

Putting the World Outside Himself: Metaphorical Meaning in the *Zhuangzi*

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The *Zhuangzi* was originally compiled around 350-300 BCE, or the Warring States period, during which many classic Chinese philosophical works were written. Like the *Dao De Jing* and other canonical Daoist texts written around this time, the *Zhuangzi* has been used as a meditative guide and self-cultivation handbook for people looking to escape the social pressures of traditional Chinese culture. The parables in the text are intended to lead the individual closer to alignment with an ineffable, monistic principle called the Way, the Way of Heaven, or *Dao*. In later Warring States Period debates, this alignment comes to be called *wu-wei* (non-doing or non-action). It is a term of art that describes not physical inactivity, but the phenomenology of individuals who act with a kind of unselfconscious ease (yet exceptional skill) in daily life. They are described as “having lost themselves,” “following along with things,” or “fitting.” Their psychology is metaphorically described as the fitting into the “hinge of the Way,” and from this state the Daoist sage is able to “respond endlessly” to the world that presents itself without being troubled by it. In many examples, getting to *wu-wei* is an apophatic process of eliminating superfluous attachments from one’s consciousness such as social values or the Confucian rites.

Edward Slingerland, P. J. Ivanhoe and others have argued that it is particularly important in early Chinese discourses to pay attention to

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their metaphorical ways of describing human nature, *wu-wei*, and the means of achieving the best possible life. While generally metaphor has been considered no more than a flourish of language, or fancy rhetoric, there is growing scientific evidence that metaphor may be foundational to human thought. The contemporary Western linguist George Lakoff and philosopher Mark Johnson have recently developed a conceptual metaphor theory that places metaphor at the center of cognitive processes. They argue that our bodies and environments are the most structured and easily distinguishable areas of our lives, and that the constant exposure to these concrete, physical stimuli are metaphorically imported when we want to discuss something more abstract. In this “projection mapping,” we take a physical experience (the source domain) and metaphorically direct and extend our reasoning about the source towards some conceptual target domain (Fauconnier 9). In many early Chinese philosophical works these projection-mapping arguments are very common. Many writers focus on a particular metaphorical conception of an idea and show how it is flawed. In this essay, I will argue in agreement with Edward Slingerland that conceptual metaphor theory is best suited to give a compelling reading of the soteriological project described in the *Zhuangzi*, tracing the ways that descriptions of heaven are metaphorically imported into stories of the sage and conceptions of the self that rely on these basic projection mappings. Along the way, I will argue against Donald Davidson’s theory of cognitively empty metaphor that Kim-Chong Chong uses to give a compelling but eventually incomplete reading of *Zhuangzi*’s text.

Chong’s reading proceeds from *Zhuangzi*’s conception of language, which uses metaphor, irony, and infinite regresses to “empty” his concepts of any stable meaning. It is this constant attention to unstable, unfixed language that encourages Chong to propose that *Zhuangzi* is able to stay clear of making any propositional statements, as suggested by the theory of metaphoric interpretation put forth by Davidson. *Zhuangzi*’s metaphoric statements do not have “special meanings,” because there is no place to locate those meanings in the words. Instead the thoughts they intimate for the reader are the only significance they can have. But Chong realizes that to make this claim would allow any interpretation of a metaphor to be valid, and

he gives reasons to disagree with this. I argue that it is more helpful to use conceptual metaphor theory because although *Zhuangzi* does use language in interesting ways, he also thought that language was a tool that humans can use to make important realizations. Otherwise he would not have written his work down in such a specific manner. Nor would he have given metaphors that point towards his ideal person if he did not think that words—though only words used properly and sensitively—could help one get there.

The text of the *Zhuangzi* is traditionally separated into three parts, the “Inner Chapters” (1-7), “Outer Chapters” (8-22), and “Miscellaneous Chapters” (23-33), for it appears that there are multiple authors responsible for the text.¹ Evidence that other Chinese thinkers like Yang Zhu influenced later disciples adds layers of complexity to the text, for each new voice brings different interpretations to *Zhuangzi*’s message. For the most part this essay will deal with the Inner Chapters, since they are considered to be the oldest and actually written by the historical *Zhuangzi*. However, where the Inner Chapters are the most abstract or metaphorically complex, it may help to attend to other sections because they often give more straightforward expression to the concepts and their early interpretations.

Throughout the text *Zhuangzi* attacks the positions and theories of opponents like Mengzi and Kongzi² to present his own views, using targeted metaphors that invoke and then transvalue important aspects of their ideas. One of the ways that *Zhuangzi* attacks the positions of Kongzi and Mengzi is with a radical view on language. Many of his critiques of other schools of thought are found in Chapter Two, “Discussions on Making All Things Equal,” where he admonishes philosophers who assume that language gets at some true order of the world.

Kongzi is probably the most obvious example of the kind of thinker that *Zhuangzi* attacks. Kongzi portrays the ideal person as one with a perfect sensitivity to ritual propriety, social interaction and human virtue. The only way to get to this point is with extensive training. With careful practice these skills develop until they are no longer forced rules, but unselfconscious habits. His example is of a ruler named Shun whose only actions were to “make himself reverent and correctly face south” (Wing-tsit Chan 43). South was the direction that the ruler

sat in his throne, and all subjects were to enter from the north. It is therefore both easy to do and in alignment with what is right. The point of this image is that if the man is able to live a perfectly ordered and virtuous life, then his rule will be effortless. Everything under heaven will align with the ruler because the ruler is aligned with heaven. The perfect gentlemen for Kongzi maintained ease in relation to all social interactions and cultivated the virtue *ren*, which is often translated as “true humanity” or “benevolence.” Although some individuals had achieved this virtue in the ancient past, Kongzi believed everyone in the present world needed extensive remolding to recapture its previous harmony.

One of the ways Kongzi encouraged his disciples to gain these skills was through naming and categorizing the objects in the world. Kongzi explains that the source of language’s “proper” application came from the ancestral Zhou dynasty, which composed the *Book of Odes* and many other texts relating to the descriptions and duties of different social positions that Kongzi supported. Kongzi described the *Odes* as

a source of inspiration [that] can broaden your perspective; they can be used to bring you together with others as well as to give vent to vexations and complaints. In the domestic sphere, they articulate the proper manner to serve your father, and in the public sphere, they articulate the proper manner to serve your ruler. They also acquaint you with the names for a wide variety of birds and beasts, plants and trees. (17.9)

Kongzi portrays the *Book of Odes* as a source of order for the individual wishing to live a proper life in all spheres, including the physical world. He assumes these notions to be fixed through texts that he connects to an ancient past where the world was still in order with Heaven (*tian*).

Zhuangzi does not think that human beings are capable of accurately depicting the world in alignment with heaven through language. He holds most of his scorn for those who consider humans capable of capturing the distinctions between things in the world. He starts with a general attack on Confucian practices, saying: “When the Way relies on little accomplishments and words rely on vain show, then we have the rights and wrongs of the Confucians and the Mo-

ists [another school of thought]. What one calls right the other calls wrong; what one calls wrong the other calls right” (39). Zhuangzi thus inverts Kongzi’s view, elevating the non-conceptual and non-linguistic as the highest form of knowledge:

The knowledge of the ancients really got somewhere. How far did it get? There were those who believed that there had never even been things in the worlds – they reached the highest, most exhaustive form of knowledge. Nothing could be added to it. Below them were those who believed that things existed but that there had never been boundaries between them. Farther down still were those who believed that there were boundaries but that there had never been “right” and “wrong.” The glorification of “right” and “wrong” is what caused the Way to be harmed, and that which caused the Way to be harmed also caused love to become complete. (41)

Instead of a depiction of linguistic knowledge that progresses to an elevated conception of love, or a true humanity that can be expressed through a perfected knowledge, Zhuangzi’s story describes the discursive quality of language as its greatest danger. The result of this picture is a loss of harmony with the Way (*Dao*). This process is described as gradual. First people came to realize that there were objects in the world, and set up boundaries between these things with words. This was followed by theories about them and discriminations between them. But the most harmful and easily forgotten mistake was when people reified and attached value judgments to what they saw in the world. For Zhuangzi it is at this point that the Way was “harmed.” Love, originally a spontaneous caring for others, became a valued and expected emotion. It became simply a social expectation that could be conceptually enumerated, made into a conscious activity and then turned into vain show.

Zhuangzi takes this radical position against Kongzi because he believes that humans are led astray when they get caught up in theoretical disputes. He connects this to the concept of the heart/mind (*xin*), which serves as the center for these linguistic distinctions and disputes. In warring states period discourse the heart/mind is the locus of one’s natural moral order and consciousness. This is most

present in the *Mengzi*, where the ideal qualities or “sprouts” of the heart/mind are “cultivated” by proper Confucian teaching (Slingerland 139). As Edward Slingerland, Kim-Chong Chong and others have noted, the heart/mind is one of Zhuangzi’s most interestingly used concepts, and central to his soteriological project of the sage or “True man of Heaven.” In an instructive discussion Zhuangzi employs the metaphor of the “full” or “completed” heart/mind (*cheng xin*) to direct his project toward the emptying of these distinctions. He begins, “When asleep people’s *hun*-spirits interact; when awake, their bodies open wide, and everything they touch becomes entangled. Day after day they use their heart/minds (*xin*) to stir up trouble” (37). Whether they realize it or not, at some level most people have fixed notions of right and wrong, beautiful and ugly, or good and bad. Zhuangzi doesn’t think that any such distinctions are worth holding onto. They are dangerous because they construct binaries about which people debate, and these distinctions are kept in the heart/mind, causing physical and psychological harm.

He calls people who participate in such debates “the arbiters of right and wrong,” writing that “they use their mouths like crossbow bolts.” For all their words, arguments, and attempts to fix language to the world they are unsuccessful. Zhuangzi sees their demise in their actions: “Their decline is like fall fading to winter—this describes the way they dwindle day by day. They drown in what they do—you cannot make them turn back” (37). The “completed” or “fixated” heart/mind (*cheng xin*) is the cause of their disputations, and they fail to recognize its danger because this characteristic of the human mind has been mistaken for its “natural” and “enlightened” capability.

Because all the theories of his opponents rely upon value judgments, on fixed distinctions between “right” and “wrong,” Zhuangzi thinks they hopelessly confuse and jumble the reality that is beyond those words. What then is the position of his statements? How does Zhuangzi stay clear of the apparent impossibility of using words to empty conceptual distinctions between things?

Kim-Chong Chong asks this same question and makes an insightful analysis of the metaphors in the text along the way. He proposes another interpretation about the purpose of metaphor in the text that is heavily influenced by a very important philosophical

article written by Donald Davidson called “What Metaphors Mean” (1978). Davidson proposes that aside from the literal meaning of the metaphoric statement, it is not appropriate to say a metaphor possesses any cognitive content. Chong applies Davidson’s position to the *Zhuangzi* and proposes that Zhuangzi’s use of free-flowing language and metaphor, sometimes referred to as “goblet words,” “teach one to be open to multivalence, and not attached to specific views...What is significant about a metaphor is its imaginative use to intimate any number of things. Thus, it might be said, à la Davidson, that it is precisely this nature of metaphor that explains how Zhuangzi is able to stay free of (being attached to) any distinctions” (370). Chong’s argument focuses on two important metaphoric schemas in the *Zhuangzi*: clarity (*ming*) as a method to achieve the “empty” heart/mind, and the metaphors of the empty heart/mind as a mirror or as still water. He argues that Zhuangzi’s intentional use of “goblet words” is evidence that a theory of unconscious metaphor production like Lakoff and Johnson propose may not be necessary.

Chong’s analysis is insightful because he successfully uncovers an argumentative structure in Zhuangzi’s rhetoric, metaphors, and “goblet words,” which will be explained shortly. Yet it is this intentional metaphoric structure in the text that complicates his commitment to Davidson’s theory of cognitively empty metaphor. The structure functions to elaborate aspects of a specific soteriological project that relies on concepts that Zhuangzi describes through metaphor. He therefore does not finally believe, as Davidson does, that any thoughts intimated by metaphor are valid, since it is possible to mistake Zhuangzi’s message. The ability to direct the thoughts intimated by metaphor without propositionally stating them is evidence of some other type of pre-conceptual cognitive content to metaphor, as Lakoff and Johnson argue. If this is the case, then although Davidson’s claim that the words in a metaphor do not possess any extra or special meaning may be correct, the ways that concepts are derived by metaphor are nonetheless crucial, and theories that are concerned with how this occurs are necessary.

Chong’s analysis of the text follows our own thus far. He believes that the *Zhuangzi* has “a certain metaphorical structure,” and that Chapter 2 illustrates this very well (374). He agrees that Zhuangzi was

concerned with the endless intellectual disputes of his contemporaries, believing them to have made a fatal mistake about language. As for the status of Zhuangzi's own statements on the nature of the world, Chong emphasizes that Zhuangzi does not wish to throw out language completely. Zhuangzi writes, "Words are not just wind. Words have something to say. But if what they have to say is not fixed, then do they really say something? Or do they say nothing? People suppose that words are different from the peeps of baby birds, but is there any difference, or isn't there?" (39). Zhuangzi knows that he has to answer this question, since he recognizes that he is expressing his own ideas in linguistic form. Chong argues, "We should not see Zhuangzi as *stating propositions* and thereby trying to establish the truth of any position. Instead his words have a certain metaphorical structure that enables him to resist being pinned down to any position" (375, emphasis in original). Yet Chong runs into difficulty because he sees how Zhuangzi's structured metaphors direct the reader to a specific project, which implies that certain interpretations of the *Zhuangzi* are more valid than others.

As was described earlier, Zhuangzi's scorn of his philosophical opponents is due to a metaphoric conception of the "completed" or "fixated" heart/mind. Zhuangzi inverts this conception and uses metaphors of the "empty" or "tenuous" heart/mind. He often describes it as a mirror, or still water. In a popular example, the heart/mind is described as empty and like a mirror because it responds without storing. It is able to use its abilities to the fullest without being unnecessarily bound:

Do not be an embodier of fame; do not be a storehouse of schemes; do not be an undertaker of projects; do not be a proprietor of wisdom...Hold on to all that you have received from Heaven but do not think you have gotten anything. Be empty, that is all. The Perfect Man uses his heart/mind like a mirror - going after nothing, welcoming nothing, responding but not storing. Therefore he can win out over things and not hurt himself. (97)

Here we first have several other examples of the kinds of distinctions that people generally hold in their heart/mind: fame, wisdom and

schemes all rely on judgments that are not absolute. These are then referred back towards the monistic force of Heaven that Zhuangzi uses as the source for his metaphors for the true man, or sage. The project, Chong explains, “is not one of ‘critical inquiry,’ but of ‘stilling the heart/mind’” (376). The example of the mirror is the clearest metaphorical expression in this passage. It connects the concepts of “emptiness” to words and the appropriate *use* of words. The metaphorical connection between the mirror and emptiness is tight and sound. It is only because the mirror is itself empty of anything that it is able to reflect the world clearly. The mirror does not hold an image after the object it reflected has been removed. It is responsive and non-judging. Zhuangzi uses this inference from the mirror metaphor to make an important move that saves the conventional use of language.

Zhuangzi illustrates that he does not have a problem with language itself, but only with how human beings mistakenly use it. Mocking the insistence on discrimination, he observes that, “there is left, there is right, there are theories, there are debates, there are divisions, there are discriminations, there are emulations, and there are contentions” (44). Zhuangzi agrees that “a road is made by people walking on it; things are so because they are called so,” but this does not make all language use appropriate (40). The difference between the sage and common man is that “[t]he sage embraces things. Ordinary men discriminate among them and parade their discriminations before others. So I say, those who discriminate fail to see” (44). In conventional use, language is acceptable, and the way that language can be used to differentiate between things so humans can communicate is fine. But the “parading” of distinctions fails to see what is really worth seeing. Therefore, “use” in this sense is sensitivity to the ways that words are used in specific instances to express ideas. Zhuangzi does not want language to become reified or static. In the text, this appropriate use of words is called “clarity.”

Zhuangzi calls this appropriate use of language “clarity,” the attitude that allows the sage to differentiate between “right” and “wrong” in the world. He explains how clarity is different from the language distinctions of his contemporaries. Instead of parading his distinctions around for all to see the sage has a different method:

[T]he sage does not proceed in such a way, but illuminates all in the light of Heaven. He too recognizes a “this,” but a “this” which is also “that,” a “that” which is also “this.” His “that” has both a right and a wrong in it; his “this” too has both a right and a wrong in it. So, in fact, does he still have a “this” and “that”? Or does he in fact no longer have a “this” and “that”? A state in which “this” and “that” no longer find their opposites is called the hinge of the Way. When the hinge is fitted into the socket, it can respond endlessly. Its right then is a single endlessness and its wrong too is a single endlessness. So, I say, the best thing to use is clarity. (40)

The terms “this” (*shi*) and “that” (*fei*) refer to distinctions of what “is” and what “is not,” and Zhuangzi states that the sage uses clarity so that what is and what is not is only conditioned by the present situation. For him, there is no stable or fixed conception of “beautiful” and “ugly,” or “right” and “wrong.” Because these dichotomies “do not find their opposite,” the sage is described as being able to respond endlessly to every situation. It is worth noting that Zhuangzi connects this use of language to the same idea of “response” as the “still” or mirroring heart/mind achieves. And again, this responsiveness is associated with the power of Heaven and the Way.

It seems that Zhuangzi’s use of clarity (*ming*) and the empty heart/mind is evidence that Zhuangzi does in fact hold onto some kind of process, or concept, above others. But Chong’s analysis illustrates how metaphors can be used to avoid overt propositional statements, and Zhuangzi himself was a master writer. Chong cites a compelling article by Shuen-fu Lin that explains the term “goblet words” (*zhi yan*), which is a powerful rhetorical tool in the Zhuangzi. “Goblet words” work to invert the meaning of any terms:

[T]he *zhi*—a wine vessel used as a metaphor for the mind [*xin*]
—is originally empty and gets temporarily filled with liquid—a metaphor for words—which comes from a larger wine container only when the occasion requires one to do so.... Since the mind [*xin*] is like the *zhi* vessel without any fixed or constant rules or values of its own stored in there, and takes ideas always from outside when the occasion for speech arises, it

will never impose artificial distinctions and discriminations upon things. This is what [is meant by] “mindless”—the “mind” to be done away with here is, of course, the *cheng xin* or “fully formed heart/mind”.... *Zhi yan* [spillover sayings], then, is speech that is natural, unpremeditated, free from preconceived values, always responding to the changing situations in the flow of discourse, and always returning the mind to its original state of emptiness as soon as a speech act is completed. (Chong 376)

Zhuangzi uses all of his important philosophical concepts like goblet words, taking the meaning they seem to gather through their use and forcing us to see them differently. Chong cites an example from Yuet-Kueng Lo to suggest that “clarity” need not be seen as “illumination,” as it appears in several examples, but also may be “ironically darkness *par excellence*” (378). While it may appear that Zhuangzi presents clarity above and beyond the Confucian values, in several examples he encourages one to stop using clarity (*yi ming*) because it still relies on the finite intellect. Thus even the apparently weighty and important philosophical topics are presented as only situational terms to use in a moment.

Zhuangzi intentionally inverts or empties the meaning his words gain through use. This illustrates how one is able to use words in a manner that is not “fixed” or “completed.” Instead the words Zhuangzi uses are only supposed to stand as the most fleeting of distinctions, made only because they are convenient. Zhuangzi describes this with a parable of a caretaker trying to feed his monkeys:

When the monkey trainer was handing out acorns, he said, “You get three in the morning and four at night.” This made all the monkeys furious. “Well, then,” he said, “you get four in the morning and three at night.” The monkeys were all delighted. There was no change in the reality behind the words, and yet the monkeys responded with joy and anger. Let them, if they want to. So the sage harmonizes with both right and wrong and rests in Heaven the Equalizer. This is called walking two roads. (41)

Zhuangzi sees how the words used to describe phenomena are not the phenomena themselves. In fact, most pleasant or negative responses to

ideas are the result of the terms or the manner in which the ideas are presented, not the reality behind them. Zhuangzi explains that the sage who does not attach fixed meaning to the words is able to get closer to the reality of the matter. This he calls “walking two roads.”

Chong uses the examples of “goblet words” in the *Zhuangzi* to argue in support of Davidson’s idea that metaphors possess no meaning besides the meanings of the words used to describe them. Davidson dismisses the meaningful thoughts that metaphors invoke, because “everything is like everything, and in endless ways” (39). He states, “there is no limit to what a metaphor calls to our attention, and much of what we are caused to notice is not propositional in character. When we try to say what a metaphor ‘means,’ we soon realize there is no end to what we want to mention” (46). It is therefore possible for metaphor to intimate certain thoughts, but there are no wrongs thoughts about what a metaphor can mean with regard to those intimations. While Chong agrees that Zhuangzi uses metaphor intentionally to avoid propositional statements, he is unsure if it is fair to take any interpretation of Zhuangzi’s metaphors as valid. For example, Chong objects to Robert Allinson’s claim that Zhuangzi’s butterfly dream is a central metaphor in the text that pre-conceptually establishes the highest value to the idea of beauty.³ Chong explains that Allinson has imported a “metaphorical structure that does not belong to it” (380). Zhuangzi does not elevate the upper tier of the dichotomies of ugly/beautiful, superior/inferior, or more/less developed in his elaboration of the sage, or the Way. Nor does he elevate the lower tier of these dichotomies as Laozi so often does.

What is significant about Chong’s rebuttal of Allinson is that it relies on the idea that there are contextual or cultural metaphoric schemas that one may employ unselfconsciously in efforts to comprehend a metaphor, and that there is a definitive reaction that Zhuangzi is trying to elicit from his readers. Allinson chooses to elevate a single example in the text and import a powerfully Judeo-Christian schema of evaluation to interpret it, thereby missing the point Zhuangzi proposes. I agree with Chong that this interpretation is incorrect, and that a more sensitive analysis of the *Zhuangzi* and its structured metaphorical argument illuminates this matter. But to say this is to grant that there is a certain form of pre-conceptual or unconscious

content to that metaphorical argument.

We can see that content at work in a passage from the middle of chapter 2:

[W]hether you point to a little stalk or a great pillar, a leper or the beautiful Hsi-shih, things ribald and shady or things grotesque and strange, the Way makes them all into one. Their dividedness is their completeness; their completeness is their impairment. No thing is either complete or impaired, but all are made into one again. Only the man of far reaching vision knows how to make them into one. So he has no use [for categories], but relegates all to the constant. The constant is the useful; the useful is the passable; the passable is the successful; and with success, all is accomplished. He relies upon this alone, relies upon it and does not know he is doing so. This is called the Way. (40-41)

This passage is metaphorically rich and deserves some breaking apart. First Zhuangzi asks us to picture several things that are easily called upon and that suggest some kind of contrasting judgment: the grandeur of the pillar compared to the meekness of the stalk, or our obvious revulsion at the leper versus our image of Hsi-shih, who needs no other description beyond “beautiful.” As we conjure these images and begin to judge, he breaks these distinctions apart by introducing the monistic Way, which in other passages is called the Way of Heaven. The Way of Heaven is an integral part of the cosmological and philosophical discourses of the time, including Kongzi’s *Analects*. It is constantly described through metaphors of natural phenomena like the motions of the stars, seasons, and *yin/yang* cycles.⁴ The metaphors of the Way of Heaven routinely stress silence about particular events in these cycles: no one considers if heaven names the animals in the world, or if it feels bad about a terrible flood that kills many. The Way simply unfolds, producing a flourishing world in perfect harmony. Ancient Chinese believed the cycles of the Way to be essential to proper living, and so great care was made so human beings could align with these cycles. Thus when Zhuangzi says “the Way makes them all into one,” he means that from the view of heaven there is no difference.

Then Zhuangzi returns momentarily to the level of distinctions and theories, claiming, “their dividedness is their completeness; their

completeness is their impairment.” This reflects the perspective of humans, who by making distinctions between things think they have grasped them. In other words, the human perspective makes things capable of being conceptualized and valued. At the same time, this linguistic, conceptual grasp impairs their ability to be simply a part of the world (consider again the problem of completing and thus impairing the natural feeling of love through the Confucian rites). Since Zhuangzi has shown how ineffective this actually is, he concludes, “No thing is either complete or impaired, but all are made into one again.” It is possible to achieve this mode of living, and the “man of far reaching vision” has the ability to properly apply distinctions to the world. But he is without attachment to them, except in how well they succeed in making distinctions without fixity. The sage’s mind has become like the *zhi*, the empty goblet that needs not hold onto anything. The last two sentences imply that this sage, or true man, is like Heaven, because he never realizes that he has made this shift. He is silent, living in perfect harmony with the Way and through the world. Alignment with Heaven and the Way can make these distinctions appropriately, and in accordance with the world as it presents itself.

If Zhuangzi truly wanted to achieve this project, then it would not make sense for him to elaborate the project with clearly defined and enumerated steps, because then he would only continue the pattern he is dedicated to eliminating. Therefore, there is another way to read Zhuangzi’s metaphors that is on the surface non-propositional and “empty,” but point towards something else, encouraging the reader to grasp a new concept. This grasping of concepts is what is described in conceptual metaphor theory.

Conceptual metaphor theory seeks to analyze the way that this process occurs, and thus some attention to this contemporary field of research will help us better understand Zhuangzi’s use of metaphor. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have probably done the most work to popularize the theory of conceptual metaphor for the general academic public. Lakoff and Johnson aim to sketch out a “geography of human experience” that focuses on the centrality of the body in thought and language production (xxxviii). “Metaphor” in this theory refers to using one domain of bodily-based and concrete experience to structure or highlight similarities in another domain. Because the

physical realm is our most structured and primary experience, the frequently paired experiences we have with our bodies and the physical serve as the most basic source domains when we turn towards the abstract. These basic experiences are called “primary metaphors” and include ideas such as AFFECTION IS WARMTH, IMPORTANT IS BIG, or KNOWING IS SEEING (50-54).⁵ These are employed when we turn to abstract domains of experience, such as emotional states, or concepts.

It is important to note that, as Lakoff and Johnson claim, the majority of primary metaphors are created through an experiential correlation. They represent an analog, image or “irreducible gestalt structures” rather than propositions (Johnson 44). Thus, it is not appropriate to limit the utility of a metaphor just to the words used to describe it. Any metaphor refers to the “complex web of connections in our experience and understanding formed by this mapping across domains of experience” (Johnson 7). This location of the importance of language separates it from more traditional theories like Davidson’s, which believe that if metaphors have meaning, then those meanings should be reducible to some kind of propositional form. For Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors, or “cross-domain mappings” as they term them, are not primarily matters of semantics, but a basic aspect of human thought.

Metaphors are used so commonly in all human language “simply because we have the bodies [and] brains we have and live in the world we live in” (Lakoff and Johnson 59). As these metaphors become more complex and entrenched in our semantic systems, they can be used almost unconsciously in novel expressions of language. These metaphors are not inert within the mind; they may be employed in varying levels of complexity, including blends of two or more metaphors, or in idiomatic or imagistic expressions. Central to conceptual metaphor theory is the claim that extended *reasoning* is possible within the structure of a complex metaphor. The connections between the objects of the source domain and the metaphorically extended meaning they have in projection mappings are understood as *entailments*. For example, the expression “dead-end street” in reference to a relationship becomes more than a helpful image when we consider the common American metaphors, “LIFE IS A PURPOSEFUL JOURNEY and LOVE IS A JOURNEY.” (Lakoff and Johnson 60-68). The “dead-end

street” comparison begins with the basic action of journeys and then moves into a narrower category that is utilized to complete journeys (journey → vehicle → car). Then the expression is connected to a specific experience within that narrower category and journeys (cars → street → dead-end street). Many of these metaphorical entailments are made unconsciously, as Slingerland explains:

While abstract concepts such as “time” or “death” may have a skeleton structure that conceptually is represented directly (i.e., non-metaphorically), in most cases this structure is not rich or detailed enough to allow us to make useful inferences. Therefore, when we attempt to conceptualize and reason about abstract or relatively unstructured realms, this skeleton structure is fleshed out (usually automatically and unconsciously) with additional structure provided by the primary metaphors derived from basic bodily experience, often invoked in combination with other primary schemas to form complex metaphors or conceptual blends. When primary or complex source domains are activated in such cases and mapped onto the target domain, most aspects of the source-domain conceptual topology—that is, inference patterns, imagistic reasoning patterns, salient entities, et cetera—are preserved, thereby importing a high degree of structure into the target domain. (2004: 325)

LOVE AS A JOURNEY unconsciously relies on more basic primary metaphors – PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS, and ACTIONS ARE SELF-PROPELLED MOTIONS – that are commonly used metaphors Americans use to reason about life. They resurface when the topic shifts towards the interaction of two lives trying to walk the same path. Using these connected aspects of the experience of driving connected to the metaphoric schema, Lakoff and Johnson observe, “allows forms of reasoning about travel to be used in *reasoning* about love (65). It functions so as to map inferences about travel into inferences about love, enriching the concept of love and extending it to love-as-journey” (65). Being on a dead-end street means that the people are going nowhere, and not reaching their destinations. Since the people are not reaching their goals in the vehicle they are traveling in (the relationship) they reason it may be best to abandon the vehicle and

journey alone. Though this reasoning can take place without the use of metaphor, the influence of these structures on our reasoning is profound. At the same time, it is so basic that it is rare that we actually realize we employ metaphoric schemas so readily and effortlessly.

Edward Slingerland has argued that such metaphoric schemas are crucially at work in the *Zhuangzi*. Slingerland explains that the *Zhuangzi* employs many metaphors for the self. In many cases these metaphors are used together or in rapid succession, often confusing a first time reader. Reading for propositional content, as Chong opts to do, suggests that the metaphors for self are literally inconsistent, and this seems to agree with Chong's Davidsonian claim that Zhuangzi's metaphors are cognitively empty. But approaching the metaphors of self from the perspective of conceptual metaphor theory, and relying on basic, common primary metaphors for describing the self, Slingerland and others find "they are not incompatible, and in fact the inference patterns that they provide fit together to provide a coherent soteriological strategy" (Slingerland 2004: 328). Here we will focus on the schema that most clearly describes the soteriological project: the ESSENTIAL SELF + SELF AS CONTAINER.

Both Zhuangzi and modern English speakers often talk about themselves as split between the subject and one or more self or selves.⁶ In this schema, the subject is often conceived as an independent, person-like entity that is the locus of consciousness. The self represents everything else about the individual that one wishes to communicate. An object, location, physical organ, faculty, social role, et cetera can represent it. This schema is present in many common expressions, such as "I didn't feel like myself yesterday," or "I wasn't sure about my feelings." In both these examples, the subject "I" comments on experiences by creating another entity. This "self" can then be mapped onto several kinds of scales with positive or negative entailments depending on the context, i.e. inferior vs. superior, higher vs. lower, authentic vs. inauthentic. This will become important in the *Zhuangzi* because in many cases Zhuangzi attempts to better the subject by eliminating aspects of the self from a metaphorical container. In other words, the subject that is not conceived as a self at all is the most authentic subject. As we shall see the container of the heart/mind is a clear example of this.

First, let us look at how Slingerland maps the SUBJECT-SELF schema (2004: 328):

The SUBJECT-SELF

A Person	→	The Subject
A Person or Thing	→	The Self
A Relationship	→	Subject-Self Relationship

This basic schema is then often expressed in more specific terms. Two very common schemas are the SELF AS CONTAINER, in which the subject locates qualities of the self as within or without it, and the ESSENTIAL SELF schema, in which the subject separates into two or more selves, one of which is living in alignment with the essence of the subject, and the other is in disunity with some aspect of it. In English, phrases reflecting the SELF AS CONTAINER are common (“He didn’t have it in him”). Slingerland explains that Zhuangzi’s soteriological project often combines this SELF AS CONTAINER schema with the ESSENTIAL SELF schema, as mapped below (2004: 330):

ESSENTIAL SELF

Self 1	→	The Subject, with the Essence
Self 2	→	Self 1, the Real Self (fits the Essence)
Person or Thing 3	→	Self 2, not the Real Self (does not fit the Essence)

ESSENTIAL SELF PLUS SELF AS CONTAINER

Inside container	→	Self 1 (fits Subject/Essence)
Outside container	→	Self 2 (does not fit Subject/Essence)

One of the most important aspects of the *Zhuangzi* are the distinctions between what needs to be preserved and sealed *inside* the container of the

self, and those concepts that should best be left on the outside. In this schema, what is conceived as external is often the “human” aspect, and internal are forces associated with Heaven. Again Slingerland provides an illustration that maps this schema through the parables of the text (2003 188):

Properly Internal Things Related to Essential Self)	Properly External Things (Not related to Essential Self)
Heaven (<i>tian</i>)	Human (<i>ren</i>)
Essence (<i>qi</i>)	“Full” Heart/Mind (<i>xin</i>)
Spirit (<i>shen</i>)	Knowledge (<i>zhi</i>) or Scheming (<i>mo</i>)
Virtue (<i>de</i>)	Fame (<i>ming</i>) or Achievements (<i>gong</i>)
True Self (<i>shen</i>)	Cultural Standards: “Morality”
The Numinous (<i>ling</i>)	“Likes and Dislikes” Life and Death The Political World The Physical Form or Body (<i>xing</i>) Sensory Perception

What is profoundly useful about this schema is that Zhuangzi’s language primes readers to certain entailments that are soteriologically significant and can be made without elaboration. For example, if things that are supposed to be outside the container of the self are inside of it, Zhuangzi reasons that the subject is in a bad state. The earlier cited admonishment “do not be a storehouse for schemes” exemplifies this entailment. When the self is filled with schemes, the subject is unable to act according to its perfect Heavenly nature.

There are many examples of Zhuangzi using the container schema to illustrate a soteriological project. We will review several famous parables to illustrate this. Zhuangzi (who masquerades as Kongzi to make the polemic more apparent) speaks to one of his disciples, Yan Hui. Upon hearing the teaching (*yan*, literally “statement” or “word”)

“Leave the state that is well-ordered and go to the one in chaos!” Yan Hui is anxious to impart his knowledge and change the world (54). Kongzi is unsure about the effect Yan Hui’s advances will have, however, and admonishes him for claiming to possess superior advice and attempting to gain fame. After a few failed attempts to explain an appropriate method for success to Kongzi (one of which he describes as “inwardly direct, outwardly compliant”) Yan Hui finally gives up and asks Kongzi what to do. ““You must fast!” says Kongzi. ‘I will tell you what that means. Do you think it is easy to do anything while you have [a heart/mind]? If you do, Bright Heaven will not sanction you” (57). Zhuangzi refers to the heart/mind here as an object that the subject must do without. In this example the heart/mind is the self, and is imagined as an organ-like container that one can “have” or not in the container of the subject. Possession of a heart/mind is connected to the idea of the “full” heart/mind, and the subject must be purged or starved of superfluous attachment to social or personal desires. The fast therefore is not physical, but metaphorical. Furthermore, Zhuangzi connects the possession of a “full” or fixated heart/mind as a blockage between the subject and its more appropriate source of knowledge. The conceptual content of the metaphor is made through its association with previous and associated statements. Heaven and its associated forces are the conceptual targets that Zhuangzi metaphorically directs his readers to.

The connection to heaven as the proper location of distinctions connects it back to the issue of language that we described earlier. According to Zhuangzi, heaven is itself “empty” or “tenuous” (*xu*) and this allows it to respond to the endless changes in the physical world. For the human being this is more difficult because it has become common practice for us to use language distinctions to carve the world into static concepts. Zhuangzi has already spent considerable effort to show how it is possible to use metaphor and the technique of “goblet words” to get close to avoiding this issue. When Yan Hui asks Kongzi to elaborate on how to achieve this notion of “fasting the heart/mind,” we are given an explicit connection between the Way of Heaven, language and the heart/mind:

Kongzi said, “Unify your intention! It is better to listen with your heart/mind [*xin*] than to listen with your ears, but better still to listen with your *qi* than listen with your heart/mind. Listening

stops with the ears and the heart/mind stops with matching things up, but *qi* is tenuous and waits upon things. Only the Way will gather in tenuousness. Tenuousness is the fasting of the heart/mind.” (57-58)

It is important to note first that Zhuangzi describes the progression of listening from the ears, then onward to the heart/mind, and finally to *qi*. *Qi* will be explained as an important term shortly, but contextually this progression is interesting as well. This passage refers to the view of self-cultivation proposed in the *Mengzi*. Mengzi elevates the heart/mind as the source of moral and appropriate judgments, while Zhuangzi takes the movement started by Mengzi one-step further (Slingerland 2003: 183). He makes the heart/mind also something that “stirs up trouble” and would be better for one to do without. Slingerland says, “this is because the ears can get no deeper than the surface of words, and the heart/mind can get no deeper than coordinating things with words” (184). Zhuangzi’s True Man or sage lives without the heart/mind because he does not need it. His subjectivity is tenuous, based on *qi*, and Heavenly.

Kongzi’s last piece of advice to Yan Hui is to listen to your *qi*. This is clearly an example that Zhuangzi’s project is steeped in notions of Heaven of this time period. *Qi* is an important term of Warring States philosophy and deserves a short explanation. *Qi* is conceptualized as a force that pervades the material and intangible world. Heaven, Earth, the body and *qi* are all related. Though it can’t be seen, it is understood to be the source of all transformations and motion in the material world. It is not a force that adheres to specific materials—instead it moves through the world, present and transforming all things. *Qi* is sometimes referred to as “essence,” but it is better to characterize it as providing support and direction to the object’s function.⁷ In the body, proper flow of *qi* ensures that the organs, blood and all bodily functions happen smoothly and harmoniously. In this sense *qi* is physiological. But *qi* also ensures the continuous fluctuation and motion of the world, the macrocosm. For example, the Chinese term for weather (*tian qi*) literally references the movements and fluctuations of Heavenly *qi*. This constructs an interesting connection between the individual and cosmic order of the world that is employed in Zhuangzi’s soteriology. Zhuangzi’s soteriological goal is to transcend the normal methods one

uses to make decisions by locating the source of appropriate knowledge in a force within you (*qi*), which is also a constant force in the world. Listening to one's *qi* in this context then means plugging directly into the source of distinctions in the world.

The benefit of using conceptual metaphor theory, and more specifically container schemas of describing the self, is that it helps make sense of Zhuangzi's more confusing statements. One such example comes right after Kongzi finishes describing the process of fasting the heart/mind to Yan Hui:

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

The Master answered, "You've got it! I tell you now: you may go and wander in his cage without being moved by fame. If he is receptive, then sing; if not, keep silent. Be without gates and without schemes. Reside in oneness and lodge in what cannot be stopped. Then you will be close to getting it." (57-8)

A Davidsonian reading of the propositional content of this statement would conclude this statement is cognitively empty or simply rhetorical, since it is impossible to not be oneself. However, reading this statement as a conceptual metaphor is perfectly appropriate. In this example, "Hui" represents a self, and the loss of one's name indicates that he or she has lost attachment to another false self, thus further "emptying" the more general self so that the subject can come into greater alignment with Heaven.

Remember, Yan Hui comes to Kongzi for permission to give teachings to an immature ruler. With this new state of being, Kongzi thinks Yan Hui is ready to "enter his [the ruler's] cage," another container representing the ruler's self. Because his loss of self leads to "tenuousness," and is attributed to *qi* so connected to Heaven, the subject of Hui will be "without gates or schemes." Being tenuous, Hui will "wait" on the king's receptiveness and then act or not. It is significant that nowhere in the passage does Kongzi or Yan Hui "decide" what to do. Instead, it is his *qi* that "responds." The connection between waiting on the king and *qi* is another example

of Zhuangzi's commitment to "lodging" action in Heavenly action, which cannot be stopped like mental activities or theories. Conceivably Yan Hui would be able to state his case in a manner that is perfectly situated to the king's situation. He would not be tied up in "examples of antiquity" that the king may disagree with or not understand. Nor would he be concerned with personal desires. Although this does not guarantee Yan Hui's success, it will bring him "close to getting it": that is, having the understanding and responsiveness that will allow him to adapt to any situation perfectly. The ruler who perceives this may then come to align himself with Yan Hui because he is "lodged in what cannot be stopped" and the ruler will be drawn towards his similarity to Heaven. In the *Zhuangzi* this notion of power or virtue is called *de*, and although there is not enough time to elaborate upon it here, it serves as a representation of the Heavenly qualities that something may possess and makes it innately attractive.

It is clear from these examples above that while Zhuangzi possess a nuanced and confusing position with regard to language, his use of metaphor is not cognitively empty. While the propositional content of the text is not absolutely clear, we can understand it through the perspective of conceptual metaphor theory. His metaphors employ schemas that are basic to human communication and convey specific objects, values and aspects of living that one should endeavor to cultivate. It is, however, not clear that Zhuangzi knows how to "try not to try," that is, how to develop these abilities and selfhood without holding onto some doctrines, practices or concepts if only for a little while. In fact, it is not even clear, given the claims of conceptual metaphor theory, that the ultimate project of eliminating the notion of a separate self is even possible. It is not clear that it is possible for a subject to eliminate the experience of—or talking about—our lives as a split between subject and one or more selves. This question cannot be answered here, but even to pose in these terms it is to rely on the kind of conceptual metaphors that show that Zhuangzi's use of metaphor is not cognitively empty.

Notes

¹ For a detailed overview of the history and authors in the Zhuangzi see Charles Graham.

² I have transliterated all Chinese names with the exception of “Confucianism” and contemporary Chinese authors into pinyin. Thus Kongzi refers to Confucius, and Mengzi to Mencius.

³ This is a very famous example in which Zhuang Zhou dreams of himself as a butterfly, and forgets himself as Zhuang Zhou. Upon waking he is unsure if “he was Zhuang Zhou who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Zhuang Zhou” (49).

⁴ For an excellent overview, see Harold Roth, Sarah Queen, and Nathan Sivin (236-82).

⁵ The convention of referring to primary metaphors in all caps “gives a name for a reality at either the neural or conceptual level” (58). It reminds readers that the proposition of the metaphor does not exhaust the possibilities of the metaphoric use. See Lakoff and Johnson (50-54) for a list of important primary metaphors and experiential correlations.

⁶ Slingerland notes: “[T]he SUBJECT-SELF schema [was] first identified by Andrew Lakoff and Miles Becker [Lakoff and Becker 1992] and elaborated in Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 268-70). After examining a wide variety of metaphors for the self in modern American English, Lakoff and Becker conclude that English speakers fundamentally experience themselves in terms of a metaphoric split between a Subject and one or more Selves” (328).

⁷ For a brief description of the role of *qi* in the confluence of Chinese cosmology, philosophy and medicine see Ilza Veith (106).

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