Zhuangzi《莊子》

Book 17: "Autumn Floods" 秋水

Translated by Frank Saunders Jr.

Introduction

The main dialogue of "Autumn Floods" and the sections that follow encapsulate many of the themes found elsewhere in the *Zhuangzi* anthology. It thereby offers an effective introduction to the main contours of Zhuangist thought. The dialogue blends both metaphysical and ethical elements in an effort to illustrate a conception of living well informed by an appreciation of our necessarily limited perspectives and the futility of arriving at once-and-for-all, universal system of value. Importantly, the text does so within the broader context of a critique of a particular conception of the good life promoted by moralizing thinkers of the day, including Confucius, whose perspective remains limited by a commitment to the goodness of a single "corner" (*qu* 曲) of the Way rather than to an appreciation of its cosmic enormity. The chapter also ridicules the sophists or logicians, Gongsunlong 公孫龍 and Huizi 惠子. What emerges from the texts is a characteristically Zhuangist humility, among other virtues, that promises an inner peace and freedom.

The translation below attempts to make the text accessible to the modern English reader without doing too much violence to the original Chinese. The main commentary consulted for textual and interpretive decisions is the version prepared by Chen Guying,[1] though I will identify any departures from his edition in the footnotes. I have also made use of the commentary by Li Mian[2] and the English translations by James Legge[3] and A.C. Graham.[4] The numbered paragraphs mostly follow the section divisions utilized by most modern commentaries. I have in some cases further divided these sections into smaller paragraphs for readability. I have also included notes explaining certain editorial decisions and have attempted to clarify certain references and obscure phrases to the best of my ability.

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[1] Chen Guying 陳鼓應. *Zhuangzi jinzhu jinshi* 莊子今注今釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983).
[2] Li Mian 李勉. *Zhuangzi Zong Lun Ji Fen Pian Ping Zhu* 莊子總論及分篇評注 (Taibei: Taiwan shang wu yin shu guan, 1973).
[3] The James Legge translation is available alongside the original Chinese on https://ctext.org/zhuangzi.
[4] Graham, A.C. *Chuang-tzu: The Inner Chapters* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001).

Main text

17.1

The autumn floods arrived, and the hundred streams poured into the Yellow River. Its surging currents were so great, and the riverbanks were separated by so much water,[5] that one [looking from one side to the other] could not distinguish between an ox or a horse. The River Lord was delighted by the situation and was so pleased with himself that he took himself to contain all the world's beauty. Following the river's currents eastwards, he eventually arrived at the North Sea. When he arrived, he faced east and looked intently but could not see where its waters end. The River Lord then turned himself around and looked back [at his work].[6] Turning back towards the North Sea he said to its God with a sigh, "There's a rustic saying that goes: 'When someone hears the Way a hundred times, he thinks that nobody else can compare.' This is really about me. I have heard of people making light of the teachings of Confucius and demeaning the righteousness of Bo Yi, and at first, I didn't believe them; but now, I've seen your sheer infinitude. Had I not arrived your doorstep, I would still be in trouble, continuing to relish within the confines of my own domain."

17.2

The North Sea replied as follows: "[You can't] discuss the ocean with a frog in a well[7], as he is limited by his living space. [You can't] discuss the autumn with a summer insect, as it is restricted by its lifespan. [You can't] discuss the Way with the Corner Scholars,[8] for they are shackled by their teachings. Having left the confines of your banks and shores, you have now seen the greatness of the Sea, in turn coming recognize your shamefulness [in being so prideful]; now, though, you are able to learn about the Great Patterns. For all the water in world, none is greater than the Sea. The myriad rivers all return to it; I know of no time when they stopped flowing, but it is never really full. The remotest villages take from it; I know of no time when they did not, but it is never empty. It does not change with the passage of the seasons. It does not know floods or droughts. It exceeds the flow of the Jiang and He [rivers] beyond measure. That said, I've never used these facts to puff myself up. I received my form from

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[5] Reading *an* 岸 for *si* 涘 (Chen, 443).

[6] There are a few ways to understand this phrase, literally, "his face and eyes began to turn." It could refer to a change in countenance, so a metaphorical "turning," or a literal turning around to see what was behind him. I've gone with the latter option (Chen, 443).

[7] There is some controversy over whether the frog in this infamous saying was originally a fish (Chen, 443).

[8] "Corner Scholars" refers to learned persons who focus on "one corner" of the Way while neglecting the full picture. This language is found in both book 33 of the *Zhuangzi* as well as in book 21 of the *Xunzi*.

Heaven and Earth, and I received my breath from *yin* and *yang*.[9] I liken my existence between Heaven and Earth to that of a small rock or tree on a great mountain. As I maintain my perspective of myself as something small, how could I instead consider myself great?

"Consider the four seas within the great expanse of Heaven and Earth—do they not resemble a small mound within a vast wetland? Consider the Central States occupying its place within the great expanse of the Sea—is it not like a grain of rice within a massive granary? When we refer to all things, we use the number 'ten thousand', and humankind constitutes but one of them. We speak of the people living in the nine provinces, but those places where grains and food are grown and where boats and carts can pass make up just a small portion [of all that land]. Compared to the ten thousand things, does it not resemble the tip of a single hair on the body of a horse? The succession of the Five Emperors, the struggles of the Three Kings, the anxieties of benevolent persons, the labors of dutiful scholars—it all took place right here! Bo Yi declined [to take over the kingdom] and thereby garnered a reputation [for virtue];[10] Confucius talked about it and was considered to be of broad learning—both in turn took themselves to be great. Is this not just like you taking pride in your floods?"

17.3

The River Lord asked, "If that's the case, then can I deem Heaven and Earth 'Great' and the tip of a hair 'Small'?"

The North Sea said: "No. For all things, measurement has no limit;[11] time never stops; allotments (*fen* 分) are not constant; and beginning and end are not fixed.[12] Thus, those of Greater Knowledge observe both what is remote and what is at hand, and so deem things small without taking them to be meagre and deem things large without taking them to be great, as they

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[9] *Yin* and *yang* are two fundamental, oppositional forces in ancient Chinese cosmology, with *yin* representing the hidden, dark, and feminine and *yang* representing the bright and masculine elements of the cosmos.

[10] Bo Yi (and his brother Shu Qi) were legendary figures in Warring States writings who served as stock examples of paragons of virtue. This passage refers to Bo Yi refusing to receive the throne from his father, as would have been custom, because he felt that his father preferred his younger brother, Shu Qi, instead, and so declined the kingdom out of filial piety—an infamously selfless act. Shu Qi in turn declined the kingdom as well, since it would have been unfilial for the younger brother to take over in place of the elder brother, and so as a result both brothers fled into exile to live out their days. Confucians and others celebrate the brothers' uncompromising commitment to virtue.

[11] Limit, *qiong* 窮, is defined in the Mohist *Canons* (A42) as "the point at which there is no further room for measurement." See https://ctext.org/mozi/book-10#n168.

[12] Reading *gu* 固 for *gu* 故 (Chen, 448).

understand that measurement is infinite. They clearly ascertain both ancient and modern, and so are not troubled by things being far away, gathering [wisdom] without seeking, as they understand that time never stops. They examine things whether full or empty, and so comprehend [them] without being joyous; they acknowledge losses without being disturbed, as they understand the inconstancy of allotments. [Those with Greater Knowledge] are clear regarding the simple path, and so they take neither joy (*yue* 說)[13] in life nor despair in death, as they understand the fluidity of beginning and end. You must recognize that what a person knows can scarcely be compared with what one does not know, and the time a person is alive can scarcely be compared with the time they are not. Thus, when one seeks out the Realm of Arriving at Greatness by means of Arriving at Smallness, she will be perplexed, disordered, and unable to achieve self-realization (*zide* 自得). Looking at it from this perspective, how indeed can we know that the tip of a hair is sufficient to settle the Boundaries of the Microscopic? And how indeed can we know that Heaven and Earth are sufficient to mark out the limits of the Realm of Arriving at Greatness?"

17.4

The River Lord said: "Lots of learned people claim that, 'The subtlest essence has no shape. The largest thing cannot be encircled.' Is it true?"

The North Sea said: "From the perspective of something miniscule, what is large is inexhaustible, and from the perspective of something large, what is miniscule is surely subtle. The subtlest essence is but the smallest of the small. The gigantic is the largest of the large. The difference is a matter of convenience[14] and the possession of [relative] powers [owing to the circumstances].[15] Subtlety and coarseness both presuppose a thing's having shape. If something has no shape, then it cannot be numerically divided. If something cannot be encircled, then it has no numerical limit. The coarseness of things can be discussed in words, and the subtle essences of things can be reached in thought. Those areas where words cannot discuss or where thoughts cannot reach cannot be ranked among the coarse or subtle.

"Thus, the conduct of the Great Person does not issue from the intention to harm others, though she does not think much of

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[13] Rather than *shuo* 說 (Chen, 449).

[14] Chen reads "convenience" (*bian* 便) as "bias" or "side" (*bian* 邊). His reading suggests that differences in perspective arise from (and result in) the preponderances biased views, adding an overall critical connotation to the text. My own reading, following Legge, is instead that perspectives emerge from circumstantial (though not absolute) appropriateness, but Chen's interpretation may indeed be correct.

[15] Chen (450-451) places these sentences before the previous two. I'm not comfortable modifying the text in this way, so I will leave it unamended.

her benevolence and charity. She does not act for the sake of benefit, but nor does she look down upon her subordinates. She does not struggle for wealth and riches, but nor does she make much of her reluctance and deference. She does not begrudge the help of others, and she does not make much of relying on her own strength; nor, however, does she look down on the greedy and impure.[16] Her conduct departs from mere custom, but she does not make much of her uniqueness. Where her actions do accord with the masses', she does not disparage flatterers.[17] The ranks and riches of the world are not enough to encourage her, and punishment and humiliation are not enough for her to consider it disgraceful.[18] She knows that *shi* and *fei*[19] cannot be apportioned and that the miniscule and the great cannot be distinguished. Thus I have heard it said, 'The person of the Way is unheard.[20] The utmost virtue is not realized. The Great Person has no self.' Such are the utmost divisions."[21]

17.5

The River Lord said: "Regarding both what is external to things and what is internal to things, how can we arrive at the distinction between prized and worthless? How can we arrive at the distinction between small and great?"

The North Sea said, "From the perspective of the Way, things are neither prized nor worthless. From the perspective of the thing itself, it prizes itself and deems others as worthless. From the common perspective, a thing's being prized or not lies not in the thing itself. From the perspective of their differences, if you use what is great [about it] as a criterion (*yin* 因) for deeming things great, then nothing is not great. If you use what is small [about it] as a criterion and deem it small, then nothing is not small. When you know Heaven and Earth to be a grain of rice or know the tip of a hair to be a hill or a mountain, then the difference in number can be ascertained. From the perspective of accomplishments, when you use what a thing has as the

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[16] Here I'm following Li (326) and Legge, who read the relevant characters as *tanwu* 貪污, which implies greediness. Chen instead has *pinwu* 貧污, implying poverty, though I am unsure of the basis for this emendation.
[17] Following Legge. The implication may be that the Great Person is neither stubborn nor judgmental.
[18] Xunzi in Book 22 argues at length against the thesis attributed to Song Xing that "To be insulted is not disgraceful" 見侮不辱, and Song Xing appears as an (imperfect) Daoist exemplar elsewhere in the *Zhuangzi*.
[19] *Shi* and *fei* judgments refer to the most general pro and con attitudes of early Chinese philosophy, often translated as "this" and "not" or "right" and "wrong." A major theme in early Chinese philosophical writings is to find a stable way (*dao* 道) to reliably distinguish *shi* and *fei*, though this project is frequently rejected in the *Zhuangzi*.
[20] Meaning that she has no reputation (Li, 326).
[21] Chen believes that this entire paragraph passage about the Great Person is a later addition and was not originally part of the dialogue owing to its jarring thematic shift. I leave it here translated anyway.

criterion for deeming it as having [something], then nothing is lacking. And if you use what a thing lacks to deem it as lacking [in general], then nothing is not lacking. Once you understand that East and West are opposed to one another but cannot exist without one another, then [you will see that] the division of achievements is settled. From the perspective of interests, if you use what is so of it to deem it so, then nothing is not so. If you use what is *fei* (not this/wrong) of it to deem it *fei*, then nothing is not *fei*. If you understand that Yao [the ancient sage] and Jie [the ancient tyrant] each took himself to be 'so' while also deeming one another *fei*, then the interests in question can be understood.

"Formerly, Yao yielded the throne to Shun[22] and became Emperor, while Kuai [King of Yan] yielded the throne to [chancellor] Zhi, but the rule was cut short.[23] Tang and Wu fought for the throne and became kings, while Bai Gong fought for the throne and was eliminated.[24] From this perspective, the ritual propriety of yielding and contending, the conduct of Yao and Jie, and the seasonality of being prized or worthless—none of these can be consistently maintained. A battering ram can be used against a city wall, but it cannot be used to fill in a hole. This is called the 'uniqueness of instruments.' The legendary horses, Qi Ji and Ma Liu, could gallop a thousand *li*[25] in a single day but would not be as good as a fox or a weasel at catching rats. This is called the 'uniqueness of skills.' The horned owl collects fleas at night and can observe the tip of a hair, but during the daytime it glares angrily and cannot see a mound or a hill. This is called the 'uniqueness of natures.'

"Thus, it is said, 'Why not follow what is right (*shi*) and have nothing to do with what is wrong (*fei*)? Why not follow what is orderly and have nothing to do with what is chaotic?' This shows a lack of clarity with respect to the patterns of Heaven and Earth and the essential features of the myriad things. It is really akin to honoring Heaven while having nothing to do with Earth, or

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[22] The sage king Yao famously gave the throne to Shun, a distant relative, rather than to one of his sons, whom he deemed useless. This episode is often cited in the Chinese classics as the pinnacle of virtuous, meritocratic rulership favoring ability over familial relationships in determining political office.

[23] In an effort to demonstrate his humility, and perhaps to imitate the infamous yielding of the throne by Yao, Kuai, King of Yan 燕, one of the ancient Warring States, turned over rulership to one of his chancellors, Zi Zhi, in 318 BCE. Shortly thereafter, the state of Qi invaded Yan in 314 BCE and was all but conquered as a result.

[24] Bai Gong refers to Sheng 勝, grandson of king Ping of Chu 楚平王 (d. 516 BCE) and son of Prince Jian 太子建 (d. 520 BCE). His biography in the *Shiji* and other ancient sources records that he was fond of war and led various military campaigns. He had a special enmity for the state of Zheng 鄭, where his father was killed. He eventually launched a rebellion in the state of Chu, but he was defeated and hanged himself.

[25] The precise distance of one *li* has varied over time but it is typically understood to be about 0.5 kilometers or 0.3 miles.

honoring *yin* while having nothing to do with *yang*, which is something that clearly cannot be carried out. Nevertheless, they talk this way without stopping. If they are not stupid, then they are liars. The Five Emperors of the past had unique circumstances in which they yielded the throne, and the Three Dynasties[26] had their own unique ways of passing down the throne. One who departs from the times and rebels against custom is called a usurper. One who goes along with the times and obey customs is called a follower of duty. Hush, River Lord! How could you possibly know the groupings of the prized and worthless, or the houses of small and great!"

17.6

The River Lord said, "If that's the case then what should I do? What should I not do? What ultimately ought I refuse or accept; what should I pursue or dwell in?"

The North Sea said, "From the perspective of the Way, what can be prized and what can be worthless? Call it 'cycling through the changes.' Don't have rigid or firm intentions or you'll be too incapacitated to follow the Way. What should we belittle and what should we pride ourselves on? Call it, 'letting things have their turn.' Don't be single-minded in your conduct, or else you'll depart from alignment with the Way. Be stern, like the ruler of a state with impartial virtue. Be placid, like a spirit being sacrificed to, dispersing bounty impartially. Be broad, like the infinitude of the four corners of the Earth, without boundaries or borders. If you keep all the myriad things close to your heart, which would receive any special assistance? Call it, 'being without any particular direction.' If the myriad things are all equal, then which would be short, and which would be long? The Way has no end or beginning, but things have both life and death, without relying upon being complete [in any respect], at one point empty, and at one point full, neither being determined by [a thing's] form. The years cannot be refused,[27] and time does not stop. Decay and growth, fullness and emptiness [recycle]—with any end, there is a beginning. This is how to discuss the Method of the Greatest Duty (*da yi zhi fang* 大義之方) and discourse the order of all things. The lives of things are like the trot or gallop of a horse. There is no movement without change, no moment without alteration. What to do? What not to do? Merely steel yourself to go along with the transformation of things."

17.7

The River Lord said, "In that case, then what of the Way is to be prized?"

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[26] The "three dynasties" refers to the quasi-legendary Xia dynasty, Shang dynasty, and Zhou dynasty.

[27] Following Chen (458) reading *ju* 拒 for *ju* 舉.

The North Sea said, "One who understands the Way surely masters the patterns [of things]. One who masters the patterns [of things] is certainly clear-headed in weighing things up (*quan* 權).[28] And one who is clear-headed in weighing things up will not be harmed by things. As for one with the utmost virtue, fire cannot burn him, and water cannot make him wet. Heat and cold cannot harm him, and birds and beasts cannot hurt him. It's not that he discounts these things. Rather, he is thorough regarding safety or peril, calm regarding calamity or riches, circumspect regarding what he shuns or what he associates with—all this such that nothing is able to harm him. And so, it is said: Heaven is located within, and humankind is located without. Virtue lies in what comes from Heaven. When one understands the conduct of both humankind and Heaven, one stays grounded in [what comes from] Heaven, and one becomes established in [what comes from] virtue.[29] Advance and retreat, contract and stretch; return to the fundamentals and discourse on the extremities [of the Way]."

The River Lord said, "What can we say [comes from] Heaven? What can we say [comes from] humankind?"

The North Sea said, "Oxen and horses have four feet—this comes from Heaven. The headstalls of a horse's head and the pierced ring of an ox's nose—this is called comes from humankind. The saying goes: Don't let [what comes from] humankind exterminate [what comes from] Heaven. Don't let [what comes from] the initial conditions exterminate [what comes from] fate (*ming* 命). Don't let [what comes from] what is obtained obscure your reputation. Guard it carefully and do not lose it. Call it, 'returning to one's own genuineness'."

17.8a

The kui[30] envies the millipede. The millipede envies the snake. The snake envies the wind. The wind envies the eye. The eye envies the mind.

17.8b

The kui said to the millipede, "I hop around with one foot and can hardly manage it. But now you have ten thousand feet, what's up with that?"

The millipede said, "Not so! Haven't you seen somebody spit? The biggest wad is like a pearl, but the smallest parts are like the mist. These two kinds are inextricably and uncountably mixed

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[28] *Quan* 權 refers to a balance-weight or scale, but it can also refer to flexibility or responsiveness to circumstances. Here it means something like the ability to exercise discretion.

[29] Reading *de* 德 for 得.

[30] Kui 夔 is a "one-legged monster" or a type of insect.

together. Now I move along with my Heavenly Machinery, but I don't know what makes it so."

17.8c

The millipede said to the snake, "I get around with all these feet, but I can't keep up with you, who doesn't have any! What's up with that?"

The snake said, "For all those who move about with their Heavenly Machinery, how could things be any different? What use could I possibly have for feet?"

17.8d

The snake said to the wind, "I move along with my spine and ribs, and I have a definite shape while I'm doing it.[31] But you, with your howling through the North Sea and whipping down through the South Sea, seem to lack any sort of definite shape. What's up with that?"

The wind said, "Indeed! I howl my way up to the North Sea and whip my way down to the South Sea, sure, but you can defeat me by extending your finger. And if you tread on me, you may also defeat me. Nevertheless, only I am the one who can snap great trees or blow over a great house. Thus, [one may] utilize a multitude of insignificant things, which cannot overcome anything [on their own], to enact a Great Overcoming, and only the sage is able to enact a Great Overcoming."

17.9

Kongzi was wandering in Kuang [in the state of Wei] when some men from Song surrounded him, and yet he continued to sing and play his lyre without stopping. Zilu entered the scene and said, "Master, what are you so happy about?"

Kongzi said, "Come here and I'll tell you! I avoided such dire straits for a long time, but that I have not been spared must indeed be fate. I have travelled and sought [a suitable ruler] for a long time, but that I haven't found one must be a sign of the times. During the time of Yao and Shun, nobody in the empire was in dire straits, but it's not like they knew how to accomplish this. During the time of Jie and Zhou, there wasn't a single person with integrity in the empire, but it's not like they knew how to get rid of such people. The times are powerful, and what was suitable made it so. Those who work in the water do not avoid lizards or dragons—that is the courage of a fisherman. Those who work on the land do not avoid rhinos or tigers—that is the courage of hunters. With bright and sharp blades before

[31] Following Chen (463) in interpreting *si* 似 as *xiang* 像.

them, they look at death like being reborn—this is the courage of a fierce soldier. When one understands that being in dire straits is a matter of fate and that success is a matter of timeliness, when one comes across great difficulties but remains unafraid, this is the courage of a sage. Wait, You! [My] fate has its determinations."

Shortly thereafter, the leader came and released them, saying, "We thought you were Yang Hu. That's why we surrounded you. But now we see that you're not, and we beg to take our leave."

17.10a

Gongsunlong asked [Gong Zi] Mou of Wei, "When I was young, I studied the Way of the former kings, and as I grew up, I learned about benevolent and righteous conduct. I united sameness and difference and mixed together hard and white; I deemed [what was] so and not so, acceptable and unacceptable, and fully encapsulated the knowledge of the hundred schools, towering over the impoverished sophistry of the masses. I took myself to have reached the pinnacle. But now I have heard the words of Zhuangzi, and I've been cast into a confusion. I don't know if my rhetorical skill doesn't match his, or if my understanding is lacking. I now find that I can scarcely open my mouth, so I dare ask you what direction I should pursue?"

17.10b

Gongzi Mou leaned forward on his armrest and let out a great sigh; he then looked up towards Heaven and laughed, saying, "Have you not heard of the frog in the crumbling well? He once said to a turtle of the Eastern Sea, 'How joyous it is! I go out to hop along the edge of the well and then head inward to rest atop the broken bricks. In the water, I pump my legs to keep my chin afloat, and in the mud, I lose sight of my feet all the way past the ankles. I look back at the worms, crabs, and tadpoles, but none can compare to me! To have complete dominion over the waters of this domain, to be unparalleled in enjoying the crumbling well—this is simply the utmost. Why don't you come in and see for yourself?' But before the turtle of the Eastern Sea could even get his left foot into the well, his right leg had gotten stuck up to the knee. The turtle then hesitated and retreated, and he began to tell the frog about the Sea, saying, 'A thousand *li* is not sufficient to describe its length, nor is a thousand fathoms[32] sufficient to describe its depth. In the time of Yao, there were floods in nine years out of ten, and yet its water level did not increase. In the time of Tang, there were droughts seven years out of eight, and yet water level on the cliffs never lowered. No transformation occurs in it on account of either short-term or

[32] A *ren* 仞 is an ancient Chinese unit of measurement about 8 feet or one fathom.

long-term events, and no alteration in the coming and going [of the tides] occurs on account of either great or small events—this indeed is the great joy of the Eastern Sea.' When the frog of the crumbling well heard this, he was horrified and dumbfounded, as if he lost himself.

"And yet you, whose understanding does not comprehend the ends of *shi* and *fei*, nevertheless desire to comprehend the teachings of Zhuangzi—this is like a mosquito trying to carry a mountain on its back, or a millipede trying to keep up with a river. It will certainly fail! You, whose understanding does not reflect the knowledge of how to discourse with or about the most extreme subtleties of words, nevertheless find any occasion to demonstrate your sharpness—is this not just like the case of the frog in the crumbling well? As for Zhuangzi, he treads on the Yellow Spring[33] and mounts the great majesty of Heaven itself without regard for south or north. Utterly free and unfettered in all directions, he becomes lost in the immeasurable abyss. Beginning in the Pool of Mystery, he returns to the grand message. But all the while, you look on, dumbfounded, and try to seek out [an understanding of] him through mere observation, groping at [an understanding of] him through disputation and sophistry. This is like trying to view the heavens through a tube, or to scan the earth with an awl. Are they not far too small to be up to the task? Get lost, good sir! Haven't you heard about the son of Shou Ling[34] studying the way they walk in Han Dan? Before he mastered the ability to walk like they do in Han Dan, he forgot how he originally walked, and thus he had to crawl back home on his hands and knees. If you don't give up now, you'll lose sight of your old ways and be out of a job!"

Gongsunlong's mouth fell open and would not close, and his tongue was stuck to the roof of his mouth. He then ran off.

17.11

Zhuangzi was fishing in the Pu River one day when the King of Chu sent two emissaries with the message that the King wished to task Zhuangzi with the control of all his territories. Zhuangzi didn't even lay down his fishing rod and said, "I have heard that there is a Divine Tortoise[35] in the state of Chu that has been dead for some three thousand years, which the King keeps stored in a

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[33] The Yellow Spring (*huang quan* 黃泉) is the mythological Chinese underworld where the dead reside.

[34] Sources say very little about this person except that he was from the state of Yan.

[35] The term Divine Tortoise (*shen gui* 神龜) could refer to a sacred ornament but may also refer to an ancient turtle shell used in divination practices. See Jao Tsung-i, "A Discussion of Turtles Becoming the *Shui mu* 水母 and Related Topics" in *Histories of Spiritual Traditions in China: A Selection of Jao Tsung-i's Essays in Religious Studies*, Tr. Frank Saunders Jr, Ed. Frank Saunders Jr and Richard Sage (Dordrecht: Brill, Forthcoming).

basket covered in cloth in the ancestral temple. Now as for this tortoise, do you think it prefers to be dead but have left behind its shell to be prized, or would it prefer instead to live on and drag its tail in the mud?"

"Surely it would prefer to live on and drag its tail in the mud," said the emissaries.

Zhuangzi said, "Begone! I will drag my tail in the mud."

17.12

Huizi was a minister in Liang[36] and Zhuangzi went to see him. Someone asked Huizi, "If Zhuangzi is coming, he must want your job." Huizi was terrified, and for three days and three nights he searched all over the state for Zhuangzi. Zhuangzi eventually went to see him and said, "In the south, there is a Fenghuang bird called Yuan Chu.[37] Do you know of it? Yuan Chu emerges from the South Sea and flies to the North Sea, only stopping to rest in the sycamore tree, only eating the fruit of the *lian* tree, and only drinking the purest spring water. Once, it flew over an owl that had caught a decaying rat. The owl looked up towards Yuan Chu and let out a shriek. Now do you similarly wish to frighten me with a shriek to prevent me from taking control of Liang?"

17.13

Zhuangzi and Huizi were strolling over the Hao River. Zhuangzi said, "The fish come out and wander about unbothered by anything. This is the joy of fish!"

Huizi said, "You are not a fish—how do you know of the fish's happiness?"

Zhuangzi said, "You are not me. How do you know I do not know of the fish's happiness?"

Huizi said, "I am not you, so surely I don't know you. But you surely are not a fish. Thus, you do not know the complete happiness of the fish."

Zhuangzi said, "Let's return to the foundation. You asked *how* I know of the fish's happiness. Thus, you already acknowledge that I know it, and yet you ask me anyway. [In that case,] I know it from being above the Hao River."

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[36] This Liang 梁 actually refers to the state of Wei 魏, which was also called Liang during the Warring States period under the reign of King Hui of Wei (r. 369 – 319 BCE). The independent state of Liang was conquered by Qin 秦 in 641 BCE, well before this episode would have taken place.

[37] The Fenghuang is a mythical bird in Chinese folklore often referred to as the "Chinese Phoenix," although its resemblance to the Phoenix of the Greek tradition is superficial. It is typically viewed as a symbol of prosperity and wealth and often paired with dragon designs in dress and decorations.