchell 51)

Since the sage fundamentally grasps this principle is not afraid to treat the things as things and forget that he is a thing, as we said previously. Zhuangzi gives a very interesting analogy in this sense:

When a drunken man falls from a carriage, though the carriage may be going very fast, he won't be killed. He has bones and joints the same as other men, and yet he is not injured as they would be, because his spirit is whole. He didn't know he was riding, and he doesn't know he has fallen out. Life and death, alarm and terror, do not enter his breast, and so he can bang against things without fear of injury. If he can keep himself whole like this by means of wine, how much more can he keep himself whole by means of Heaven! The sage hides himself in Heaven—hence there is nothing that can do him harm. (Watson 477)

And yet neither does the sage get entangled in things, nor does he push for any untimely completion:

He who knows the part which the Heavenly (in him) plays, and knows (also) that which the Human (in him ought to) play, has reached the perfection (of knowledge). He who knows the part which the Heavenly plays (knows) that it is naturally born with him; he who knows the part which the Human ought to play (proceeds) with the knowledge which he possesses to nourish it in the direction of what he does not (yet) know: to complete one's natural term of years and not come to an untimely end in the middle of his course is the fulness of knowledge. Although it be so, there is an evil (attending this condition). Such knowledge still awaits the confirmation of it as correct; it does so because it is not yet determined. How do we know that what we call the Heavenly (in us) is not the Human? and that what we call the Human is not the Heavenly? There must be the True man, before there can be True knowledge. (Legge, ch. 6.1)

Following we are going to examine the nature of the True Man and how it is connected with the nature of Pure Love.

4.6.3. Love and Injuries on the Way. The first reference of love in the text of Zhuangzi occurs in the following passage from Inner Chapter 2: “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?” (Watson 110) It seems that the Way had

to be injured for the completion of Love. This injury happened through the appearance of the rights and wrongs of men. Later on, in Footnote 8 of the same chapter, Watson maintains that “the unity of the Way was injured by the appearance of love—that is, man’s likes and dislikes.” (Watson 127)

This means, that Watson considers man’s likes and dislikes as a synonym of love and therefore, uses love in two different ways while translating the *Zhuangzi*. In our view, Watson’s statement is both right and wrong; an ironical fact, if one considers the fact that in this statement Watson refers to the appearance of likes and dislikes. That is, the *rights and wrongs* of men! We could ask then, are likes and dislikes a pure form of love? As long as they express an authentic, spontaneous expression of the Tao, we believe yes. As long as they act as, i.e., become, a cause for hurting life, then we would say no. This higher sense of Love, for the sake of which the Dao was injured, that runs through the very veins of the natural expressions of things seems to obey a higher order than that of likes and dislikes. This order of which the sage acts as a perfect ambassador most certainly does not dwell on the duality amongst things: “The ten thousand things differ in principle, but the Way shows no partiality among them, and therefore they may achieve namelessness. Being nameless, they are without action; without action, yet there is nothing they do not do.” (Watson 685-686)

Hiding himself/herself in Heaven, the True Man does not simply discover one’s own True nature, that is, the Nature of the Tao, but also uncovers the integral nature of the ten thousand things in always greater grades of Harmony, that is, based on Pure Love. Is this what the Way is all about?

V. The Sacred as a Key to Understanding

As mentioned previously, the sacred key to read the *Zhuangzi* and the subsequent foci of attention derived from that will be granted center-stage position in our essay. In the previous subchapters we attempted to present the foci of attention of Taoist thinking and through their salience to illuminate Zhuangzi’s original thought. To explicate their characteristic function, we might as well revert to an analogy: if we imagine ourselves as travelers and these figures of thought as signs to our destination, we could say that these signs do not simply inform, but rather form their traveler; their purpose is not fulfilled unless and until the transformed

traveler becomes one with the Way, the Dao and the Destination itself.

This means that these fundamental ideas which lie in the heart of Zhuangzi's Philosophy of the Heart signify real processes in nature which could be triggered in oneself, as soon as one allows oneself to engage with this special type of exercises and practices pertaining to the Daoist thinking. As a result of this special kind of thinking, a new way of experiencing the world, of finding oneself in the world, unfolds. Authors like D' Ambrosio and Moeller most likely would argue that our reading of *Zhuangzi* is more or less a spiritual interpretation of the text, "a reading", which in the authors' view, is "often encouraged by its imagery and style" (D'Ambrosio and Moeller 12). Nonetheless, these authors "do not think that such a reading is any way privileged over other, more this-worldly interpretations." (12)

Alluding to Girardot's verdict on "the fundamentally medicinal intention and structure of the Daoism", the authors point also to the "healing" that this text promises as *a quest for physical and mental health* (13). In their view though, this healing can be seen as something "emphatically mundane" and not in terms of a mystical spiritual ascension: "The sanity it promotes and imparts is not a transcendental spiritual blessedness but instead an everyday mental health that allows one to cope with stress, anxiety, and the challenges that both social success and social failure can present." (13)

Even though we do not mean to fundamentally mean to dispute the position of Moeller and D' Ambrosio (in the sense that they may follow whichever reading of Zhuangzi they deem fit for the purposes of their work), in our view, a spiritual interpretation of Zhuangzi does not irresistibly imply an all-mystifying vision of the world – an other-worldly interpretation as rigidly opposed to a this-worldly interpretation, as Moeller and D' Ambrosio profess to know (13). At bottom, when Moeller and D' Ambrosio refer to this "transcendental spiritual blessedness", it is our personal estimation that there isn't any fundamental grasp on the authors' side of what is being expressed through these words. That is, a distinct mental and psychical state, which is not easy to pin down, let alone speak about, especially when one has never had any personal experience of such a state of mind.

On our side, we would like to maintain open the possibility that the healing effect of *Zhuangzi* could take on a form of a so-called spiritual ascension. This would certainly entail a specific way of viewing and experiencing reality which develops in a natural way and the unfolding of which could lead to being totally devoid of "stress, anxiety, and the challenges

that both social success and social failure can present”, as the authors describe the supposedly *emphatically mundane* healing effect (13). This effect on the person though and the difference this would bring about on the own perspective, barely noticeable from the outside, may not lie

so far from what could be perceived as an *emphatically mundane* healing effect. It is not an easy task to distinguish between such a person and a person that has been granted with the emphatically mundane healing effect of Daoism, as Moeller and D’ Ambrossio suggest.

Suffice it to say, what we do know about Laozi as well as Zhuangzi is that, even though both of them speak of the Dao in apophatic terms, they recognize the possibility of experiencing the Dao by embodying its very nature:

According to the Daode jing and the Zhuangzi, the Dao cannot actually be named and is beyond anything that can be grasped or delimited, but is open to personal experience. ... Unlike any other trend of thought in the Warring States period, these texts emphasize the necessity of ‘returning’ (fan or fu 復) to the Dao ... The goal is to return to one’s original nature and to pristine simplicity of the authentic state of things. (Robinet, “daoia” 6)

The nature of the Dao and one’s original nature is one and the same according to these authors. Returning back to the origin of everything that is the Dao, and therefore, of oneself too, is the only way one has to discover one’s own true nature. In the *Daodejing*, we read in Chapter 40:

Return is the movement of the Tao.

Yielding is the way of the Tao. (Mitchell 40)

For Zhuangzi, returning to the Tao equals to “returning to one’s own authenticity 反其真 (fan qi zhen)” (Hsu 8) or reverting to one’s True (Nature), as several translators of Zhuangzi have chosen (Legge; Watson 440).

In this sense, these are not merely empty words, but they rather reflect the actual experience of the person and as such they will be studied. How does this “return” to the Tao

come into being, is made possible? In the Chapter 16 of *Daodejing*, there is a clear answer given to us by Laozi:

Empty your mind of all thoughts.

Let your heart be at peace.

Watch the turmoil of beings,
but contemplate their return.

Each separate being in the universe

returns to the common source.

Returning to the source is serenity.

If you don't realize the source,
you stumble into confusion and sorrow.

When you realize where you come from,
you naturally become tolerant,
disinterested, amused,
kindhearted as a grandmother,
dignified as a king.

Immersed in the wonder of the Tao,
you can deal with whatever life brings you,
and when death comes, you are ready. (Mitchell 16)

According to the last passage we cited from *Daodejing*, it is through the emptying of the mind and the heart's being at peace that this inner step of realization of one's own source – the return to the Tao – is made possible. One then becomes capable to face “whatever life brings”, and eventually to face death. The unfolding of this inner state in the person, according to Laozi, signifies an altogether different approach towards life and death.

We understand this unfolding in a natural way in the same way that Heidegger describes *physis* in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*: “What does the word *physis* say? It says what

emerges from itself (for example, the emergence, the blossoming of a rose), the unfolding that opens itself up, the coming-into-appearance in such unfolding, and holding itself into appearance—in short, the emerging-abiding sway.” (Heidegger 15) The blossoming of a rose, one could object, is something tangible – there, for one to see, smell and touch! How are we to compare it then with a fundamental change, a quantum leap in the field of consciousness⁷³ of the person? Our response to this would be that in spite of there being no visible trace of it, according to both Laozi as well as Zhuangzi, as we will see further on, this different inner mental as well as psychical state is being reflected outwards through the changed attitudes of the person, especially when it comes to dealing with hardship and suffering.⁷⁴

In Chapter 50 of Daodejing, we read:

The Master gives himself up
to whatever the moment brings.

He knows that he is going to die,
and he has nothing left to hold on to:
no illusions in his mind,
no resistances in his body.

He doesn't think about his actions;
they flow from the core of his being.
He holds nothing back from life;
therefore he is ready for death,
as a man is ready for sleep
after a good day's work. (Mitchell 50)

⁷³ “The basic assumption here is that human beings lost their original oneness with the Dao because they developed consciousness. Consequently, the ‘chaotification’ or complete reorganization of consciousness is the avowed aim of this tradition. Its main technique is a form of meditation called ‘sitting in oblivion’ (zuowang), the ‘fasting of the mind’ (xinzhai), and in later times ‘observation’ (guan).” (Kohn, “Mysticism” 121)

⁷⁴ To those that concerning Heidegger’s philosophical thinking would stress on considerations of ontological sort about Physis implying Being and oppose it to the Meontology upon which Zhuangzi is based: Physis is the event of standing forth, arising from the concealed and thus enabling the concealed to take its stand for the first time.” (Heidegger 15) It includes the being as well as the non being. (See Laozi chapters 11, 21 as well as DavidChai, emptiness being *prima facie* the root of all things)

How are we to grasp what this inner state is about? Returning back to the notion of *measureless responsibility* as it was defined by Nancy, in an ongoing Dialogue with the Other, “in an indefinite number of instances, degrees, stages and connections” (297), anyone can set this gentle movement of yielding into existence into motion, as long as one is willing to give up one’s finite sense of self.

It is through love that the two infinities⁷⁵ — the Other and Me — can merge into one. It is in this oneness only — the poem⁷⁶ in its utmost sense — that one is no longer indebted towards anOther other than being bound to be free, free from the own very sense of limited self, from

the very sense of me. Giving up ourselves into existence, we unbecome into unlimitedness and oneness, which no longer knows borders or the feeling of the separation of self!

⁷⁵ A reminiscence of Derrida’s “Uninterrupted Dialogue: Between Two Infinities, the Poem”.

⁷⁶ Poem etymologically comes from *poiein*, which can as well be translated as “to make”, “to create”.

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