CHAPTER NINE

TRUTH CLAIM WITH NO CLAIM TO TRUTH: TEXT AND PERFORMANCE OF THE "QIUSHUI" CHAPTER OF THE *ZHUANGZI*

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Many texts from early China bear witness to the way thinking was caught in a conflict between the realisation (*zhi* 知)[1] that the workings of Dao 道 pervade the world, on the one hand, and the desire to communicate this insight and its implications to the world, on the other. But the realisation of the truth and its philosophical communication to the world form two poles in that they are fundamentally separated by language: speaking of the Dao is always a reduction of Dao to an arbitrary definition and therefore a destruction of reality.[2]

With 'truth' and 'philosophy,' I use two concepts that are not undisputed in Chinese history of thought. I take experience of truth as the subjective grasp (*zhi* 知) of the workings of Dao, which may be realised in different ways. I talk about philosophy as the reasoned attempt to communicate this experience to a community, which may necessitate a process of intellectualisation and systematisation.[3] At the same time, I think of the philosophical in early China as something that carries an element of performance.[4] It is an *act* of philosophising. As praxis-oriented activity, it is a real-world experience rather than a purely theoretical undertaking, and this is where the paradox lies. While there is an urge to communicate the experience of truth to the world, that action generally requires intellectualisation, systematisation and categorisation. But systematising truth

[1] For a discussion of the concepts knowing and knowledge in early China, see Anne Birdwhistell, "Knowledge Heard and Seen: The Attempt in Early Chinese Philosophy to Analyze Experiential Knowledge," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 11 (1984): 67–82.

[2] This problem is discussed in considerable detail in Rudolf Wagner, *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator: Wang Bi on the* Laozi (Albany: SUNY, 2000).

[3] Here I am not concerned with the academic question as to whether we should describe the intellectual activities in early China as "philosophy." I agree with Geoffrey Lloyd that the word philosophy is a mere epistemological obstacle for the historian of thought who wishes to study the intellectual reality of the past, be it in China or Greece. See Geoffrey Lloyd, *The Ambitions of Curiosity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002); Lloyd and Nathan Sivin, *The Way and the Word* (Yale: Yale University, 2002). Lloyd's positions are as summarised succinctly in Anne Cheng, "'Y a-t-il une philosophie chinoise?' Est-ce une bonne question?" *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* 27 (2005): 5–12 Unlike Heiner Roetz, esp. id., *Die chinesische Ethik der Achsenzeit. Eine Rekonstruktion unter dem Aspekt des Durchbruchs zum postkonventionellen Denken* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992), I have no intention of looking for the universality of philosophical activity. Instead, much in agreement with Lloyd, I hold that we should attempt to demonstrate the polymorphous nature of philosophising in early China. Note also that I do not refer to "truth" in the sense of the Judaic-Christian theological image of the divine that is "bound to contingency through historical revelation." See Petra Bahr, "Religious Claims of Truth Versus Critical Method – Some Western Remarks on a Complex Relationship in Western Tradition," in *Historical Truth, Historical Criticism, and Ideology: Chinese Historiography and Historical Culture from a New Comparative Perspective*, eds. Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer, Achim Mittag and Jörn Rüsen (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 1, but of a felt reality of Dao in the world.

[4] See also Dirk Meyer, "Bamboo and the Production of Philosophy: A Hypothesis about a Shift in Writing and Thought in Early China," in *History and Material Culture in Asian Religions*, eds. Benjamin Fleming and Richard Mann (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2014): 21–38.

means putting it into a rigid framework, which bears the danger of reducing it to an arbitrary set of definitions.

Consequently, different strategies were chosen to escape the problem that, at the very moment one speaks of truth, it is already something else. In this chapter, I discuss one such attempt, the "Qiushui" chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子[5] as put together by Guo Xiang 郭象 (d. 312 AD). I suggest that Guo Xiang collaged a philosophically coherent essay that aims at bridging the gap between philosophy and praxis of Dao by producing a text that creates an act of philosophical performance. Much of the *Zhuangzi* is concerned with seeking Dao through the everyday rehearsal of seemingly trivial activity, as exemplified in the story of Cook Ding 丁 that describes the cook's knack in carving meat,[6] or that of the wheelwright Bian 扁 and the chiselling of wheels.[7] Dao learning, these stories suggest, comes through skill learning, and vice versa.[8] The "Qiushui" reflects exactly this dynamic and its very existence, I argue, manifests a claim to truth despite the fact that no such claim is ever made explicitly in the text.

The "Qiushui"

1.

秋水時至，百川灌河。涇流之大，兩涘渚崖之間，不辯牛馬。於是焉河伯欣然自喜，以天下之美為盡在己。順流而東行，至於北海，東面而視，不見水端。於是焉河伯始旋其面目，望洋向若而嘆曰：「野語有之曰：『聞道百，以為莫己若者。』我之謂也。且夫我嘗聞少仲尼之聞，而輕伯夷之義者。始吾弗信，今我睹子之難窮也，吾非至於子之門則殆矣，吾長見笑於大方之家。」[p. 561][9]

> The Autumn Floods arrived at the usual seasonal time and the various streams all poured into the River. It swelled up so widely that from [the distance] between the cliffs and islets of the two shores, one could no longer differentiate oxen from horses. At this, the Lord of the River was decidedly pleased, thinking that the world's beauty was all within himself. Flowing along the River,

[5] The dating of the *Zhuangzi*, but also the organisation of the work into 'inner' (*nei* 內), 'outer' (*wai* 外), and 'miscellaneous' (*za* 雜) chapters is highly problematic. Scholarship has long regarded the inner chapters as the "core" of the *Zhuangzi*, while the outer and miscellaneous chapters were commonly taken as the work of later followers, and the chapters have been categorised according to their supposed philosophical value. (For such attempts, see especially Angus Graham, "How much of Chuang-tzŭ did Chuang-tzŭ write?" (Repr. in Graham, ed., *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, Singapore: The Institute of East Asian Philosophies, National University of Singapore (1986), 283–321); Harold Roth, "Who Compiled the Chuang Tzu?" in *Chinese Texts and Philosophical Contexts: Essays Dedicated to A.C. Graham*, ed. Henry J. Rosemont Jr. (La Salle: Open Court, 1991), 79–128; Liu Xiaogan, *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters*, William E. Savage, transl. (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1994); id. *Zhuangzi zhexue jiqi yanbian* 莊子哲學及其演變 (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin Daxue, 2010); David McCraw, *Stratifying Zhuangzi: Rhyme and Other Quantitative Evidence* (Taibei: Institute of Linguistics, Academia Sinica, 2010). More recently, Esther Klein has argued that the Inner Chapters probably are the result of a careful choice of what was considered the best material, but they do not represent the earliest stratum of the body of materials (in Esther Klein, "Were there 'Inner Chapters' in the Warring States? A New Examination of Evidence about the *Zhuangzi*", *T'oung Pao* 96 [2011]: 299–369). Although much of it is may still be late Warring States period production, all we can say with certainty is that its final compilation—and composition?—is the product of Guo Xiang 郭象 (d. 312 AD).

[6] "Yangsheng zhu" 養生主 (Nourishing the Lord of Life)

[7] "Tian Dao" 天道 (The Way of Heaven)

[8] See Robert Eno, "Cook Ding's Dao and the Limits of Philosophy," in *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi,* eds. Paul Kjellberg and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Albany: SUNY, 1996), 127–151, 136 ff.

[9] The pagination refers to the *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (1894) edition by Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (1844–1896) and compiled in *Xinbian Zhuzi jicheng* 新編諸子集成 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961).

> he (the Lord) travelled east until he reached the Sea of the North where, when turning his face towards the east to look out, he could not see the further edge of the water. Only then did the Lord of the River turn his head. Looking up to the sea, he faced the God of the North Sea, Ruo, and said, with a sigh: "There is a folk proverb that says the following:
>
> 'Those who know a hundred paths, think there is no one like themselves.'
>
> This could [also] be said about me. Also, I have heard of those who were mocking the knowledge of Zhongni and ridiculing the integrity of Boyi. At first, I did not want to believe it; but now that I see your endless vastness [I realise that], had I not come to your gates [to learn from you], I would have been in danger forever of being laughed at by the masters of the Great Method."

This scene sets the stage for a tortuous narrative within the *Zhuangzi* that is all about perspective and self-realisation. Not much is known about the origins and the composition of the "Qiushui" and the aim of this essay is not to disentangle different chronological layers in the composition of this text that is collaged from different snippets and scenes. Instead, I here wish to follow the composition of the text as created most likely by Guo Xiang and take seriously the picture that is presented through that composition.

The "Qiushui" consists of altogether thirteen scenes, many of which would make a good context-dependent text in their own right.[10] Of these scenes, eight record an imagined dialogue between the Lord of the River and the God of the Northern Sea, Ruo, before five more stories complete the narrative and conclude with the realisation that the reality of the world cannot be expressed through language that takes propositional force.

The text responds to the idea that language, when taken in absolute terms, serves as a proper tool to express reality. The "Qiushui" sets out to undo that myth. Through the literary device of separate scenes, the recipient of the text is confronted with different positions and ideas. The text behaves like the bends and turns of a river—the river is in fact the introductory metaphor of the text—in that with each scene (or bend), a new reality manifests itself before the reader's eye, only to change again at the next turn. The storyline that is unfolding accordingly shows that everything material—and this includes language and perception—depends on perspective and hinders the process of self-realisation when mistaken as ultimate reality. The "Qiushui" as we know it now is therefore not just a collection of snippets of unrelated stories. Instead, close analysis suggests that it makes sense to read it as a carefully crafted collage where the different scenes and stories each take a new turn in the development of the overall narrative. When approached accordingly, the different scenes compound the literary form of the argument and form a crucial device for delivering the message of this text. With each scene the text recipient realises that the understanding gained though the previous scene was yet again tainted because it was only the manifestation of a limited account of a much more complex situation. The overall structure of the composition therefore reduplicates the water metaphor through the stream that runs through the text, in that each bend of that stream presents a new reality, and so a changed insight on the part of the text recipient. Through the repeated use of the water metaphor as something that is at the same time

[10] For a discussion of context-dependent texts, see Dirk Meyer, *Philosophy on Bamboo: Text and The Production of Meaning in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 194 ff.

both strong and pliant[11] and able to adapt to—and is in fact dependent on—varying situations, the different scenes, when understood together and in this way, serve as a strong literary device to express a multi-facetted, ever-changing reality.

In what follows, I provide a form analysis of the "Qiushui" both on the micro-level of the text and on the macro-level of composition by analysing the individual scenes of which the text is composed and by reviewing the strategies by which the different scenes are connected in one complex narrative where meaning is produced on different levels.

The first scene of the "Qiushui" already hints at the central dilemma of self-realisation that features in the entire narration: a state of affairs is taken as the expression of ultimate reality rather than a conditioned snippet of a much more complex situation. Autumn floods led to a rise of the level of the river to the point where from the two shores, one could "no longer differentiate oxen from horses." The fact that the "Qiushui" qualifies the size of the river indicates that this is yet again only a conditioned manifestation of a more complex reality, for size is in itself meaningless. It requires a perspective (in that ox and horse can no longer be differentiated) and only works in a particular context. However, the Lord of the River mistakes size for absolute value, thinking not only that "the world's beauty was all within himself" but moreover that "there is no-one like [himself]." Going yet one step further, through the water/river metaphor at this stage of the text, the "Qiushui" provides a key to the fundamental conflict inherent in understanding. Water—in this scene it takes the form of a river—is a common metaphor for Dao, and here it can be read in that way too. Dao is the one thing that pervades the world.[12] Although in itself impalpable, it nevertheless manifests the ultimate reality of the world by being "the substance of the cyclical and dynamic universe."[13] The river is similarly difficult to grasp in cognitive terms. The nature of the river is to be in constant flux. Each of its many and constantly changing manifestations is easily mistaken as its ultimate form of reality: in this case 'big'; in other cases 'shallow,' 'deep,' 'rushing,' 'still,' et cetera. When read as a metaphor, the river thus prompts the conclusion that the nature of the world is to be in constant flux too. But a world in constant flux easily creates confusion. This is because constant flux is not commonly seen as the underlying pattern of reality, but instead each of the moments within that circle of constant change is commonly mistaken for the ultimate reality itself, rather than just a snapshot of something more complex. Through the river metaphor it therefore becomes clear that it is inherent in the world's nature to be miscomprehended when its individual material manifestations are not seen as a circle of everlasting change, where each moment within that circle takes a different realisation, and where each realisation is in fact nothing but one constituent of the unchanging reality of constant change. The river, when taken as root metaphor, is therefore in itself at the same time the source of misconception, as well as ultimate reality, depending on how one sees it. Through this depiction, the first scene expresses at the same time the fundamental insight, as well as dilemma, of this text. That insight, however, can only be gained when going through the "Qiushui" as a whole. The first scene therefore exhibits that the world is

[11] For a good discussion of nature serving as root metaphor of early Chinese thought, see Sarah Allan, *The Way of Water and Sprouts of Virtue* (Albany: SUNY, 1997).

[12] The earliest and most explicit mention of this idea is perhaps in the "Tai yi sheng shui" from tomb Guodian One.

[13] Y. M. Chang, *The Thoughts of Lao Tzu* (Taipei: Li Ming, 1977), 27.

a constant manifestation of change. Moreover, as I discuss below, this scene also reduplicates the act of comprehension on the part of the text recipient.

On the level of its language, the first scene displays a skilful playfulness, and the literary form of the text plays a crucial part in presenting it in vivid terms. The first forty graphs (from 秋水時至 to 以天下之美為盡在己[14]) set the scene, followed by seventeen graphs of four subsets in units of quick rhythm dominated by regular tetrasyllabic units (順流而東行，至於北海，東面而視，不見水端[15]) that describe the movement of the Lord of the River as he flows along rapidly in an ardour of self-satisfaction. This unit of quick progression, beautifully introduced by *shun* 順 and demonstrating the quick movement of the river, is then slowed down in two subsets of ten/seven graphs that break the rhythm of quick sentence patterns at the very point where an incredulous astonishment sets in on the part of the Lord of the River as he faces the vastness of the sea (於是焉河伯始旋其面目，望洋向若而嘆曰[16]). The moment of astonishment is beautifully exaggerated through elements of elongation, especially *shi* 始, thus giving form to the Lord of the River's disbelief on the level of language and rhythm. The compositional features of this scene thus mirror the emotional state of the Lord of the River when undergoing change from self-satisfied ardour to incredulous astonishment as he goes through different stages of self-realisation. Moreover, by deploying a uniform phrase in parallel fashion where the two lines each present an opposite situation, the text makes plain the significance of perspective. The first scene portrays a world in flux where the same situation, depending on perspective, prompts very different reactions. Starting off from line 1 (於是焉河伯欣然自喜[17]), the texts presents a situation where, based on size, the Lord of the River is saturated with self-satisfaction, believing that all the world's beauty is exhausted in him. Just a few sentences further down,[18] the very same sentence pattern introduces his feelings of incredulous astonishment when he is taken aback by the size of the sea that triggers in him a sense of inferiority:

> 於是焉河伯欣然自喜，以天下之美為盡在己
>
> At this the Lord of the River was decidedly pleased, thinking that the world's beauty was all within himself.

He thus flows along until he reaches the sea and where he faces a vastness that dwarfs his own size, prompting a reaction as follows:

> 於是焉河伯始旋其面目，望洋向若而嘆曰

[14] P. 561, l. 1/1–l. 2/10: "The Autumn Floods arrived at the usual seasonal time" to "thinking that the world's beauty was all within himself."

[15] P. 561, l. 2/11–27: OC: *Cə-lun-s ru nə tʰoŋ grʰaŋ-s, tit-s ʔ-a pʰek mʰʷe-ʔ, tʰoŋ C.men-s nə gijʔ-s, pə kʰen-s s.turʔ tʰor. (Flowing along the River, he (the Lord) travelled east until he reached the Sea of the North where, when turning his face towards the east to look out, he could not see the further edge of the water.) In my reconstruction of Old Chinese, I follow the system of Baxter and Sagart, *Old Chinese: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[16] P. 561, l. 2/28–l. 3/13. (Only then did the Lord of the River turn his head. Looking up to the sea, he faced the God of the North Sea, Ruo, and said, with a sigh…)

[17] P. 561, l.1/23.

[18] P. 561, l. 2/28: 於是焉河伯始旋其面目.

> Only then did the Lord of the River turn his head. Looking up to the sea, he faced the God of the North Sea, Ruo, and said, with a sigh: […][19]

The parallel pattern in which the statements are phrased stresses that the situation, which has triggered the two opposing sets of reactions, is in fact no different in either case. Through the literary device of uniform sets of statements that are deployed in parallel fashion but where each statement presents an opposite state of affairs, the text stresses the unchanging reality of an ever-changing world. For this insight, it would have been impossible for the authors of the "Qiushui" to use a positive assertion because this would have installed an unchanging definition, and the mere presence of such a thing would have conflicted with what the text aims to do. In such a situation, it is only through the use of a literary form that the text can deliver its message. The device for the construction of meaning discussed here is used everywhere in the "Qiushui." I call it "opposing uniformity."

2.

北海若曰：
井蛙不可以語於海者，**拘**於虛也；
夏蟲不可以語於冰者，**篤**於時也；
曲士不可以語於道者，**束**於教也。
今爾**出**於崖涘，**觀**於大海，乃**知**爾醜，爾將可與語大理矣。

天下之水，莫大於海，萬川歸之，不知何時止而不盈；尾閭泄之，不知何時已而不虛；春秋不變，水旱不知。此其過江河之流，不可為量數。而吾未嘗以此自多者，自以比形於天地，而受氣於陰陽，吾在於天地之間，猶小石小木之在大山也。方存乎見小，又奚以自多！

計四海之在天地之間也，　　不似礨空之在大澤乎？
計中國之在海內，　　不似稊米之在太倉乎？
號物之數謂之萬，　　人處一焉；
人卒九州，穀食之所生，舟車之所通，　　人處一焉；
此其比萬物也，　　不似豪末之在於馬體乎？
五帝之所連，三王之所爭，
仁人之所憂，任士之所勞，盡此矣！
伯夷辭之以為名，仲尼語之以為博。此其自多也，　　不似爾向之自多於水乎？ [p. 563–564]

> The God of the Northern Sea, Ruo, said: "that a frog in a well can tell [you] nothing about the sea is because it is captured (拘) in his hole. That a summer insect can tell [you] nothing about ice is because it is bound (篤) to its season. That a bent scholar can tell [you] nothing about the Way is because he is fettered (束) by his studies.

But now that you have ***left*** (出) your banks, ***gazed*** (觀) at the great sea and ***realised*** (知) your meanness, it might be possible to talk to you about the Great Principle:

[19] The parallelism of the two sentences is not well kept in the translation, which might be rendered rather awkwardly as "at this, the Lord of the River began to turn his head…"

> Of the waters on the earth, none is bigger than the sea, and the myriad streams [all] return to her; I don't know when this might stop – yet she never fills. At Wei Lü the waters drain out; I don't know when this might end – yet [the sea] never empties. Spring and Autumn never alter [her], and [she] neither knows floods nor droughts. It is in this that the sea surpasses the streams of the Jiang and the He immeasurably; and yet, it never happened that I have seen myself as superior because of this, since I shelter my form within Heaven and Earth and receive my spirit from the spirits [20] of light and dark; and therefore I remain between Heaven and Earth just like a small stone, or a small tree in a huge mountain – so tiny that it is only just to be seen. How could I consider myself to be great?

> If you measure the Four Seas against what is between Heaven and Earth – are they not just like an ants' nest in a vast marsh? If you measure the Middle Kingdoms against what is within the sea – are they not just like a grain of rice in a vast granary?
>
> When denoting the sum of the many things we call them "myriad" – and yet man is [only] one of them:
>
> Man populates the nine provinces,[21] he feeds on grain and interacts with others by ship and carriage – and yet, man is only one [of the myriad things]. When comparing him to the "myriad things" from this perspective, is he not just like the tip of a hair on the body of a horse?
>
> What the Five Emperors passed on [through abdication], what the Three Kings fought over, what benevolent ones worried about, what men in office laboured for is no more than this (the tip of a hair on the body of a horse). By declining this (all under Heaven), Boyi won himself a name, and by speaking about it, Zhongni was taken as a man of learning; but in taking themselves as so important, don't they resemble you, when just now you thought of yourself as the greatest of all the waters?"

Scene two can be subdivided into three sub-units. The first runs from the first line (北海若曰) to line five (爾將可與語大理矣), altogether 65 graphs.[22] This passage creates a duality on the lexical level of what I want to call "obstruction words," such as 'captured' (*ju* 拘) 'bound' (*du* 篤), or 'fettered' (*shu* 束), on the one hand, and "non-obstruction"[23] or "connecting" words, such as 'leave' (his banks) (*chu* 出), 'gaze' (*guan* 觀) and 'realise' (*zhi* 知), on the other, further underpinned by the division between 'can' (*ke* 可) and 'cannot' (*bu ke* 不可). It takes a bridge position with reference to the next unit where the great principle is being described, such that it is positioned between "obstruction" and "the great principle."

The second unit of this scene contains altogether 101 graphs and runs from line six

[20] I here follow Nathan Sivin who considers *yin* and *yang* as aspects of *qi* 氣. See Sivin, *Traditional Medicine in Contemporary China: A Partial Translation of Revised Outline of Chinese Medicine (1972): With an Introductory Study on Change in Present-day and Early Medicine* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1987), esp. 59–70.

[21] The *locus classicus* for the 'nine provinces' is the "Yu gong" 禹貢 (Tribute to Yu) chapter of the *Shangshu* where the Great Yu is said to divide the world into the nine provinces of Ji 冀, Yan 兗, Qing 青, Xu 徐, Yang 揚, Jing 荊, Liang 梁, Yong 雍, and Yu 豫, but different texts provide different interpretations of what constitutes the nine provinces.

[22] P. 563, l. 1/1–l. 3/4: "The God of the Northern Sea, Ruo, said" to "it might be possible to talk to you about the Great Principle."

[23] See also Chia-Lynne Hong on non-obstruction in the *Zhuangzi* in id., "Seeing through the *Dao*: Image Schema Related to Non-obstruction in the *Zhuangzi* 26" (Paper presented at the 19th Conference of the European Association of Chinese Studies, Paris, 5 September 2012).

(天下之水) to the end of line nine (方存乎見小，又奚以自多).[24] It employs the water metaphor to describe the one thing that pervades the world (Dao). Parallel to the previous scene where water takes the form of a river, water here manifests as sea. But whereas water in the previous scene produces the image of constant change, it here casts light on the underlying principle of that change: the unchanging principle of the one thing that pervades the world is that it is forever changing.

The third unit of this scene explains that things are what they are in a context. The conversation between the Lord of the River and the God of the North Sea in scene 1 has confirmed the status of Kongzi (Zhongni) and Boyi as cultural heroes of the past and personae of moral integrity.[25] However, the current scene deconstructs that image by setting in parallel fashion the *zi xi* 自喜 (pleased with oneself) from scene 1[26] that ridicules the Lord of the River's self-delusion with the *zi duo* 自多 (taking oneself as great) that relates to the cultural heroes of the past,[27] indicating that they fall short in just that way by labouring for measurable achievements in the human sphere which they have mistaken for the ultimate reality but which is, as this unit makes plain, no more than just one element of the myriad things, and so just like the tip of a hair on a horse's body. The previous scene is thus put in a new context in the sense that the ideas gained from the brief conversation in scene 1 were just a fettered snippet of reality, compromised by the Lord's limited vision.

The water metaphor in this scene is placed between the two real-world descriptions from unit 1 and 3. It seems to function as a conceptual principal insertion in scene 2.[28] As is typical of the feature of a principal insertion, it delivers a passage of central importance.

But this is only one feature in the construction of meaning in this scene of the "Qiushui." As in the previous scene, the "Qiushui" makes use of uniform statements to describe opposite affairs in the form of the literary device of an opposing uniformity. This allows for the insight on the part of the text recipient that one and the same situation may prompt opposing sets of perceptions, thus questioning absolute ontological truth in an ever changing world. The first instance occurs in line three (p. 563), graphs 17–24: 不知何時止而不盈 "I don't know when this might stop – yet she never fills"; and again, graphs 31–38: 不知何時已而不虛 "I don't know when this might end – yet [the sea] never empties." The two uniform statements stress the never changing principle behind everlasting change. Despite constant movement, the water level—note that when read metaphorically water can easily stand for Dao—never alters. The other instance of this recurring device of deploying uniform statements for opposing state of affairs—the

[24] P. 563, l. 3/5–l. 6/10: "Of the waters on the earth" to "just to be seen. How could I consider myself to be great?"

[25] I here refer to the concept of (philosophical) personae à la Deleuze and Guattari in their work *What is Philosophy?* Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchill (London, New York: Verso, 1994).

[26] P. 561, l. 1/30–l. 2/1.

[27] P. 564, l. 4/3–4.

[28] The literary device of a 'principal insertion' is discussed in full in Meyer, *Philosophy on Bamboo*, 99. Briefly, the principal insertion is an alien element cutting through an otherwise parallel figure, and so it bears some resemblance with the device of a 'double-directed parallelism' described by Joachim Gentz, "Zwischen den Argumenten lesen. Zu zweifach gerichteten Verbindungsstücken zwischen Argumenten in frühen chinesischen Texten," *Bochumer Jahrbuch fuer Ostasienforschung* 29 (2005): 35–56. The idea behind the principal insertion is to explicate the overall concern of the text passage. (See Meyer, *Philosophy on Bamboo*, 117).

literary device of an opposing uniformity—can be found just a few lines further down. It is made of just four graphs 人處一焉 "man is [only] one of them."[29] That same statement reappears in the next line (l. 2/6–9). It stresses that man—and likewise the entire human realm—is just one element among the myriad things. In the first instance (p. 564, l. 1/20–23), the line is used in the parallel context of "the Four Seas" that, when measured "against Heaven and Earth," appear "just like an ants' nest in a vast marsh." The same is true for the human realm in the context of the myriad things. It is just "one of them." At this point, the "Qiushui" zooms in on that seemingly insignificant element, which is just one (*yi* 一) of the myriad things (*wan wu* 萬物) and opens up a whole world of farming, trading and life, just to zoom out again immediately after, reminding the recipient of the text that this whole world, a cosmos of its own, is in fact nothing but one of the myriad things. The repetition of the same line prompts a surprise in the reading experience of the text recipient, thus slowing down the process of text reception and so helping to visualise what has just been described. It thus becomes clear how insignificant both Kongzi (Confucius) and Boyi were amidst the myriad things, as they just acted for this one element—the human realm—and mistook it for the whole world, the myriad things, as also conveyed so beautifully by this passage.

Scenes 1 and 2 form one larger unit as indicated through the recurring reference to the personae Zhongni (Confucius) and Boyi. Crucially, they are brought together in the form of a double-directed text segment, which features as a bridge between the two scenes (1: p. 561, l.1–l5/end; 2: p. 563, l. 1–p. 564, l. 4/end). That text segment is placed in scene 1 and is, at first, difficult to contextualise, reading *shi wu fu xin* 始吾弗信 "at first I did not want to believe X."[30] The question that remains is what constitutes the reference of the Lord's disbelief. One possibility would be that it refers to the voices mocking Zhongni and Boyi. The structure of the argument would thus work as follows: at first, the Lord of the River did not want to believe what he used to hear, namely that there were those mocking Zhongni and Boyi. This would imply he had thought highly of them. The problem with this reading is that the same section describes the Lord's self-esteem as he was flowing along the banks, thinking that there would be no-one like him. From such a position of absolute self-esteem, he would arguably not question the mocking of Zhongni and Boyi. It therefore seems that such disbelief on his part must relate to what was before his eyes, that is, the vastness of the sea. Accordingly, now that he realises the vastness of the sea, and thus understands his own limitations, he comprehends that the mocking of Zhongni and Boyi was questionable because it resulted from the same deluded position in which he thought of himself as great. However, scene 2 deconstructs this. It shows that Zhongni and Boyi acted from the same state of self-delusion because—just like the Lord of the River—they equally worked in a framework of misguided taxonomies by misunderstanding their context as the only thing of relevance. It therefore appears as though the mocking of Zhongni and Boyi was in the end justified due to their self-delusion. However, we will learn later on that that is just another layer of misconception.

[29] P. 564, l. 1/20–23.

[30] P. 561, l. 4/18–21.

3·

河伯曰：然則吾大天地而小豪末，　　可乎？
北海若曰：　　否。
夫物，

量　無窮，
時　無止，
分　無常，
終始　無故。

是故

大知	觀於遠近，故小而不寡，大而不多：	知量	無窮。
	證曏今故，故遙而不悶，掇而不跂：	知時	無止；
	察乎盈虛，故得而不喜，失而不憂：	知分之	無常也；
	明乎坦塗，故生而不說，死而不禍：	知終始之	不可故也。

計　人之所知，　不若其所不知；
其生之時，　不若未生之時；

以其至小，求窮其至大之域，是故迷亂而不能自得也。
由此觀之，

又何以知毫末之足以定至細之倪，
又何以知天地之足以窮至大之域！[p. 568–569]

The Lord of the River [then] asked: "this being so, is it then permissible that I consider Heaven and Earth as great and the tip of a hair as small?"

The God of the Northern Sea, Ruo, said: "no, it is not. With regard to what is in the world (= the phenomenal world),

measures have no limit,
times have no endings,
divisions have no constancy,
beginnings and endings have no fixation.

From this it follows that the wisest have a full vision over far and near, and so they do not make less of [what others perceive] as small, nor do they make more of [what others perceive] as big,

for they know that measures have no limit;

They have a clear vision over past and present, and so they are not disheartened about what is far (= out of reach), nor do they go on tiptoe for what is within reach,

for they know that times have no endings;

They discern the waxing and the waning, and so they are not rejoiced about gaining, nor are they grieved about loss,

for they know that divisions have no constancy;

They have a clear vision about the level path, and so they are not pleased about new life, nor do they consider death a calamity,

for they know that [things] from their beginnings to endings cannot be kept as they were before.

When considering what man knows, it does not compare with what he doesn't;
When considering his lifespan, it does not compare with the time before he was born.
To seek to exhaust the greatest areas by means of the smallest – that this creates confusion and cannot be achieved, is self-evident.
When seen from this perspective,
how should we know whether the tip of the hair suffices to serve as a standard for defining the limits of the minute;

> and how should we know whether Heaven and Earth suffice to serve as a realm to exhaust the vastness of the greatest?

This conversation connects directly to the previous scenes and concludes the conversation about the categories *xi* 喜 (pleased/ rejoiced), *you* 憂 (grieved), *jin* 盡 (exhaust), *yue* 說 (pleased) that find no further mention in later parts of the "Qiushui." It starts from a question by the Lord of the River showing that he mistook the contextualisation given in the previous conversation as an absolute epistemological framework, and it ends with some conclusions about the absence of absolute standards, as is clear from the men who have gained deep understanding. Just as in the previous scene, this passage about the ways of the men of deep understanding is placed between two structurally different passages and so, a conceptual principal insertion, it seems to formulate the claims of central importance in this passage. The ways of the men of deep understanding as described in the passage from "the wisest have a full vision over far and near" 大知觀於遠近 to "for they know that beginnings or endings cannot be fixed" 知終始之不可故也—comprising 76 graphs[31]—are phrased in remarkable parallel fashion, of four matching lines each. The regular patterning of this unit expresses—on the formal level of composition—the regular patterns of their ways. Even if the individual action is different in each situation, the underlying principle is forever unchanging.

The men of deep understanding have left the hermeneutical circularity that hinders understanding on our part, as is well described in this scene: when trying to encompass the greatest from the perspective of the smallest, the result is ultimately one of confusion (p. 568, l.6/14[32]). The problem is that we are inextricably bound to that perspective: just as the frog is bound to the vision gained from within the well, we cannot escape the human realm which, however, is just one of the myriad things. This scene thus describes a fundamental ontological problem that renders understanding impossible. At the same time, the text leads us through that circularity by means of the literary representation of that circularity. It thereby enables the reader to assume an all-encompassing perspective, leaving behind that limited vision. Without putting it in explicit terms, this scene thus enables the text recipient to break away from the circularity of limited vision by visualising that circularity before his or her eyes.

Following this scene, the conversation between the Lord of the River and the God of the Northern Sea moves in a different direction:

4.

河伯曰：世之議者皆曰：『至精無形，至大不可圍。』是信情乎？
北海若曰：
夫　　自細視大者不盡，
　　自大視細者不明。
夫　　精，小之微也；
　　垺，大之殷也：
故異便。此勢之有也。
夫　　精粗者，期於　有形者也；

[31] P. 568, l. 2/23–l. 5/14.
[32] 以其至小，求窮其至大之域，是故迷亂而不能自得也.

無形者，數之所不能分也；
不可圍者，數之所不能窮也。
可以言論者，物之粗也；
可以意致者，物之精也；
言之所不能論，意之所不能察致者，不期精粗焉。
是故大人之行，
不出乎害人，不多仁恩；
動不為利，不賤門隸；
貨財弗爭，不多辭讓；
事焉不借人，不多食乎力，不賤貪污；
行殊乎俗，不多辟異；
為在從眾，不賤佞諂；
世之爵祿不足以為勸，戮恥不足以為辱；
知是非之不可為分，細大之不可為倪。
聞曰：『道人不聞，至德不得，大人無己。』約分之至也。[p. 572–574]

The Lord of the River said: "The debaters of our age all say, 'the most quintessential has no form, the largest cannot be encompassed.' Is this really the nature of the matter?"

The God of the North Sea, Ruo, replied:

"As a matter of principle, when looking at the great from the perspective of the minuscule, it won't be exhaustive; when looking at the minuscule from the perspective of the great, it won't be clear.

As a matter of principle, that which [the debaters of our age call] 'quintessential' refers to the minute in the small; and that which [they think of as] 'massive' refers to the chunkiness in the great. Hence, this differentiation is just for convenience; it is based on the situation.

As a matter of principle, the quintessential and the chunky both point to (期指) that which has a form; but that which has no form is something which cannot be divided through numbers (which means to say it cannot be measured); and that which cannot be encompassed is something which cannot be exhausted through numbers (which means to say it cannot be measured).

That which can be categorised through words is the chunkiness within things; and that which can be conveyed through ideas is the quintessential within things.

However, that which cannot be categorised through words, and that which cannot be investigated through ideas, does not point to anything quintessential or massive.

From this it follows that the actions of the great man do not result in harming others,[33] nor do they seek to increase good treatment and favour. When the great man acts it is not for benefit, but [at the same time] he does not despise the servants and slaves (who do exactly this); he does not compete for valuables and goods, but [at the same time] he does not make much of declining and granting; when he applies himself to things he does not rely on other people, but [at the same time] he does not set great store by making a living through his own efforts or despise those who, in their greed, become impure; his actions deviate from those of the mean, but [at the same time] he does not make much of being eccentric; in his behaviour, he does not follow the masses,[34] but [at the same time], he does not despise the gossipers and sycophants; the world's ranks and riches do not suffice to stimulate him, but [at the same time], dishonour and blemish do not suffice to disgrace him; he understands that right and wrong cannot be divided [in two clear categories], and the minuscule and the big cannot be used as categories. I have heard that

'those who follow the way have no fame,'

'those of utmost virtue obtain nothing,'

[33] Because they are not directed at the material world and so have no intention of material gain.

[34] Reading *zai* 在 as *bù* 不.

'and the great man has no self.'

This is the highest form of binding oneself to one's place."

This scene works in a parallel fashion to the ultimate scene of the "Qiushui" discussed below (scene 13). The God of the North Sea is confronted with an argument based on the absolute value of language as held by current debaters and posed to him by the Lord of the River. The God of the North Sea duly engages with it and shows that it is caught in a contradiction. The God of the North Sea demonstrates that the debaters mistake categories with no intrinsic value for frameworks of ultimate reality. Because the debaters are able to categorise what they think as big and small, it must be something that has a form. As such, it refers to something that can be measured, because the debaters simply refer to material instantiations of a world in flux and not the generic ideas beyond the matrix of what surrounds us. That which has no form, however, must by definition refer to something beyond that matrix, which, therefore, cannot be categorised as such. Thus, the fact that the debaters bring those two concepts together is in itself a conflict, demonstrating the limitations of language and categorisation when mistaken for generic, and ultimately valid, frameworks.

This scene consists of two parts. The first part[35] engages with the nature of the quintessential and the chunkiness. It demonstrates that misprision is the ultimate and unavoidable result, when confusing definitions that are gained through the propositional force of language on the one hand, and real world experiences that have an intrinsic value on the other, rather than just seeing them as auxiliary constructions that rely on context and perspective.[36] The second part[37] portrays the implications of real comprehension with reference to the Great men, who do not confuse worldly affairs with situations that have intrinsic value.

On the whole, the text does not shy away from debate. In fact, it embraces it – as is also stressed through the repetitive use of the discourse marker *fu* 夫 'as a matter of principle' in the first part of this unit.[38] Just as in the Platonic dialogues, an argument is taken seriously and willingly engaged with so as to show that it is based on misguided premises. In this case, it is demonstrated that the propositional force of language is misleading because it opens up absolute categories by which situational conditions are mistaken for frameworks of ultimate value. A similar form of argument deconstruction as used in this passage reappears in the final scene of the "Qiushui."[39]

[35] P. 572, l. 1/1–l. 5/end.

[36] It is perhaps in this context that we should read the conceptual definition constructed between 'large' (大), 'massive' (垺), and 'chunky' (粗) in this unit. On the argumentative purpose of 'conceptual definitions' in early Chinese texts, see Meyer, *Philosophy on Bamboo*, 41, 229.

[37] P. 574, l. 1/1–l. 5/end.

[38] On the rhetorical function of the discourse marker—overstressed in my translation of the passage—see also Wagner's contribution in this volume.

[39] A brilliant analysis of that scene is given in Norman Teng, "The Relatively Happy Fish Revisited," *Asian Philosophy* 16:1 (2006): 39–47. I shall provide a discussion of that scene below.

5·

河伯曰：
若物之外，若物之內，惡至而倪貴賤？惡至而倪小大？
北海若曰：
以道觀之，物無貴賤；
以物觀之，自貴而相賤；
以俗觀之，貴賤不在己。
以差觀之，因其所大而大之，則萬物莫不大；因其所小而小之，則萬物莫不小。
　　知天地之為稊米也，
　　知毫末之為丘山也，則差數睹矣。
以功觀之，因其所有而有之，則萬物莫不有 ；因其所無而無之，則萬物莫不無。
　　知東西之相反而不可以相無，則功分定矣。
以趣觀之，因其所然而然之，則萬物莫不然；因其所非而非之，則萬物莫不非。
　　知堯、桀之自然而相非，則趣操睹矣。昔者堯、舜讓而帝，之、噲讓而絕；湯、武爭而王，白公爭而滅。

　　由此觀之，
　　爭讓之禮，堯、桀之行，貴賤有時，未可以為常也。
　　梁麗可以衝城，而不可以窒穴，
言殊器也；
　　騏驥驊騮，一日而馳千里，捕鼠不如狸狌，
言殊技也；
　　鴟鵂夜撮蚤，察毫末，晝出瞋目而不見丘山，
言殊性也。
　　故曰，
　　蓋師是而無非，師治而無亂乎？
　　是未明天地之理，萬物之情也。
　　是猶師天而無地，師陰而無陽，
　　其不可行明矣！
　　然且語而不舍，非愚則誣也！
　　帝王殊禪，三代殊繼。
　　差其時，逆其俗者，謂之篡夫；
　　當其時，順其俗者，謂之義之徒。
默默乎河伯！女惡知貴賤之門，小大之家！[p. 577–580]

The Lord of the River said: “regardless of whether [the viewpoint] is external to things, or internal to things, what position do we need to attain to discern a standard for noble and mean, as well as for small and great?”

The God of the Northern Sea, Ruo, responded:

“When looking at it from the perspective of the Dao, things are neither noble nor mean; [but] when looking at it from the perspective of the [individual] things themselves, each considers itself as noble and the other as mean;

when looking at it from the perspective of customs, noble and mean do not lie in oneself [but depend on the judgment of others]; [but] when looking at it from the perspective of degree and difference and, going along with that which is considered as great and we call it ‘great,’ then none of the myriad things is not great; and when going along with that which is considered as small and we call it ‘small,’ then none of the myriad things is not small.

However, when you understand that Heaven and Earth are in fact like a grain of rice, and when you understand that the tip of a hair is in fact like hills and mountains, then you have assumed the position of seeing things from the perspective of degree and difference (which means to say it is a relative perspective).

> When looking at it from the perspective of properties (功) and, going along with that which is considered as there and we call it 'there,' then none of the myriad things is not there; and when going along with that which is thought of as not there and we call it 'not there,' then none of the myriad things is not there.
>
> However, when you understand that east and west are in fact opposites but cannot be without each other, then you have assumed the perspective that defines the things according to their properties.
>
> When looking at it from the perspective of tendencies and, going along that which is thought of as so and we call it 'right,' then none of the myriad things is not right; and when going along that which is thought of as not-so and calling it 'wrong,' then none of the myriad things is not wrong. However, when you understand that Yao and Jie each considered themselves as right and the other as wrong, then you have assumed the perspective that sees the things in relation to inclinations and tendencies.
>
> In the past, Yao and Shun abdicated but reigned as emperors; King Kuai of Yan 燕王噲 (r. 320–314) abdicated and lost everything;[40] Tang and Wu battled and reigned as kings; Duke Bo battled and perished. Looking at this from the perspective of the rituals of contending and deferring and the conduct of Yao and Jie [you see] that noble and mean each have their time and can never be seen as constancies:
>
> A battering ram can be used to break down a city wall but not for closing up a hole, which means that there are different tools [for different things]. Fine horses (a thoroughbred piebald horse and a fine steed) may gallop up to a thousand *li* in a day, but in catching mice they cannot compare with a wildcat or weasel, which means that there are different skills [for different things]. Owls can snatch a flea at night and discern the tip of a hair, but when they come out in daytime they blink their eyes and won't see a hill or a mountain, which means that there are different natures [in different things].
>
> This is why to say: 'why not follow that which is right instead of doing wrong; why not follow order instead of making chaos?' epitomises the fact that one hasn't understood the patterns of Heaven and Earth and the essence of the myriad things. This is like following Heaven whilst ignoring Earth, and following the spirit of *yin* whilst ignoring that of *yang*; that this cannot be done, is clear. Despite this, [people] don't give up saying such things. If this is not due to stupidity then for false pretention: the sage kings have abdicated for different reasons, and the Three Dynasties succeeded in different ways.[41] Those who stood out of their time and went against the customs are called usurpers; but those who hit on the time and went along with the customs are called men of integrity. Be silent, Lord of the River! How should you know the gates of the noble and mean, and the masters of the small and great?"

This scene directly connects to the previous conversation by taking up the question about the guiding thread (*ni* 倪) for discerning noble and mean, great and small, that is, discerning a standard to compartmentalise the world into a known taxonomy of stable categories. Just as in the previous scenes, the answer to the Lord's question is constructed in a remarkably regular fashion of five sets of well-adjusted parallelism which, at first sight, creates a tension between the highly balanced text composition on the one hand, and its content that says that nothing is fixed and fully depends on context, on the other. Hence,

[40] In 314 BC, King Kuai of Yan 燕王噲 (r. 320-314) resigned in favour of his minister Zi Zhi 子之. The leaders of the various states generally condemned his move as an acute violation of political propriety. The ruler of Zhongshan 中山 used this incident to invade Yan and conquer part of its territory, as recorded in a bronze vessel inscription. *Wenwu* (1995) 1: 341-369. See the discussion in Yuri Pines, "Disputers of Abdication: Zhanguo Egalitarianism and the Sovereign's Power," *T'oung Pao* 91.4–5 (2005): 243–300, 269.

[41] Yao and Shun abdicated; the kings of Xia, Yin and Zhou, so this passage, were succeeded by sons.

the world cannot be discerned through rules and principles that determine a point of fixation from where it is possible to give an absolute value statement about a certain matter. There is no such thing as a unified standard to discern what is great or mean, big or small.

However, the regularity of text composition is on a par with the regularity of the composition of the world, whose regular pattern is the irregularity of things. Expressed through regular sentence patterns that articulate the irregularity of the things, the text composition features as a device that gives form to the regularity of flux. The non-existence of absolute standards and values therefore does not hint at chaos but at a world composition where everything is beautifully balanced and dependent on its contexts: there is no *yin* without *yang*, as there is no East without West. The literary form of this unit therefore compounds the thought of this scene to a remarkable extent and contributes to the making of the argument by means of the regularity of its formal composition. Without stating so explicitly, the world is portrayed as fully regular in its irregularity.

6.

河伯曰：
然則我何**為**乎？何**不為**乎？吾辭受趣舍，吾終奈何？
北海若曰：
以道觀之，　何貴何賤，是謂反衍；無拘而志，與道大蹇。
　　何少何多，是謂謝施；無一而行，與道參差。
嚴乎　　若國之有君，其無私德；
繇繇乎　　若祭之有社，其無私福；
汎汎乎　　其若四方之無窮，其無所畛域。
兼懷萬物，其孰承翼？
是謂無方。
　　萬物一齊，孰短孰長？道無終始，物有死生，不恃其功。一虛一滿，不位乎其形。年不可舉，時不可止。消息盈虛，終則有始。
是所以語大義之方，論萬物之理也。
　　物之生也，若驟若馳 。
　　無動而不變，無時而不移。
何為乎，何不為乎？夫固將自化。[p. 584–585]

The Lord of the River said: “if this is so, then what should I do and what shouldn’t I do? On what final consideration am I to know what to refuse or accept, and choose what to prefer or discard?”

The God of the Sea of the North, Ruo, said:

“When [you] look at it from the perspective of Dao, then

what should be noble and what should be mean when this can simply be called ‘returning to the [same] source?’ Don’t limit your mind, so that you won’t become lame with the Dao.

[When you see it from the perspective of Dao,] then

what should be [worth] less or more when this can simply be called turns come round? Don’t limit your actions to one way only, so that you won’t be at odds and evens with the Dao.

[Therefore:]

Be stern like a lord to his state who grants no private favours;

Be bountiful like the deity at the sacrifice who grants no private blessings;

> Be endless (flowing everywhere) like the infinite in the four directions that have nothing which bounds or hedges them.
>
> Embrace the myriad things every one – which of them would deserve special shelter?

This is what I call being without a method (無方).

> When [you understand that] the myriad things even out in one, then what should be [considered as] long and what should be [considered as] short? Dao has no ending and no beginnings, but all things are bound to be born and die – you cannot rely on their achievements. One moment empty, the next moment full, you cannot take a stand on their form.
>
> The years cannot be warded off [from coming], time cannot be stopped. Decay, growth, fullness, and emptiness – when this comes to an end it starts all over again.

This is how I describe the method of Great Meaning (大義之方) and sort the patterns of the myriad things.

> The life of a thing is like a stampede, a gallop: with every movement there is a change;[42] in no time there is an alteration.

So, what is it then that we should do and that we shouldn't do, when it is in fact inherent in the things that they transform by themselves?

This scene marks a turning point in the conversation between the Lord of the River and the God of the North Sea. For the first time, there is an attempt to translate the epistemological angst of the interlocutor into a philosophy of praxis: what is it that we should do in a world with no absolute standards and categories? The response by the God of the North Sea demonstrates the complexity of simplicity, which, as it turns out, is in fact surprisingly simple, too. For the first time in the "Qiushui," a dialectical situation is described where simplicity proves to be a complex affair, which, when taken in its full consequence, again captivates by its simplicity. And so on: our actions must be parallel to the patterns of the world with its lack of stable taxonomy clusters. However, and here we enter the realms of complexity: if seen as an absolute standard for actions, this guideline does not work either, for it implies rigidity and therefore carries the danger of "becoming lame with the Dao," that is, becoming unbending again in our actions and holding fast to a fixed pattern of irregularity. This insight with regard to the complexity of simplicity is translated into praxis as being "without a method" (無方), summing up the position one should take when looking at the things from the perspective of Dao – immediately undermined a few lines further down when the text speaks of the "method of great meaning" (大義之方). In other words, there is a method for being without a method, and this implies that one cannot live against the cycle of nature. But obviously, the 'method of great meaning' is in its implication being without a method, too, and there is a method for being without a method. Thus, a scenario of dialectical complexity is constructed that, in its full extent, is surprisingly simple: actions must be parallel to the patterns of the world with no stable taxonomy clusters, but this must not become a fixed pattern itself, for the world is in constant flux, and so, too, is the pattern of irregularity. This insight into the complexity of simplicity that, when taken to its full extent, captivates by its simplicity, was created not through the use of positive assertions—for this would contradict everything that is being said—but on the level of text composition. Interestingly, the two positions—being 'without a method' and the 'method of great meaning'—each result from what is

[42] Here I follow James Legge, *The Tao Te Ching, The Writings of Chuang-tzŭ, The Thai-shang Tractate of Actions and Their Retributions* (Taipei: Ch'eng wen Publishing, 1976), 431.

said immediately preceding them in the text. But while being without a method sums up a form of behaviour that is expressed in two sets of rigidly parallel sentence patterns, the term 'method of great meaning' sums up something formulated in non-regular prose. The passage therefore develops concepts which, when taken together, undermine each other and so formulate an idea beyond the immediate lexicon of this passage. The strategy for producing meaning in this unit therefore carries meaning itself.

7·

河伯曰： 然則何貴於道邪？
北海若曰：
知道者必達於理，
達於理者必明於權，
明於權者不以物害己。
至德者，
火　弗能熱，
水　弗能溺，
寒暑　弗能害，
禽獸　弗能賊。

非謂其薄之也，言察乎安危，寧於禍福，謹於去就，莫之能害也。

故曰，
天在內，　人在外，
德**在乎天**。
知天　人之行，
本乎天，
位乎　得/德:
蹢躅而屈伸，
反要而語極。

曰：
何謂**天**？　何謂人？
北海若曰：
牛馬四足，是謂天；
落馬首，穿牛鼻，是謂人。
故曰，
無以人滅**天**，
無以故滅**命**，
無以得殉**名**。
謹守而勿失，
是謂反其真。[p. 588–591]

The Lord of the River said: "But in that case, what is there to value in the *Dao*?"

The God of the North Sea, Ruo, said:

"He who realises Dao is certain to reach [understanding] of the basic patterns;

he who reaches [understanding] of the basic patterns is certain to be clear about [the right] balance;

he who is clear about [the right] balance will not allow things to do him harm.

He who is of perfect virtue,

> fire won't burn him, water won't drown him, cold or heat won't do him harm, birds and beasts won't hurt him.

This is not to say that he takes them lightly, but that he is perspicacious about safety and danger, peaceful about fortune and misfortune, careful in approaching and shunning, [so that] nothing can do him harm.

That is why I say:

> The heavenly is internal, the human is external, and virtuous power (*de*) is located in the heavenly.
>
> [Therefore], when you understand the workings of the heavenly and the human [realms], you find yourself rooted in the heavenly whilst taking stance in virtuous power (*de*).[43]

So, even when hastening or holding back, bending or stretching, you return to the essential to expound the supreme!"

[The Lord of the River] said: "But what do you mean by the heavenly and the human?"

The God of the North Sea, Ruo, said:

> "Oxen and horses have four feet – this is what I call the heavenly; putting a halter on horses' head and piercing oxen's nose is what I call the human.

That is why I say:

> Don't extinguish the heavenly through the human;
>
> don't extinguish fate through reason;
>
> don't let your name suffer harm through gain.
>
> Embrace this carefully and without losing [it], this is what [I] call 'returning to genuine nature.'"

This unit takes the "Qiushui" to the next higher level. Based on the previous conversation about the complexity of simplicity and the dangers of becoming "lame with the Dao" when not seeing the complex in the simple and the simple in the complex, the interlocutor moves on to ask about the value of Dao. This is by far the most challenging question and this is reflected also on the level of the microstructure of this unit, which, in terms its formal composition, is the most complex of the entire "Qiushui."

This unit is the final scene where a conversation between Ruo, God of the North Sea, and the Lord of the River takes place and closes the first sub-canto of this text.[44] The strategy taken in this unit to respond to the question about Dao is to construct *dao* 道 in parallel fashion to *de* 德. By taking up notions from the previous scenes and integrating them within a unified vision of reality, this unit presents a synthesis of the account so far.

This unit discusses the principles of the cosmic and the human realms, *dao* and *de*, in a conceptually parallel fashion. The two principles are also put in parallel context on the formal level of text composition, whereby the *de* chain is subordinate to the *dao* chain in that it explores the attainment of *de* in very concrete terms, while the *dao* chain moves

[43] Based on the structure of the argument, I read *de* 得 'obtain' (OC *tˁək) as *de* 德 'virtue' (OC *tˁək). This change is well attested.

[44] As in Meyer, *Philosophy on Bamboo*, I use 'sub-canto' to describe structurally coherent text parts. The sub-canto is the next higher unit after the pericope (Meyer, *Philosophy on Bamboo*, 56). The terminology is used for textual analysis in biblical studies. See Marjo Korpel, "Introduction to the Series Pericope," in *Delimination Criticism. Pericope 1: Scripture as Written and Read in Antiquity*, eds. Marjo Korpel and Josef Oesch (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2000), 1–50. The sub-canto is a unit that should be elaborated with respect to the individual text. I want to use 'sub-canto' (as opposed to 'section') to indicate a self-contained unit at a level of meaning construction above the building block.

from *dao*, and via the cosmic patterns and the varying balance, to the phenomenal world of *wu* 物 (the things in the world) in toto. Hence, whereas the *dao* chain, A, is developed on the level of cosmic entities—patterns (理), varying balance (權), as well as the phenomenal world overall (物)—the *de* chain, B, is constructed in concrete terms only. These two chains are brought together in a unifying C component that elaborates on the fact that those who understand *dao* and attain *de* will suffer no harm:

Figure 1: Parallel case of Dao *and* de

A **知道者必達於理**，　　**道**

達於理者必明於權，

明於權者不以物害己。

B 至德者，　　**德**

火弗能熱，

水弗能溺，

寒暑弗能害，

禽獸弗能賊。

非謂其薄之也，言察乎安危，寧於禍福，謹於去就，莫之能害也。　　**C**

Based on the formal composition of this unit, four things are clear thus far: first, the principles of *dao* and *de* work in parallel fashion; however, second, whilst it is possible to attain *de* in concrete terms, *dao* can only be grasped cognitively; third, *de* is subordinate to *dao*. It remains on the level of concrete terms while *dao* controls the cosmic principles in toto; fourth, they both lead to a level of insight on the part of the individual to the point where "he is perspicacious about safety and danger, peaceful about fortune and misfortune, careful in approaching and shunning, [so that] nothing can do him harm."[45]

Following these two chains of *dao* and *de* realities, a second parallel case is opened, namely that between the heavenly and the human as complementary inner and outer aspects. Just as in the two parallel chains above, the heavenly and the human are brought together in a synthesising C component that elaborates on the implications of the foregoing:

[45] This sentence will have implications for the construction of reality on the macro-level of composition. I come back to that later in this chapter.

Figure 2: Inter-crossed parallelism

故曰，

天在內，　　人在外，　　*inter-crossed* (X) *parallelism*:　　天 and　　人
　　德在乎**天**。　　德 (/人) and 天
知**天**　　人之行，
　　本乎天，
　　位乎德:

蹢躅而屈伸，
反要而語極。
曰：

The figure works in the form of a chiastic parallelism that is commonly found in argument-based texts[46] beginning from the Warring States period but has not yet been well described. In the *de*-line (德在乎天 'the virtuous power resides in the heavenly'[47]), the first inter-crossed element in this figure—'human' (*ren* 人)—is replaced by *de* 德 through a conceptual definition that is typical of argument-based texts from the Warring States period, where conceptually two terms are given equal structural significance and can be substituted for each other in parallel constructions.[48] Without having to say so explicitly, this unit thus constructs a relatedness between the human and *de* 德. By so doing, the text explicates formally that that *de* 德 belongs to the human realm.

The line just discussed further states that *de* 德 is located within the heavenly and so he who "understands the workings of the heavenly and of the human [realms]" is firmly "rooted in the heavenly" whilst taking a firm "stance in virtuous power (*de*)." According to the same principle of constructing a conceptual definition by substituting two conceptually related terms in the context of a parallel figure, the last line of this parallelism (位乎德[49]) substitutes *de* 德 for the human (人) which, based on its parallel context with the heavenly (天) from the previous line, is the concept one would expect to find here.

The equation of two terms works the other way round too. The figure just discussed[50] connects to the previous figure of a parallel unit within that scene[51] as indicated by the connection *gu yue* 故曰 ('that is why I say'), from where it becomes clear that a conceptual relatedness is assumed between the two parallel figures, and so, too, for

[46] On argument-based texts, see Meyer, *Philosophy on Bamboo*, 11 ff.

[47] P. 588, l. 4/22.

[48] On the composition of conceptual definitions in Warring States period philosophical texts, see Meyer, *Philosophy on Bamboo*, 40 f. Persuasive definitions with a distinction between 'emotive' and 'conceptual'—or 'descriptive'—meaning were developed by Charles Stevenson, "Ethical Judgements and Avoidability: Persuasive Definitions," *Mind* 47 (1938): 331–350 and id., *Ethics and Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1945).

[49] P. 588, l. 4/8.

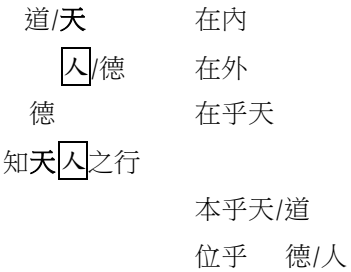
[50] P. 588, l. 4/16–l. 5/10.

[51] P. 588, l. 2/5–l. 4/13.

the terms "heavenly" (天) and "*dao*" (道) that are substituted for one another between these two figures. This is a full circle established in this unit. Without propounding this circularity explicitly, it is shown that virtuous power (*de*) is rooted in *dao*, while *dao* is carried within; *dao* rests in the realm of the heavenly. As a result, the one who arrives at a cognitive grasp of *dao* has necessarily cultivated the heavenly within and translates this through virtuous power into worldly affairs. The figure below (figure 3) visualises this.

This complex relationship between the human and the heavenly on the one side, and *dao* and *de* on the other, recalls the *Mengzi* where self-cultivation is deemed possible (and justified!) through a connectedness between humans and heaven. The passage here demonstrates a similar connectedness between the human and the heavenly realms. However, unlike the *Mengzi*, it does so not by expounding this explicitly, but through developing this notion on the level of its formal structure and thus reduplicating the cosmic pattern, instead of defining it in categorical terms. In this passage of two parallel figures that together make a consistent pericope of text composition,[52] it is shown that by nourishing a cognitive grasp of Dao, humans realise a connectedness with heaven which translates into virtuous workings in the world that never go against the cosmic pattern around them. But this can also be established the other way round: virtuous conduct is only possible when acting according to the cosmic pattern which, in turn, requires a cognitive grasp of Dao. This most elegantly answers the initial inquiry about the value of Dao in a world where there exist no stable taxonomical values.

Figure 3: Relatedness of concepts



The subsequent dialogue where the Lord of the River further inquires about the implications of the foregoing[53] furthers the insight about the human and the heavenly with regard to *de* and *dao*. The heavenly is the natural course of things; it is carried within. The human is the man-made course of things; it is external and translates into worldly behaviour. At the same time, the human should not contradict the heavenly realm. This would disqualify one's actions and render them un-virtuous. The following holds accordingly:

> don't extinguish the heavenly through the human
>
> don't extinguish fate through reason

[52] I use the term 'pericope' to refer to structurally coherent text parts that are on the level below the sub-canto (Meyer, *Philosophy on Bamboo*, 56). Just like the sub-canto, the pericope is a unit that should be elaborated with respect to the individual text.

[53] P. 590, l. 1–p. 591, l. 1/end.

> don't let your name suffer harm through gain.

The heavenly participates in the human through *dao* and so any form of violation against the natural course of things is necessarily a violation of the human, too.

Within the "Qiushui," scene 7 appears in an environment which states that without a cognitive realisation of the unchanging cosmic pattern of everlasting change, one will always be a victim of perception: a frog, it is said in a previous scene, cannot have a conversation about the world because it is bound to its well, a summer fly can tell you nothing about the winter because it is bound to its one season. Man, in the same vein, can say nothing about Dao and the workings of heaven because he is bound to concrete affairs. Each participant is ultimately tied to the limited vision of experience, and language does little to help solve this. This proves to be a fundamental problem, a real drama of epistemological angst: the hermeneutical circularity of comprehension facilitates no insight beyond the narrow frame of understanding through immediate experience. Whatever lies beyond that horizon is by definition beyond discernment. Scene 7 is an attempt to take one step out of the hermeneutical circularity of insight that is bound to immediate vision and experience, whilst language, tied to the level of the human, proves unable to express anything beyond that level. Scene 7 does so not just by pointing out this hermeneutical circularity as was done in scene 3; it now provides a way out of this circularity: scene 7 is made up of two dialogues and three building blocks. The two dialogues are constructed in parallel fashion with regard to the strict patterns of questions and answers. Subsequent to the parallel text on *dao* and *de* there appears a rather odd insertion:

> …躋躅而屈伸，反要而語極[54]
>
> […], when hastening or holding back, bending or stretching, you return to the essential to expound the supreme.

These lines break away from the general pattern of the text and present a somewhat alien element within this section. At first sight rather dark and ambiguous, the authors of the text felt the need to contextualise this statement through another parallel unit following that line. Situated therefore between the two parallel sections, it might be a principal insertion, if perhaps a rather vague one, and so a literary form that carries the main thought of this unit. Whilst this may well be the case, it remains that a core term of this line reappears at the end of the section: *fan* 反 'to return.' This makes the line become a recurrent text feature that contextualises the two parallel sections of this unit by looking at what has just happened: it describes movement that, in circular fashion, itself expounds the ultimate by returning to the essential. This is exactly the circle carried out in the parallel sections of the text. As a consequence, by describing the movement that the recipient of the text just undertook when engaging with this unit, it allows a vision of the hermeneutical circularity of limited understanding from outside that circular movement. Such stepping out of the circularity of limited understanding by looking at it from the outside as carrying out that circularity in oneself is in itself a way to deconstruct that

[54] P. 588, l. 5/11–20.

circularity of limited vision. The recipient of the text is thus made to understand that she is already following the natural circle of the things—and therefore Dao—simply by virtue of reading or reciting this text. The text thus produces meaning through form. By going through the text and so carrying out that movement based on that form, the recipient of the text performs the bridge between comprehension and conduct. To recite the text may therefore become a philosophically meaningful event.[55]

The "Qiushui" has now provided all the tools necessary to allow the text recipient to understand the processes by which meaning is constructed without relying on the propositional force of language. It comes as no surprise that after this unit the text moves away from the dialogic pattern of interlocutor and respondent between the God of the North Sea and the Lord of the River. Assuming that the text recipient has internalised the strategies of the "Qiushui" to invoke understanding, it now moves on to a hitherto unseen playfulness.

8.

夔憐蚿，蚿憐蛇，蛇憐風，風憐目，目憐心。

夔謂蚿曰：「吾以一足踔而行，予無如矣。今子之使萬足，獨奈何？」

蚿曰：「不然。子不見夫唾者乎？噴則大者如珠，小者如霧，雜而下者不可勝數也。今予動吾天機，而不知其所以然。」

蚿謂蛇曰：「吾以眾足行，而不及子之無足，何也？」

蛇曰：「夫天機之所動，何可易邪？吾安用足哉！」

蛇謂風曰：「予動吾脊脅而行，則有似也。今子蓬蓬然起於北海，蓬蓬然入於南海，而似無有，何也？」

風曰：「然，予蓬蓬然起於北海而入於南海也，然而指我則勝我，(魚酋)我亦勝我。雖然，夫折大木，蜚大屋者，唯我能也。故以眾小不勝為大勝也。為大勝者，唯聖人能之。」[p. 591–594]

> The Kui[56] envies the millipede, the millipede envies the snake, the snake envies the wind, the wind envies the eye, and the eye envies the mind.
>
> The Kui said to the millipede: "I have one leg that I use to hop about and move along and I hardly keep up [with you]. Now that [I see] you commanding ten thousand legs – how is it that do you do that?"
>
> The millipede answered: "It is not so. Have you, sir, never seen a man spitting? As he spits, there are big bubbles like pearls and small ones like dewdrops; what drops out is in disarrangement of countless bubbles. Now that I move my natural device, I don't understand how it actually works."
>
> The millipede said to the snake: "I move by using all these legs and yet I do not keep up with you, sir, who have no feet at all, why is that?"
>
> The snake answered: "It is by means of my natural device that I move, how could it be different? What should I use feet for?

[55] The "Qiushui" is not exceptional in this regard as becomes clear from examples such as Guodian One "Laozi" or "Tai yi sheng shui."

[56] Kui is a being with only one leg. It is sometimes described as a spirit or a strange beast, sometimes as a historical personage – the Music Master Kui.

> The snake said to the wind: "I proceed by moving my backbone and ribs, and so I still have an appearance. But you, sir, when whirling with a blustering force you arise from the North Sea and enter into the South sea in just that way, but there is no appearance [of you]. How is that possible?"
>
> The wind answered: "It is so: I arise from the North Sea with a whirling force and enter into the South Sea in just that way; and yet, to point a finger at me overcomes me, and to trample on me overcomes me too. Despite this, I alone have the ability to break down big trees and blow over large houses. And so, a real victory is when one is not overcome by the mass of the petty things. To achieve a real victory, only the sagacious ones are able to achieve that."

Entertaining as the scene is, I simply like to point out that it takes up notions from previous scenes, namely that of limited vision and the differences in nature as portrayed, for instance, through the frog in the well (scenes 2 and 10) or the battering ram (scene 5), and it alludes to what the "Qiushui" describes as the highest form of attaining one's lot (分) in scene 4. Through the use of parallel sentence constructions, it is stressed that for each of the natural manifestations (Kui, millipede, snake), the same situation applies. This makes it clear that despite their differences, their existence is a parallel case in point, and in each case, they are bound to their specific lot (分). By so doing, scene 8 prepares for the next scene in talking about the sagacious person and the nature of true victory:

9.

孔子游於匡，宋人圍之數匝，而弦歌不輟。

子路入見，曰：「何夫子之娛也？」孔子曰：「來，吾語女。

我　　諱窮久矣，而不免，命也；

　　求通久矣，而不得，時也。

當堯、舜而天下無窮人，非知得也；

當桀、紂而天下無通人，非知失也：時勢適然。

夫

水行不避蛟龍者，漁父之勇也；陸行不避兕虎者，獵夫之勇也；白刃交於前，視死若生者，烈士之勇也；知窮之有命，知通之有時，臨大難而不懼者，聖人之勇也。由處矣！吾命有所制矣！」

無幾何，將甲者進，辭曰：「以為陽虎也，故圍之；今非也，請辭而退。」[p. 595–597]

> Kongzi was travelling in Kuang when the men of Song encircled him with several layers of troops; nonetheless, [Kongzi] kept playing his lute and singing to it without stopping. Zi Lu entered to see him and asked: "How is it, venerated master, that you are so carefree?" Kongzi replied: "Come here, I shall tell you:
>
> For a long time I have tried to avert hardship; the fact that I now cannot escape it is because [Heaven] has ordained it thus. For a long time I have sought to be successful; that I cannot achieve it is because the times are not right.[57] That at the time of Yao and Shun no men in the world

[57] This notion is a constant in early Chinese literature. It is discussed most explicitly in the text "Qiong da yi shi" from Guodian One.

> suffered hardship is not because wisdom had been gained. That at the time of Jie and Zhou no [wise] men in the world were successful is not because wisdom had been lost; it was because times and circumstances coincided.

As a matter of principle:

> To travel on water yet not shrink from the sea serpent and dragon tiger – that is the courage of the fisherman. To travel on land yet not shrink from the rhinoceros and the tiger – that is the courage of the hunter. To see uncovered blades crossing just in front of the eyes and looking at death as though it was life – that is the courage of the arduous knight. But to understand that hardship depends on heavenly ordain, that be successful has its time, and to face great difficulty without fear – that is the courage of the sagacious person.[58]
>
> Be calm, You, my destiny has been decided."
>
> Not long afterwards, the leader of the armed men came in and apologised by saying: "We have mistaken you for Yang Hu,[59] and so we have surrounded you. Now that [I realise] you aren't, I beg to take my leave," and so he withdrew.

At a first glance, this scene seems to portray Kongzi in a very positive light: despite the obvious threat posed to him and his disciples, Kongzi stays calm and keeps on singing to his lute, fully conforming to the ways of a cultured man of learning. He is further free from distress with regard to his success in his political career, for he notes that achievements depend on heavenly commands and the right times, and so there is no way by which he can enforce success. It either happens or it does not, depending on the world around him. This notion is furthered with reference to the cases of Yao and Shun plus Jie and Zhou that are set apart through the literary device of a uniform opposition: whereas Yao and Shun flourished, Jie and Zhou perished despite the world around them being the same. Moreover, the scene makes Kongzi construct four parallel cases, each of which explains fearlessness for different types of people. This accords with the previous unit where different things are said to have different natures, each to their particular lot (分). Correspondingly, in one of the four cases developed in the unit under review, fearlessness is defined as the trait of a sagacious person: Kongzi himself. The sagacious person understands that failure depends on heavenly command whilst success relies on the times being right and so, similar to the wind in the previous unit that can uproot trees but is overcome by the pointing of a finger, the sagacious person has the power to change the course of things (through his *de* 德), but he can likewise be blocked by a random group of soldiers not letting him pass. Kongzi is not disheartened because of this metaphorical pointing of the finger against him. By keeping his faith and singing to his lute despite hardship, he conforms to the ideal of a sagacious person as not being defeated by the multitude of petty things.

So far, so good. However, this seemingly straightforward picture dissolves under closer scrutiny. The problem is threefold. First, one of definition, second one of application, and third one of perception. First, Kongzi provides a positive definition of a sagacious person by portraying himself in such terms – beautifully exaggerated by the discourse marker *fu* 夫 'as a matter of principle.' Whereas the previous scene simply

[58] Cf., Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang tzu*, Translated by Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 185.

[59] A contemporary of Kongzi, Yang Hu was a usurper in the state of Lu.

acknowledges that only a sagacious person is able to overcome the petty things of daily affairs, Kongzi translates this into a definition that requires positive action on his part, and so he restricts the notion of a 'sagacious person' to a definition of his vision and understanding. The sagacious person according to Kongzi is, secondly, just concerned with the human realm. He sought to be successful (*tong* 通), but this just applies to the 'one' (*yi* 一) of the myriad things (*wan wu* 萬物), as mentioned in scene 2. Thirdly, Kongzi confuses taxonomical realities. As previously portrayed in scene 5, an example is sought from the rulers of the past, namely Yao and Shun in comparison to Jie and Zhou. However, unlike in scene 5 where the world under Yao and Shun is different from that under Jie and Zhou with the result that Jie and Zhou are seen as usurpers whilst Yao and Shun appear as men of principle, Kongzi here portrays the world as a stable entity and the rule of Jie and Zhou as abhorrent deviations from ideal rulership. Kongzi therefore seems to misunderstand definitions of decline as absolute value categories instead of seeing them in relation to one another. Kongzi, it seems under closer scrutiny, mistakes a snapshot in time for an absolute representation and manifestation of reality.

At this point, the scene ends with an expression of misunderstanding. Kongzi was simply mistaken for someone else. He may now move on. This line therefore beautifully manifests the reading experience of this unit on the part of the text recipient by reduplicating on the textual level the expression of misunderstanding with regard to the persona of Kongzi, thus compounding on the literary level the thought of this unit. The text has its message acted out.

10.

公孫龍問於魏牟曰：
「龍少學先王之道，長而明仁義之行；合同異，離堅白；然不然，可不可；困百家之知，窮眾口之辯：吾自以為至達已。今吾聞莊子之言，茫然異之。不知論之不及與？知之弗若與？今吾無所開吾喙，敢問其方。」
公子牟隱機大息，仰天而笑曰：
「子獨不聞夫坎井之蛙乎？謂東海之鱉曰：

> 『吾樂與！吾跳梁乎井榦之上，入休乎缺甃之崖。赴水則接腋持頤，蹶泥則沒足滅跗。還虷蟹與科斗，莫吾能若也。且夫擅一壑之水，而跨跱坎井之樂，此亦至矣。夫子奚不時來入觀乎？』

東海之鱉左足未入，而右膝已繫矣。於是逡巡而卻，告之海曰：

> 『夫千里之遠，不足以舉其大；千仞之高，不足以極其深。禹之時，十年九潦，而水弗為加益；湯之時，八年七旱，而崖不為加損。夫不為頃久推移，不以多少進退者，此亦東海之大樂也。』

於是坎井之蛙聞之，適適然驚，規規然自失也。」

「且夫知不知是非之竟，而猶欲觀於莊子之言，是猶使蚊負山，商蚷馳河也，必不勝任矣。且夫知不知論極妙之言，而自適一時之利者，是非坎井之蛙與？且彼方跐黃泉而登大皇，無南無北，奭然四解，淪於不測；無東無西，始於玄冥，反於大通。子乃規規然而求之以察，索之以辯，是直用管闚天，用錐指地也，不亦小乎？子往矣！
且子獨不聞夫壽陵餘子之學行於邯鄲與？未得國能，又失其故行矣，直匍匐而歸耳。今子不去，將忘子之故，失子之業。」

公孫龍口呿而不合，舌舉而不下，乃逸而走。[p. 597, l. 2 – p. 603, l. 1]

Gongsun Long[60] asked Wei Mou,[61] saying: "When I was a young boy, I studied the ways of the former kings; when I grew up, I gained clarity about the workings of benevolence and rightness. I harmonised alike with difference, I separated hardness from whiteness,[62] I made so what is not-so, and I permitted the non-permissible. Painfully, I mastered the knowledge of the various masters, and I exhausted the arguments of the many debaters. I considered myself to have reached the highest form of accomplishment. But now that I hear the words of Zhuangzi, I am confused in that I find them very different. I do not understand whether my theories are not as good as his, or whether my knowledge is not equal to his? Now that I have nothing about which to open my mouth, I venture to ask about his method (*fang* 方)."

Gongzi Mou leaned on [his] small table, took a long breath, looked up to heaven and said, laughingly:

"Have you, sir, alone, never heard of the frog in the old well, which said to the turtle of the Eastern Sea:

> 'How great is my pleasure! When jumping out of the well I leap on to its parapet, when getting in, I can rest on the wall where a brick has fallen out. When diving into the water, I let it come up right under my armpits so that it supports my chin, and when slipping into the mud, I bury my feet so that [the mud] gets over my ankle. When turning around, I realise that of the mosquito larvae, crabs and tadpoles, none can possibly be my match. Moreover, to have complete control of the water in the gully and preside over all the pleasures of the well, this clearly is the best there is. Why don't you, sir, come in some time and see for yourself?'

But before the turtle of the Eastern Sea had even got her left foot into the well, her right knee already stuck fast. Upon this, she backed out and withdrew, and told the frog about the sea:

> 'Even the distance of a thousand miles would not suffice to measure its vastness, and the height of a thousand fathoms would not suffice to estimate its depth. At the time of the great Yu, there were [heavy] floods in nine out of ten years, and yet the level of its waters never rose; at the time of Tang, there were droughts at seven out of eight years, and yet [its waters] never ebbed away from the shores.
>
> Thus, that no change is produced in its waters by any cause of long-term influence, and that no advance or retreat is produced in its waters by any amount of addition or subtraction; this clearly is the great pleasure of the Eastern Sea.'

Upon hearing this, the frog from the old well was at once lost in surprise and, rotating in circles, the [bloated frog] disappeared."

"Now that your knowledge does not suffice to grasp the limits of right and wrong, and still you wish to inspect the words of Zhuangzi, this is like trying to make a mosquito carry a mountain, or a pill-bug race against the River – clearly, this cannot be taken on. And now that your knowledge does not suffice to comprehend the words about the mysterious things and still you wish to appropriate them yourself for temporary gain, does this not resemble the frog in the old well [that talks about things which it doesn't understand]?

Also, that one (Zhuangzi) is at one moment putting his foot on the Yellow Springs of the underworld and mounting the heights of the great sky at another. To him, there is no north and south—in utter freedom he moves in all four directions and sinks into the immeasurable; to him,

[60] Gongsun is the name of the descendants of the sovereign of Zhao – one of the three successor states of Jin; Gongsun Long is known as a controversial debater infamous for his paradoxical arguments, such as that a "white horse is not a horse."

[61] Wei was another successor state of Jin. Mou was one of the sons of its ruler of that time and a great admirer of Zhuangzi.

[62] Gongsun Long holds that the attributes of material objects, such as hardness and whiteness, are separate existences.

there is no east or west—he starts off from what is abysmally obscure[63] and returns to what is grandly perceptible (*da tong* 大通).

But, you, sir, whilst going in circles [like the bloated frog that is disappearing in circles], you seek to discern him, and explore [him] through disputation, this is just like using a tube to investigate the sky and using an awl to measure the depth of the earth – surely they are too small [for this task]! Go your ways, sir! Or have you alone not heard of the young boys of Shou Ling who attempted to learn the ways of the capital of Zhao, Han Dan? Before they had even mastered [the ways] of Han Dan, they had already forgotten their old ways, and so they could only return home on their four hands and knees.[64] If you won't leave, you might forget your old acquirements, and fail in your profession."

Gongsun Long stood there, mouth open, unable to close it, his tongue right at the top; and so he turned tail and fled.

Scene 10 is one of the most amusing in the "Qiushui." The irony that comes to the fore in this unit is a literary device and important for the making of the argument.

In this scene, altogether four layers of stories are nested within one another. The conversation between the frog in the old well and the Turtle of the East Sea is one; the story about the young boys of Shou Ling is another; and this is all framed by an imagined conversation between Gongsun Long, the infamous debater of the time and known for his paradoxical claims, and Gongzi Mou, the admirer of the Zhuangzi and son of the ruler of Wei, one of the successor states of Jin. But that conversation is again written from the perspective of an outside spectator, and so nested in yet another context. That this framing conversation is again nested within yet another reality becomes especially obvious from the last line where we find a theatre-style stage direction that gives a burlesque of Gongsun Long, as he is left in utter disbelief of what is happening around him – or, in fact, to him. The distance thus created in the last line between text recipient—that is, us, the readers—and the framing conversation held between Gongsun Long and Gongzi Mou that turns the whole scene into staged theatre play puts us, the text recipient, into the role of the spectator and hence into a context providing reference. Through this device, the text makes it obvious that the foregoing is an exaggerated caricature and the 'information' to be taken with a pinch of salt. A complex reality is thus formulated where the various stories feature like Russian matryoshkas within the wider context of this scene. No such reality is to be trusted as an ultimate state of affairs but is nested within a wider, situation-specific, context. That is a clear hint as to how to approach this unit, and in fact how to approach the entire "Qiushui": a particular situation—or scene—can never be taken as the ultimate expression of reality, for there is always yet another reality to it. The literary form of this scene reduplicates this notion. Form and content are one.

As in Schwitzgebel's reading of the *Zhuangzi*, I should like to propose that this scene does not want to be taken at face value.[65] It talks about Zhuangzi's strategies and

[63] Here I follow James Legge, *The Sacred Books of China: The Writings of Kwang-sze* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891), 437.

[64] It is on purpose that I keep 行 in its most generic sense rather than translating it as 'walk' to allow for its applicability to the ways of Gongsun Long.

[65] See Eric Schwitzgebel, "Zhuangzi's Attitude Towards Language and His Skepticism," in *Essays on Skepticism,* 68–96.

methods (*fang* 方), his teachings (*yan* 言) and his achievements, when there is clearly no such thing. The same is true when it is said of Zhuangzi that he disqualifies Gongsun Long for not knowing the boundaries of right and wrong, which is again clearly ironic. The *Zhuangzi* does not want to be taken seriously here; at least not in the literal sense. But as outlined above, there is a seriousness behind the non-serious, and being not serious on one level of meaning-construction means to be serious on another level. This is exactly what the text means when criticising Gongsun Long ironically for not knowing the borders (*jing* 竟) of right and wrong. The one who is criticising the other for not knowing the borders is exactly the one who claims that there is no such thing as strict boundaries. Through the irony used in this passage, Gongsun Long is criticised for taking boundaries too seriously when undermining them, thus enforcing the very concepts he intends to challenge. That this is done better in ironical terms, is clear.

Lastly, this unit parallels Gongsun Long with Kongzi as portrayed in the previous scene in that they both confuse taxonomical conventions and mistake them for ultimate realities. In both cases, it results in their belief that they have reached the ultimate (*zi yi wei zhi da yi* 自以為至達已).

11.

莊子釣於濮水。楚王使大夫二人往先焉，曰：「願以竟內累矣！」莊子持竿不顧，曰：「吾聞楚有神龜，死已三千歲矣。王巾笥而藏之廟堂之上。此龜者，寧其死為留骨而貴乎？寧其生而曳尾於塗中乎？」二大夫曰：「寧生而曳尾塗中。」莊子曰：「往矣！吾將曳尾於塗中。」[p. 603, l. 2–604/end]

> Zhuangzi was fishing in the Pu River when the King of Chu sent two great officers to him to deliver the message as follows: "I wish to entangle you with the affairs of all within my borders."
>
> Zhuangzi, holding on to his rod without looking round, said: "I have heard that in the kingdom of Chu once lived a sacred tortoise that has been dead for three thousand years now. The king keeps it in the ancestral temple inside a box wrapped with cloth. Now that tortoise, would it rather be dead and have its bones left behind and honoured? Or would it rather live and drag its tail through the mud?"
>
> The two great officers replied: "it would rather live and drag its tail through the mud."
>
> Zhuangzi replied: "go your way! I, too, would rather drag my tail through the mud."

This and the next unit provide in metaphorical terms Zhuangzi's choice against prioritising the world of the one (*yi* 一) over that of the myriad things (*wanwu* 萬物). Through the repetition of border (*jing* 竟) it connects to the previous scene, while it is no longer used in the context of borders between categories but that of realms. In mention them in passing only.

12.

惠子相梁，莊子往見之。或謂惠子曰：「莊子來，欲代子相。」於是惠子恐，搜於國中三日三夜。莊子往見之，曰：「南方有鳥，其名鵷鶵，子知之乎？夫鵷鶵，發於南海而飛於北海，非梧桐不止，非練實不食，非醴泉不飲。於是鴟得腐鼠，鵷鶵過之，仰而視之曰：『嚇！』今子欲以子之梁國而嚇我邪？」[p. 605, l. 1–606]

> Huizi was minister of Liang when Zhuangzi was planning to call by to see him. Someone said to Huizi: "Zhuangzi comes in wishing to supersede you, sir, as minister." Upon this, Huizi was filled with fear and had him searched for in his realm for three days and three nights.
>
> When Zhuangzi came by to see him, he said: "There is a bird in the south whose name is Young Phoenix; do you, sir, know of it? This Young Phoenix, when it starts out from the South Sea to fly to the North Sea, unless it is on holy Wutong trees, it does not rest; unless it is the fruit of the Lian, it does not eat; unless it is the purest springs, it does not drink. At this, an owl had just got a rotten rat when the Phoenix passed it. As the owl looked up and saw the Phoenix, fearful of its prey, it frightened it away by screaming 'He!' Do you now, sir, wish to frighten me away from your state with just that scream?"

Connecting to the topos of the choice of refusing the one (*yi* 一) over the myriad things (*wanwu* 萬物) this scene introduces Huizi, who will play a vital part in the last unit below. It thus serves as a bridge to the final unit of this text:

13.

莊子與惠子游於濠梁之上。莊子曰：「儵魚出游從容，是魚之樂也。」惠子曰：「子非魚，安知魚之樂？」莊子曰：「子非我，安知我不知魚之樂？」惠子曰「我非子，固不知子矣；子固非魚也，子之不知魚之樂，全矣！」莊子曰：「請循其本。子曰『汝安知魚樂』云者，既已知吾知之而問我。我知之濠上也。」[p. 606, l. 1–608]

> Zhuangzi and Huizi were strolling on the dam of the Hao River. Zhuangzi said, "How these minnows jump out of the water and play about at their ease! This is the joy of the fish!"
>
> Huizi said: "You, sir, are not a fish, how do you know what is the joy of fish?"
>
> Zhuangzi replied: "You, sir, are not me, how do you know that I do not know what is the joy of fish?"
>
> Huizi said: "I am not you, sir, so I inherently don't know you; but you, sir, are inherently no fish, and that you don't know what is the joy of fish, is [now] fully [established]."
>
> Zhuangzi replied: "Let's seek for the roots [of this conversation]. By asking, '*how* do you know what is the joy of fish,' you already knew that I know it, and yet you asked me; I know it by standing overlooking the Hao River."

In his brilliant analysis of this unit, Norman Teng has established the validity of Zhuangzi's argumentation. Unlike what has been argued previously, Teng holds that Zhuangzi is not dismissing Huizi's point through skilful dialecticism where a privileged position is assumed to the first person's standard of knowledge.[66] Instead of leading Huizi into a logical trap in what could be described as a dishonest way of argumentation, Zhuangzi, Teng claims, and I should like to follow him here, engages in a serious and honest way in the conversation, thus demonstrating to Huizi the flaws of disputation.

Both Huizi and Zhuangzi are paralleling each of their responses to the previous statement, thus displaying the approval—or disapproval—of what was previously said.[67]

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[66] Cf. Chad Hansen, "The Relatively Happy Fish," *Asian Philosophy* 13 (2003): 145–164, 153.

[67] Norman Teng, "Revisited," 42.

By making reference to the guidelines of argumentation as laid out in the "Lesser Pick" of the *Mozi*,[68] Teng shows that Huizi's line "I am not you, sir, so I inherently don't know you; but you, sir, are inherently no fish, and so you don't know what is the joy of fish"[69] does not improperly privilege the first person's perspective. Rather, this line suggests a reverse switch to Zhuangzi's previous response where he applies a species-specific viewpoint to the first person's perspective which, in Teng's words, proves "both elegant and powerful from an ancient Chinese dialectical viewpoint."[70] Keeping to this form of argumentation, their debate could be continued in perpetuity, thus leading to a deadlock. It is clear that both parties, Zhuangzi and Huizi, should have realised this problem; hence Zhuangzi's proposal to go back to the roots of the conversation.[71]

With his request, "let's seek for the roots [of this conversation]," Zhuangzi invites Huizi to reorient himself to a different angle. Acknowledging Huizi's ability, Zhuangzi is "acting on behalf of his beloved philosophical partner but answering the trick from his own perspective,"[72] "I know it by standing overlooking the Hao River."[73] Zhuangzi thus proposes they go back to where they started, that is, having been on top of the dam overlooking the Hao River and "sharing all along the experience of witnessing the fish swimming easily and smoothly."[74]

History portrays Huizi as a sharp disputer who is, however, prone to pointless argumentation. By inviting him to go back to the roots of their conversation, Zhuangzi, Teng suggests, makes Huizi aware of what they both knew long ago.[75]

With this form of debate, Zhuangzi is not just seriously engaging in the conversation, he also shows, by applying the technique of paralleling and inferring, the limitations of such a debate.

Debate is shown as non-productive. In fact, it is dangerous, for it leads astray from intuitive understanding and shared, common, ground. This point has not just been made in the current scene. Scene 10 has alluded to this by ridiculing Gongsun Long, and scene 4, in a similar way to the unit under review, embraces it too, thus demonstrating that argumentation and debate, in fact, language in general when used in absolute terms, can make no claim to truth. Here, as above, an argument is engaged with seriously and on its own terms, to show that it is based on the faulty premise of language serving as a frame for categories of ultimate value by reduplicating reality. The complexity of this problem forbids expounding it in explicit terms. Instead, the text exposes the problem by carrying it out before our eyes.

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[68] "What is present in one's own case is not to be rejected in the other man's; what is absent from one's own case is not to be demanded of the other man's," in Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1978), 483. (Quoted from Teng, "Revisited," 43)

[69] P. 607, l. 3/4–23.

[70] Teng, "Revisited," 43.

[71] Ibidem.

[72] Teng, "Revisited," 45.

[73] P. 607, l. 3/26–l. 4/4.

[74] Teng, "Revisited," 45.

[75] Teng, "Revisited," 46.

Conclusion

Scene 13 ends where the "Qiushui" began: at the river. The text has come full circle. However, it has taken many turns in the meantime. Each scene offered a new perspective on what was previously said, either enriching it or demonstrating that the previous understanding was simply a reflection of a tainted vision of reality because it lacked yet another perspective of looking at the world. The "Qiushui" thus instructs the text recipient without instructing. It simply takes the text recipient along on its journey so that he or she undergoes the same stages of realisation where the individual stages of that journey merely reflect a tainted—that is, limited—comprehension, to the point where intuitive understanding becomes possible. It comes as no surprise that the final sentence of the text closes with exactly that: a reminder of the roots where intuitive understanding frames our comprehension of being one with the world that surrounds us.

But this is not yet the whole story. Each scene, when taken in isolation, has its own reality too, just as there is a reality for the frog in the well, for the turtle or for the summer fly. Each of these represent one of the myriad things, and each of the myriad things has its own reality and is therefore true in itself. I should like to propose that this is exactly what the text means when it talks about "the ultimate form of being bound to one's lot" (*yue fen zhi zhi* 約分之至也).[76] But this works only insofar as no reality assumes any truth claims over other realities, or perspectives, and this brings us right back to the last unit where the dispute between Zhuangzi and Huizi demonstrates exactly that: truth claims of one reality over another do not lead anywhere.

The "Qiushui" as a whole is composed such that the different scenes float smoothly one into the other, each preparing the grounds for the one to follow. It builds up slowly to the point where the text inquires into the value of Dao in scene 7. This unit is notably placed at the centre of composition, as is typical for argumentative texts from the time of the Warring States period. However, unlike argument-based texts from that period—texts such as the "Zhong xin zhi dao," the "Qiong da yi shi," the "Tai yi sheng shui," or even the "Wu xing"—the macrostructure of the "Qiushui" does not design an architecture where each unit has its necessary place in the composition of the text.[77] Instead, it creates a dramaturgy where the text recipient is taken to different stages of realisation when following the text. The composition of the text behaves like a stream, ever changing, and as such it reduplicates the image with which the text begins and with which, in fact, the text closes. In contrast to texts such as the "Zhong xin zhi dao" or the "Tai yi sheng shui," the macrostructure of the "Qiushui" does not propound a vision of the world where everything has its given place, and I venture to say that this would in fact contradict the very concept of the "Qiushui." Instead, the structure of the text composition is such that it reduplicates the dynamics of a river, and, hence, of Dao.

This essay has cast light on the argumentative force inherent in the literary form of the "Qiushui." In the "Qiushui" thought is translated into form. The "Qiushui" does not declare, it has things performed, and such does the text recipient when following the text. The literary form is thus not only a device to express the unsayable where any kind of

[76] See scene 4, p. 573, l. 5/2–6.

[77] See Meyer, *Philosophy on Bamboo* for a discussion of the compositional structure of these texts.

declaration or definition would necessarily lead to the misrepresentation of reality; rather, the literary form is part of the message. By having the message performed, in the "Qiushui" philosophy and praxis become one.

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