

Article

Machine Hearts and Wandering Spirits in Nietzsche and Zhuangzi

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Abstract: Both Nietzsche and Zhuangzi spurn the boundaries of human convention and traditional authority and maintain that the ego-self, based on the internalization of external norms is its unwelcome byproduct. In an attempt to counteract this, these thinkers espouse a wandering approach to existence, which would affirm the existence of the variegated and perpetually evolving cosmos and help to undo the often pernicious effects of the objectification of language. Paradoxically, they maintain that a deep connection to other beings and the natural world necessitates a willingness to embrace solitude and also the dissolution of the self.

Keywords: Nietzsche; Zhuangzi; wandering; solitude; authenticity; convention; egoism

We inhabit a world wherein, as Marx prophetically warned, “all that is solid melts into air” and crises of identity and a profound sense of alienation abound. In such a world, it might seem strange to turn to texts such as the *Zhuangzi* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which advocate perpetual wandering and solitude, for they seem to extol the very fluidity that Marx had warned us about. However, despite hailing from very different epochs and cultural traditions, these texts both offer a trenchant critique of socially produced egoism that launches us on a futile quest to find a solid self lurking beneath the surface. Both advocate wandering that spurns social image-making and instead fosters a deeper connection between the natural and human world. The erroneous assumptions that underpin the ego-self are unmasked and it is seen as little more than a fiction arising out of the objectification of language.

There are nonetheless some profound differences between Nietzsche and Zhuangzi. Nietzsche’s main character Zarathustra is engaged in a constant struggle against the internalization of what Nietzsche calls the herd mentality; not because he seeks to conform, but because it is difficult for him to relinquish the desire for recognition, and guard against the resentment that ensues when such recognition eludes him and his message falls on deaf ears. As the story progresses, he retreats into an ever greater solitude and silence. Zhuangzi’s sages, in contrast, do not show evidence of such intense internal struggle. Of course, this could in part be due to completely different contexts. Zhuangzi could not have foreseen the far-reaching consequences of what Nietzsche labels the herd mentality. Furthermore, while Zhuangzi does maintain that Confucian societies propagate an exaggerated concern with self-image, the assumptions that underlie them are very different. While Confucianism depends upon a dynamic of recognition, there is nonetheless no concept of an individually isolated self since the self is seen as inherently social. While the need for social approval is deeply problematic according to Zhuangzi, it does not spawn the same kind of deep insecurity that a member of a herd might experience in isolation since the herd is little more than an agglomeration of separate selves, not a web of interconnected beings. This is perhaps why Zhuangzi’s sages can spurn convention and yet, at the same time, forge deeper social interconnections, while Zarathustra’s efforts to find friends and a community consistently fail.

1. The Trials and Tribulations of a Wandering Zarathustra

It is a surprise to many that Nietzsche's thought contains a trenchant critique of egoism given that he holds the solitary individual in such high regard. And yet, the solitary wanderer Zarathustra is always battling not only the hatred of the social herd, but his own egoism, which he acknowledges is to some extent an internalization of the herd mentality he so vociferously struggles against. Although largely unsuccessful, one of his greatest desires is for friendship which would offer a sense of human connection not predicated on the toxic combination that cements together the herd, namely mimicry and resentment.

According to Nietzsche, the cohesion of the social herd depends upon defining itself negatively in relation to what it is not, and therefore resentment and envy are fundamental components of group cohesion, ensuring that there is no genuine solidarity. As in our own era, the solitary individual constitutes a threat often met with the barbs of social scorn and vengeance. While the devastating impact of the herd on the individual has been addressed by many philosophers, what is overlooked is that in undermining solitude one also undermines the possibility of friendship. In today's world, friendship often takes the form of fleeting encounters that take place when we share common activities for the sake of our personal enrichment, but it is rare that we cultivate friendships of love which would demand, above all, the ability to let go of or go beyond the egoistic self in order to intertwine with another. Thus, it is no coincidence that it is the solitary Zarathustra who continuously underlines the importance of love, which embraces the non-human natural world as well. Overcoming egoism in Nietzsche also means overcoming human anthropomorphism, which places human beings at the centre of existence.

Much of Zarathustra's wandering is dedicated to the quest for "deep friendship," which would break through the egoistic solipsism cultivated in the "market place" wherein friendship is based largely on the exchange of "goods" for mutual benefit. Egoism, in Nietzsche's view, is antithetical to self-affirmation, because it constitutes the internalization of an external image reflected to one through the eyes of others. Such an internalized social "awareness" is inherently fragile, and so the efforts to maintain one's identity and seek approval become frenzied. Just as goods of the market can only be traded and "possessed" when objectified and externalized, a self which fantasizes about possessing itself is always only an externalized self and therefore stands on shaky ground. Zarathustra's wandering is in part an antidote to the socially produced egoism that leads to a preoccupation with identity. There is a strong sense in which Zarathustra is trying to incubate a non-self, a formidable task especially in the community of 'shopkeepers' as Nietzsche describes the town of the motley cow. Instead of self-affirmation he seeks to affirm the cosmos, which recognizes the self as an interconnected being, albeit one that is constantly engaged in overcoming.

Like Weber, Nietzsche insists that the dynamics of the market economy cannot be disentangled from religious developments. The instrumentalization of the self that forms the bedrock of the market economy is made possible by what Nietzsche calls a "slave reevaluation of values." The weak slaves were unable to manifest their life force because it was simply overwhelmed by the power of those who were stronger. In an ingenious attempt to counteract this power, the slaves made a *virtue* of their inaction, maintaining that they *chose* to restrain themselves and defined themselves as "good" in relation to the "bad" masters who exercised no such self restraint.¹ (Nietzsche 1968b, 1, 7). The asceticism already inherent in this gesture is compounded by the priests who invent a God in the presence of whom everyone, regardless of social status, must perpetually feel guilty, thereby continuously repressing life's vitality and venerating inaction and also claiming that the

¹ Gilles Deleuze points out that values emerge out of an interaction between forces, which are each trying to assert primacy over the other. There is no such thing as an essential value, or a value that is valuable in and of itself. Values are always valuable because they assert themselves against other values: "every force is essentially related to another force. The being of force is plural, it would be absolutely absurd to think of the force as singular." (Deleuze 2002, p. 6).

suffering arising from the internalization of animal instincts is caused by sin (Nietzsche 1968b, III. 15). The ebullient “masters” are dethroned as a consequence, and human beings engage in continuous warfare against life’s vitality, which Nietzsche refers to as a hatred of the earth. Linked to this process is the creditor–debtor relationship through which human beings are taught to repay their debts and thus are made predictable and “sovereign.” Nietzsche points out that (*Schulden*) debt and *Schuld* (guilt) are etymologically related. Cruelty was inflicted on the debtor by the creditor so that the human being was transformed into a being amenable to making promises (Nietzsche 1968b, II. 19). Furthermore, this monetarization of human relations meant that one person could be easily compared to another by the “objective” measurement of number. The newly minted ascetic self appears to be knowable and therefore easily possessed, because numbers project the illusion of objectivity. Number is an extreme example of what Sarah Kofman calls “*l’oubli de la métaphore*” or the forgetting of metaphor. It cloaks what she refers to as the “violent” method of establishing an equivalence, which we are forced to accept.²

This delusion, upon which our whole economy is founded, only deepens the fragility of the self, which through numbers is always defined in relation to others, not only weakening deeper social ties but also continuously repressing its “wild” and natural instincts. Together, the priests of the market and the priests of the church weave a tight web around the self. A constant battle takes place to ensure that the self remains the being that others want it to be: namely the emaciated, sickly, and conformist being that feeds the demands of the market place. As Nietzsche points out: “The virtuous still want to be paid” because their virtue is instrumental from its very inception (Nietzsche 1978, On the Virtuous, 93). Monetary utility and moral conformity go hand in hand according to Nietzsche. The religion of the marketplace has a tight stranglehold on the contemporary individual.

The great irony of this system of perpetual “exchange” is that the self is subjected to the unceasing insecurity of the marketplace. For this reason, the self gravitates towards the herd in which it can find a “false” affirmation to compensate for its emptiness arising from a disconnection from the natural world and others. Furthermore, the pulsing vitality of life, which traverses through us, cannot be completely suppressed but is kept at bay by the viciousness of the herd, whose main goal becomes to perpetuate survival of the group. Although we desire to overcome socially imposed constraints, the only legitimate desire that is permissible within a market economy is the desire for more acquisitions, and thus a form of excess not only is woven into the system but ensures that resentment and envy are continuously cultivated: “For the possessor who does not know how to make use of the free time which his possessions could purchase him will always *continue* to strive after possessions: this striving will constitute his entertainment, his strategy in his ‘war against boredom’.” Thus, in the end, the moderate possessions that would suffice the man of spirit are transformed into actual riches—riches which are in fact the glittering product of spiritual dependence and poverty. They only *appear* quite different from what their wretched origin would lead one to expect because they are able to mask themselves with art and culture: for they are, of course, able to *purchase* masks. By this means, they arouse envy in the poorer and the uncultivated—who at bottom are envying culture and fail to recognize the masks as masks—and gradually prepare a social revolution: for gilded vulgarity and histrionic self-inflation in a supposed ‘enjoyment of culture’ instill into the latter the idea ‘it is only a matter of money’—whereas, while it is to *some* extent a matter of money, it is “*much more a matter of spirit*” (Nietzsche 2009, 310). This excess is not what Nietzsche calls the Dionysian excess, which demands the collapse of individual boundaries, thereby affirming the primordial “oneness” (*Ureine*) between all living things. In fact, the market society is predicated on stifling the Dionysian because this unfulfilled desire can intensify the anxiety that propels us on a frenzied quest for ever more acquisitions. Thus, the general insecurity generated by the repressed Dionysian is necessary to fuel the logic of the market economy.

² See (Kofman 1972, p. 69).

Although Zhuangzi does not subscribe to a notion that parallels the herd mentality, there is nonetheless a powerful criticism of the instrumental thinking that defines human social orders. Such thinking is based on habit, a habit that Nietzsche thinks must first be seared into consciousness. When Huizi complains of gourds that produced “fruit enough to hold five piculs” because they were useless as water containers, Zhuangzi admonishes him for not knowing how to use “big things” (Zh 2, 34) and suggests an alternative use: “Why didn’t you think of making it into a great tub so you could go floating around the rivers and lakes, instead of worrying because it was too big and unwieldy to dip into things! Obviously you still have a lot of underbrush in your head!” (Zh 2, 35). In a similar vein, he points out the “uses” of useless trees that are too “gnarled and bumpy” to serve carpenters (Zh 2, 35). But because of this, the useless tree could live out its years in “Not Even Anything Village” or in the field of “Broad and Boundless” and welcome those who wanted to sleep under the shade (Zh 2, 35). In other words, there is a cost to the tree’s use, just as there is a tremendous spiritual cost inflicted upon an individual who thinks with the market.

Eventually, we are left with what Nietzsche calls last men, for whom a catatonic waking life is but an imitation of a dreamless sleep, which remains utterly immune to the truths of the night where identities dissolve. After all, the “last man lives longest” (Nietzsche 1978, Prologue, 17). However, the suppressed natural instinct also ensures that there will always be present within the herd a subterranean rage, which is directed against those who dare to abandon the norms and conventions. It is manifested in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in the cruelty the herd exhibits in relation to the tightrope walker, who dared to venture above the city and tumbled to his death as a result of the jester “who uttered a devilish cry and jumped over the man who stood in his way” (Nietzsche 1978, Prologue, 19). When the tightrope walker tumbles to the ground, the herd scurries, unwilling to confront death: “people rushed apart and over one another, especially at the place where the body must hit the ground” (Nietzsche 1978, Prologue, 19). Zarathustra is the only person who accompanies the dying man and resolves to bury him with his own hands. This is a profound gesture of friendship.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra begins with Zarathustra emerging from the solitude he had sought out when he left the security of his home: “When Zarathustra was thirty years old he left his home and the lake of his home and went into the mountains. Here he enjoyed his spirit and his solitude, and for ten years did not tire of it.” (Nietzsche 1978, Prologue, 9). His solitude allows him to drink from the plenitude of nature, unencumbered by other human beings, but eventually the plenitude begins to spill over and needs to be shared with other human beings. The sun he addresses is a secularized sun that is no longer worshipped as a deity but is rather one “great star”, not even *the* great star. In other words, when Nietzsche turns towards the sun, he does not do so in the context of a hierarchically ordered universe. Instead, he relates *to* the sun experiencing his likeness to it because he participates in the Dionysian flow of energy that it bequeaths to him. It incites in him the desire to spread his wisdom needing “outstretched hands to receive it” (Nietzsche 1978, Prologue, 10) just as the sun gives to those who receive its “overflow.” It is in solitude that he can drink of the Dionysian and his solitude is rejuvenating, not only because it affords him the chance to bask in the natural world but also because it allows him to be liberated himself from human sentiments of envy, for the sun’s quiet eye “can look even upon an all-too-great happiness without envy” (Nietzsche 1978, Prologue, 10). Free from the social gaze, he can again experience the oneness of the *Ureine*, which he then is compelled to try to share with other beings.

Zarathustra anthropomorphizes the sun, ascribing to it intention because *he* benefits from it when of course in reality it just gives off energy without purpose. He then takes upon himself the burden of this “purpose”, which is why he first enters the marketplace wanting to bellow his sermon of the “overman” (*Übermensch*) who would create new values and break free from existing social mores. Although he proclaims loudly that he loves him “whose soul is overfull so that he forgets himself”, he does not manage to forget himself as is evidenced by his bombastic announcements: “I am a herald of the lightning and a heavy drop from the cloud: but this lightning is called *overman*” (Nietzsche 1978, Prologue, 16). The message of the overman is a difficult one to receive, because Zarathustra is

describing a being beyond the human who somehow is able to go beyond the narrow perspective of self-preservation and even humanity, recognizing that going-under, and down-going (including one's death) are causes for celebration. On the one hand, the message is completely distorted, because people are really looking for a new saviour whom they can herd behind. What Zarathustra ends up realizing towards the end of the text is that his bold proclamations have cultivated the very following he hoped to avoid as is evidenced by the "ass festival" in which he finds a group of higher men braying "J-a" in the presence of an ass. The gods have tumbled along with Zarathustra's message, but human beings cannot give up the need to worship, and they would rather worship an ass than "nothing at all", even while mocking both the act of worship and Zarathustra's message in doing so. Instead of heralding the arrival of the overman, they now worship the load-bearing animal of humans in the form of an ass. In other words, they worship themselves. On the other hand, in the very act of wanting to convey a message through speech, he already does violence to what Klossowski describes as the tonality of the soul, which cannot be expressed in words, and must necessarily collapse into muteness: "The tonality of the soul, in making itself thought, was pursuing its own inquiry, to the point where the terms of the latter were reconstituted as a muteness: this thought spoke to itself of an obstacle that the intension to teach it would stumble over at the outset"³ In other words, Nietzsche engaged in a task which was bound to fail, because as Klossowski points out, the "intention to teach and learn is the obverse of the soul's tonality which can neither be taught nor learned."⁴

On the one hand, Zarathustra returns to the community because he longs to connect with his own kind, secularizing the message of Jesus: "Behold this cup wants to become empty again, and Zarathustra wants to become man again" (Nietzsche 1978, Prologue, 10). Zarathustra wants to engage in an emptying of the soul, not as an ascetic impulse, but as a kind of affirmation of Dionysian *Ureine*. Furthermore, he wants to become man again, because he has become animal as well. His kinship with the natural world is manifested in the fact that his only enduring friends are the eagle and the serpent. He tells his disciples "He who has knowledge walks among men *as* among animals" (Nietzsche 1978, On the Pitying, 88). Rather than being an attempt to exert domination, his gift-giving is his way of participating in the generosity and fecundity of nature which overflows. He compares himself to the north wind that brings down the "ripe figs" (Nietzsche 1978, Upon the Blessed Isles, 85). By highlighting the gift-giving virtue against the virtue of appropriation, Nietzsche exposes the assault on nature that occurs when we turn appropriation into the ultimate value. The problem is that a society predicated on envy, resentment, and appropriation (all of which are inextricably linked) cannot receive gifts because it cannot extricate itself from the logic of the creditor-debtor relationship, wherein a gift instantaneously becomes a debt owed. Real gift-giving is generosity without purpose, and therefore is also freed from the logic of indebtedness. In an ironic comment, Nietzsche notes that what made gold valuable initially was its utter uselessness: "how did gold attain the highest value? Because it is uncommon and useless and gleaming and gentle in its splendor, it always gives itself. Only as the image of the highest virtue did gold attain the highest value" (Nietzsche 1978, On the Gift-Giving Virtue, 75). Giving is sacred or "holy" (*heilig*) because it is purposeless. The German word *heilig* is interesting because it also contains the root *heil* which means to heal, which is a connotation that is significant in Nietzsche's thought since the selfishness of the marketplace is described as a sickness. It is an "all-too-poor and hungry one that always wants to steal: the selfishness of the sick. The thievish greed of this selfishness speaks of a diseased body" (Nietzsche 1978, On the Gift-Giving Virtue, 75). We are unable to connect to the inherent fecundity of the natural world, and participate in its creative capacity for constant generation. Zarathustra's solitude was necessary in order to relearn the virtue of generosity that is not infected by the logic of the market.

³ See (Klossowski 1998, p. xviii).

⁴ See (Klossowski 1998, p. xix).

Zarathustra hopes to enter the community and liberate others from their social shackles, because he wants to liberate himself, but it is a hermit that realizes the impossibility of the task Zarathustra has set for himself. He warns Zarathustra of the dangers of the city and a people that would not be receptive towards his gift of “fire.” The risky abundance of life he offers is not welcome in a town which above all privileges comfort and survival. Zarathustra is an “arsonist” because the gift he has to offer would destroy the very foundations of the city and its mores. It is a gift suited to loners and wanderers, not one that will be embraced by the madding crowd: “They are suspicious of hermits and do not believe that we come with gifts. Our steps sound too lonely through the streets” (Nietzsche 1978, Prologue, 11). One cannot bring the mountains into the city, as Zarathustra attempts to do, for from within the walls of social order, their abundance is always rejected as dangerous excess. Nietzsche reveals an important paradox here, one that thinkers such as Freud articulated in more theoretical fashion, namely that the very thoughts and desires that make us feel alive, which in Nietzsche’s mind are manifested in a constant overflowing, constitute a threat to “civilized” life. We trade in life, and our connection to the natural world, for survival and comfort, resigning ourselves to a perpetual and painful alienation. To live fully, one must also be prepared to go to the cusp of self-dissolution. Zarathustra’s wandering has little to do with “finding himself” but rather is a process of trying to let the self go. The hermit has appreciated this, but even he suffers from loneliness, so he needs God to keep him company. Realizing this, Zarathustra refrains from telling him God is dead, in order not to deprive him of this panacea to his loneliness. This, too, is an act of friendship.

Friendship and the gift-giving virtue are intertwined, although this is easily overlooked given the militant language Zarathustra uses to describe friendship: “If one wants to have a friend one must also want to wage war for him: and to wage war, one must be *capable* of being an enemy. In a friend one should still honor the enemy. Can you go close to your friend without going over to him? In a friend one should have one’s best enemy. You should be closest to him with your heart when you resist him” (Nietzsche 1978, On the Friend, 56). When one reads these passages while keeping in mind Nietzsche’s condemnation of egoism, they take on a different hue. A friend is not somebody one tries to appropriate or persuade to bring to one’s side. This is why the friend is also an enemy. Furthermore, a friend helps one break out of the solipsism of the ego, a solipsism born out of *ressentiment*. The desperation that impels one to reduce the other to the same means that “I and me are always too deep in conversation: how could one stand it if there were no friend” (Nietzsche 1978, On the Friend, 56). The conversation between I and me is a conversation that is initiated by a concern for one’s “social image”. The appropriation by oneself for oneself, which to Hegel is indicative of the advancement of spirit, for Nietzsche emanates from a position of weakness. In the famous master–slave dialectic, Hegel’s slave grants the master the recognition he covets, but only as an instrumental way to hold onto his life, thereby turning himself into the master’s tool. Hegel sees a problem in the falsity of the recognition granted by a mere tool, but for Nietzsche, the desire for recognition in itself constitutes the slavish desire.

Friendship offers the possibility of a relationship outside of the dynamic of the herd. This means that the *difference* between one’s friend and oneself is the greatest gift, which is why one must be prepared to be one’s friend’s enemy. Respect for difference necessarily entails struggle. When one overcomes boundaries, one must always struggle in Nietzsche’s view. One must refrain from reducing the friend to a version of oneself. Nietzsche’s account of friendship flies in the face of the Hegelian master–slave dialectic, because it does not end in a relationship of domination or submission. In true friendship, one does not try to reduce one person to the other: “Have you seen your friend asleep-and found out how he looks? It is your own face in a rough and imperfect mirror. Have you ever seen your friend asleep? Were you not shocked that your friend looks like this? O my friend, man is something that must be overcome. A friend should be a master at guessing and keeping still: you must not want to see everything. “(Nietzsche 1978, On the Friend, 57). The friend is both similar and radically different and the acceptance of this paradox is vital for deep friendship to develop. The desire to “see everything” is a form of appropriation. One must keep the mystery of one’s friend alive, a mystery

which one touches upon in *silence* when one sees one's friend asleep. Silent communication will take on greater and greater importance throughout the text.

Zarathustra himself succumbs to slavish desire when he bursts out of his solitude upon looking into a mirror held up by a child, realizing his teaching is in danger. He expresses a "foolish happiness" because his enemies have now given him a purpose by distorting his teaching. The child who holds up the mirror does not speak. The voiceless child, a symbol in Nietzsche of a soul not yet infected by egoism, brings his own egoism into sharp relief. But Zarathustra misconstrues the message in the mirror. While he sees in it the social misappropriation of his teachings, he does not see his own role in contributing to this misappropriation through his mode of delivery. Zarathustra desires disciples and one who desires disciples will attract followers. He wants to usher in a new era of redemption freed from slavish resentment, but in so doing falls victim to the very resentment he ostensibly spurns. Any time one is concerned with one's public image, one easily falls prey to the logic of resentment. Only the hunchback notices this about Zarathustra when Zarathustra urges the cripples not to resent their "disabilities" that may invite public ostracism, but rather embrace them for they constitute their very identities. The hunchback replies: "But why does Zarathustra speak otherwise to his pupils than to himself" (Nietzsche 1978, On Redemption, 142). Zarathustra has no friends, not only because people are not ready for his message and misinterpret it, but because he too is not yet ready for them.

Zarathustra's use of cripples as the sole interlocutors to challenge Zarathustra directly is reminiscent of the role that cripples play in Zhuangzi's thought. In a chapter entitled "Signs of Virtue Complete", Zhuangzi refers to a panoply of characters who are all "de-formed" from a conventional perspective. The title of the chapter, 德充符 (*de chong fu*) is interesting, since *fu* can refer to an official seal and the characters who people the text would not be the types to garner any official approval. But this is a seal of virtue, not a seal of approval, and like Nietzsche's cripples they are outsiders who see a truth that others cannot see. Wang Tai has had his foot cut off which suggests that he has been punished for some offense, but has as many followers as Confucius (Zh 5, 68). However, as a result of this deformity, he recognizes that even his body is a thing and he "does not shift with things" (Zh 5, 68). His perspective is completely non-egoistic and so he "regards the loss of his foot as a lump of earth thrown away" (Zh 5, 69). He simply moves with the changes of heaven and earth. He does not covet social recognition, which has been denied to him anyway. The hunchback in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* may be the only person who poses a direct challenge because his status as an outsider allows him to recognize Zarathustra's own desire for public approval and followers. Such recognition will never be afforded to the hunchback.

To some extent, each time one speaks, one enters the dynamic of the desire for recognition, which is why speech must always be accompanied by silence. Therefore, Zarathustra yells at the firehound: "Believe me, friend Hellishnoise: the greatest events—they are not our loudest but our stillest hours. Not around the inventors of new noise, but around the inventors of new values does the world revolve; it revolves *inaudibly*" (Nietzsche 1978, Of Great Events, 131). As the book progresses, Zarathustra falls increasingly into silence and solitude as he tries to free himself of the leader-follower dynamic that plays out with his disciples. Repeatedly, he provides them with tough love, forcibly pulling back, leaving them behind until they learn to "go away and resist Zarathustra" and even are "ashamed of him" (Nietzsche 1978, On the Gift-Giving Virtue, 78). Once he has his disciples, he finds it hard to embrace his solitude, growing full of "impatience and desire for those whom he loved, because he still had much to give them." (Nietzsche 1978, The Child with the Mirror, 83). Although he finds it hard to contain his desire to give, he needs to learn to maintain a "sense of shame as a giver" (Nietzsche 1978, The Child with the Mirror, 83) so as not to be seduced by the lure of recognition for the handing out of his gifts.

Nietzsche's descent from the mountaintops manifests not only a social desire to find friends, but represents a longing for death and self-dissolution in keeping with the Dionysian: "The creator wanted to look away from himself; so he created the world. Drunken joy it is for the sufferer to look away from his suffering and lose himself. Drunken joy and loss of self the world once seemed to

me" (Nietzsche 1978, On the Afterworldly, 31). This of course refers to the destruction of individual boundaries that is so pleasurable when we lose ourselves. In so doing, he is also implicitly begging the community to destroy him because the Dionysian also represents an intoxication with death. Life and death are not opposites, but rather are connected through desire. Death is not just the end of life, but marks the merging of the self into the abundance of nature. This affirmation of death challenges another fundamental goal of the market place, which is to secure survival and comfort. This is why Zarathustra's message only succeeds if it fails, because the community must necessarily spurn a figure such as Zarathustra. Had he succeeded, he would have succumbed to the logic of what Klossowski terms "gregarious" thought, which has a levelling effect.⁵ Along his travels, Zarathustra encounters a youth who is just coming to terms with this paradox: "I no longer trust myself since I aspire to the height, and nobody trusts me any more . . . When I am at the top I always find myself alone. Nobody speaks to me, the frost of loneliness makes me shiver . . . the higher I climb the more I despise the climber" (Nietzsche 1978, On the Tree on the Mountainside, 43). He despises the climber because the herd mentality which is threatened by all that departs from convention has infected him. When Zarathustra tells him that the tree stands lonely in the mountains because it has grown high and waits for lightning, the youth exclaims, "Yes Zarathustra you are speaking the truth I longed to go under when I aspired to the height, and you are the lightning for which I waited" (Nietzsche 1978, "On the Tree on the Mountainside, 43). The same forces that invigorate us and catapult us beyond the inhibiting boundaries of the socially contrived egoistic self, are also the harbingers of our death. Creation and destruction are part and parcel of the same process. The fullness of life can only be realized by also celebrating death: "Everybody considers dying important; but as yet, death is no festival . . . My death I praise to you, the free death which comes to me because I want it. And when shall I want it. He who has a goal and an heir will want death at the right time for his goal and heir. Thus I want to die myself that you my friends may love the earth for my sake; and to earth I want to return that I may find rest in her who gave birth to me" (Nietzsche 1978, On Free Death, 74). A true embrace of the process of continuous overcoming, and of life's vitality means that one willingly dies when the time has come to be overcome. This is why Zarathustra wills his own death.

An embrace of death is also evident in Zhuangzi's philosophy as can be witnessed in a chapter entitled "Perfect Happiness" which ironically is replete with stories of death since the union with the universe in death is complete. Here, Zhuangzi's seeming nonchalance in the aftermath of the death of his wife is remarked on by his friend Huizi, who finds him with his "legs sprawls out pounding on a tub and singing" (Zh 8, 192). Huizi assumes this is a gesture of disrespect, accusing him of "going too far" (Zh 8, 192). But Zhuangzi points out that when she first died he grieved "like anyone else" (Zh 8, 192). Then, he realized that before she had a body and a spirit, a "change took place and she had a spirit", after which she had a "body" and then another change occurred and "she was born" (Zh 8, 192). Death was another one of these changes, like the "progression of the four seasons" (Zh 8, 192). Her death is something that happens to her; she does not actively seek out her own dissolution. Death in Nietzsche's thought is linked to excess, and thus can become a desire for the self to merge into the cosmos. It is thus a desire for self-dissolution that comes out of a longing to be the whole. The death and life instinct are connected and both pose a threat to a smoothly functioning social order. For Zhuangzi, death and life are equally part of the transformation of things that we neither long for nor desire. We simply participate in the process and do not try to herald its arrival.

Thus, Nietzsche throws into question not only the survival instinct but also the whole valorization of success: "Physiologists should think before putting down the instinct of self-preservation as the cardinal instinct . . . A living thing seeks above all to discharge its strength—life itself is will to power; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent results" (Nietzsche 1968a, 15). The will to power is a kind of vitality that resists being confined within any walls, including the walls

⁵ See (Klossowski 1998, p. 7).

of self-identity. It relishes excess and is a kind of pathos that is in all living things. It is not a desire for dominance in itself, as is commonly presupposed, (although domination could be its byproduct). Seeking domination for its own sake would be a form of power based on the logic of *ressentiment*. Rather, the will to power is a desire for movement, creativity, and exceeding boundaries. The root of the term *Macht* (power) is *machen* which means to make. We do not *have* a will to power, we *are* will to power which constantly seeks to overflow. Nietzsche's texts abound with images of excess, spilling over, the overman and self-overcoming: "And life itself confided this secret to me: 'Behold, it said, 'I am that which must always overcome itself.' Indeed, you call it a will to procreate or a drive to an end, to something higher, farther, more manifold: but all this is one and one secret Whatever I create and however much I love it—soon I must oppose it and my love; thus my will wills it." (Nietzsche 1978, On Self-Overcoming, 115). The will to power is the desire to overcome all boundaries, including those of the self. Overcoming is also linked to a rejection of egoism: "One must learn to *look away* from oneself in order to *see much*: this hardness is necessary to every climber of mountains" (Nietzsche 1978, The Wanderer, 153).

In order to reach the depths and the heights, one must be willing to go to places inaccessible to the eye. Nietzsche describes the man of knowledge as "obtrusive with his eyes", thereby only scratching the surface of things: "But you, O Zarathustra, wanted to see the ground and background of all things; hence you must climb over yourself-upward up until even your stars are *under* you" (Nietzsche 1978, The Wanderer, 153). Seeing only occurs at a distance, whereas the curiosity that Zarathustra exhibits drives him to climb. He is afflicted by what in German is known as *Fernweh*, namely the continuous desire to be somewhere else. (It is contrasted with the word *Heimweh*, which is translated as homesickness). He looks for joy not "in certainty but in uncertainty" (WP 545).

Nietzsche's language of climbing the heights leads to assumptions that he is propagating a philosophy glorifying hierarchy and dominance, a view which often blinds readers to the radically nonhierarchical and also *indifferent* nature of the universe of nature that he describes through the eternal return (*Ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen*.) According to this metaphor, whatever can happen has already happened (Nietzsche 1978, On the Vision and the Riddle, 158), and the ugly and small return with the same regularity as the great. Shifting constellations of power in which some dominate over others will always occur, but none will be everlasting. The eternal recurrence is a "vision of the loneliest" because only the lonely can embrace their own insignificance in a cosmos in which they are only ever "moments." If purposelessness is embraced rather than feared, then the mocking scorn of the dwarf who taunts Zarathustra with the idea that "every stone that is thrown must fall" will not touch him because it does not matter if it falls. Only in loneliness can he see that his insignificance is also a kind of "lightness" of being that permits creativity unshackled by purpose. Two lanes stretch out in two directions towards eternity. "They contradict each other" and yet, at the gateway of the moment, they "come together" (Nietzsche 1978, On the Vision and the Riddle, 158). There is no forward trajectory that gives us the illusion of purpose.

As the story progresses, Zarathustra increasingly embraces his solitude, and his quest for disciples transforms into a desire for his future children, a desire that grows out of a happiness that he does not seek, but rather one that runs after him (Nietzsche 1978, On Involuntary Bliss, 163). It happens to him after four days on the open ocean away from his friends. Images of unbounded expanse take over, as he abandons the desire to make things comprehensible and certain, instead wanting to merge into the boundless openness of nature. He realizes that his mountain-climbing was propelled by this: "And all my wandering and mountain-climbing were sheer necessity and a help in my helplessness: what I want with all my will is to *fly* to fly up into *you*" (Nietzsche 1978, Before Sunrise, 164). It is not his own action that is most significant, but the pull of boundlessness that transports him. Instead of broadcasting his message, he reverts increasingly to silence, for words are like the clouds that obstruct the view of the open sky. Daylight gives the illusion of boundaries, while in night all boundaries collapse, including the boundaries of language: "The world is deep—and deeper than day had ever been aware. Not everything may be put into words in the presence of the day" (Nietzsche 1978, Before

Sunrise, 166). The spirit of gravity (*Geist der Schwere*) represents the weight of Platonic and Socratic thought as Lampert suggests⁶ but also the weight of all words which constitute a form of resentment against life, by seeking to render life comprehensible and thereby setting “boundary stones” (Nietzsche 1978, On the Spirit of Gravity, 192). When all is made comprehensible, then life becomes a “grave burden” which interferes with the purity of knowledge. This grave burden includes the egoistic self obsessed with its identity: “And verily much that is our *own* is also a great burden!” (Nietzsche 1978, On the Spirit of Gravity, 193). In fact, our obsession with self-identity is closely tied to our obsession with knowledge. In contrast to this, Zarathustra advocates lightness and dance, which respond to the openness of the world and revel in its unpredictability. He is no longer weighed down by the quest for truth: “but this blessed certainty I found in all things: that they would rather *dance* on the feet of Chance” (Nietzsche 1978, Before Sunrise, 166). Relishing this openness eventually allows him to simply “*pass by*” the community when his ape, who represents the resentment of his former self towards the herd, implores him to “spit on this city of shopkeepers” (Nietzsche 1978, On Passing By, 177). Propelled into motion by a new joy and love rather than resentment, he has learned to pass by “where one can no longer love” (Nietzsche 1978, On Passing By, 182).

Nonetheless, while Zarathustra has overcome his resentment, and as a result experiences a liberating joy and affirmation of the cosmos, the deep friendship that he sought has also eluded him and his love is reserved for his animals and eternity itself. “If ever I spread tranquil skies over myself and soared on my own wings into my own skies; if I swam playfully in the deep light-distances and the bird-wisdom of my freedom came—but bird wisdom speaks thus: ‘Behold there is no above, no below! Throw yourself around, out, back, you who are light! Sing! Speak no more! Are not all words made for the grave and heavy? Are not all words lies to those who are light? Sing! Speak no more! Oh, how should I not lust after eternity and after the nuptial ring of rings the ring of recurrence? Never yet have I found the woman from whom I wanted children, unless it be this woman whom I love: for I love you, O eternity!’” (Nietzsche 1978, The Seven Seals, 231). He must now hold out for the coming of his children and the possibility of a new type of human who will be capable of sharing in and receiving his love. All he is left with towards the end of the text is hope.

2. Wandering Lightly in the *Zhuangzi*

The *Zhuangzi* is a text that is filled with stories of not only wandering but also intraspecies transformation. There is, as in Nietzsche, an attempt to merge with the creative forces of the cosmos, but there is no preoccupation on the part of Daoist figures with their own doing or even their own creativity. Instead, these characters participate in a kind of doing that is at the same time a letting go of all intention (*wu wei* 無為), recognizing that all doing is responsiveness: “practice having no thoughts and no reflections and you will come to know *Dao*. Only when you have no place and can see no way forward will you find rest in *Dao*. Have no path and no plans and you will obtain the *Dao*” (Zh 22, 187) Furthermore, there is a cosmological dimension to *wuwei* since it marks a symbolic return to the primordial oneness of the *Dao*, which is assumed to be a nondifferentiated nothingness. Although sages can never definitively rid themselves of the body’s physical boundaries, through transformation and “wandering” they become porous or open boundaries rather than closed. Paradoxically, movement then becomes a kind of return to stillness and nothingness.⁷ The agency of *wuwei* emerges between beings and is never purely an individual action.

The true man (*zhenren* 真人) “breathes with his heels” while “the mass of men breathe with their throats. Crushed and bound down, they gasp out their words as though they were retching” (Zh 6, 78). The heels connect the true man to the earth, from which he draws his energy, while the throat

⁶ (Lampert 1986, p. 198).

⁷ Michael Thomas has referred to this primordial condition as a “pure potentiality for everything that is.” He points out that in pre-Daoist cosmological texts, this primordial nondifferentiated state often takes the form of a watery abyss. See (Thomas 2005).

is commonly associated with speech. Ungrounded speech causes us to choke on our own words. According to Zhuangzi, the frenetic purposive behaviour most human beings engage in is an outgrowth of the tendency of our language to objectify and separate. It disrupts the harmonious rhythm of the cosmos and leads to quarrelsome interaction. While Zhuangzi does not use the word “objectification”, he criticizes the kind of discriminating language that readily lends itself to dispute (*bian* 辯): “If discriminations are put into words, they do not suffice” (Zh 2, 44). In contrast, nonobjectifying language is expansive: “Great words (*da yan* 大言) are clear and limpid, little words (*xiao yan* 小言) are shrill and quarrelsome. In sleep, men’s spirits go visiting; in waking hours, their bodies hustle” (Zh 2, 47). In sleep, boundaries collapse, while in waking hours, they are once again established which propels a kind of anxious activity associated in Zhuangzi with excessive purposiveness.⁸ Language and knowledge play a crucial role in our instrumental relationships to other things and beings. Ironically, when we experience things as separate from us, we desire to obtain them in order to overcome the separation. This is one reason why Zhuangzi, as David Chai notes, challenges us to return to “unknowability”: “the nothingness associated with the Dao is an empty equanimity whose purpose is to facilitate the actualization of its own unknowability.”⁹ Unknowability from Zhuangzi’s perspective is necessary to re-experience the primordial oneness of the world and to sever the link between action and acquisition.

We are used to associating action with individual agency, but Zhuangzi insists that every transformation we effect is also a process of allowing ourselves to be transformed. It is akin to the musicality of a pianist who must listen to the music she is playing so that the music also plays her. The famous passage describing the butchery skills of Cook Ding is a profound example of *wuwei* at work: “A good cook changes his knife once a year-because he cut. A mediocre cook changes his knife once a month-because he hacks. I’ve had this knife for nineteen years and I’ve cut up thousands of oxen with it, and yet the blade is as good as though it had just come from the grindstone. There are places between the joints, and the blade of the knife really has no thickness. If you insert what has no thickness into such spaces, then there’s plenty of room-more than enough for the blade to play about in it . . . whenever I come to a complicated place I size up the difficulties, tell myself to watch out and be careful, keep my eyes on what I’m doing, work very slowly and move the knife with the greatest subtlety, until—flop! The whole thing comes apart like a clod of earth crumbling to the ground. I stand there holding the knife and look all around me, completely satisfied and reluctant to move on and then I wipe off the blade and put it away” (Zh 3, 51). Cook Ding actively watches and feels. He allows his knife to be guided by the meat and doesn’t mangle it by hacking away. Upon completion of his task, he emerges from a type of trance, which is why he looks around. Not seduced by his own efficacy, he also knows that it is time to stop.

Individuals exercising *wuwei* such as Cook Ding are often said to be following their spirit (*shen* 神): “now I go at it by spirit and don’t look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop and spirit moves where it wants” (Zh 3, 51). Cook Ding’s *shen* allows him to wander through the oxen with his knife. He is encumbered neither by his will, nor his knowledge, nor his perceptions. In order to liberate one’s *shen*, one must also undo one’s affections (*jie xin shi shen* 解心释神). The *shen* is often contrasted with the sense organs, including the heart, which together with the intellect and language objectify things by virtue of their attachment to them. Because Cook Ding does not see things as bounded, he no longer sees a single oxen. Instead he is just part of a process of moving the knife through multiple channels, rather than identifying the oxen as an object to be cut up. These pathways guide him and his skill inheres in his ability to let himself be led.

⁸ Youru Wang notes that disputation and discrimination of words are intimately connected: “the character *bian* (dispute) is the synonym of another *bian* (discriminate) because the former contains the meaning of the latter. . . . Dispute as such implies using language to discriminate, divide.” (Wang 2003, p. 98).

⁹ See (Chai 2014, p. 363).

There is, however, also a darker side to this metaphor which I do not want to ignore and it is one that Nietzsche would recognize as part of the Dionysian. Butchery is a violent act, even though the cook is cutting up an oxen that is already dead. He no longer sees the oxen before him as a separate thing, but this, and his purposeless focus on the movement itself, seem to render him indifferent to the death and dismemberment of the creature that he glides through with his knife.¹⁰ A similar “flow” can occur in the midst of killing. Furthermore, it is not the nature of the oxen to be killed for human consumption, any more than it is the nature of the horse to be bridled and tamed for the sake of human beings: “When horses live on the plain. They eat grass and drink from the streams. Pleased, they twine their necks together and rub, angry, they turn back to back and kick . . . But if you pile poles and yokes on them and line them up in crossbars and shafts, then they will learn to snap the crossbars, break the yoke, rip the carriage top, champ the bit and chew the reins” (Zh 9, 106). There can be a gruesome fluidity in the act of murder, which is part of the reason Nietzsche insists in the *Birth of Tragedy* that the Dionysian has a destructive side which must find an outlet in festivals, lest it erupt in bloodshed. People in war have discovered with horror that killing can become addictive in its purposelessness, especially when the initial hurdle of the fear of death is overcome.

The oxen was once a living creature, and the irony of this image is that the movement of the knife made possible by death mimics the interconnected flow of life. In other words, the oxen continues to guide, even while a lifeless corpse. A similar skill applies to the carpentry of Wheelwright Pian. Duke Huan was sitting reading an ancient text and the wheelwright accuses him of reading “nothing but chaff and dregs of the men of old” (Zh 13, 152). His craftsmanship requires responsiveness to the wood in order to create the shape of a wheel, and no instruction manual will help him: “When I work on a wheel, if I hit it too softly, pleasant as this is, it doesn’t make for a good wheel. If I hit it furiously, I get tired and the thing doesn’t work. So not too soft, not too vigorous, I grasp it in my hand and hold it in my heart. I cannot express this by word of mouth, I just know it” (Zh 13, 115). Although obviously the wheelwright intends to make the wheel and Cook Ding intends to butcher the oxen, their purposiveness must be accompanied by a kind of forgetting of the purpose that initiated their action. This suggests that Daoist texts do not advocate purposelessness per se, as is often presupposed, but rather a forgetting of purpose while engaged in purposive activity.

There is a difference though between the *wuwei* of Cook Ding and the wandering of the sage, who is completely unsullied by the process of human objectification. The sage travels freely through the world, seemingly immune to potential dangers and truly does nothing: “‘The perfect man is pure spirit’ (‘*zhi ren shen yi* 至人神矣’) replied Wang Ni. ‘Though the great swamps blaze, they cannot burn him, though the great rivers freeze, they cannot chill him; though swift lightning splits the hills and howling gale shake the sea, they cannot frighten him. A man like this rides the clouds and mist, straddles the sun and moon and wanders beyond the four seas. Even life and death have no effect on him, much less the rules of profit and loss’” (Zh 2, 18). The potential harbingers of death no longer frighten the perfect man because his *shen* is connected to them. The perfect man cultivates life (*yang sheng* 養生) within his body, no longer viewing the body as his own. Because he does not care about its preservation, he adapts to whatever happens to befall him.

Each body is a teeming mass of multiple organisms operating in unison. Their interconnection can lead us to falsely believe that there is some kind of “True Lord” (*zhen jun* 真君) or centre that unifies these variegated creatures into a whole. When Cook Ding describes the oxen, despite using the word “oxen”, he no longer sees the oxen as a single being. Similarly, the text throws into question the notion of the unified self: “The hundred joints, the nine openings, the six organs, all come together and exist here. But which part should I feel closest to. I should delight in all parts you say? But there must be one I ought to favor more. If not, are all of them mere servants? But if all are servants, how can

¹⁰ Philip Ivanhoe dismisses the concern I have just outlined, maintaining that because the actions of the sage accord with *tian*, the purposeless flow of actions by figures such as Cook Ding can be assumed to be morally exemplary: “there is a pattern in Nature and the Daoist sage follows it.” See (Ivanhoe 1993, p. 652).

they keep order among themselves? Or do they take turns being lord and servant? It would seem as though there must be some True Lord among them. But whether I succeed in discovering his identity or not, it neither adds to nor detracts from his truth" (Zh 2, 38).

The sage wanders because he participates in the constant interchange and coming together of multifarious life forces. *He* does not just wander. He allows other beings to propel him along the way just as Liezi rides the wind. His wandering is symbolic of a creature that no longer has a distinct form, such as the shadow, which continuously takes on different shapes. This is why wandering becomes an antidote to the limitations of conventional society, in this context a Confucian one, which prescribes a role and place for each individual. The sage is led to the far reaches of the cosmos which represents a transgression of social mores but also a departure from that most essential of human conventions, namely language. In fact, one could argue that wandering becomes a kind of counterweight to the objectifying tendencies of speech. In Nietzsche, the limitlessness of the open sky contrasts with the limited nature of the constrictive social world, and creativity must naturally prepare one to destroy the old idols in order to make way for the new and liberate oneself from its stagnation. This path is necessarily a lonely and difficult one as old idols must be smashed to make room for the new. Sandra Wawrytko points out that Nietzsche's demolitions are based on a notion that one is either free or enslaved, and thus is grounded in a kind of dualism that is absent in Zhuangzi.¹¹ Perhaps this is because while for Zhuangzi, boundaries are limiting, they also represent possibilities for transformation. There is no smashing in Zhuangzi and no philosophizing with a hammer because the creativity in nature is seen as fundamentally harmonizing, while in Nietzsche, creativity takes the form of a surge of energy that longs to destroy old boundaries.

Nietzsche's Zarathustra never completely relinquishes the desire to have a following and thus retreats into solitude to guard against this urge. In contrast, some of Zhuangzi's sages are able to live within the community and therefore transform it in the process. Although they are in the social world, they are not *of* it. One example of such a figure is the ugly Ai Tai Tuo, because he "chimed in with others", and never attempted to lead, "when men were around him they thought only of him" and "women begged their fathers to let them become his concubine" (Zh 5, 72). Someone like Ai Tai Tuo is completely unconventional and yet has an uncanny ability to be at home regardless of his location, even in the midst of conventional society. His inner wandering allows for his outer adaptability, which in turn encourages others to adapt to him. While Zarathustra attempted to smash the herd from the outside to no avail, Ai Tai Tuo unintentionally transforms and harmonizes social relations from within. But, it is also important to note that Ai Tai Tuo does not face the same kind of entrenched and potentially malicious herd that confronts Zarathustra.

However, this also means that Ai Tai Tuo is not dependent on others, unlike Zarathustra who has a parasitic relationship to the herd against which he defines himself. Ai Tai Tuo can be in the very midst of the society because he sees its limits as an opportunity for transformation. Zarathustra must pass by, not only because he does not want to be infected by resentment, but also because the community is now a limit that must be smashed within himself. Ai Tai Tuo is solitary because he does not conform to the conventions of the human community, but he is never alone, because he transforms along with the community. Zarathustra is solitary *and* alone. The herd remains unchanged throughout the course of his journeys.

In both texts, there is a hankering for the creativity inherent in the openness of nature. When Nietzsche looks at the dome of the cloudless sky, it fills him with longing, in part because it contrasts so starkly with the morality of the community that constrains him. In Zhuangzi, this longing for shapelessness does not demand a rejection of shapes (*xing* 形) but rather their continuous transformation (*hua* 化). Unlike Zarathustra who peers into mirrors, the perfect man in the Zhuangzi is a mirror allowing him to take the shape of others reflected in him. He does not objectify himself

¹¹ See (Wawrytko 2008, p. 530).

and so becomes a shapechanger: “The perfect man uses his heart like a mirror—going after nothing, welcoming nothing, responding but not storing. Therefore he can win out over things and does not hurt himself” (Zh 7, 97). The categories of self and other have no inherent meaning, although their fiction can shape our responses to the world: “Without the other, the self doesn’t exist, without the self, nothing can be obtained” (*fei bi wu wo, fei wo wu suo qu* 非彼無我, 非我無所取). What we call the self is always externally defined, which is why there is no self without others who reflect an objectified image back to us, even in the simple act of calling us a name. This fiction of the self in turn propels us to grab or obtain things (*qu* 取) for the self. Thus, even our seemingly individualized acts of acquisition are the result of a fictional self that is created for us by the perception of others. In order to reestablish a connection between people that goes beyond the trappings of language, one must practice solitude, since solitude allows for a nonlinguistic encounter with the world. But in Zhuangzi, one can practice such solitude in the midst of the social world. One does not abandon language completely, but instead repeatedly undoes it to ensure that one “forgets the trap” after having caught the hare.

If the self is no longer viewed as an enclosed entity, but rather as a porous process, then the justification for hierarchy and authority disappear. According to Zhuangzi, this includes the hierarchy that arrogates to humans superiority over other creatures and beings. As a result, someone like Uncle Lame-Gait can be completely nonplussed by the willow tree that shoots out of his arm. When questioned about his nonchalance he responds: “No what is there to resent? To live is to borrow. And if we borrow to live, then life must be a pile of trash . . . You and I have come to watch the process of change and now the change has caught up with me. What is there to resent?” (Zh 18, 193). Ironically, Uncle Lame-Gait has succeeded where Zarathustra fails: he has overcome resentment of the past by utterly letting go of his identity.

Letting go of one’s attachment to linguistic constructions is an important part of Zhuangzi’s strategy. To do so, one must examine language in the process of emergence, not simply regard it as an already congealed form. The origins of language according to Zhuangzi inhere in the particularly human sounds that we make, that like a child’s early sounds make no sense. This does not mean they are meaningless for they constitute a response to life itself. Zhuangzi calls this the “piping of men” and compares it to the “piping of the earth” (Zh 2, 36). He suggests that human language mirrors the language of nature: “the trees have openings like noses, like mouths, like ears, like jugs, like cups . . . those in the lead calling out yee, those behind calling out yuu. In a gentle breeze they answer faintly but in a full gale the chorus is gigantic” (Zh 2, 36). Our speech, which impels us to arrogate to ourselves dominion of nature is no different than the wind that roars through the tress. Furthermore, the wind only whistles in this manner when it travels through the hollows of the trees. The movement of the wind and the stillness of the hollows in the tree *together* create the sound. We must not forget that our speech also is a natural phenomenon that begins in a seemingly arbitrary manner, like the noises *yee* and *yuu*. Eventually, it too must recede into silence for it is no more meaningful than the sound of the wind.

When these pipings congeal into commands that enforce behaviour we have morality, which, according to Zhuangzi, is necessarily coercive. At the time of “complete virtue”, “people live side by side with birds and beasts sharing the world in common with all life. No one knows of distinctions such as nobles and the peasantry” (Zh 5, 73). Zarathustra hopes to catapult humanity beyond good and evil, but still wants to promulgate new tablets and laws of his own to replace the old ones. In contrast, the absence of power relationships is manifested in Zhuangzi’s text by the sheer panoply of characters that appear. One of the most striking differences between the two texts is that *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* has a single main character with others forming the background for Zarathustra’s story. While Zhuangzi does appear as a character in his text, he is but one creature among a plethora of beings, both human and non-human.

Morality is an outgrowth of the objectification of language. Too much linguistic repetition produces ‘heavy’ or ‘repeated’ words: “(*zhong yan* 重言). There is an interesting parallel here with Nietzsche’s spirit of gravity (*Geist der Schwere*), which could also be translated as a spirit of heaviness.

The implicit connection made between heaviness and repetition is interesting since repetition is like a cudgel used to enforce behaviour that accords with the words, allowing people to “parade profit and righteousness” so that our “likes and dislikes, and what you approve and disapprove” lead us to “produce nothing more than servile agreement” (Zh 27, 196). Like Nietzsche, Zhuangzi suggests that the primary purpose of morality is to encourage conformity. Every objectified word transforms a complex process into a thing, capable of being consumed and owned by human beings. In contrast to heavy words, Zhuangzi proposes we engage in the speaking made possible by “wine-goblet words” (*zhi yan* 卮言). Wine goblets are receptacles that give shape to the fluids they contain, but do not solidify them: “With these goblet words that come forth day after day, I harmonize all things in the Heavenly Equality, leave them to their endless changes and so live out my years” (Zh 27, 304).

Rather than abandoning language, and retreating into a stubborn silence, Zhuangzi models a new way of speaking that opens one’s spirit to appreciate strangeness and wonder. In other words, language itself wanders, refusing to become an instrument of authoritative declarations. Zhuangzi begins his text with a chapter entitled “Free and Easy Wandering” (*xiao yao you* 逍遙遊), which not only describes the journeys of peculiar creatures, but also exhibits wandering in language which unsettles the very words we use. It describes creatures who cannot be anthropomorphized in language by virtue of their sheer size and also because they are not human.¹² Their description is intended to make the human mind appear small: “In the darkness of the north there is a fish, whose name is Kun. The kun is so huge I don’t know how many thousand li he measures. He changes into a bird whose name is Peng. The back of the Peng measures I don’t know how many thousand li across” (Zh 1, 29). The *Universal Harmony or Book of Wonders* (*qi xie zhe* 齊諧者) is a text that records the strangeness of the world, which does not arrive at definitive conclusions about anything. It describes the roc’s journey but then wonders if the “deep blue of Heaven” is indeed its “real colour?” Or whether it is “because it is so far away and has no end” (Zh 1, 29). Persistent questioning guards against the solidifying propensity of language.¹³ The text eschews authority encouraging the proliferations of questions and uncertainties instead. Eske Mollgard notes that the main function of these “double questions” is to “suspend propositional discourse and open up a space between affirmation and negation in which saying (*yan*) is able to speak the world.”¹⁴

Strangeness and wonder entice one to wander. The chapter takes this fantasy to the limits of the fathomable describing the journeys of beings such as Liezi who could “ride the wind and go soaring around with cool and breezy skill” (Zh 1, 32). Another image describes the sage “with skin like ice and snow, and gentle and shy like a young girl. He does not eat the five grains but sucks the wind, drinks the dew, climbs up on the cloud and mist, rides a flying dragon and wanders beyond the four seas” (Zh 1, 33). Sages are not trapped within the world of human making as most human beings are when they are mired in their all-too-human purposive busy-ness which paradoxically results in physical exhaustion: “The farmer is not content if he does not have his work in the fields and weed patches; the merchant is not content if he does not have his affairs at the market place and wellside. The common people work hardest when they have their sunup to sundown occupations; the hundred artisans are most vigorous when they are exercising their skills with tools and machines. If his goods and coin do not pile up, the greedy man frets; if his might and authority do not increase, the ambitious man grieves. Servants to circumstance and things, they delight in change and if the moment comes when their talents can be put to use, then they cannot keep from acting. In this way they all follow along with the turning years letting themselves changed by things. Driving their bodies and natures on and

¹² Graham Parkes points out that Nietzsche and Zhuangzi share “a common enemy” in anthropomorphism and encourage the cultivation of a non-human perspective by “weighting the imagery on the side of the non-human cosmos.” (Parkes 1983, p. 237).

¹³ Robert Gaskins refers to Zhuangzi’s tendency to guard against dualistic thinking as the “double bind method of instruction” which “defy simple affirmation or negation and pressure the reader to transcend dualistic thinking.” (Gaskins 2008, p. 109).

¹⁴ (Mollgard 2007, p. 83).

on, they drown in the ten thousand things, and to the end of their days never turn back. Pitiful are they not" (Zh 24, 267).

While the sages in Zhuangzi's text are liberated from familiarity and a stultifying business, they are not mired in the agonizing social solitude of Zarathustra either: "The sage has his wanderings. For him, knowledge is an offshoot, promises are glue, favors are a patching up, and skill is a peddler. The sage hatches no schemes, so what use has he for knowledge. He does no carving, so what use has he for glue? He suffers no loss so what use has he for favours? He hawks no good, so what use has he for peddling? ... He has the form of a man, but not the feelings of a man. Since he has the form of a man, he bands together with other men. Since he doesn't have the feelings of a man, right and wrong cannot get him. Puny and small, he sticks with the rest of men. Massive and great, he perfects his heaven alone" (Zh 5, 75). This offers a stark contrast to Zarathustra who must leave, or "pass by" in order to ensure that he is not infected by the resentment of the community. Because the sage covets no recognition, he is hardly noticed while still drawing human beings to him. He does so because of his nonauthoritative demeanor. Unlike Zarathustra, he does not try to bellow his message into the marketplace. He is more like the Kierkegaardian man of faith, who has the outward appearance of ordinariness but whose inwardness sets him apart. He can be in the social world, but not *of it*.

Transformation and wandering mark a return to a kind of primordial state of unity before distinctions emerged in which there was "perfect knowledge" for "nothing could be added" (Zh 2, 14). The perfect non-knowledge is eventually eroded as distinctions are carved out: "Those at the next stage thought that things exist, but recognized no boundaries among them. Those at the next stage thought there were boundaries but recognized no right and wrong. Because right and wrong appeared, the Way was injured and because the Way was injured, love became complete" (Zh 2, 41). But even the injury of the way provides a possibility for return to it through love. The "purpose" of wandering, is to return to the intrinsic fluidity and oneness of the cosmos, which transcends even the attachment to home and a life wedded to things. Travelling is a kind of constant *becoming*. Zhuangzi himself is described as travelling with "creative things or 'making' things" (*zao wu zhe* 造物者) and thus his vision is "vast and penetrative", "unshackled by anything or anybody" (Zh 33, 304).

The sage's need to return to the root of the cosmos is at odds with the purposive, instrumental nature of much of our existence. It also throws into question our desire to advance and achieve, which launches us onto a treadmill of frenetic movement. Wandering in Zhuangzi is also a means of cultivating non-knowledge: "Why don't you try wandering with me to the Palace of Not-Even-Anything ... Already my will is vacant and blank. I go nowhere and I don't know how far I have gotten. I go and come and don't know where to stop. ... I ramble and relax in unbordered vastness, Great Knowledge enters in, and I don't know where it will ever end" (Zh 22, 241). Non-knowledge is not simply ignorance. It is a process of undoing the objectifying effects of knowing (*bu zhi* 不知) and thereby of forgetting the self (*wang qi shen* 忘其身). The sage thus appears to be ignorant, although his ignorance is profound: "Ordinary men strain and struggle; the sage is stupid and blockish. He takes part in ten thousand things and achieves simplicity in oneness. For him, all the ten thousand things are what they are and thus they enfold each other" (Zh 2, 47).

While instrumental thinking may provide comfort and ease, it can have deleterious effects on the emotions. In one passage, Zi Gong travels to Chu and saw an old man was carrying water he had drawn from the well to irrigate his fields and was using up most of his strength in this activity (Zh 12, 134). Zigong informed him that there were machines to do this and the old man responds: "I have heard my teachers say, where there are machines, there are bound to be machine worries, where there are machine worries there are bound to be machine hearts" (Zh 12, 134). With a machine heart in your breast, you've spoiled what is pure and simple and without the pure and simple, the life of the spirit knows no rest" (Zh 12, 134). This is a profound message in an era where we increasingly become appendages to our machines, especially our cell phones, allegedly in the name of a technological advancement that simplifies our lives. Long before the advent of the industrial revolution, Zhuangzi recognized the anxiety which would be spawned by technological aids precisely

because of its alienating effect. As we rely increasingly on machines or objects, we begin to see the world as a series of disconnected things, and this generates worry.

Thus, Zhuangzi's radicalism goes much further than that of Nietzsche. All objectification, whether through language or technique, is considered dangerous, including the seemingly innocent act of repeating a metaphor. Only when Zarathustra gives eternity a name can he fantasize about marrying it and thereby appropriate it. He can marry eternity the word which he incants, not the process eternity itself. But metaphor has a different function in Nietzsche than it does in Zhuangzi. The eternal return, as I pointed out above, also contains within it the ugliest thought, which is difficult to bear. By chanting its name, he offers what Peter Sloterdijk calls a rhetorical "notturmo within which opinions that are too severe to be heard without producing despair can be voiced from beneath of well-formed sentences and attestations of courage."¹⁵ Such repetition in Nietzsche's text draws attention to the rhythmic, musical nature of language which attempts to resuscitate its Dionysian roots in musical sounds. As Sarah Kofman points out, he thereby reminds us of the metaphorical roots of all language which is not absent in the use of logical concepts but simply is repressed and forgotten.¹⁶ However, Zhuangzi's language is even more radical in its attempt to resist the ossification of metaphor through repetition. Other than the word *Dao*, there is no single predominant metaphor in the text but rather an often confusing proliferation of stories which are often only loosely linked to each other and do not follow any sequential logic. But Nietzsche sees the world not just as harmonizing but also threatening and destructive, so he cannot easily dispense with the metaphysical comfort that the repetition of metaphor offers. Zhuangzi's imagery by comparison is weightless, because he sees the *Dao* as fundamentally harmonizing.

One example of a such a light, but also confusing, tale is that of the famous butterfly dream, which casts into doubt any conceptions we have about our identity, even the identity which most of us assume we can take granted, namely that of a human being: "Once Zhuang Zhou dreamt he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know he was Zhuang Zhou. Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Zhuang Zhou. But he didn't know if he was Zhuang Zhou who had dreamt he was a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming he was Zhuang Zhou. Between Zhuang Zhou and a butterfly there must be some distinction. This is called the transformation of things" (Zh 2, 49). When all beings are assumed to be intertwined, it does not much matter whether or not Zhuangzi is a butterfly or Zhuangzi, nor is the waking reality inherently more real than the dream. In fact, the dream may reveal a truth that the waking reality cloaks. On the other hand, there must be some sort of difference as indicated by Zhuangzi's bewilderment, but no attempt is made to end the perplexity. Thus, Zhuangzi's wandering occurs not just within the physical world, but within the recesses of his own mind.

Through his trenchant critique of objectification, Zhuangzi offers what is perhaps one of the most radical critiques of power and authority ever written, insisting that it begins when we take language and identity too seriously. Power in Zhuangzi is not an inevitable inequality between life forces, as Nietzsche avers, but rather a human propensity to reduce what is moving into a static form so that we can possess, tame, and control it. Only when boundaries are drawn around things can they be comparatively assessed in a manner that permits the development of hierarchies. Power for Zhuangzi is linked to enclosure, even for the powerful who find themselves wedged into a role. When Zhuangzi is approached by an official to administer lands, he tells the official the story of a "sacred tortoise" which died when kept in an ancestral temple "wrapped in cloth and boxed". He tells the official that like the tortoise, he would rather continue to drag its tail about in the mud (Zh 17, 146–47). That simple act of dragging one's tail in the mud, it turns out, is the most difficult one to perform once we have been seduced by the comfortable trappings of language and the temptations of power. But it is one

¹⁵ See (Sloterdijk 1989, p. 12).

¹⁶ See (Kofman 1972, p. 68).

that must be performed lest we forget the importance of the mud and the creatures that inhabit it. What Zhuangzi is doing is not only rejecting the status and accoutrements of power. He is illustrating a different kind of power, which resides in the capacity to see the potential of other creatures, who inhabit a world that is not human. If all of us aspire to officialdom, or status, we remain trapped in a world of human making and so we stuff the turtles into our temples, making them objects of *our* veneration. Instead of worshipping, Zhuangzi suggests we too must plunge into the mud and in so doing develop a healthy confusion about our status and identity as human beings.

3. Conclusions

Both Nietzsche and Zhuangzi spurn the boundaries of convention and the human hubris that accompany the desire to know the world. In fact, one could argue that knowledge and convention are closely intertwined since they represent efforts on the part of human beings to reduce the world to a manageable size, rendering things predictable, and thereby easily controlled. But this is accompanied by a pernicious resentment as Nietzsche points out. For one thing, the undercurrent of rage that results from the suppression of life forces seeks an outlet, which is often directed at other people, particularly those who dare to depart from social conventions. Furthermore, it leads to weariness with life as symbolized by the pale and sickly beings of people in the text of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Zhuangzi was writing at a time when the herd mentality had not yet evolved to the same degree. His targets are the Confucian pedants with their moral codes who rigidly cling to ritual and, therefore, are unable to participate in the transformative creativity inherent in nature.

Both thinkers see nature as a salve for the objectified world that human beings have constructed, in part by a reification of language. In fact, solitude and wandering within the natural world are necessary in order for human beings to begin to appreciate the interconnectedness of all things. Daoist sages wander beyond human communities to the untamed and far reaches of the world. This wandering is also accompanied by a collapse of the ego-self, which is viewed as a social construction, based on an externalized image of the self projected to one by others, and then internalized. It is inherently fragile, because it is a delusion, and thus precipitates a relentless quest for social recognition in a futile attempt to solidify this mirage further. According to Zhuangzi, in the Confucian world it leads people to “parade” the virtues of righteousness and benevolence, and in Nietzsche, a deep insecurity is also behind the moralizing impact of Judeo-Christian morality which masks the vindictive spirit that underlies it. For both thinkers, conventional morality is deeply conformist and is also unnecessary when one becomes aware of the intertwined nature of all things.

In an attempt to counter the pernicious potential of language, both thinkers offer images of boundlessness, nebulousness, lightness, flying, and dance, all of which depend upon an intimate relationship to the natural world. When Zhuangzi’s sages engage in *wuwei*, they abandon all purpose and seem to enjoy the sheer pleasure of movement. Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, after periods of intense mourning and rage directed at the herd, eventually allows himself to be transported by the open expanse of the ocean and the sun to experience joy. But in contrast to Zhuangzi, this openness also is accompanied by tremendous risk, because the world is not always harmonizing. Nietzsche sees the world as one of tempests and storms, as well as open skies, which threaten to destroy as well as create. There is never a complete abandonment of the ego since the Apollonian boundaries of the self cannot be completely let go without a plunge into madness. Perhaps it is because Zhuangzi’s sages have abandoned the ego completely, a tall order indeed, that they see nature as ultimately harmonious. Only a creature not wedded to its own existence in any way would fail to be threatened by nature’s cruelty. While Zhuangzi’s sage is more at ease than the tortured Zarathustra, it is also clear that his egoless equanimity is also much harder to attain.

Evidently, we cannot abandon language all together, but both thinkers advocate for the recognition that language must also be permeated by non-speech and silence. For Nietzsche, this would be a language that sings rather than asserting, since it no longer claims to capture the world. Zhuangzi’s wine-goblet words are like the whistling of the wind, which constitutes a response to the world, rather

than a form of control of it. It is a language that resists the impulse to be reduced to a technological tool. Zarathustra sings his ode to the eternal return, rather than presenting it as an intellectual scaffolding which can offer a new conceptual grasp of reality. Both thinkers have recognized that it is not enough to simply leave the conventional world behind; one must also transform it. However, departing from the conventional world has dramatic consequences. For Zhuangzi it would shatter all hierarchies, whereas for Nietzsche new hierarchies would emerge, but none would be everlasting. The overcoming of boundaries in Zhuangzi leads to a deeper harmony, whereas in Nietzsche such transgressive acts are connected to a desire for overflow and excess manifested in the Dionysian impulse. In both cases, it would mean embracing what most human beings are very reluctant to embrace: an existence that is uncertain, shifting, and moving rather than fixed and secure. The vivacious life-affirming self must also be prepared to accept its own dissolution. This is a very tall order indeed, as it seems that much of the linguistic edifice we have constructed is mobilized to shelter us from this reality.

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