THE CICADA & THE BIRD

THE USEFULNESS OF A USELESS PHILOSOPHY

Chuang Tzu's ancient wisdom

translated for modern life

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Cover design by Christopher and Chloe Tricker. The image is a colour-modified excerpt of an untitled painting by Bada Shanren. The original painting is black ink on paper, is dated to 1688, and is known as 'Cicada on a Banana Leaf', in the untitled album known as *Flowers, Birds, Insects, and Fish*, held by the Smithsonian Institution's Freer Gallery of Art in Washington DC.

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Dancing with Chuang Tzu

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Who is Chuang Tzu?

1

Chuang Tzu (Master Chuang) lived in ancient China sometime around 300 BC. His personal life is a mystery. All that we can really say about him is that he wrote one of the most entertaining and profound books ever written.

Let's, then, begin with the philosophy he presents in his book.

He observes: I am not my body. I am not my thoughts. I am not my social position. I am awareness, this here-and-now field of consciousness *in which* all these here-and-now things exist. And I am energy—this felt sense of aliveness, these felt inclinations, urges, promptings—here-and-now engaging with the world.

Having awoken to his nature as here-and-now awareness-and-energy, he sees that nothing can harm him and that everything is a gift with which to play. He sees that to identify with wealth and social standing, or an agenda, or a young, healthy body would be to fail to see the majesty of nature here-and-now spread out before him.

Let's turn to you.

You face difficulties. Perhaps the government, or your boss, or your neighbours are behaving badly, in ways you wish they were not? Perhaps your partner, or your child? Perhaps nature (a destructive storm; a harmful pathogen)? Perhaps your body, or your thoughts, or your emotions?

What to do?

Take up arms? Submit? Retreat to the hills?

Chuang Tzu answers: It is not *what* you do that matters, but *how* you do.

He says: Identify with awareness, get in touch with your energetic sense of engagement with things, and from *that* place—act. With grace and good humour. Like water flowing to fill a terrain.

These words of mine—identify with awareness, get in touch with your energetic sense of engagement with things—are abstract and so perhaps without meaning. Chuang Tzu's philosophy is not. He illustrates his vision with grand metaphors and charming parables. For example, he represents your field of consciousness as a mythically large bird whose wings span to the horizon. Your chattering brain and proud ego present as a cicada and a pigeon. You'll be invited to engage with things as if you are a noble charioteer whose chariot platform is the entire world and whose spirited team of horses the dynamic process of change itself. These images provide practical guidance. They have helped me to live a more engaged and playful life. Dear reader, there is every chance they can help you, too, to live a more engaged and playful life.

Given that New Age woo has an almost monopoly hold on the words 'awareness', 'consciousness', and 'energy', allow me to say that there is nothing woo about Chuang Tzu's philosophy. If you love the clarity and intellectual rigour of the Stoics, and Nietzsche, and Wittgenstein, you will find yourself in good company with Chuang Tzu.

You may be wondering what someone from the ancient world could possibly offer us in our present predicament. We who face existential threats. The possibility of annihilation by nuclear bombs, an engineered pandemic, environmental collapse, artificial intelligence. True, Chuang Tzu did not face these threats. But he did face this: a world in which autocrats and their minions inflict unspeakable harm and annihilation on entire populations. Chuang Tzu, like us, lived in the shadows of existential dangers. The solution he found to the problems of life is as relevant today as it was millennia ago.

Well, so much for Chuang Tzu's philosophy, as vague as this sketch is. Let's now see if we can glimpse a little of the man himself.

2

Writing in the early first century BC, the Grand Historian Su-ma Chien tells us that Chuang Tzu lived during the second half of the fourth century BC, was a native of Meng (a town in the Dukedom of Sung), and served as an official of some sort.

Scant as these morsels are, we should take them with a pinch of salt. For example, Su-ma Chien says that Chuang Tzu wrote The Old Fisherman, Robber Chih, and Rifling Trunks. Modern scholarship shows, convincingly, that he did not. And he writes a biography of the Taoist sage Lao Tzu that is pure fiction. (To take just one point: he thinks it plausible that Lao Tzu might have lived to be over two-hundred years old.) Biographical scholarship in first century BC China was not what it is today.

But let's say that Chuang Tzu did serve as an official. This means he was a member of the gentry social class: a rung below the nobility, but above the merchants, tradesmen, and farmers. That doesn't necessarily mean he was wealthy (the material circumstances of the gentry ranged from very wealthy to very poor), but it does mean he wasn't labouring in the fields.

3

There are several anecdotes about Chuang Tzu in the *Chuang Tzu.* (The *Chuang Tzu* is an anthology that includes Chuang Tzu's book, but which is mostly comprised of stories and essays written by other people. I discuss this later on in this introductory material, in the section titled 'About this edition and translation'.) We read that he's friends with the philosopher and chief minister of Wei, Hui Tzu (Master Hui). He refuses an offer to be chief minister of Chu. He lives in poverty. He's married and has children. But these accounts aren't history, they're stories. They're like the tale that when the Buddha was born lotus petals blossomed. They're like the parable of the thirteenth-century Persian, Nasrudin, who lost his keys in his bedroom but searched for them under a street lamp because the light was better there.

If you're poor you'll probably like hearing that Chuang Tzu, too, was poor. If you keep missing out on that promotion you might console yourself with the thought that Chuang Tzu *refused* high office. And if your kids are driving you mad you might find comfort in the thought that Chuang Tzu, too, had children. But what if you're rich? What if you've been promoted to a high-up position? What if you don't have children? Is Chuang Tzu against these life paths? No. He is neither for

nor against them. His focus is elsewhere. Chuang Tzu doesn't care *what* we do, his interest is in *how* we do.

Did Chuang Tzu actually know Hui Tzu? Did he actually live in poverty? Did he actually refuse an offer to be chief minister?

Did the historical Nasrudin actually lose his keys in his bedroom and then look for them under a street lamp?

Was Chuang Tzu tall? Short? Handsome? Ugly? If he married, was he happily married? Did he have a lover on the side? Perhaps he was gay? Perhaps a recluse?

We don't know.

In one story he tells of a time he dreamt he was a butterfly (Chapter 2.9). When he woke from this dream he wondered, 'Was the butterfly in Chou's dream? Is Chou in the butterfly's dream?' (Chou is Chuang Tzu's given name.) For Chuang Tzu, being Chou or the butterfly—and by extension, being married or single, a bum or a boss—is neither here nor there. What matters is being present with the circumstances in which you happen to find yourself. When he happened to be a butterfly, he was a butterfly. When things changed and he happened to be Chou, he was Chou. He identified with neither and was present with each.

It's like fire and firewood (Chapter 3.6). As fire passes from log to log, awareness passes from moment to moment. Now a butterfly, now Chou. Now well-to-do, now a neglected bum. Now this log, now this log. As far as Chuang Tzu is concerned, he is not this or that log. He's the fire, the that which is alight on now this log, now this log. He's awareness, energetic presence, ever alight on what here-and-now is.

4

So, there are two Chuang Tzus.

There's Chuang Tzu the fire: the awareness, the energetic presence that alighted on now this log, now this log.

And there's Chuang Tzu the log of firewood. Or more accurately, the man who was now this log, now this log.

This second Chuang Tzu is the historical Chuang Tzu. The man who lived almost two-and-a-half thousand years ago in ancient China. The

man who wrote the stories you'll read in this book. The man who may or may not have been poor. Who may or may not have been married. Who may or may not have had children.

We don't know who this Chuang Tzu was. So let's imagine him in each of these different circumstances. Now poor, now well-to-do. Now single, now married. Now tall, now short. And in each circumstance let's see a man acting with humility, equanimity, and good humour.

That's Chuang Tzu the firewood. What about Chuang Tzu the fire: the awareness, the energetic presence that *alighted* on now this log, now this log?

This Chuang Tzu exists here and now, waiting for you to meet him.

Jesus told his followers that if they split a piece of wood, or lifted up a stone, there he would be. Walt Whitman told his readers that if they ever wanted to find him, all they need do is look at the waves on the shore, or look under their boot-soles. And Chuang Tzu? What does he say? This:

A name constrains by treating a person as a log of firewood.
The fire that passes from log to log
knows not their exhaustion.

What do I hope *you* will say after reading this book? This:

It is in such places—
this split piece of wood,
beneath this lifted stone,
among these waves on the shore,
beneath my boot-soles,
this burning log—
it is here that I find Walt Whitman,
and Jesus,
and Chuang Tzu.

And not just them,
myself too.

Who is Mr Tricker?

1

I hesitate to tell you about me. What matters is not me, but the translation: Chuang Tzu's book. But I appreciate that you may be curious about who this person is who has written this translation. 'Can this person be trusted?' 'What are his credentials?' 'Is he on the same page as me?' I too am curious about who people are, and so in the spirit of meeting your natural curiosity I here tell you a little about myself.

2

I was born near Sydney, Australia, in 1972.

When I was twenty-four I attempted to kill myself with sedatives. My lack of pharmaceutical knowledge meant that I survived, which was a piece of good luck. Prior to taking those pills I'd been a painfully self-conscious person. My childhood had been a violent, lonely existence, with fantasies of suicide seducing me from a young age. I'd experienced the world and human relationships as things that I looked out upon as from behind a glass wall. Way back at the beginning, from behind the glass wall, I played with Lego blocks. Later, the piano. I practised scales. Learnt Bach, and Chopin. Just prior to taking the tablets I'd completed degrees in philosophy and law. Lego blocks, scales, by any other name. Still behind the glass wall I still had not the slightest idea how to make my way in the world. My other problem was that I was in a relationship with an emotionally unstable woman. I was very attracted to her bright eyes, her emotional expressiveness, her sense of adventure—and to the unspoken contract we had: that she would take me by the hand and lead me out and into the world, and I would provide her with calm and meaning and empathy. As it turned out, that bargain didn't work so well for me, but I've always been grateful that her sense of out-of-control

drama helped to push me over the edge, allowed me, finally, to give myself permission to do what I'd always wanted to do: kill myself.

Being an atheist I'd expected death to be final, so it's a curious thing that when I awoke in the afterlife I didn't question it. I knew that I'd died, but that seemed far away and long ago. What was close and present was the peace I felt. It was a peace I'd not known before.

What was this peace?

It has taken me many years to find a language to fully articulate the change I'd experienced, but within weeks of waking up I did come up with an image that I called the ego castle. I'd never noticed that I was living in this castle, but after I woke up from taking those tablets I found myself standing outside the castle, and then I saw it. Its courtyards and rooms. Its high, stone walls. That grand realm that had once been all the world—what a small, claustrophobic structure it now seemed.

Standing in the open space of the world, my self-consciousness was gone.

The simplest things shone with vibrant beauty.

A cut orange.

A light-filled bus.

A rat in a cage.

I met the rat when I began studying psychology a few months after the suicide attempt. My task was to train the rat to push a lever. It was an easy thing to do. When the rat happened to touch the lever I rewarded it with a sip of sugar water. This reward caused the rat to keep pushing the lever. Prior to taking the suicide tablets I'd probably have seen this as a nightmare illustration of authoritarian control, or as a despairing image of how we are all doomed to follow our cause-and-effect trajectories in life like balls on a billiard table. But now, having woken up from being dead, I saw this rat's circumstance as something divine and beautiful. I saw that we are all rats in a cage: delicate, vulnerable beings unknowingly conditioned by this and that to do this and that, feel this and that, think this and that. My heart went out to that little rat, so innocently going about its business, bright eyed and engaging with the world. It wasn't a nightmare, it was a miracle. Consciousness engaging with the world. I felt such tender love for this rat. And wonder—in response to our

innocence and vulnerability, and in response to this mystery in which we all find ourselves.

Around the same time as meeting the rat I chanced upon a story from the *Chuang Tzu:* the story of the wheelwright. (You can read this story now if you like: Theme 4.1.) It's about a duke sitting up on a podium reading a philosophical book, and a lowly wheelwright down in the courtyard making a wheel. The wheelwright boldly points out to the duke that the book he's studying is just the dregs of the lived life of the sage who wrote it. Offended, the duke threatens death. And yet—he's curious. He offers to spare the wheelwright if he can explain himself. The wheelwright explains how he's tried to teach wheel-making to his son, to no avail. His words were useless because wheel-making is something you have to do. The wheelwright can't put it into words. It's something he feels in his hands and his heart. His words are just the dregs of his lived experience.

I recognised that I was that duke. Having lived my life behind a glass wall, I knew nothing about real life. I'd observed others out in the world making wheels, conversing, playing on the beach, and not knowing how to do any of these things myself, I'd spent my life up on a podium studying the words of the sages. I'd been diligent and I was good at it. Not brilliant, but good. I'd been proud of having written prize-winning essays on how to live, and I'd argued scathingly against anyone who disagreed with me. I felt embarrassed remembering this. Those proud, prize-winning words of mine were just the rearranged dregs of other people's lives. I was someone who knew all the theory of wheel making, but who couldn't make a wheel.

Inspired by the wheelwright story I went to the library and found a translation of the *Chuang Tzu.* (This was back in the days before internet.) The translation, in hindsight, was poor. But even in this poor translation I sensed that here was the language, here were the images that expressed what I'd awoken to, and what I now needed to learn.

The *Chuang Tzu's* opening story struck me. An unfathomably large bird rising from the northern darkness, its wings spanning to the horizon. Having recently stepped out of the ego castle I recognised that this bird

represented awareness, the field of consciousness, the spaciousness I was now awake to.

Immediately following the story of the large, silent bird was a story about a little, chirping cicada. I knew this cicada well. I'd lived with him all my life. This chirping cicada was my chirping brain, ceaselessly theorising about this and that.

So, I'd now met the duke and the wheelwright, and the cicada and the bird.

I kept reading—this poor, in hindsight, translation, but this translation that was good enough to engage me, to let me know that its author knew what I had awoken to (awareness) and was now wanting to know (how to live in the world). Here was a book that might show me how to put down books and how to pick up a mallet and make wheels.

I didn't know it at the time, but I was to spend the next twenty-five years learning Classical Chinese and working on translating Chuang Tzu's imagery.

That's quite a gap, yes? Twenty-five years from my initial awakening to producing this translation. Why so long?

My life since stepping out of the ego castle has zig-zagged here and there. Although free of the ego castle, although having awoken to the spaciousness of the world, I still had a lot to learn about myself and others and the world. Learning to make wheels takes hands-on practise and time.

After a brief stint as a plain-language legal drafter, I picked up a part-time job at a drug detox-centre as a lowly (by society's standards) detox worker. My feeling was, 'I could be dead, yet here I am.' The whistle had blown, the points tallied, the crowd had left the stadium; and the groundskeeper had graciously granted us some extra time to play at our leisure. So I worked at the detox centre. I studied psychology, one unit at a time: at first on campus, and then by correspondence. I took up yoga. I played around with the *Chuang Tzu*—not translating it (at this time the idea of learning Classical Chinese was no more in my mind than the idea of flying to the moon), but rewriting this and that story from the existing translations, creating renditions that spoke to me. I left the city and

moved to a beachside hippyville, my head filled with vaguely-sketched visions of free love and philosophical comradeship.

All up, this simple joy of playing in the world lasted four years. Then my demons returned. One by one they snuck up on me. Loneliness. Frustration with the New Age nonsense that was the native language in the hippyville. Resentment over not having a lover. Yoga became a chore. One missed day became two, which became three, which became—. When I'd moved to the hippyville I'd happened to land a dream job as a counsellor at a famous drug-rehab centre, only to find that I was out of my depth. I remember one day looking at a psychology study and thinking, 'I just can't do this. This inane study is in no way helping me to function as a therapist.' I put the paper down and I picked up a joint. I quit my job at the rehab centre and I walked into the social security office. Thoughts of suicide returned. I'd awoken to awareness and yet my needs were not being met. I felt like the king who had discovered a pure spring up in the mountains and who then saw that the villagers were drinking from a poisoned well that was making them all a bit mad. When the king told the village folk about the pure spring, they just looked at him quizzically. Sometimes a concerned, well-meaning soul would rush to the poisoned well to get him a drink. He tried building an aqueduct to direct the mountain water down into the village, but the task was beyond him. After four years of this his loneliness started to get to him and create its own sort of madness. It started to seem to him that if he was to cleanse himself of the toxic effects of loneliness he'd have to go down into the village and drink from the poisoned well that everyone else was drinking from. This dilemma marked the beginning of the next phase of my awakening.

Years passed. Five, ten, fifteen. Early on I realised that if I was going to make proper sense of Chuang Tzu there was nothing for it but to learn Classical Chinese. There I was searching for Chuang Tzu in other people's translations, and of course it was ridiculous. We don't know our friends by second-hand reports. If I was to know what Chuang Tzu says, I would have to read *his* words. But O, to learn Classical Chinese—that was a daunting prospect. And yet—others had managed it, why not me? I have a brain, and time on my hands. So I got myself a Chinese-English

dictionary, a Classical Chinese grammar guide, and a copy of the Chinese text and began, sinograph by sinograph, phrase by phrase, learning Classical Chinese. At some point I studied Gestalt psychotherapy and spent years seeing now this, now that therapist. I took up jogging. And meditating. I bought an old timber house and learnt how to use a saw and how to turn a wall into a window. I cycled through relationships and aloneness. I worked as a disabilities support worker, a mental health support worker, a youth worker, a dish pig. I studied nursing and, degree fresh in hand, neck deep in the hierarchical social madness of a medical ward, learnt that my calling really is psychotherapy after all—so I went back and finished the psychology degree. This time round I was ready: I wasn't looking for approval; I wasn't looking for guidance; I was simply looking for an arena in which to act. So I dutifully jumped through the inane hoops of university study, snatched the piece of paper, and landed a job as an addictions counsellor at my local health service. This time round, working as a psychotherapist was as effortless as a duck wading on water. Somehow all those lost years of loneliness and wandering, of jogging out into the countryside and committing to a meditation practice, and learning to use a saw, and to give an injection, and to navigate the coastlines and inlets of relationships—these activities and experiences had developed my sense of place and competence in the world.

Through it all Chuang Tzu was my companion. It has taken me twenty-five years to produce this translation, not because it has taken me twenty-five years to learn Classical Chinese, but because it has taken me twenty-five years to discover and embody in my own life the wisdom that Chuang Tzu's stories express.

Sitting here now, twenty-five years on from having found myself on the outside of the ego castle, I can say that I have never re-entered that prison. Stepping out of that castle was a threshold step, a one-way step into freedom and spaciousness. But looking back over the past twenty-five years I see that ego takes on many forms. By a gift of pure luck—of grace—I'd escaped the ego castle, and what would you know? It turns out that ego has little huts scattered about here and there. Since finding myself on the outside of the ego castle I have now and then taken up

lodgings in this and that little ego-hut. Wallowing in self-pity over not having a lover. Resenting the worldly success of people I judge to be unworthy of it. Lamenting that all the world is drinking from a poisoned well.

But I kept at it, experimenting and exploring.

I learnt that mere awareness of awareness easily becomes passivity and resignation, and that out of passivity and resignation grows resentment and despair. And gradually, bit by bit, I learnt how to make space for pain and doubt, how to actively engage with the world with skill, gratitude, and good humour. Bit by bit I began to value and trust myself, and to allow that others sometimes simply lack the capacity to see what I see. Ironically, this freed me to value and trust others. I came to see that I am a precious child of Nature, and that others, too, are her precious children (my brothers and sisters), and that just as kookaburras and echidnas have different ways of going about things, so too do I and others. Kookaburra doesn't lament that Echidna is an echidna. Kookaburra greets the dawn with a joyful heart and sings his song. He keeps an eye out for other kookaburras and when among his own kind plays kookaburra games, but being a sociable type he also learns the ways of the other bushland folk. Echidnas in particular are enticing and tricky playmates. They have soft, adorable snouts, but also a maddening habit of curling into a ball and communicating with quills. Those quills have a sting to them, no mistake; but Kookaburra is quick on his feet and when the play becomes too tiresome, he has his wings.

I've laid out these details, these thinly sketched excerpts from the zig-zag of my life, because I think they illustrate an important aspect of what awakening involves. For me, awakening has been a two-step process. First was the initial awakening: stepping out of the ego castle and into the spaciousness of the world. That was a sudden, good-luck, all-changing experience. A gift of grace. Step two has been a longer, drawn-out process of gradual exploring and clumsy trial-and-error learning. It's a process that is ongoing, that continues to this day. Like wheel making. Your first wheel is a mess. And your second. And with practise you get better at it. And even when you think you've mastered it; even when, indeed, you *have* mastered it—for let's not be falsely, stupidly modest;

let's not put up before us unrealistic ideals of what it means to master life—there is always this: each new piece of wood presents new challenges.

One reason I love Chuang Tzu is that he doesn't shy from the realities—the complexities and hardships—of life. He doesn't badger us with Pollyanna platitudes and solutions. Any monkey can do that. I myself have been one of those monkeys, badgering myself and others with my Pollyanna—my pedestal—wisdom, my 'You should be this. Just do that. All is well, so just be happy.' No, Chuang Tzu is not a Pollyanna monkey. He does not preach from a pedestal. Chuang Tzu is a compassionate companion. A fellow traveller. He does offer answers, but his answers are the sort that allow us to make peace with uncertainty and unwanted circumstances. And in the depths of our uncertainty, our now-and-then despair, he helps us to once again see the nurturing, ever-present light of love and wonder. The straight line in the zig-zag. He reminds us how to remain engaged, how to remain connected with a sense of play.

This, then, is what I have learnt from Chuang Tzu, and what I hope to share with you. That you, if you have not already, can step free of the ego castle and into the spacious wonder of awareness. And that you can learn to navigate the little ego-huts and engage with the beauty of your here-and-now circumstances. And that you can find a faithful companion in Chuang Tzu. A companion who acknowledges your hardships, who is at peace with the zig-zags of life. A companion who, through his companionship, turns hardship into gratitude and play.

3

Now that you know a little about me, you might be wondering: Who are you, Mr Tricker, to translate Chuang Tzu?

It's a fair question. I've asked it myself.

It's especially fair because my interpretation of Chuang Tzu is in some ways unique. Most unique is that I interpret the large bird Of a Flock (Chapter 1.1) to be a metaphor for awareness, the field of here-and-now consciousness. No native Chinese scholar has ever interpreted Of a Flock in this way. (For that matter, no Western scholar has either.) Which raises

the question: How likely is it that I, a nobody Australian, have discovered in Chuang Tzu things that native Chinese scholars have not? Isn't it more likely that I'm misreading Chuang Tzu, that I'm projecting thoughts onto his writing that he didn't think?

I've come to see that modern English speakers are no less qualified to interpret Chuang Tzu's Classical Chinese than are native Chinese folk. To use an analogy, here's why:

Consider the Old English poem *Beowulf,* written sometime around AD 1000. Here's the opening line:

> Hpæt pe garde na ingear dagum þeod cyninga þrym ge frunon huða æþelingas ellen fremedon.

OK, this comparison is unfair because Classical Chinese uses the same sinographs as modern Chinese. So let's replace the Old English words with modern English words:

> What we spear-dane plural in-days gone people kings glory hear past-tense how princes valour accomplished.

For we modern English speakers, Old English is a foreign language. And AD 1000 Great Britain is a foreign land. Were a native Chinese person to try their hand at translating and interpreting *Beowulf* they'd be no less qualified than a native English person who set themselves the same task. Both the native Chinese person and the native English person would have to apply themselves to learning a long-dead language from a long-dead land.

My fellow native English speaker, how'd you go with that sentence of Old English? Well, with a good dictionary, an Old English grammar guide, some background research into AD 1000 British history, and an ear for poetry, you might come up with something like this:

> Behold! We spear-Danes in days of old heard the glory of the tribal kings, how the princes did courageous deeds.

It may indeed be that I've projected thoughts onto Chuang Tzu's writing that Chuang Tzu didn't think. And it may be that I haven't. It may be that until me the sort of scholarly person who has bothered to

learn Chuang Tzu's Classical Chinese has not been the sort of person who has lived the sort of life or had the sort of experience you need to live or have to see what Chuang Tzu saw. Dear reader, if you do decide that I've projected thoughts onto Chuang Tzu's writing that Chuang Tzu didn't think—fair enough. But the reason you come to that conclusion should not be that I'm not a native Chinese scholar. The native Chinese scholar, no less than me, is just a person who has learnt a foreign language from a foreign land. A long dead language from a long dead land.

We translators, Chinese and English alike, are on equal ground here. We are archaeologists doing the best we can, as studiously as we can, to recreate a lost world.

A world, as it turns out, that is here-and-now present.

A world that you, you who have eyes that see, can see.

About this edition and translation

1

The source text.

I translate the text presented in the Harvard-Yenching Institute's *A Concordance to Chuang Tzu.*

2

Romanisations.

Chuang Tzu's name isn't really Chuang Tzu. It's 莊子.

To render 莊子 into English-like words we have to use roman-alphabet letters (a, b, c) to represent a phonetic pronunciation of 莊 子. This process is called romanisation.

There have been many different systems for romanising Chinese sinographs. Each system has its pros and cons, but let's note how no system is, or ever could be, inherently better than any other. A romanised word, be it 'Chuang Tzu', or 'Zhuangzi', or any other combination of letters, is not, and is not even close to being, the original Chinese: 莊子. Because of this it doesn't matter which system we use. Whatever system we choose the only thing to recommend it over another will be that we just happen to prefer it, for whatever reasons, and that it is a system that other people in the community are using.

The most widely used system in the English-speaking community in the twentieth century was Wade-Giles, according to which 莊子 is rendered 'Chuang Tzu'. In the 1950s, however, China adopted the Pinyin system, according to which 莊子 is rendered 'Zhuangzi', and over the last few decades this has become the almost universally-used system in the English-speaking world, all but replacing Wade-Giles.

In this book I use a combination of modified Wade-Giles romanisations and Pinyin romanisations.

~

In the translation, I use modified Wade-Giles romanisations.

Why use the out-of-date Wade-Giles spellings ('Chuang Tzu') instead of the current, almost universally-used Pinyin spellings ('Zhuangzi')? Because, whereas the printed words 'Chuang Tzu' are rounded, warm, and convey a sense of Eastern antiquity, 'Zhuangzi' is a harsh neon-lit nightmare of futuristic zeds.

Given that Pinyin ('Zhuangzi') is the official romanisation system of China, and the United Nations, and Stanford University, and—Ah, it is inevitable, I know, that 'Chuang Tzu' will die out and become completely replaced by 'Zhuangzi'. But, and call it what you will—I'm holding on to 'Chuang Tzu'.

Just as some Pinyin words are horrendous (e.g., Zhuangzi), so too are some Wade-Giles words—e.g., Ch'u (what the heck does that apostrophe mean?) and I (no, not a first-person pronoun; a Chinese name pronounced *ee*). In these cases the Pinyin is much better: Chu and Yi. So instead of Ch'u I write Chu. Instead of I, Yi.

Sometimes the Wade-Giles spelling for different sinographs is the same. For example, the states Wei 魏 and Wei 衛. To distinguish the two, I spell one of them Wey (衛).

If you want to know the correct Wade-Giles spelling or the Pinyin spelling of a name, look it up in the glossary. There you'll find the unmodified Wade-Giles spelling, the Pinyin spelling, and the sinograph.

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In my translation notes, when referring to sinographs I use italicised Pinyin (e.g., *xīn* 心).

3

I omit material so as to reveal Chuang Tzu's book.

This book is the first in over two thousand years to present Chuang Tzu's stories in a coherent, accessible manner. Before now his stories have always been mixed up with other people's writings.

If you go to the library and ask for Chuang Tzu's book, you'll be given a book called the *Chuang Tzu.* You'd be forgiven for thinking that the

Chuang Tzu is by Chuang Tzu. It is not. It's as if you asked for Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and the librarian hands you a book titled *Coleridge's The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* but in fact the book is an anthology of nineteenth-century romantic poetry. This anthology does have Coleridge's poem in it, but it mostly has other poems by other writers, some of them plonked right in the middle of Coleridge's poem, and there are no headings to tell you who wrote what. Well, it's the book you've been given, so you read it. And you get a lot of enjoyment from it, even if it's a strange sort of experience. The writing style and themes seem to be inconsistent and disjointed. But you shrug and say to yourself that Coleridge is just one of those writers who's a bit scattered in his thinking, a bit hit-and-miss in his ability.

This has been Chuang Tzu's fate for the past two thousand years. His book lost in the *Chuang Tzu,* one of the greatest philosophers and literary stylists in the Asian world has been known as someone who's a bit scattered in his thinking, a bit hit-and-miss in his ability.

How did this outrage happen?

Chuang Tzu wrote his book sometime around 300 BC. Over the following one-and-a-half centuries a body of literature developed in response to his book. At the same time, all of this material—Chuang Tzu's writings and the other writings—began to be collected into a single book, the *Chuang Tzu.* Over yet more centuries the *Chuang Tzu* was revised and edited until we arrive at AD 300 with the Kuo Hsiang edition. When we talk about the *Chuang Tzu* it is this book that we're talking about: the Kuo Hsiang edition of AD 300.

The *Chuang Tzu* (i.e., the Kuo Hsiang edition) is divided into three sections: the Inner Chapters (Chapters 1–7), the Outer Chapters (Chapters 8–22), and the Miscellaneous Chapters (Chapters 23–33). The general consensus among scholars has been that Chuang Tzu wrote the Inner Chapters, and possibly the occasional story in the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters.

You'd never know this from reading the existing translations. With only one exception (which I'll discuss in a moment) the existing translations present the entire thirty-three chapters as being by Chuang Tzu. For example, Burton Watson in the introduction to his landmark translation

of 1968, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu,* notes that the Inner Chapters are 'the product of a superbly keen and original mind' and that the rest of the book is most likely the work of later writers. But then in the actual translation the reader is presented with a contents list of thirty-three chapters under the title 'The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu'.

Inevitably, then, most readers think that the *Chuang Tzu* is by Chuang Tzu. In a similar way to how most Christians think that the Bible—that vast cacophony of conflicting voices—is a coherent book composed by a single intelligence (God), most readers think that the *Chuang Tzu*—a vast cacophony of conflicting voices—is a coherent book composed by a single intelligence (Chuang Tzu). Even people who know better, like Watson—they act *as if* the *Chuang Tzu* is by Chuang Tzu. The tell-tale sign that someone is doing this—and practically everyone does—is that they attribute any and all stories in the *Chuang Tzu* to Chuang Tzu.

If you read the *Chuang Tzu* as a book written by Chuang Tzu, you will end up concluding that either (a) Chuang Tzu has some moments of brilliance, but lacks a coherent vision; or (b) Chuang Tzu probably does have a coherent vision, so it must be that *you* lack the intelligence to behold that vision; or (c) Chuang Tzu definitely does have a coherent vision, and the genius and coherence of that vision is too sublime a thing to be grasped by mere rational analysis and that to grasp its sense one has to be wise enough to put reason aside and get in touch with one's intuition and go along with the flow of—well, you get the idea.

Each of these conclusions is wrong. All that's in fact happening is that you're reading a text that neglects to identify that different bits of the text are written by different people.

Only one translator has addressed this problem: A. C. Graham. In his landmark translation of 1981, he sorts the text into five sections: (1) Chuang Tzu's writings, (2) material that's similar to Chuang Tzu's writings, (3) Primitivist material, (4) Yangist material, and (5) Syncretist material. By arranging the text in this way, Graham's translation was the most important edition of the *Chuang Tzu* since the Kuo Hsiang edition itself. It was the first edition ever to identify (to attempt to identify) which bits of the *Chuang Tzu* are by Chuang Tzu.

Graham, however, did something strange. He took material from the Miscellaneous Chapters and inserted it into the Inner Chapters. So now I found myself looking at two different versions of Chuang Tzu's book. Graham's edition of the Inner Chapters, and Kuo Hsiang's.

Let's picture the Inner Chapters as an old English manor. Graham's edition of the Inner Chapters, then, is an old English manor, and Kuo Hsiang's edition is another. Looking at these manors, in each case I had the sense that I was seeing a grand structure, while simultaneously feeling that the building was a strange sort of rambling hodgepodge of a thing. I kept gazing at these manors, trying to make sense of my conflicting feelings. For years I gazed. I walked the perimeters. I wandered in and out of the numerous rooms. And then, eventually, I saw. What I was looking at was an original, elegant building that had had, over the centuries, one ill-conceived extension after another added onto it. An extra wing here. An additional room there. A piece of furniture inserted here. The original building was still there, elegant and intact, but it was hidden by these later additions.

This is a new way of seeing the Inner Chapters. There are people who say that the Inner Chapters are an elegant work of art, and others who say they're a rambling hodgepodge of a thing, but none who say they are both. Might it be that each of these opposite responses is a failure to properly resolve a conflict that we *all* experience; that each of these responses, instead of genuinely resolving this conflict, merely resolves the tension by pushing out of awareness one half of the experience?

Let's consider each response, each side of the tension.

~

Let's start with the view that the Inner Chapters are a beautifully crafted work of art.

Shuen-Fu Lin notes that 'Chinese literary scholars through the ages have admired the unity and structure of the Inner Chapters,' and that 'there is a subtle kind of "inner logic" in the unfolding of ideas running through [the Inner Chapters].' What Lin and the literary scholars are seeing, I propose, is the original building. But if so, how is it that Lin and the literary scholars don't see the bits that to my eyes are distracting and confusing additions?

One possibility is that these people do see that some parts of the Inner Chapters are incongruous, but they ignore these bits, allowing their focus to land elsewhere. We noted above how Watson saw the Inner Chapters as being 'the product of a superbly keen and original mind.' More fully, what he wrote was: the Inner Chapters 'are certainly in the main the product of a superbly keen and original mind, though they may contain brief interpolations by other hands.' Here we see Watson acknowledging that there are incongruous bits. But having done so he promptly skips on to other matters. He completely neglects to identify which bits are incongruous, and the whole issue vanishes into thin air.

Another possibility is that these people begin with the assumption that the Inner Chapters *are* a coherent whole, and they then make it so. I myself did this at first. It is an easy thing to do. All that it requires is a bit of creative intelligence and a lazy willingness to join the dots between different ideas without worrying too much about whether or not this dot-joining really makes sense. A tell-tale sign that someone is doing this is their saying something along the lines of, 'Chuang Tzu is a cheeky, provocative writer who at different times intentionally adopts different literary styles and philosophical views, so we can never edit out bits of the text on literary or philosophical grounds,' or, 'Chuang Tzu intentionally bamboozles our reason, so we must never use reason to judge that some bits of the Inner Chapters are out of place.' These are circular arguments. They *assume* that Chuang Tzu wrote the Inner Chapters and then say, *therefore* Chuang Tzu wrote the Inner Chapters.

To these people I say: If you're willing to use reason to determine that Chuang Tzu wrote the Inner Chapters, but not the Miscellaneous and Outer Chapters, why stop there? Why not use that very same reason to determine whether Chuang Tzu wrote this bit of the Inner Chapters, but not that bit?

Does Chuang Tzu adopt different literary styles? Well, were we to take an anthology of modern poetry and attribute it to a single author, we would find ourselves saying that this author adopts different literary styles. And we would be mistaken. True, there are writers who adopt different styles and who do so to good effect. The novelist Peter Carey is an example. But Peter Carey's different styles are all of a style that is

recognisable as being Peter Carey's, and as being distinct from, say, Jane Austen's. Each of these writers has a distinct voice. Also, any one of Peter Carey's novels is written in a coherent style. Each of his novels has internal coherence.

Does Chuang Tzu adopt conflicting philosophical views? This calls to mind Walt Whitman's famous quip, 'Do I contradict myself? Very well then … I contradict myself. I am large … I contain multitudes.' But of course Whitman does not *in fact* contradict himself. The very meaning of his quip is that his view coherently transcends the merely apparent contradictions that some people might see between this and that statement in his writing. And we who get his meaning do see the coherence. We do not ramble incoherently about the profound coherence of Whitman's incoherence!

I agree that Chuang Tzu makes use of a variety of literary styles, and that one of his agendas is to put reason in its place. But philosophical and literary genius does not produce writing that is confused and inelegant. Works of philosophical and literary genius are coherent and elegant.

Yes, we must take great care before deciding that this or that bit of the Inner Chapters is not the work of Chuang Tzu. But when we see incongruity, we must not ignore it. To ignore incongruity in the Inner Chapters is to do a great disservice to both ourselves and Chuang Tzu. Let's entertain the possibility that the incongruity is the result of our poor understanding. In that case we owe it to ourselves to acknowledge the incongruity—indeed, to highlight it—and to then get to work to improve our understanding. Alternatively, let's entertain the possibility that the incongruity is the result of extraneous text having been added to Chuang Tzu's book. In that case we owe it to Chuang Tzu to acknowledge the incongruity, to correctly determine that the incongruity is the result of extraneous text having been added to his, and to then remove the extraneous text. There are no easy, formulaic answers here. Each sentence, each paragraph, each story must be argued on its merits. Far from mindlessly putting our reason aside, these tasks require us to use the very best of our reason.

~

Let's now consider the other side of our felt tension: the view that the Inner Chapters is a rambling hodgepodge of a thing.

Martin Palmer, in the introduction to his 2007 translation, *The Book of Chuang Tzu,* says that 'trying to read Chuang Tzu sequentially is a mistake. The text is a collection, not a developing argument.' Graham paints a starker picture. His view is that although the Inner Chapters contain material that is 'homogenous in thought and style', the material is a 'hotchpotch' of 'discontinuous episodes', 'disjointed pieces', 'fragmented' passages. The text is in places 'scrappy' and 'badly damaged', scrapings from 'the bottom of the barrel'. Graham accounts for the hotchpotch by surmising that Chuang Tzu just wrote standalone pieces and that it was a later editor who, searching through the relics of Chuang Tzu's literary remains, arranged these pieces under seven themes (the seven chapter-titles of the Inner Chapters).

How is it, then, that Palmer and Graham don't see that the Inner Chapters is a beautifully crafted work of art?

The answer is obvious enough. They correctly see that much of the Inner Chapters contains material that is disjointed and incongruous, and this disjointed, incongruous material prevents them from seeing that among this material there exists a congruous structure.

To restore what he sees as fragmented, scrappy, badly damaged text, Graham adds text from the Miscellaneous Chapters. In doing so, he makes matters worse. Ah, what a difficult task we restorationists undertake once we resolve to fix what has been corrupted. What scope there is for error and disagreement. No wonder so few dare embark on this task! (There have been several translations since Graham's. Not one of them takes up the baton from Graham. Not one of them attempts to present the reader with *Chuang Tzu's* words.) So for all that I disagree with some of Graham's amendments, I applaud him for making them. He did not shy from the experience of incongruity. He stepped up to the mark and did his honest best to do something to resolve it. He did the thing that must be done.

~

Let's recap.

Everyone sees the Inner Chapters as being the centrepiece of the *Chuang Tzu,* as being a collection of writings that are both philosophically profound and stylistically remarkable. Some people see the Inner Chapters as being a structured, elegant work of art. Others see them as being something of a hodgepodge, a collection of writings that are for the most part brilliant but which are in places stylistically and philosophically at odds with the major part of itself. My view is that this tension is best resolved by seeing that the Inner Chapters contain a coherent, elegant book, a book that is obscured by the presence of extraneous material.

And so I carefully remove the extraneous material and reveal the coherence and elegance of Chuang Tzu's original book.

~

How did text get added to Chuang Tzu's book?

Ancient China was a very different place to the world that you and I inhabit. You and I live in a world in which such things as global databases exist, and an international army of scholars dedicated to preserving texts in their original form. Ancient China was a world of horses and warring kingdoms in which isolated scholars read bamboo scrolls by candlelight.

Chuang Tzu wrote his book sometime around 300 BC. The Kuo Hsiang edition was written around AD 300. That's a gap of six hundred years. During those vast epochs there was a period, around 213 BC, when the emperor ordered, on pain of torture and death, that all non-state-endorsed books be burned. Books were burned. Scholars were buried alive. Scholarship went underground. Books went into wall cavities, and into caves—and lingered there, unseen, untouched except by the rodenty creatures of perpetual dark, for generations. I'm not sure that you and I, living in our brightly lit world of global databases and institutional scholarship, can even begin to imagine the fear and silence of such times. This single event hints at the wide-open opportunities that existed back in those candlelit centuries for texts to become damaged and distorted.

One way that text may have been added to Chuang Tzu's book is by bits of commentary being mistaken for primary text. The traditional way of writing a commentary on a text was to reproduce the entire text,

inserting your commentary at the relevant place. Once the primary text became lost to history and the only available texts were these commentaries, we can imagine this and that scribe now and then mistaking the occasional line of commentary for primary text, with the result that what Kuo Hsiang presents as primary text may in fact be, at times, some prior commentator's commentary.

Another way that text may have been added to Chuang Tzu's book is by physical mishap. Ancient Chinese books were strips of bamboo tied together with leather thread and rolled into scrolls. We can imagine that the thread binding the bamboo strips decayed and broke now and then, or was eaten away by rats, providing the opportunity for some strips to have been unintentionally put back in the wrong order. (Again, the person putting the strips back together was not a twenty-first-century professor with access to Google Scholar, but may have been someone who was completely unfamiliar with the text.)

The primary way, though, that text was added to Chuang Tzu's book was through the intentional actions of this and that editor. We know that editors did edit the text. Kuo Hsiang himself tells us that he did this. (Unfortunately, he doesn't tell us *what* changes he made.) Also, bibliographic records tell us that around 50 BC the *Chuang Tzu* was a book of fifty-two chapters. It's anyone's guess what sort of editing happened to whittle those fifty-two chapters down to the thirty-three chapters presented in the Kuo Hsiang edition. One obvious possibility is that there was an agenda to consolidate the material in the various chapters and that during this consolidation process some material from the discarded chapters was incorporated into the non-discarded chapters, including the Inner Chapters.

~

So, I've removed material from the Inner Chapters so as to reveal Chuang Tzu's book. Here's the stats:

Chapter 1. I've omitted 20% of the chapter.
Chapter 2. I've omitted 11% of the chapter.
Chapter 3. No changes.
Chapter 4. I've omitted 35% of the chapter.
Chapter 5. I've omitted 30% of the chapter.

Chapter 6. I've omitted 78% of the chapter.

Chapter 7. I've omitted this chapter in its entirety.

All up, the book that I present to you as Chuang Tzu's book amounts to 60% of the material in the Inner Chapters.

I don't flag in the translation when I've omitted text, but you will find all of the omitted text at the end of this book, and I've formatted that section so that it is easy to locate where the text has been omitted from.

Along with each bit of omitted text, I provide my reasons for omitting the text. Basically, I omit material that I judge is not homogenous in thought and style with the remaining material, and which obscures the coherent structure and meaning of the remaining material. Of course, the devil—and the truth—is in the detail. I provide that detail with the omitted material at the end of the book.

The core building from which I've worked is Chapters 1–3. The small amount of material I've omitted from Chapters 1 and 2 won't, I imagine, ruffle many feathers. With that material omitted I see Chapters 1–3 as a coherent, elegant structure. The core of the original building. From this core structure the question I've asked myself has been, Does the material in Chapters 4–7 belong with the material in Chapters 1–3? Given that Chapters 1–3 are the central body of the original building, to what extent are the bits in Chapters 4–7 also part of the original building? To what extent does their thought and aesthetic match the thought and aesthetic of Chapters 1–3?

I'd like to acknowledge that there is some great material in the material I've omitted, material that is very much worth reading. Some of this material was difficult for me to omit. So if you feel outraged by some of my omissions, then, and for what it's worth, I empathise. The dogged purpose of the present book, however, is to present *Chuang Tzu's* book.

If you like my translation but take issue with my omissions, allow me to suggest that you mark where I've removed the bits you think should not be removed. Then as you're reading the translation you can flip to the omitted material and read the omitted bits. I don't suppose you'll find this completely satisfying, but it will at least allow you to have access to the edition of Chuang Tzu's book that suits you.

~

What to call Chuang Tzu's book?

We don't know what title Chuang Tzu gave his book.

We can't call his book the *Inner Chapters.* The book that Chuang Tzu wrote was not a subsection of some later editor's anthology.

We can't call his book the *Chuang Tzu.* Apart from being a lame title, it has already been taken.

In a moment of inspiration the title *The Cicada and the Bird* popped into my brain. I think this is a great title, but not everyone agrees with me and it has the further downside of being *my* title, not Chuang Tzu's.

We have no option but to take his book as it has come to us: untitled. To refer to this untitled book we can call it, simply, Chuang Tzu's book.

4

I format the translation into sections, paragraphs, and lines.

The received text is an imposing block of unpunctuated sinographs. It looks like this:

南	已	枋	笑	以	摶	徙	志	運	翼	知	為	大	北
為	奚	時	之	六	扶	於	怪	則	若	其	鳥	不	冥
	以	則	曰	月	搖	南	者	將	垂	幾	其	知	有
	以	不	我	息	而	冥	也	徙	天	千	名	其	魚
	之	至	決	者	上	也	諧	於	之	里	為	幾	其
	九	而	起	也	者	水	之	南	雲	也	鵬	千	名
	萬	控	而	蜩	九	擊	言	冥	是	怒	鵬	里	為
	里	於	飛	與	萬	三	曰	齊	鳥	而	之	也	鯤
	而	地	槍	學	里	千	鵬	諧	也	飛	背	化	鯤
		而	榆	鳩	去	里	之	者	海	其	不	而	之

We don't know how Chuang Tzu presented his text. All we have is the text as presented in the Kuo Hsiang edition. But it's probably safe to assume that Chuang Tzu, at least to some extent, wrote in this block-text manner. Other books of the era were written in this format.

It is difficult, perhaps impossible, for we modern readers to imagine ourselves into this block-text reading context. In that written-word

context it was up to the reader to mentally create the sections, paragraphs, and line breaks, and one way or another the readers in that context must have known how to do so.

The primary way that readers would have learnt how to do this is by reading the book under the close tutelage of a master. Books back in those days were not the things they are today: mass produced things that we read in the privacy of our own homes. Back in those days a book was a rare work of art. To read a book you'd have to go to the home of a master who had a copy of the book, and the master would sit down with you and read through it with you, instructing you in how to make sense of it.

We modern readers exist in a written-word context in which sections, paragraphs, and line breaks *do* exist. The absence of these things means something very different to us than it did to people living back in those block-text times. For us, the absence of sections, paragraphs, and line breaks confounds us and strikes us as bad writing. And this, alas, has been the fate of Chuang Tzu in English. In English, Chuang Tzu has existed as a rambling, confounding, not-very-good writer.

~

Numbered sections.

I got the idea of breaking the text up into numbered sections from Nietzsche. Like Nietzsche, Chuang Tzu is unique among philosophers in that he is not just a philosopher of the first rank, he is a creative writer of the first rank. Both write parables and stories.[1] Also like Nietzsche, Chuang Tzu presents his ideas in discrete sections. These sections follow logically from one to the next, but to see this logic you need to see where one section ends and the next begins. To borrow a metaphor that Nietzsche uses to describe his own writing, these sections are like peaks in a mountain range. The different mountain peaks sit in a definite relationship to each other, and by stepping from one peak to the next,

[1] In regard to Nietzsche, standout examples are the parable of the madman (in *The Gay Science,* paragraph 125) and the entirety of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* Beware that Nietzsche is often translated horrendously. I recommend that you only read the excellent translations by Walter Kaufmann.

and by stepping back and seeing all the peaks in a single view, you get the meaning of the landscape.

To fail to present the different sections as discrete sections, to instead present them as a continuous stretch of prose, is like taking a mountain range and pushing all the peaks up against each other to create a plateau. The mountain range, and the meaning it expresses, is destroyed.

So to present the mountain range I format the text into numbered sections.

~

Headings.

To help orientate you to the sections, I use headings. The chapter titles are Chuang Tzu's, but all other headings are my invention.

~

Paragraphs and lines.

Classical Chinese reads more like poetry than prose. In the mind's eye of a competent reader the block text above arranges itself into the following shape:

北冥有魚
其名為鯤
鯤之大不知其幾千里也
化而為鳥
其名為鵬
鵬之背不知其幾千里也
怒而飛
其翼若垂天之雲
是鳥也
海運則將徙於南冥

You read these lines in columns, from top to bottom, from right to left. I translate them as:

In the northern darkness there is a fish.
His name is Speck of Roe.
Speck of Roe's size? It measures I don't know how many thousands of miles.

He changes and is now a bird.
His name is Of a Flock.
Of a Flock's back—it spans I don't know how many thousands of miles.

He rouses vigorously and takes to flight,
his wings like clouds arcing across the heavens.

This bird—
When the tide turns, he'll migrate to the southern darkness.

Because Classical Chinese reads more like poetry than prose it is a mistake to translate Classical Chinese into English prose. Imagine taking, say, T. S. Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' and instead of writing out the lines as paragraphs and lines, join the lines together into a stretch of block prose. Suddenly the rhythm and meaning of the poem is ruined. It doesn't read right. Instead of flowing and resonating, the writing is now a confused and jolting ramble. For example, Watson translates those lines as:

> In the northern darkness there is a fish and his name is K'un. The K'un is so huge I don't know how many thousand li he measures. He changes and becomes a bird whose name is P'eng. The back of the P'eng measures I don't know how many thousand li across and, when he rises up and flies off, his wings are like clouds all over the sky. When the sea begins to move, this bird sets off for the southern darkness, […].

When translating Chuang Tzu's block text into modern English the lines need to be separate lines. And groups of lines need space between them. The lines need this so that they can sit in the right relation to each other and resonate in the right way.

5

I translate people's names.

Some names in Chuang Tzu's book are just names. For example, Chuang Tzu. In that case I don't translate them. Well, in the translation

I do translate Chuang Tzu as Master Chuang. Tzu is an honorific for a scholar. But Chuang is just a family name, like Smith. Note how Smith *is* just a name. Although it is true that if I ask you what a smith does you picture a blacksmith, when I introduce you to Adam Smith you do not picture a blacksmith. Likewise, it happens that a chuang is a hamlet or a manor, but it would be a mistake to translate Chuang Tzu as Master Hamlet. Chuang, here, is simply functioning as a family name.

Most names in Chuang Tzu's book, however, have meaning. For example: Path Approver, I Shoulder Responsibility, Neglect to Breast Beat.

All translations to date have neglected to translate most of these names. So in other translations instead of meeting Path Approver you'll meet Hsü Yu (or Xu You). Instead of meeting I Shoulder Responsibility you'll meet Chien Wu (or Jian Wu). And instead of meeting Neglect to Breast Beat you'll meet Ch'in Shih (or Qin Shi).

These translated names can sound a little odd at first. But consider names like Sitting Bull and Dances with Wolves. These names sounded a little odd at first, but we're all used to them now. Indeed, we know these names. These names say something to us. For all their strangeness these names are poetic. They endear us.

Sitting Bull is a translation of Tatanka Iyotake. Imagine if you'd been introduced to him by *that* name!

6

I've done my best. (The art of juggling.)

Translations of the *Chuang Tzu* are often promoted as being either literary or philosophical. But this distinction makes no sense. The so-called literary translation, in failing to translate the philosophy, also fails to translate the poetry. Lacking the philosophy, it's just a superficial babble. The so-called philosophical translation, in failing to translate the poetry, also fails to translate the philosophy. Lacking the poetry, it's just a maze-like graveyard of words. A translation cannot be literary *or* philosophical. It can only be good—or not. True—or not.

Appreciating that the poet and the philosopher are one, Graham

laments that a translator is a juggler who cannot keep all balls in flight. My juggling balls have been:

Ball 1. Convey the philosophical meaning.

Ball 2. Write good English.

Ball 3. Use the same imagery (idioms, metaphors) as the original.

Ball 4. Adhere to the grammatical structure (the poetic form, the rhetorical flair) of the original.

Ball 5. Translate words and phrases consistently.

Juggling these balls is difficult. You're forever having to decide: Which balls, at this moment of the text, must be kept in flight? Which can be allowed to fall? It's a balancing act, but to the extent that I was guided by rules, they were:

Rule 1. Keep Ball 1 in flight at all times: Convey the philosophical meaning. Why? Because Chuang Tzu isn't just throwing words about for the fun of it. Yes, he *is* throwing words about for the fun of it, but his primary motivation in putting brush to bamboo is that he has something to say.

Rule 2. While keeping Ball 1 in flight, keep Ball 2 in flight: Write good English. Why? Because when Ball 2 *is* kept in flight, Ball 1 flies better. To the extent that you *do* write good English, the philosophical meaning is better conveyed.

Rule 3. While keeping Balls 1 and 2 in flight, keep Ball 3 in flight: Use the same imagery (idioms, metaphors) as the original. Why? Because when Ball 3 *is* kept in flight, Balls 1 and 2 fly better. To the extent that you *do* use the same imagery as the original, the English is richer and the philosophical meaning is better conveyed.

Rule 4. While keeping Balls 1, 2, and 3 in flight, keep Ball 4 in flight: Adhere to the grammatical structure (the poetic form, the rhetorical flair) of the original. Why? Because when Ball 4 *is*

kept in flight, Balls 1, 2, and 3 fly better. To the extent that you *do* hold to the grammatical structure of the original, the imagery is sharper, the English is richer, and the philosophical meaning is better conveyed.

Rule 5. While keeping Balls 1, 2, 3, and 4 in flight, keep Ball 5 in flight: Translate words and phrases consistently. Why? Because when Ball 5 *is* kept in flight, Balls 1, 2, 3, and 4 fly better. To the extent that you *do* translate words and phrases consistently, the poetic form is more apparent, the imagery is sharper, the English is richer, and the philosophical meaning is better conveyed.

Let's look at an example.

In Chapter 3.2, a lord describes a cook butchering an ox. Here's the Chinese (the English on the right provides the word-for-word meaning):

手之所觸	hand going to where it pushes
肩之所倚	shoulder going to where it leans
足之所履	foot going to where it steps
膝之所踦	knee going to where it inclines
砉然	whoosh so (the sound of flesh separating from bone)
嚮然	guiding so
奏刀	playing the knife
騞然	swoosh so (the sound of slicing through meat)
莫不中音	none not in tune
合於桑林之舞	joining with the mulberry grove dance
乃中經首之會	now among the principal chiefs gathering

The lord is describing an exquisite performance of high culture. The first four lines set a steady tempo, and describe the cook *dancing* with the ox. The tempo then doubles, and as the knife slices here, and there, we realise that the cook isn't just dancing, he's creating music. Here's my translation:

As his hand touches
and shoulder leans
and foot steps

and knee bends—
sher-wooshhh!
(he guides, he *plays* the knife)
sher-wishhh!
Not a sound not in tune.
In time with the Mulberry-Grove Dance.
In step with the Sacred-Chiefs Corroboree.

It isn't perfect. The middle lines aren't as tight as Chuang Tzu's, and it isn't necessarily clear that the sher-wooshhh and sher-wishhh are the sounds of the knife slicing up the ox (as opposed to whizzing through the air). But overall, the rhythm and imagery are *pretty* close to Chuang Tzu's. The English isn't awful and the philosophical meaning—that butchery can be an exquisite dance—is conveyed. For a comparison, here's the widely acclaimed 2009 and 2020 translation by Professor Brook Ziporyn:

> Wherever his hand smacked it, wherever his shoulder leaned into it, wherever his foot braced it, wherever his knee pressed it, the thwacking tones of flesh falling from bone would echo, the knife would whiz through with its resonant thwing, each stroke ringing out the perfect note, attuned to the "Dance of the Mulberry Grove" or the "Jingshou Chorus" of the ancient sage-kings.

Ziporyn starts out with a rhythm of sorts, though it's a bit awkward. More problematic is that the words don't make sense: wherever the cook's hand, or shoulder, or foot, or knee touches the ox, the flesh falls from the bone? Far from describing an exquisite dance, Ziporyn has the cook *wrestling* with the ox! The tight rhythm of the middle section, and the imagery of guiding and playing the knife, isn't translated at all. In Ziporyn's translation it is clear that the sounds have to do with the ox, but is 'thwacking' really the sound of meat coming off the bone? And those sounds echo? Not in Chuang Tzu's writing. Chuang Tzu's two-beat 'swoosh so' (*huo ran* 騞然; in my translation: *sher-wishhh!)* has become a prosaic 'would whiz through with its resonant thwing'. Things aren't as bad in the concluding phrases, but here too Ziporyn plays freely with the grammar, with the result that his translation lacks the assured, dance-like

meter of Chuang Tzu's writing. Incidentally, the lord's name is Cultured Benevolent Lord (*wen hui jun* 文惠君). 'Cultured Benevolent' is a posthumous title, and Chuang Tzu has chosen this title for a reason: he is comically putting a cultured, benevolent lord down into the bloody, grimy kitchen. Ziporyn doesn't translate the lord's name, and thus robs the reader of the comedic value of the story.[2]

Still, many academics cannot praise Ziporyn's juggling act highly enough, while having no interest in mine. It is a curious place, the public square. I remind myself that it is a happy juggler who juggles for himself and who, when in the public square, is content to present *an* act. One that is sufficiently different to the other acts to justify troubling the occasional passerby who stops to watch it, and yes, an act that is in many ways imperfect, but also, one that is, and is to the best of one's ability, in many ways good and true.

7

I provide interpretative comments at the end of each section.

Part of the genius of Chuang Tzu's stories, like all great stories, is that they can be read and enjoyed on different levels. A story about an impossibly large bird can just be a fantastic story about a mythic bird. Or it can be a profound metaphor for consciousness. A conversation between a shadow and its penumbra can just be a curious conversation between a shadow and a penumbra. Or it can be a profound metaphor for the illusion of free will and how to freely engage with the world.

I don't present my interpretative comments as definitive interpretations. If they show you something in the stories you hadn't seen; if they help give depth to the stories so that they come to 3-D life for you; if they inspire you to disagree with me and to sharpen the focus of your own view; then they have served their purpose.

Of course, if they don't do any of that, if they just annoy you, then don't

[2] Actually, instead of using the name that Chuang Tzu uses (*wen hui jun* 文惠君: Lord Wen-hui; Cultured Benevolent Lord), Ziporyn substitutes King Hui of Liang.

read them. Just read the translation. The translation's the thing that matters.

8

I provide a glossary.

Allow me to present a sales pitch. If you're not a person who usually looks at glossaries, I invite you to peruse this one. Perhaps not straight away; but at some point, after you've explored Chuang Tzu's book a while. I've made an effort to make the glossary concise and interesting. In it you'll find a background to Confucius, and discussions of key concepts—for example, 'charisma', 'daemonic', and 'energy'.

Mmm. Enticing, yes?

OK, sales pitch over. Of course it doesn't really matter if you peruse the glossary or not. Chuang Tzu's book is where it's at. But when you're reading Chuang Tzu's book and if you happen to trip on a word or phrase (or for the scholars among you: if you find yourself questioning my translation of a term, name, or phrase), please know that there's a decent chance you'll find it listed in the glossary.

9

All of which is to say …

This book is enough Chuang Tzu's for me not to present it as mine, and is enough mine for me not to present it as Chuang Tzu's. It is a book, and I present it to you for your enjoyment.

How to read this book

You can read this book in any which way. From beginning to end, or dipping in and out of it.

Dip in and out of it

Each of the stories and essays in this book stands on its own.

The stories in Book 2 (dancing with Chuang Tzu) are a very accessible way to introduce yourself to Chuang Tzu's philosophy. If you're new to Chuang Tzu's philosophy and are looking for an immediate hit, this is a good place to start.

In Book 1 (Chuang Tzu's book), standout stories to dip into are Chuang Tzu's butterfly dream (Chapter 2.9), the cook unravelling the ox (Chapter 3.2), and hearing the music of heaven (Chapter 2.1).

Peruse the contents list and follow your interest.

Read it from beginning to end

Book 1 (Chuang Tzu's book) is a structured argument, a work of art, that rewards reading from beginning to end.

Use the glossary

If you find yourself wondering what a word or phrase means, there's a decent chance you'll find it listed in the glossary.

Pronunciation guide

Dear English speaker, it doesn't matter how we pronounce the Chinese words (e.g., Chuang Tzu) in this book. We aren't in China, we're in the English-speaking world. That said, here's a rough guide to how English-speaking people-in-the-know pronounce the Chinese words in this book.

Consonants

ch	*j*	like the *j* in *jump.*
t	*d*	like the *d* in *down.*
tz	*z*	like the *z* in *zoo.*

Vowels

a	*ah*	like the *a* in *far*
ao		like the *ow* in *cow*
e	*eh*	like the *e* in *bet*
ei		like the *ay* in *day*
i	*ee*	like the *ee* in *bee*
ou	*oh*	like the *oe* in *toe*
u		like the *oo* in *zoo*
ui		**u** + **ei**. I.e., the *u* is like the *oo* in *zoo* and the *i* is like the *ay* in *day.* So *hui* is pronounced *hoo-ay; hway.*

Putting it all together

Chuang	ju-*ahng* ; j*wahng* (rhymes with sung)
Tzu	zoo
Chou	joe
Hui	hoo-*way* ; h*way* (rhymes with day)
tao	dow (rhymes with cow)

Book 1

Chuang Tzu's book

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Chapter 1

Wandering, amiable and aloof

This chapter is a prologue to the following chapters, a symphonic overture to Chuang Tzu's philosophy.

Here, the overall vision. In Chapters 2 and 3, the details of the practical method. In Chapters 4–6, case studies of how the method applies in different contexts.

So, the overall vision.

Instead of identifying with things, which are small, Chuang Tzu invites us to identify with the horizon-spanning bird Of a Flock, and, switching metaphors, to mount the isness of heaven-and-earth and take the reins of the disputing six energies. Which is to say, he invites us to identify with our horizon-spanning field of consciousness, to be present with the panorama of things spread out before us, and to go along with change. If we do this we will see that the world is well ordered and we cannot be harmed. We will be free to wander, amiable and aloof.

To wander—like a vagabond, a traveller.

Aloof—from worldly worries. At ease with others and our circumstances. Not dissociated. Not disengaged. Rather:

Amiable—playful. Good humoured. Fully and creatively engaged with others and our circumstances.

Awaking to the world

1

Awaking to awareness

In the northern darkness there is a fish.
His name is Speck of Roe.
Speck of Roe's size? It measures I don't know how many thousands of miles.

He changes and is now a bird.
His name is Of a Flock.
Of a Flock's back—it spans I don't know how many thousands of miles.

He rouses vigorously and takes to flight,
his wings like clouds arcing across the heavens.

This bird—
When the tide turns, he'll migrate to the southern darkness.

This brief, enigmatic story is one of the most profound stories ever written. But to see its profundity we need to shift ourselves into the mythic mindspace.

The mythic mindspace would have been easier for Chuang Tzu's native readers to occupy than for you and me. One reason for this is that the

images in this story jar with our modern picture of the world. Speck of Roe must fill the northern polar ocean like an eel crammed into a specimen jar. Of a Flock's wings must wrap *around* our planet, like a moth hugging a marble, and for him to take to flight he'd have to blast off this little ball and out and into the airless void of space. Unlike you and me, Chuang Tzu and his fourth-century-BC readers didn't live on the surface of a tiny globe with a thin layer of atmosphere. They live in the Realm Under Heaven, a vast terrestrial realm the furthest reaches of which touch up against unexplored mystery. These events are unfolding in a sort of flat-earth cosmos that extends to infinity in all directions. In this unbounded, flat-earth cosmos there is ample room for otherworldly oceans so vast that a fish countless thousands of miles in length is but a speck (like a speck of fish roe), and it makes sense to think of the sky as being so infinitely vast that a bird with a wingspan countless thousands of miles across can just keep on ascending until it looks like a cloud arcing to the horizon.

If you live in the southern hemisphere, bear in mind that Chuang Tzu lived in the northern hemisphere. Whereas for you north is the world of equatorial palm trees and lazy sunlit days, in the Realm Under Heaven north is the unexplored region of mysterious dark. The royal throne faces south, looking out over the sunlit realm.

So forget these things, as best you can: your being on a planet, and your being on the southern hemisphere of this planet (if that's where you happen to be). Imagine yourself in the Realm Under Heaven, a vast terrestrial realm the northern reaches of which touch up against an unexplored mystery of cold and dark.

Another thing that gets in the way of you and me entering the mythic mindspace is that English moves at a faster pace than Classical Chinese. Classical Chinese is like a series of pictures, and these pictures create a mental spaciousness that is difficult to translate into English. You probably read this story quickly. This story, however, wants to be read slowly, with each line savoured, allowed to conjure a visual image, before moving on to the next line, the next image. To reproduce this mood in English I toyed with the idea of giving each line its own page, along with an artistic image. Like a beautifully illustrated children's book. That's how

slowly, how pictorially, this story wants to be read. So, let's re-read this story.

In the northern darkness …

Bang! We are not in the everyday world. We are in the mysterious, far north, beyond the furthest reaches of civilisation, beyond the limits of the known world. In this otherworldly, oceanic dark beyond the world …

… there is a fish. His name is Speck of Roe.

This fish is like a minute speck of fish roe, an infinitesimal speck in an infinite expanse of cosmic dark.

Speck of Roe's size? It measures I don't know how many thousands of miles.

Wo-ah! What? A speck? No. The camera of our mind's eye zooms in, and now this fish looms before us impossibly large. We're soaring across the length of it, dreamlike, traversing thousands of miles, and thousands more. Its size defies us. We cannot grasp it.

He changes and is now a bird.

We blink, and as in a dream, seamlessly, the image rearranges itself and we find ourselves now beholding a bird.

His name is Of a Flock.

A bird? No, many birds. A flock of birds. A thousand egrets, countless thousands, covering a silent wetlands.

Of a Flock's back—it spans I don't know how many thousands of miles.

Again we zoom in, as in a dream. We zoom in to just one of these birds, and now its back looms before us. We're tracking across its back, trying to reach the extent of it. We cover thousands of miles, and thousands more, and still we do not come to the end of it. We have forgotten, now, the other birds. How can there be other birds? This one bird fills our field of vision. This one bird is all the world.

He rouses vigorously and takes to flight …

What momentous energy, what life force, we sense in this bird as it rouses, stretches its wings, and takes to flight.

… his wings like clouds arcing across the heavens.

Our entire field of vision is filled with its presence. Its wings arc across the heavens, spanning from horizon to horizon.

This bird—

Ah, this bird. That's all we can say. We are in silent awe.

When the tide turns, he'll migrate to the southern darkness.

When the moment is right, this bird will migrate south, to—?

~

And now, my apologies. Now we leave the dream. Here's you and me back in the daylight world. Rub your eyes, and when you're ready perhaps we might discuss this dream.

~

Of a Flock is a metaphor for awareness, your here-and-now field of consciousness.

Like Of a Flock, whose wings arc across the heavens, the wings of your consciousness span to the horizon. At the same time, the wings of every other being's consciousness span to the horizon. You are of a flock, one bird among kin.

If this isn't making sense, let's consider a different metaphor: a mirror.[3] Your field of consciousness is the glass in which images come and go. People. Objects. Your thoughts and feelings. Your changing body. In a sense, the glass is not the images: the images come and go, and this coming and going causes no harm to the glass. But at the same time, the glass is not a thing that exists separate from the images: the glass is always reflecting *something,* and the images that now happen to be present in the glass *are* present *in* the glass.

Consciousness—your field of awareness—is like this. The glass in which things are occurring. The wings beneath which things are occurring.

~

Where does consciousness come from?

Your brain is an infinitesimal speck (a speck of roe) in the dark infinity of cosmic space (the oceanic mystery of the northern darkness). An

[3] For the mirror metaphor, see Book 2, Theme 1.3.

infinitesimal speck, and yet its neuronal networks are unfathomably vast (from head to tail Speck of Roe spans who knows how many thousands of miles). Your field of consciousness arises somehow—you know not how—from your brain (Speck of Roe changes into Of a Flock).

~

Awareness is the most marvellous phenomenon of the cosmos.

The fact that matter exists, and that it arranges itself into stars, and brains, and coffee cups—this too is astonishing. But the existence of awareness—not just suns and brains, but sunsets—is on another level altogether.

And so, Of a Flock is the grandest, most magnificent image in Chuang Tzu's book. And not just Chuang Tzu's book. In the entire literature of world mythology is there a creature, a metaphor, that comes even close to the grandeur and magnificence of Of a Flock? The mirror metaphor, for example, does an excellent job of pointing to awareness. Indeed, in many ways the mirror metaphor does a better job of pointing to awareness than the metaphor of Of a Flock. (For many of you the image of Of a Flock will not have made much sense, but then the mirror metaphor might have done the job of helping you to see what I mean by awareness.) But for all the merits of the mirror metaphor, there is nothing grand and magnificent about a mirror. There's a mirror in my bathroom, and now that I'm remembering its existence I can't say that my heart is leaping. It's just a tiny lump of lifeless glass in a wooden frame. But Of a Flock—*that* image is grand and majestic, attention-grabbingly fantastic, vibrant with life. Of all the metaphors ever created to represent awareness, I know of none that do as good a job as Of a Flock at conveying something of the wonder and awe we feel when we awake to the existence of awareness.

If you ever doubt your worth in the cosmos, remember this: You are not your body. You are not your thoughts and moods. You are not this or that thing. You are the grandest of mythical beings that has ever been imagined in the entirety of world literature. You are the wondrous bird Of a Flock.

And if you ever find yourself questioning the worth of someone else—an annoying neighbour, a barking dog—remember this: They too are the

grandest of mythical beings that has ever been imagined in the entirety of world literature. You don't see it at first. At first all your eyes see is a body, an egret. (The annoying neighbour, the barking dog.) To see it you have to zoom in, right in. And then back out again. Even if the other person, or the barking dog, doesn't see that they are awareness (and almost no one does), you do. You who have awoken to Of a Flock, you who have zoomed into and through the presenting body, the thoughts and moods, zoomed through and out again into the space beyond, you see that they too, like you, are not their body. You see that they too are the wondrous bird Of a Flock.

You, me, and every other being on this speck of cosmic stardust—we are kin. And what kin! In all the vast infinity of a profoundly deaf and blind cosmos, it is in us, and us alone, that the lights are on. It is we, and we alone, who *are* light. It is we few—we countless billions, but we few as compared to the infinite expanse of blind matter—who have risen from the northern darkness and spread our horizon-spanning wings.

Me, you, your annoying neighbour, that barking dog—we are precious, miracles beyond our wildest imagining. We are each the grand bird Of a Flock.

When the tide turns, he'll migrate to the southern darkness.

If the northern darkness is the otherworldly realm of oceanic cold and dark, what is the southern darkness, this place to which Of a Flock is headed?

In the next section we land in the everyday world, the world of books, cicadas, and trees. And at the start of Chapter 2 we land at the southern wall, the bustling area of the city where the common folk live.

The southern darkness is this bustling, sunlit world in which you and I live.

Why describe our bustling, sunlit world as a darkness?

Because almost all of us are in the dark. We are conscious, but unaware that we are consciousness. Failing to see and identify with our field of consciousness, we instead identify with this and that thing, with the result that we cling to this and that thing and fight against that and this thing.

But when the time is right (when the tide turns) we awake to awareness (Of a Flock migrates to the southern darkness).

2

We happy cicadas

The *Equal Tales* is a record of wonders. In the words of the *Tales:*
When Of a Flock migrates to the southern darkness
he thrashes across the water for three thousand miles,
catches a spiralling air-current to ninety thousand miles,
and departs on a six-month breeze.

Cicada and Learned Pigeon laugh at this, saying:
We spring up and take to flight, beating straight for an elm or sandalwood.
Sometimes we don't make it and we drop to the ground. No drama.
What's all this about going up ninety thousand miles and heading south!

These two insects, what do *they* know?
Small knowing doesn't reach large knowing.
Small years don't reach large years.
How do we know this?
Morning Mushroom doesn't know dark moon and crescent moon.
Summer Cicada doesn't know spring and autumn.

In the words of the *Tales.*

Whereas Chuang Tzu's opening description of Of a Flock all but compels us to look beyond the world of things (his wings span who knows how many thousands of miles), in the words of the *Tales* Of a Flock is a mere thing *in* the world. (If the wake he thrashes is three

thousand miles long, his wingspan must be considerably less. He's now a dot compared to the ninety thousand miles he ascends to.)

From being a metaphor for horizon-spanning consciousness, Of a Flock has been reduced to being a literal bird.

Religious and spiritual people reduce consciousness to a thing when they identify it with a soul: a discrete thing that moves about from here to there. Scientifically-minded people reduce consciousness to a thing when they identify it with brain cells: discrete things trapped inside our skulls. Both views fail to see what consciousness actually is: the subjectively-experienced here-and-now field *in which* things exist.

Chuang Tzu uses the image of Of a Flock to point to awareness, but we cicadas and learned pigeons mistake the pointing finger (the image of Of a Flock) for the thing being pointed to (awareness). Instead of seeing awareness we just see a big bird.

Cicada and learned pigeon laugh at this story.

No wonder they laugh. They're focused on living a good life, beating for this and that elm and sandalwood (making efforts to get food, shelter, sex, friends, qualifications). The practical irrelevance of that big bird is like the practical irrelevance of grand things like immortal souls and high-tech brain scans. Who among us really takes these things seriously? In our pursuit of so-called mundane things (food, shelter, sex, friends, qualifications), don't we all laugh, or shrug, at those *grand* things?

If we see Of a Flock as being just a big bird, we are wise to laugh at this story. We are wise to dismiss Of a Flock as an abstract irrelevance, or as an absurd tale told by a confused bard who has ingested a few too many magic mushrooms.

These two insects, what do *they* know?

We cicadas and learned pigeons know *things.* Tables. Chairs. Sex. Brain scans. Souls. Afterlives. Galaxies. Stories about big birds.

This is small knowing. Knowing this and that thing.

Small knowing doesn't reach large knowing.

Whereas small knowing is knowing this and that thing, large knowing is being aware of awareness.

~

Awareness isn't a thing.

Awareness is the here-and-now that *in which* things exist.

I point to a mirror and say, There's the glass. But my friend, following the direction of my finger, says, I can see a table and a fruit bowl. I say, No, those things are *in* the glass. To help my friend see the glass I reposition the mirror so that it now reflects a different set of things, and I say, See, now you see a doorway and a cabinet, but the medium that the doorway and cabinet are *in* is the glass. But my friend looks confused and says, Well, I see a doorway and a cabinet.

Likewise, I say to my friend, Everything you are seeing, hearing, feeling, thinking—the medium in which these things are existing is awareness. But my friend looks confused and says, Well, I see that tree over there, and you sitting here talking to me.

We cicadas and learned pigeons cannot see the forest for the trees. The glass for the images. We see things, but we fail to see awareness.

~

Awareness is large.

Not larg*er* than this or that thing. Large in the sense that it is the that *in which* things exist.

Not in the scientific sense, of course. (Not in the sense of acknowledging that there is a world outside of my mere awareness, a world that is going about its business.) In the phenomenological—the experiential—sense. (In the sense of noting what you are seeing, hearing, feeling, thinking.) In the scientific sense Mount Everest is larger than my body and smaller than our galaxy. But in the experiential sense: sitting here now and attending to my body, and Mount Everest, and our galaxy, I see that these things are here-and-now existing *in* my awareness. (These things are images in my mind's eye, objects in my field of awareness.)

Awareness is large. Things—my body, Mount Everest, the galaxy—are small.

~

Things are small and equal.

In the following story we'll meet Grandfather Peng, who lived eight hundred years, and the great cedars of antiquity, who lived sixteen thousand years. Grandfather Peng's eight-hundred-years lifespan seems

large, especially compared to the three-months lifespan of Summer Cicada. But compared to the sixteen-thousand-years lifespan of the great cedars, it is not. This sixteen-thousand-years lifespan is not large either. Consider the age of the sun (4.6 billion years and counting). No matter how *relatively* large a thing is compared to this or that thing, it is small relative to some other thing. Which is to say, all things are equal in their being small. They're all, equally, small.

Here's the wink in Chuang Tzu's the *Equal Tales.* All stories, all things, all circumstances, are equal. (We'll explore this idea in depth in Chapter 2, Discussions that make things equal.)

My cicada-like brain objects: It's all well and good to say that if I cast my eye across the expanse of cosmic time, then an eight-hundred-years lifespan is equivalent to a twenty-years lifespan. That's a nice trick. But I'm not standing out on the edge of cosmic time, I'm standing on planet Earth. And for me here on Earth a lifespan of twenty years *is* small and a lifespan of eight hundred years *is* large.

My brain is correct, but now I bring my attention to awareness (my here-and-now field of consciousness) and notice how things look. That mountain over there—it's as small as my hand. The thoughts, I'm twenty years old, I'm eight hundred years old—they're just words: blips of sound; bits of ink on this page. Neither bunch of words—bits of ink; blips of sound—makes the slightest difference to my expansive experience of the present moment.

Let's return to the mirror metaphor. There in the glass we see a vase. There, a table. (Here, a mountain. Here, a hand. Here, a bunch of words.) As we tilt and move the mirror, the vase shrinks and expands, comes into view and out of view. Likewise for the table. Yes, the vase and the table are different. And yes, when the vase is now a tiny object, now a looming wall, that's a difference. But the differently-sized vases and tables are all just bits of light dancing about in the glass.

From the point of view of awareness, things shift and dance as in a kaleidoscope, and we see that all of these shifting, dancing things are equally small, or small and equal. Only the ever-present field of awareness is large.

~

Small knowing doesn't reach large knowing. Small years don't reach large years.

Hearing that Summer Cicada doesn't know spring and autumn we'd be forgiven for thinking that small knowing is like a person living in Australia who doesn't know about the existence of China, and that large knowing is like a person who does. But the point of this analogy isn't to say that we need to acquire more knowledge about the world, more knowledge of things. The point is that small knowing (knowing this and that thing) simply *cannot* lead to large knowing (being aware of awareness). Summer Cicada simply cannot know spring and autumn.

The gap between small knowing and large knowing is a quantum gap. A discontinuous leap. It cannot be breached by stages. We don't see the glass by looking at more and more images. We don't awake to awareness by looking at more and more things. It isn't a matter of learning about the existence of China. Or of studying more and more exotic texts. Or of doing more and more detailed brain scans. (Look at a brain scan. Look at a thousand brain scans. Nowhere in those brain scans will you ever see awareness.) All of that is just things. Small knowing.

Large knowing is a leap into an entirely different orbit. It's the perceptual shift from only seeing the images to also seeing the glass.

~

The cicada and the bird.

Well, here I am chirping away, little cicada that I am.

Here, too, is Chuang Tzu, chirping away.

Let's take a moment to remember how, in those opening lines of the book, Of a Flock rose to flight so grandly, majestically, and—in silence.

As we read Chuang Tzu's book and go about our noisy, cicada lives, may we remember to notice Of a Flock's presence. Arisen from the northern darkness, his wings silently spanning to the horizon.

May we behold both:

The small, and the large.

Things, and awareness.

The chirping cicada, and the silent bird.

3

Mounting the world as your chariot

South of Chu there are netherworld sprites who with five hundred years traverse their spring; with five hundred years, their autumn.
In remote antiquity there were great cedars who with eight *thousand* years traversed their spring; with eight thousand years, their autumn.
Nowadays, though, *Grandfather Peng*[*] is renowned for longevity.
Everyone vies to match him.
Pitiful, no?
Well, people whose knowledge suffices to carry out the duties of some office, whose conduct is looked up to in some village, whose character is agreeable to some ruler and put to use in some state—their self-regard is just like that, and Master Honourable Sung[*] heartily laughs at them.
Why, the whole world could praise him and it wouldn't spur him on.
The whole world could fault him and it wouldn't discourage him.
He draws a clear line between inner and outer,
disputes what counts as honour and disgrace.
But that's as far as he goes.
His attitude toward mainstream success might not be fretful;
nevertheless, there's still something in which he hasn't put down roots.

Grandfather Peng … A mythical man who lived eight hundred years.
Master Honourable Sung … A social reformer.

Master Itemise takes the reins of the wind and off he goes, up and
away. So graceful and fine! A full fifteen days before returning.
His attitude toward political reform might not be fretful,
but, and although he's dispensed with walking, there's still
something on which he waits.

As for those who mount the isness of heaven-and-earth and take the
reins of the disputing six energies, and thereby wander without
constraint,
on what do *they* wait!

And so it is said:
A consummate person has no self.
A daemonic person has no merit.
A sage has no reputation.

Vying to match Grandfather Peng.

The people who proudly identify with their honourable social positions think that their advancement in the social hierarchy is a large thing, a big deal. But it is not, just as Grandfather Peng's eight-hundred-years lifespan is not a large lifespan. This is especially easy for you and me to see. For you and me those fourth-century-BC folk are so small they don't even exist! (Can you put a face to them?)

This is why travel is so beneficial. Something is bothering you at home, but then you take off for a while and before you know it your problem seems so small you have a difficult time even seeing it. Your problem has been dwarfed by the immensity of the world. Time travel works just as well, though it takes a bit longer. I'm fifty years old, and when I look back on the things that made me feel pride and resentment back in my teenage years, I have to laugh.

So, these proud citizens—Master Honourable Sung heartily laughs at their childish need for recognition, their childish pride in their social positions.

But Master Honourable Sung is himself caught up in his ego. He travels about preaching a philosophy of frugal, egalitarian living, and does so in such a way that it is said, 'High and how, people are sick of the sight of him, but he persists in showing up.' Unlike the social climbers, he couldn't care less what others think of him. But he cares very much that others should adopt *his* values. His ego is bound up with his social agenda. He too mistakenly thinks that a small thing (his social agenda) is large (of utmost importance).

If you care about social reform, you might be feeling a bit uncomfortable at this point. Is Chuang Tzu really saying that social reform doesn't matter?

No. In Chapter 4 Chuang Tzu explores how to productively participate in changing the world for the better. His criticism of Master Honourable Sung isn't that he cares about social reform, but that he's blind to what is truly large and that, consequently, his focus on things is narrow-minded and rigid. He has small knowing (he's aware of things; specifically, social structures), but he doesn't have large knowing (he's not aware of awareness).

Master Itemise doesn't even bother to laugh at Master Honourable Sung's ego-obsession. Is he even aware of him? Flying about for fifteen days at a time, it's as if he's completely beyond worldly concerns altogether.

In presenting us with the image of Master Itemise soaring about in the sky, Chuang Tzu is parodying the commonly-held belief that advanced spiritual practitioners are capable of supernatural feats. Walking on water. Levitating. Zipping about through the air.

Let's allow, for the sake of argument, that some people can do these supernatural things. (I don't think anyone can. Chuang Tzu doesn't either. But if you do, that's fine.) Well, says Chuang Tzu, this too is just ego. These so-called spiritual folk who speak of flying about—how are they any different in kind to people who speak longingly of zipping about in private jets? Aren't they just small-minded (thing-oriented) people seeking power over their material circumstances? Ho hum, says Chuang Tzu. There's nothing large about flying about for fifteen days at a time, just as there's nothing large about Grandfather Peng's eight-hundred-

years lifespan. Fifteen days? There are birds that remain airborne for *months* at a time. This concern with flying about is still just a case of small knowing, of knowing this and that thing, of being able to do this and that thing.

Master Itemise waits on (depends on) the wind. His freedom is constrained by whether or not the wind is blowing. Like the social climbers and Master Honourable Sung, Master Itemise depends on, is constrained by, things. Take away the wind and Master Itemise cannot fly. And who is he then? Take away the social reform and Master Honourable Sung must feel that the world is amiss. Take away the social position and the social climbers must feel that they are worthless.

All of these people are bound up in the world of things. They're all mistaking small things for something large. None of them has awoken to what is truly large: (a) awareness (Of a Flock), (b) the world (the isness of heaven and earth).

Mounting the isness of heaven-and-earth and taking the reins of the disputing six energies, and thereby wandering without constraint.

The imagery is of mounting a chariot platform (the isness of heaven and earth) and taking the reins of a team of spirited horses (the disputing six energies).

The isness of heaven and earth is the here-and-now field of things laid out before you: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, sensations, urges, thoughts.

The disputing six energies? Energy is the basic stuff that constitutes things, that pervades the cosmos and animates things. It can be described as hot/cold, hard/soft, light/heavy, and so on, and the mix of these qualities is forever changing in a sort of dynamic tug-o-war between opposite pairs. In regard to the *six* energies—I don't think Chuang Tzu has six specific qualities in mind; he's just conjuring the image of energy being like a team of feisty horses. (Incidentally, it's natural for we Westerners to picture these horses yoked in pairs in a column. Chuang Tzu would have had a different image in mind: In ancient China horses were yoked side-by-side in a single line across the front of the chariot.) 'Disputing' describes the tussling between the horses, the dynamic tug-o-war of the ever-changing mix of qualities that constitute things, like a never-ending argument between ever-shifting points of view. Our ever-

changing circumstances, thoughts, and moods—these are the ceaseless altercations of the disputing six energies. To take the reins of these disputing energies is to be in harmony with your ever-changing circumstances, thoughts, and moods.

Only the king's chariot is drawn by six horses. We who mount the isness of heaven-and-earth and take the reins of the disputing six energies are kings. We are the highest rank of nobility.

When you're aware of awareness the here-and-now world is your chariot. Just as the equanimity of a mirror doesn't depend on this and that image being present in the glass, awareness doesn't depend on, isn't constrained by, this and that thing being present in the world. *Whatever* is present, awareness is on board.

This chariot ride is a leisurely one. It doesn't require any effort. The chariot presents itself and the horses do the work.

This is Chuang Tzu's vision of freedom. It is the freedom of freely going along with what is. Of wandering, amiable and aloof to worldly cares.

~

If the image of Of a Flock is the grandest image in Chuang Tzu's philosophy, this image of charioting on the world is a close second. Master Itemise flies about with the wind as his team of horses. The Greek god Apollo mounts a golden chariot and drags the sun across the heavens. Minor-league players. We who are awake to awareness, we who are present with the here-and-now isness of our presenting circumstances—our chariot is the entirety of heaven and earth, our team of horses the very energies that generate the seasons of change!

When you identify with awareness and chariot on the world, you may or may not occupy an important position in society. You may or may not be bringing about social change. You may or may not be able to fly about on the wind (or pay for a private jet) or walk on water (or walk at all). What *is* the case is that you are not striving for these things. You are not waiting for these things so as to be free. Your freedom is not constrained by their presence or absence. You see that none of these things ultimately matters. It's not that they *don't* matter. You do enjoy being in the world, and participating in change, and moving about from here to there. It's that you have a larger view. You are awake to awareness and to the

wonder of this *this* that is blossoming here before you. In the words of Jesus, you see that the kingdom has already arrived; it is all around you. In the words of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, you see that the banquet hall of the gods is not elsewhere; it is here, and you are one of the honoured guests. In the words of Chuang Tzu, you see that Of a Flock is in flight. The miracle has happened. Is happening. The World Chariot is present and *you* are its noble charioteer. There is nothing else to wait for. Nothing constrains you. You have arrived.

~

Note the genius of these metaphors, how they simultaneously achieve two contradictory goals. They satisfy the ego's need to feel special and powerful. (You are a kingly charioteer, your chariot the entirety of heaven and earth, your team of horses the very energies that generate the seasons of change. You are Of a Flock, the grandest of mythical beings ever imagined in the entirety of world literature.) And they cause us to *transcend* the ego: to awake to awareness and be present with the here-and-now isness of things.

A consummate person has no self. A daemonic person has no merit. A sage has no reputation.

These statements arrest our attention because they invert the social norm. In common society, to call someone a consummate person is to praise them for having developed a perfectly realised persona. We admire daemonic people for their exquisite, hard-earned skills. And we reverently bow our heads when speaking of this and that great sage. But here is Chuang Tzu saying that a consummate person *doesn't have* a self. A daemonic person *doesn't have* merit. A sage is *a nobody.*

~

A consummate person has no self.

When you identify with awareness and chariot on the world, you have no self. Instead of identifying with this and that thing as being me or mine, you just see things as being this and that. For example, instead of labelling your body as being 'me' or 'my body', you just see it as being 'this' body. So when your body changes, you do not lament, 'O, my body is broken! *I* am broken!' Rather, you simply observe, 'Ah, here is this new body.' Instead of labelling your car as being 'my car', you just see it as

being 'this' car. So when someone steals your car, you do not lament, 'O, I have lost my car! Now *I* am diminished!' Rather, you simply observe, 'Hmm, where there was once a car, now there is a road. And look here. Here's a couple of legs. That's fortunate.'

~

A daemonic person has no merit.

*Dae*monic (spirit-like), not to be confused with *de*monic (devil-like). Your daemonic nature is your vitality, your felt sense of aliveness, your felt inclinations, urges, promptings.

A daemonic person is someone who is unselfconsciously aligned with the dynamic energies of life. For example, we might describe a masterful artisan at work, or an elite athlete at play, as being daemonic.

When you're in touch with your daemonic nature—when you identify with awareness and chariot on the world—you have no merit, you deserve no credit for your actions. You see that it is not I, not me who does things, but that it is the world, the disputing six energies that is doing things.

When a daemonic basketball player dodges the opposition and lands the ball in the hoop, she does not take credit for this achievement. She simply heads onto the court and the rest happens without her knowing how. When I walk to the kitchen I do not take credit for this achievement. (And it *is* an achievement. *Very* few things in the cosmos can walk to the kitchen.) I simply head for the kitchen and my legs do their magic without my knowing how.

~

A sage has no reputation.

When you identify with awareness and chariot on the world, you have no reputation, you are not known as a sage. You are in harmony with the world and with others, so you simply don't stand out as being anything especially special. You're just good company. A good friend. A mere one among others.

Pages 67–81 are not included in this preview

Interlude:

The usefulness of Chuang Tzu's useless philosophy

7

The large gourd

Master Hui says to Master Chuang:
The King of Wei gave me the seed of a large gourd.
I planted it, and indeed it produced a ninety-gallon gourd.
But when I used it to hold starch solution its sides weren't firm enough to support themselves.
When I split it to make a ladle the surface was too flat to hold liquid.
It's not that the gourd wasn't impressively large, but it was useless, so I smashed it to bits.

Master Chuang says:
Venerable Master, you certainly are clumsy at using large things.

A Sung man had a balm that was good for protecting hands from chapping.
For generations his family had made silk-washing its business.

A customer heard about it and offered to buy the recipe for a hundred pieces of gold.

The Sung man assembled his family and discussed the offer, saying: For generations we've washed silk and we've no more than a few pieces of gold. Now in one morning we can sell the secret for a hundred pieces! Let's do it.

So the customer got it.

He used it to pitch an idea to the King of Wu, who was having trouble with Yueh.

The King of Wu employed him that winter when engaging the Yueh in battle at sea, defeated the Yueh convincingly, divided up the conquered territory, and enfeoffed him.

In each case the balm's ability to prevent hands from chapping was the same.

If one man used it to get a fiefdom, while the other couldn't free himself from washing silk, it's what they used it *for* that's different.

Now, you had this ninety-gallon gourd.

Why didn't it occur to you to use it as a large barrel in which to float about on the rivers and lakes?

If you worried that its surface was too flat to hold liquid, then you still had a muddled head,* wouldn't you say?

Master Hui's story of the large gourd:

The King of Wei gave me the seed of a large gourd.

Master Hui is the chief minister in the Kingdom of Wei.

---

you still had a muddled head … Gourds have a fibrous interior that you have to clean out to have an empty, useable gourd. Master Hui may have cleaned out the large gourd, but he has neglected to clean out the tangled interior of his large, gourd-like skull.

It produced a ninety-gallon gourd.

The size of a large wine barrel.

When I used it to hold starch solution its sides weren't firm enough to support themselves. When I split it to make a ladle the surface was too flat to hold liquid.

The large gourd represents Master Chuang's philosophy, a philosophy that speaks grandly of birds countless thousands of miles in size, and of mounting the isness of heaven and earth. This philosophy is all very grand, but you can't use it to implement a political agenda. It lacks the solidity and shape required to hold an agenda.

It's not that the gourd wasn't impressively large, but it was useless, so I smashed it to bits.

Master Hui is a sophist. The sophists use clever arguments to deconstruct (smash to bits) the meaning of words. Metaphorically he represents our rational brains. The voice in your head that might be saying, Chuang Tzu's words are grand and poetic, but are they useful?—Master Hui is giving expression to this voice. He smashes Chuang Tzu's words to bits, pointing out that in practical terms they are useless.

~

Master Chuang's response:

A Sung man had a balm.

The balm represents philosophy, the discipline of inquiring into the nature of things. Philosophy is a balm because it helps you to solve problems. It provides protection against life's harsh conditions.

Using the balm to wash silk.

The Sung man represents Master Hui. He uses philosophy for the mundane, laborious purpose of engaging in clever argumentation and gaining employment (washing silk).

The customer.

The customer represents Master Chuang. Appreciating the value of philosophy, he has studied Master Hui and other philosophers.

The King of Wu defeated the Yueh.

The balm protected his soldiers' hands against the wet and cold, allowing them to handle their weapons more effectively.

Using the balm to get a fiefdom.

Whereas Master Hui uses philosophy to engage in clever argumentation and to gain employment as a political advisor (to be a labourer, a silk washer), Master Chuang uses philosophy to gain liberation from the struggles of a laborious life (to become the lord of a fiefdom).

Floating about on the rivers and lakes.

Rivers and lakes means the world. Floating about on the rivers and lakes is the same as mounting the isness of heaven-and-earth and taking the reins of the disputing six energies (section 3).

~

Master Chuang's philosophy cannot be used to manipulate others into doing what you want, but what it *can* do is serve as a vessel in which to wander at ease on the currents of the world. We can use his philosophy to awake to awareness, to mount the isness of heaven-and-earth and take the reins of the disputing six energies, and thus wander about, amiable and aloof.

Wander about—like the customer. Out and about in the world, learning from and engaging with others.

Aloof—from worldly worries. Like a lord presiding over a fiefdom, as opposed to a silk-washer labouring for coin. Not dissociated. Not disengaged. Rather:

Amiable—playful. Good humoured. Like Chuang Tzu with Hui Tzu. Like the customer with the King of Wu. Fully and creatively engaged with others and your circumstances.

8

The large tree

Master Hui says to Master Chuang:
I have a large tree
that people call holy.
Its trunk bulges and bends and doesn't fit the plumb line.
Its branches twist and curl and don't fit the square.
Though it stands by the road for all to see,
carpenters pass it by indifferently.

Now, your words are large and useless.
Everyone alike ignores them.

Master Chuang says:
Have you never seen a wild cat?
It crouches stealthily, awaiting idlers.
Then pounces—east! west! high! low!
And lands plumb in a snare and dies in the net.

Now yak—
As large as a cloud arcing across the heavens.
He's able to be large, but unable to catch mice.

Now, you have this large tree and lament that it's useless.
Why not plant it in the No Whys Countryside, the Vast Nothing Wilderness,
and potter about in non-striving by its side,
and wander, amiable and aloof, in sleep beneath its canopy?

It hasn't died young, felled by axes.
No one cares to harm it.

Lacking anything that can be put to use,
why *would* it have tormentors!

Master Hui's story of the large tree:

I have a large tree that people call holy.

This is a pun. The sinograph I translate as holy literally means an ailanthus tree. The ailanthus tree is also known as the tree of heaven. The word also means useless (the wood of the ailanthus is soft and useless). So Master Hui is saying that this large tree is a tree that people see as being useless, but Chuang Tzu is hinting at the fact that this useless tree is a divine tree, a tree of heaven. A comparable English pun is when we refer to developmentally delayed children as special—that is, as useless (unable to do basic math), *and* imbued with something of the divine.

Its trunk bulges and bends and doesn't fit the plumb line.

This large tree represents Master Chuang's philosophy. His fantastical words (words that don't fit the plumb line or square) can't be chopped up and built into some sort of useful structure of social control.

Carpenters pass it by.

Rulers ignore Master Chuang's philosophy.

~

Master Chuang's response:

The wildcat.

The wildcat is Master Hui. With his quick wit and logical acrobatics he pounces on the views of others and reduces them to shreds. But his being focused on things in this way causes him to be unaware of the broader environment. Overconfident, he pounces carelessly and in this instance lands himself in a snare. The snare is Master Chuang's closing line: Why *would* this tree have tormentors?

But let's not hold tight to the snare metaphor. It's not that Master Chuang is a groundskeeper who sets out to snare Master Hui. Rather, Master Hui pounces and Master Chuang, with the calm confidence of a

yak, simply affirms his position. Whereas Master Hui pounces and negates (this tree *doesn't* fit the plumb line and square), Master Chuang stands still and affirms (this tree *is* good for resting beneath). In the light of Master Chuang's affirming view, Master Hui's negating view is laid bare as short-sighted and off the mark. He pounced on what he thought was a wayward mouse, but comes up empty-pawed and finds himself standing in the shadow of a yak.

The yak.

Like Of a Flock, whose wings are like clouds arcing across the heavens (section 1), yak is as large as a cloud arcing across the heavens. Yak, like Of a Flock, represents awareness. Yak is also Chuang Tzu. (Chuang Tzu has awoken to and identifies with awareness.) Being awake to awareness does not give you practical skills, like catching mice, or manipulating people into doing what you want them to do. But it does provide the benefit of allowing you to be at ease in the world, and of being beyond harm.

The No Whys Countryside, the Vast Nothing Wilderness.

Like the Faraway Mirage Mountains (sections 5 and 6): the mythic realm; the psychological realm that exists outside of, and in parallel with, the mundane world (the world of small knowing; the psychological state of being attached to things).

Pottering about in non-striving by its side.

This describes what life is like when your chariot is heaven-and-earth and your team of horses the disputing six energies (section 3). We residents of the Faraway Mirage Mountains, the No Whys Countryside, the Vast Nothing Wilderness—we feel no need to forcefully exert our will on the world, but are instead free to relax into the isness of things and to go along with the spontaneous flow of things.

Wandering, amiable and aloof, in sleep beneath its canopy.

When you're awake to awareness, life is like a leisurely, never-ending dream. (The dream metaphor is explored in Chapters 2.7, 2.9, and 6.2.)

This tree hasn't died young, felled by axes.

Useful philosophies are chopped down, cut up, and built into perversions of the original tree by goal-oriented folk who want to control others. Look at what Ritualists (Confucians) have done with Confucius's teachings. (Propping up a two-thousand-year-old authoritarian state.) And what Christians have done with Jesus's teachings. (The Inquisitions. Missionaries carrying out cultural genocide. The Roman Catholic Church using all its might to crush anyone who tries to stop its robe-wearing paedophiles from raping little boys.) And what Hitler did with Nietzsche's philosophy. (Poland. France. The Jews.) Even Gautama Buddha's teachings—since ancient times to modern times, this and that Buddhist sect has waged literal war on that and this Buddhist sect, and on non-Buddhists. Not that any of this is the fault of Gautama Buddha, or Confucius, or Jesus, or Nietzsche. Chuang Tzu has been fortunate. No one has yet managed, or been bothered, to use his philosophy to oppress and control others.

Lacking anything that can be put to use, why *would* it have tormentors!

Here's the punch line. Master Hui laughs at Master Chuang, saying, Rulers ignore your philosophy. Master Chuang retorts, Thank the gods for that!

4

The art of harmonising

What hides the path, such that people argue over which path is the true path and which paths are false?
What hides speech, such that people argue over which words refer to what, with one person saying of a thing, It's *x*, and another retorting, It's not?
How can the path go somewhere and not be present?
How can speech be present and not be allowable?

The path is hidden by small definitive-forms.
Speech is hidden by flowery rhetoric.
And so behold Ritualists and Mohists arguing over which words refer to what, with one party saying of a thing, It's *x*, and the other retorting, It's not. Each affirming what the other refutes and refuting what the other affirms.

If you'd like to affirm what *they* refute and refute what they affirm, there's nothing like using clarity.

No thing isn't a that (over there).
No thing isn't a this (here).

Of course, we don't see things from over there;
we know them from here.
Which is why it is said: That arises from this; this in turn goes by that. (The theory of the co-birthing of that and this.)
Nevertheless,
when from one perspective a thing is labelled a birth,
from another it's labelled a death.

When from one perspective a thing is labelled a death,
from another it's labelled a birth.
When from one perspective a label is affirmed as allowable,
from another it's rejected as unallowable.
When from one perspective a label is rejected as unallowable,
from another it's affirmed as allowable.
Which is to say:
When going by this or that aspect of a thing someone says, It's *x*,
going by a different aspect someone else retorts, It's not.
When going by this or that aspect of a thing someone says, It's not *x*,
going by a different aspect someone else retorts, It's *x*.

Because of this, the sage doesn't walk these routes, but instead illuminates them by the light of heaven.
This too is to go by this or that aspect of a thing and say, It's *x*.
She sees that the thing she calls this is also a that,
that the thing she calls that is also a this,
that over there others say of everything whatsoever, It's *x*, It's not *x*,
just as here *she* says of everything whatsoever, It's *x*, It's not *x*.

So, a thing is that *and* this?!
Which means, it's *neither* that *nor* this?!

Where neither that nor this finds its counterpart, I call that place the pivot of the path.
As the pivot finds the centre of the socket, it responds without constraint,
allowing you to say, It's *x*, of anything whatsoever, without constraint,
and, It's not *x*, of anything whatsoever, without constraint.

And so I say, There's nothing like using clarity.
Using a finger to show that a finger isn't a finger isn't like using something that's not a finger to show that a finger isn't a finger.

Using a horse to show that a horse isn't a horse isn't like using something that's not a horse to show that a horse isn't a horse.
Heaven-and-earth is a finger.
The myriad things are a horse.*

You think those statements are allowable (valid)?
Then they're allowable.
You think they're not allowable?
Then they're not allowable.

Walk a path and you bring it into being as a definitive form.
Label a thing and you make it so.

How is a thing so?
It's so by being called so.
How is a thing not so?
It's not so by being called not so.

At the same time, a thing has *inherent* so-ness,
inherent allowable-ness (OK-ness).
In this sense, no thing *isn't* so,
no thing *isn't* allowable (OK).

And so, whereas authoritative 'It's *x*'s hold up for view reeds and pillars, lepers and Hsi Shihs,* things fantastic, perverse, and strange,
the path lets the labels pass freely, to let the thing be one.

It's by splitting the oneness that the definitive form is brought into being.
It's by bringing the definitive form into being that the oneness is broken.

Showing that a finger isn't a finger, etc. … Fear not, this *is* a joke. I explain it in the commentary at the end of this section.
Hsi Shih … A woman famous for her beauty.

And to see that the thing is neither a definitive form nor broken, you resume the practice of letting the labels pass freely, to let the thing be one.

You have to be pretty easy-going to let the labels pass freely, and let the thing be one.
Instead of using an authoritative 'It's *x*', you accommodate the thing in the label at hand.

Whatever the label at hand is, you use it.
By using it, you're letting it pass freely.
By letting it pass freely, you're falling into alignment.
You find yourself falling into alignment and on the cusp.
And then—
Going-by-this-or-that-aspect-of-the-thing-and-saying-It's-*x* ceases.
It ceases and you don't know what's so of the thing.
What you now behold, I call the path.

Disturbing your daemonic clarity to *make* things one, not knowing that different arrangements are the same—
that I call three in the morning.
What is three in the morning?
When a monkey keeper, handing out the nuts, said, 'I'll give you three in the morning, four in the evening,' the monkeys all leapt about in a rage. 'In that case,' he said, 'four in the morning, three in the evening,' and the monkeys all settled down delighted.
In name and in fact they hadn't lost a thing, and yet they used joy and rage.

Because of this, the sage uses 'It's *x*, it's not *x*' to harmonise with him, and thus rests in the equanimity of heaven.
I call this, letting both alternatives proceed.

& At the start of the chapter Mr Drabs lost himself and heard the piping of heaven, the harmonious sounding forth of our myriad different beliefs. To help us to hear the piping of heaven, Chuang Tzu then loosened our attachment to our words (sections 2 and 3). In the present section he finishes the job of showing us how to de-fuse from words. This frees us to use words to harmonise with others and the world.

What hides the path?

Chuang Tzu starts by stating a problem: the path exists, but it is hidden. Something prevents us from seeing it.

Note how he does not start by telling us what the path is. We can see why. If he did, we'd either agree with his words, or disagree; and there we'd be, like chirping fledglings (section 3), with so-and-so saying, The path is such and such, and so-and-so saying, It's not. Given this state of affairs it would be folly for Chuang Tzu to begin by saying, The path is such and such.

Although he doesn't tell us what the path is, he does give us a clue: the path is hidden. Whatever the path is, it is here for us to see. But something is in the way. Something blocks us from seeing it. Our focus, then, is going to be, not on identifying the path, but on identifying what prevents us from seeing it.

Another clue is that the path, whatever it is, is everywhere. People say that this and that path isn't the true path, in response to which Chuang Tzu asks rhetorically, How can the path go somewhere and not be present?

What hides speech?

Not only is the path hidden, so too is speech. And not only is the path everywhere, all speech is allowable. (Chuang Tzu asks rhetorically, How can speech be present and not be allowable?)

Here's another clue about the path. Somehow, being able to see that all speech is allowable is connected with being able to see the path.

The path is hidden by small definitive-forms.

Your brain's definitive forms are your beliefs, your authoritative assertions that this thing is x, that that thing isn't (section 2). Your beliefs, your truths, are like small objects—leaves, signposts, construction

workers, concrete blocks—covering a path, preventing you from seeing the path.

Speech is hidden by flowery rhetoric.

Our words are like thriving flora. The speech of others is hidden by the flourishing dominance of our own speech. We smother other people's words with our verbiage, our flowery, clever, authoritative assertions.

And so behold Ritualists and Mohists … each affirming what the other refutes and refuting what the other affirms.

Don't worry if you don't know anything about Ritualists and Mohists. All you need to know is that Ritualists and Mohists have eloquent, and opposing, ideas about which path is *the* path. Each affirms what the other refutes and refutes what the other affirms. For example, one of the things they disagree about is what constitutes appropriate conduct (i.e., they disagree about what the words 'appropriate conduct' refer to). A particular point of contention is in regard to mourning rites. Ritualists point to the traditional practice of expensive ceremonies and prolonged mourning and say, That's appropriate conduct. Mohists, however, think these practices are unnecessarily burdensome, so they point to these practices and say, That's not appropriate conduct. So when the Ritualist practises the traditional ways, the Mohist doesn't see a person walking the path, she sees a Ritualist engaging in a regimented, oppressive activity. When the Mohist practises non-traditional ways, the Ritualist doesn't see a person walking the path, he sees a Mohist engaging in disrespectful, debauched activity.

For Ritualist and Mohist substitute yourself and any person you happen to disagree with. In the following discussion I'll use the example of Mary, who says abortion is allowable, and Jane, who says it isn't.

If you'd like to affirm what they refute and refute what they affirm …

Ritualists and Mohists both reject the idea that they are both right, and they both affirm the view that only one of them is right (namely, themselves). Chuang Tzu is proposing to affirm that they are *both* right, and to refute the view that only one of them is right.

Mary, who says abortion is right, and Jane, who says it's wrong, both reject the idea that they are both right, and they both affirm the view that

only one of them is right (namely, themselves). Chuang Tzu is proposing to affirm that they are both right, and to refute the view that only one of them is right.

… there's nothing like using clarity. No thing isn't a that (over there). No thing isn't a this (here).

Whereas I, from here, point to the cup in your hand and call it 'that cup', you, from over there, point to the cup and call it 'this cup'.

If you're groaning at the triviality of this observation, your response is on cue. Didn't Chuang Tzu just say that he's going to use clarity? He's using simple, direct language to point out what's obvious. It's clear to us that things are both that and this; it just depends on where you happen to be standing. We appreciate that there's nothing to argue over.

Of course, we don't see things from over there; we know them from here.

Here's why Ritualists and Mohists, and the rest of us, argue. We *don't* see things from the other person's point of view; we know things from *our* point of view. We have no trouble appreciating that the cup is both that cup and this cup, but we fail to see that the thing we call *x* is also not *x*. Both Mary and Jane fail to see that abortion is both right *and* wrong.

Which is why it is said, That arises from this. This in turn goes by that. (The theory of the co-birthing of that and this.)

For me, the cup in your hand is only that cup (over there) because I have a concept of this (here), of me, here. Without a this (here) there couldn't be a that (over there); there'd just be an it. In this way, that arises from this. But look, I have a cup in my own hands. This cup is, yes, this cup. Likewise, this cup is only this cup because I have a concept of that (over there), of you, over there. In this way, this goes by that.

Note that the theory of the co-birthing of that and this simply says that the thing that I call 'this' gives rise to *a different* thing (over there) that I call 'that'. It does not say that the thing that I call this is *also* a that. The theory of the co-birthing of that and this shows how disputing parties affirm what the other refutes and refute what the other affirms. Mary's this ('I'm right') and that ('Jane's wrong') co-birth each other.

Nevertheless, …

Even though we don't see things from over there (the other person's point of view); rather, we know them from here (our point of view) …

… when from one perspective a thing is labelled a birth, from another it's labelled a death. Etc.

Having sidestepped into the theory of the co-birthing of that and this (the theory that my calling a thing 'this' births *a different* thing that I call 'that'), we're now back to Chuang Tzu's initial observation: Any *one* thing that we care to point to is both a this *and* a that. He's now expanding his observation to include *all* labels. In the same way that the cup in my hand is both 'this cup' (from my point of view) and 'that cup' (from yours), what from here I call a birth, from over there someone else calls a death. When Mary, from her perspective, labels abortion allowable, Jane, from her perspective, labels it unallowable. The one and same thing is both allowable *and* unallowable. In general: When from one point of view a thing is *x*, from another it's not.

~

Using clarity.

When Chuang Tzu says:

> When from one perspective a thing is labelled a birth, from another it's labelled a death.

he's quoting the sophist Hui Tzu. In Classical Chinese the line also reads:

> The moment a thing is born, it dies.

Hui Tzu's full statement is:

> The moment the sun ascends to high noon, it descends.
> The moment a thing is born, it dies.

Hui Tzu's purpose with this paradoxical statement is to awaken us to how language artificially splits reality into opposing halves. (At the exact moment of high noon the sun is both 'ascending' *and* 'descending'.) His purpose is to awaken us to the here-and-now whole, the world beyond words, the beyond-language moment of high noon.

By quoting Hui Tzu, Chuang Tzu is making an important point. Hui Tzu represents your clever, argumentative brain, that brain of yours that seeks to get others to agree with your point of view. As we'll see presently, Chuang Tzu has the same agenda as Hui Tzu: to show that language artificially splits reality into opposing halves, and to lead us to see the beautifully whole world that lies beyond words. But whereas Hui Tzu uses *paradoxes* that *confound* us by *negating* the meaning that we ordinarily attach to words (e.g., that the moment a thing is born, it dies), Chuang Tzu uses *clarity* that *illuminates* how different views are uttered from different standpoints, which allows him to *affirm* the different meanings that different people, from their different standpoints, give to words (i.e., that from this point of view the thing is a death, and from that point of view it's a birth).

Just as you and I are able to affirm that the cup in your hand is both that cup (from my standpoint) and this cup (from yours), Chuang Tzu is able to affirm that when from one perspective a thing is a birth, from another it's a death. No tricky wordplay or clever arguments required. No need for confounding paradoxes that negate what we know to be true. All that's required is the awareness that from here the thing *is* a birth (the burnt-down house is the birth of a new building project), and that from there the thing *is* a death (the burnt-down house is the death of the burnt-down house). From where Mary stands abortion *is* allowable. From where Jane stands abortion *is* unallowable.

Because of this …

Because whenever someone says of a thing, It's *x*, someone else retorts, It's not; and whenever someone says of a thing, It's not *x*, someone else retorts, It's *x* …

… the sage doesn't walk these routes …

These routes (paths) on which one negates the views of others.

… but instead illuminates them by the light of heaven.

Chuang Tzu's method is not to negate, but to illuminate.

Heaven is the sky. The sage illuminates different views by *seeing* that the sun's rays fall on all paths equally.

Heaven connotes a numinous—a divine—mood. The sky isn't just up above us, it's the space all around us. Heaven is the umbrella under which, and the space in which, all things lie. Mountains *and* valleys. Cats *and* mice. The view that a thing is *x and* the view that it's not. The view that abortion is right *and* the view that it's wrong.

This too is to go by this or that aspect of a thing and say, It's *x*.

The sage, like everyone else, uses words. To illuminate that a thing is *x*, you have to say, It's *x*. However …

She sees that the thing she calls this is also a that, etc.

In the same way that all of us see that the cup in my hand is both 'this cup' and 'that cup', the sage sees that a thing is both *x and* not *x*. If her brain happens to say that abortion is right, she sees that abortion is also wrong. Each view is but a label pronounced by, and existing in, a brain. A minuscule, three-pound speck of meat (section 2).

So, a thing is that *and* this?!

From my point of view that thing over there is that, and from over there it's this. From Jane's point of view abortion is wrong, and from Mary's it's right. We can all accept that. But our brains want to know, What's *the truth* of the matter? Yes, in terms of that and this we see that the cup in your hand is both that and this. But in terms of not-*x* and *x*—in terms of abortion is wrong, abortion is right—how can the thing *in fact* be *both?* That's just a straightforward contradiction!

Which means, it's *neither* that *nor* this?!

For a thing to be that *and* this we see that the that and this are just words thrown at the thing from here and there, and that the thing itself is neither that nor this. We see that the cup is in fact neither that nor this. It's just a cup. But how can abortion be *neither* right *nor* wrong? When Mary says abortion is right, she thinks it's *in fact* right. When Jane says abortion is wrong, she thinks it's *in fact* wrong. Neither Mary nor Jane think that abortion is *neither* right *nor* wrong. Both Mary and Jane are pulling their hair out, imploring each other: O my God, if you could just see my point of view, you'd see that I'm right!

Chuang Tzu is ratcheting up the tension.

Is this here thing *x and* not *x*? Is it *neither x nor* not *x*? Is abortion right *and* wrong? It is *neither* right *nor* wrong?

Either way, the logic of our logic bumps up against a contradiction, a heartfelt objection.

And now, having ratcheted up the tension to breaking point, Chuang Tzu resolves it. He releases the clip:

Where neither that nor this finds its counterpart, I call that place the pivot of the path. As the pivot finds the centre of the socket, it responds without constraint, allowing you to say, It's *x*, of anything whatsoever, without constraint, and, It's not *x*, of anything whatsoever, without constraint.

This is one of the most sublime moments in the history of philosophical literature. The moment in which all differences of views are both acknowledged and transcended.

~

To make sense of this metaphor of the pivot of the path, we need to be familiar with the metaphor of the path.

In English we've inherited the term the Dao, or the Tao. Ooo, mysterious. No, not mysterious, just an abysmal failure of translation, a failure to translate *dao* 道 as 'the path'. In Chinese this term is no more mysterious than the English words 'the path'.

Picture a path winding through a landscape. This path is a thing that you can walk along, thus making your way through the landscape. Metaphorically, then, 'the path' is a path that you can follow, thus making your way through the terrain of life. Ritualists point to one path (the traditional customs and ceremonies); Mohists, another (utilitarian assessments of benefit and harm). Mary, who says abortion is right, posits one path; Jane, who says abortion is wrong, posits another. Chuang Tzu? He still hasn't told us what *he* thinks the path is. But he does mean this: the path (whatever it may *in fact* be; whatever this everyday term may metaphorically be *pointing* to) is something we can picture as a path winding through a landscape.

With this image in mind, how are we to picture *the pivot* of the path?

I picture a gate. The gate is able to swing freely by means of a pivot-and-socket mechanism. Protruding from the base of the gate there is a short cylindrical rod. Likewise from the top of the gate. These short rods

are the pivots. The bottom pivot sits snugly in a shallow hole in a stone block on the ground, and the top pivot fits into a hole in the top cross-beam of the gate. These holes are the sockets. When the pivots sit snugly in the sockets, the gate swings freely: now one way, now in the opposite direction.

Now let's picture a path passing through this gate. Because the gate swings freely, neither direction is blocked. You approach from that direction? Fine. The pivot moves freely in the socket and the gate swings freely, allowing you to pass. I approach from this direction? Also fine. The pivot moves freely in the socket and the gate swings freely, allowing me to pass.

With this metaphor Chuang Tzu transcends the metaphor schema of all Chinese philosophy. All other philosophers present *a* path as being *the* path. Chuang Tzu presents us with *the pivot* of the path. A point that is not itself a path. A point that sits to the side of all paths. A psychological space from which all paths, all points of view, are allowed. A place from which we can see that this and that thing is *x*, from this point of view on the path, and not *x*, from that point of view on the path; and also, neither *x* nor not *x*, from the point of view of the pivot.

~

Without constraint.

Recall the end of Chapter 1.3: Those who mount the isness of heaven-and-earth and take the reins of the disputing six energies are able to wander without constraint.

Likewise: When we arrive at the pivot of the path we are able to affirm of this and that thing, It's *x*, It's not *x*, without constraint.

For example:

A situation presents itself?

No problem. You mount the isness of heaven and earth, the isness of the presenting situation.

Mary's brain says, 'Abortion is right'?

No problem. Having found the pivot of the path, where abortion is neither wrong nor right, Mary affirms, Abortion is right (according to my brain).

Jane says to Mary, 'Abortion is wrong'?

No problem. Having found the pivot of the path, where abortion is neither wrong nor right, Mary affirms, Abortion is wrong (according to Jane's brain).

Whatever presents itself—you're able to affirm it. The pivot swings freely in the socket, without constraint. You're able to ride the here-and-now isness of things, without constraint.

And so I say: There's nothing like using clarity. Using a finger to show that a finger isn't a finger isn't like using something that's not a finger to show that a finger isn't a finger.

Fear not, this *is* a joke. We *are* meant to react with a, What the—! Here's my explanation of the joke.

'Using a finger to show that a finger isn't a finger' and 'using a horse to show that a horse isn't a horse' echo two infamous series of arguments by the sophist Kung-sun Lung. In regard to fingers, one of his arguments is that the label heaven-and-earth (meaning the world) doesn't have a referent because when you attempt to point to heaven-and-earth you only point to this and that thing. What has this got to do with fingers? The sinograph for pointer also means finger. Kung-sun Lung uses a pointer (the name heaven-and-earth) to show that the pointer (the name heaven-and-earth) isn't a pointer (doesn't point out heaven-and-earth). In Chinese this has the rhetorical effect of saying that he uses a finger to show that a finger isn't a finger. In regard to horses, one of his arguments is that if you ask for a horse you will be satisfied with a brown horse. But if you ask for a white horse you will not be satisfied with a brown horse. So the labels 'horse' and 'white horse' refer to different things. In this way he uses a horse (a white horse) to show that a horse (meaning any horse) isn't a horse (a white horse).

Well, all of that is very confounding. Chuang Tzu recommends using clarity instead. If it happens that you want to show that a finger isn't a finger, there's no need for ultra-clever arguments. You need only say, Heaven-and-earth is a finger. Simple! Now that the word finger refers to heaven-and-earth, it doesn't refer to the digit on your hand. (This is using something that's not a finger [heaven-and-earth] to show that a finger [the digit on your hand] isn't a finger [the thing referred to by the word finger].)

That's one aspect of the joke. The real joke is that our everyday disagreements are like Kung-sun Lung's arguments. To negate other people's views we use words in ways that, for the other person, are confounding. We say that the thing the other person calls *x isn't x* (that a horse isn't a horse).

Says Chuang Tzu: Why take the confounding approach of negating, when you can achieve the same result by taking the straightforward approach of affirming? Instead of saying that the thing the other person calls *x isn't x* (that a horse isn't a horse), leave their view be (allow that the horse is a horse) and affirm *your* view, that this thing *over here* is *x* (that the myriad things are a horse).

When Jane says, Abortion is murder, Mary is tempted to negate her. Abortion is *not* murder. This would confound Jane, for whom abortion *is* murder. Instead of negating, Mary might use clarity and affirm. She might say, To unjustifiably kill a person is murder.

You think those statements are allowable (valid)? Then they're allowable. You think they're not allowable? Then they're not allowable. Walk a path and you bring it into being as a definitive form. Label a thing and you make it so. How is a thing so? By being called so. How not so? By being called not so.

From the pivot of the path we see: from this point of view a thing is *x*; from that point of view it isn't.

At the same time, a thing has *inherent* so-ness, *inherent* allowable-ness (OK-ness). In this sense, no thing *isn't* so, no thing *isn't* allowable (OK).

From the pivot of the path we *also* see: the thing in question is neither *x* nor not *x*. It simply, wordlessly—is.

And so, whereas authoritative 'It's *x*'s hold up for view reeds and pillars, lepers and Hsi Shihs, things fantastic, perverse, and strange …

Picture a beautiful woman. Now imagine that you've pointed her out to me. And imagine, believe it or not, that to my eyes she is ugly. Whereas I authoritatively assert of the woman, She's ugly, and you authoritatively assert, She's beautiful …

… the path lets the labels pass freely, to let the thing be one.

Neither ugly nor beautiful. A whole not yet conceptually split into ugly or beautiful. An unlabelled conglomeration of physical and behavioural things (eyes shaped thus, hips shaped thus, disposition thus).

It's by splitting the oneness that the definitive form is brought into being. It's by bringing the definitive form into being that the oneness is broken. To see that the thing is neither a definitive form nor broken, you resume the practice of letting the labels pass freely, to let the thing be one.

Like splitting a log, you and I have conceptually split the unity of physical and behavioural things that constitute the woman—we've split it into beautiful and ugly. Instead of seeing the unlabelled unity, we each see a definitive form. I see ugly. You, beautiful. If we want to see her wholeness (her inherent so-ness and OK-ness), the thing to do is to let the labels pass freely.

You have to be pretty easy-going to let the labels pass freely, and let the thing be one.

Because you see that the woman is clearly beautiful, you object to my saying she's ugly.

See? You have to be pretty easy-going to let the labels pass freely.

If it happens that you're not feeling so easy-going, but you'd like to see the woman's oneness (her inherent so-ness and OK-ness), try this:

Instead of using an authoritative 'It's *x*', you accommodate the thing in the label at hand.

Instead of using your brain's authoritative label, She's beautiful, take a moment to accommodate the woman in the label at hand, the label *I'm* using.

Do this in the spirit of doing an exercise. Say, She's ugly.

She's ugly.

She's ugly.

What you're doing is letting the label pass freely. You're falling into alignment with its existence.

You find yourself falling into alignment and on the cusp.

You've labelled the woman 'beautiful'. You've practised accommodating her in the label 'ugly', falling into alignment with the existence of that label. The 'beautiful' and 'ugly' begin to cancel each other out, bringing you to the cusp of the pivot of the path. And then—

Going-by-this-or-that-aspect-of-the-thing-and-saying-It's-*x* ceases. It ceases and you don't know what's so of the thing.

The pivot finds the centre of the socket. You find yourself at the pivot of the path, the silent place where the woman is neither ugly nor beautiful.

What you now behold, I call the path.

The path is the unlabelled isness of things. The directly-perceived so-ness of things. The world as seen from *the pivot* of the path.

Disturbing your daemonic clarity to *make* things one …

The daemonic is your felt sense of aliveness, your wordless sense of engagement with things. Your daemonic clarity, then, is an energised state of consciousness in which you see things directly and clearly. It corresponds to seeing the path (the unlabelled isness of things).

One way to make things one is to let the competing labels pass freely, and *let* things be one. That's Chuang Tzu's recommendation. Our habitual way, however, is to disturb our daemonic clarity by trying to *make* things one (whole, right) by rearranging things. For example, Mary has just found out that Jane has the power to stop her from having an abortion. When there was nothing at stake, when it was just a matter of allowing that Jane has a different view, Mary was able to let the labels pass freely (the labels, 'Abortion is right', 'Abortion is wrong') and behold the path. She wordlessly beheld the isness of this whole situation with her and Jane. But not now. Now she's enraged. She's desperate to *make* things one (to have an abortion) …

… not knowing that different arrangements are the same …

The concept of different arrangements being the same is from the vernacular of philosophical argument. One of the tasks of philosophical argument is to group similar things and distinguish different things.

Here's an example of grouping similar things. Consider this white animal here and that smaller brown one there. Despite their differences, I see that both animals are horses. I appreciate that these different arrangements of things (different arrangements of colour and size) are the same (are horses).

Here's an example of distinguishing different things. A man wants a horse to go riding on, but when he's given a brown horse he protests, I want a white horse, not a brown one! Not appreciating that the different arrangements are the same, and seeking now to *make* things one (to make his incomplete situation whole) by changing the brown horse for a white one, he has pointlessly disturbed his daemonic clarity.

Likewise, Mary isn't seeing that having an abortion and not having an abortion, that these different arrangements of things, are the same. Perhaps you're not, either? Let's, then, continue.

… that I call three in the morning.

The monkeys got all heated up (they disturbed their daemonic clarity) over the arrangement, three nuts in the morning, four in the evening. They used rage to change that arrangement to four nuts in the morning, three in the evening (to *make* things one, whole, right). They didn't appreciate that these different arrangements are the same (seven nuts in total). They got all worked up over nothing.

~

The monkey keeper, this distributer of nuts, is a metaphor for the world, fate, circumstances. The that which gives us our lot.

The monkey keeper says to Mary, Here's three nuts of nappy washing and four nuts of enjoying the wonder of a child's eyes.

Mary's brain continues to object. I don't want those nuts! I want four nuts of not being burdened with a child and three nuts of whatever the hell this stupid metaphor wants to give me!

Mary's brain has a point. It isn't immediately clear how the 'three in the morning' story applies to her situation. Sure, three nuts in the morning, four in the evening is the same as four in the morning, three in the evening. But having a child and not having a child—in what way are *those* different arrangements the same?

Let's see if we can work out what Chuang Tzu means.

~

3 + 4 = 4 + 3?

Three nuts of nappy washing and four nuts of enjoying the wonder of a child's eyes? Four nuts of travelling child-free and three nuts of, oh, I don't know, loneliness?

I don't know how to divide different life-circumstances into four of this and three of that. Chuang Tzu isn't inviting us to be mathematicians. The purpose of the seven nuts is to represent how any here-and-now experience is a complete experience. The monkeys didn't appreciate that three nuts now, four later, is equivalent to four now, three later. They didn't appreciate that each arrangement is a full allotment of seven nuts. Likewise, you and I don't appreciate that undesired circumstances are equivalent to desired circumstances. We don't appreciate that each arrangement is a full allotment of experience.

Let's look at some examples.

~

Two monks are camping. There they are in their tent, all snug and settled in for the night, when a wind whips up and whisks the tent away.

Monk 1 exclaims, We've lost our tent!

Monk 2 says, What an amazing view of the stars.

Snug and warm in a tent, with a view of green plastic. That's seven nuts. Cold and exposed under the glory of the stars. That too is seven nuts.

~

Monk Jon lived a simple life on the edge of town. He made a modest living counselling the townsfolk who now and then sought his counsel.

One day an angry couple visited him and said, You got our daughter pregnant.

Monk Jon hadn't got their daughter pregnant, but he could see that they were in no mood for conversation, so he said, Is that so?

The angry couple said, We can't afford the infant, so we're leaving her with you.

Monk Jon said, Is that so?

Now that his reputation was in tatters he couldn't make a living counselling the townsfolk. Who would seek his counsel now? So he bundled up the infant girl and took to the road.

Years passed. Raising the girl was a different life to the monastic life he'd lived on the edge of town. And being a nobody asking for unskilled work was different to being a respected monk with an easy income from counselling. He endured hardships, but also enjoyed new experiences: watching the girl grow, working in kitchens, seeing how people treat social nobodies. New and wonderful worlds opened up to him.

One day the angry couple tracked him down. But now they weren't angry. Now they were awkward and deferential. They said, Our daughter has told us that you didn't get her pregnant. It was the neighbour boy. We're very sorry, and we've come to take the girl.

Monk Jon said, Is that so?

He returned the girl to her grandparents and he returned to his hut on the edge of the town. Now that everyone knew the truth about what he had done he was more revered than ever. Townsfolk would say to him, You are the most noble monk ever.

Monk Jon would say, Is that so?

Living a monastic life on the edge of town, respected by one's neighbours. That's seven nuts. Raising a child while wandering about as a nobody. That too is seven nuts.

~

In 1950, twenty-five-year-old Arnold Beisser was struck with polio. There he was, twenty-five years old, a national tennis champion, a medical intern poised to embark on a career in surgery, now paralysed in an iron lung.

Finding itself in this situation, Arnold's brain did what any brain would do. It protested.

And Arnold? He identified with his brain's thoughts.

In this way he suffered for a solid two years.

Two years into this ordeal he had a life-changing experience. Lying in his iron lung, looking down the drab hospital corridor, despairing at the boredom and hopelessness of it all, something in his perception shifted. He began to notice variations in shades of colour and light, geometric patterns in the alignment of walls and doors, and the scene 'now seemed startlingly beautiful', 'full and whole'. The moment passed, but over the years such moments became more and more frequent. He came to see

that there is 'something of value in [my] new existence, something that [does] not suffer by comparison with the old.' He at times experienced 'the same sense of fullness, joy, and absorption' in his quadriplegic experience as he had in his able-bodied experience. He had experiences of 'no want, no deficit, nothing larger, nothing smaller, nothing stronger, nothing weaker.'

He ended up living a long, full, and happy life. As a quadriplegic. He had a career as a psychiatrist. He married, and remained happily married until his death in his sixties. He travelled.

We might find Beisser's contentment difficult to believe. But we have good reason to believe him. He admits to feeling anger and despair, so we have some confidence that he doesn't deny unpleasant realities. And those who knew him confirm that to all appearances he was content.

He attributed his contentment to this: he stopped struggling to change his circumstances. In Chuang Tzu's language, he stopped disturbing his daemonic clarity by trying to *make* things one, which allowed him to see that things *are* one. He saw that his here-and-now world is a full allotment of experience.

In name and in fact the monkeys hadn't lost a thing, and yet they used joy and rage. Because of this, the sage uses 'It's *x*, it's not *x*' to harmonise with him (the monkey keeper) …

Although Mary's brain is still opposed to having a child, the sage in her now appreciates that whether she has an abortion or whether she has a child, she'll have a full allotment of experience. It happens that the monkey keeper has given her the arrangement of having to carry the pregnancy to term, so she harmonises with him, saying, That's OK …

… and thus rests in the equanimity of heaven.

Heaven is the sky, and by extension, the space all around us, the numinous space in which things exist.

To rest in the equanimity of heaven is to be like the sky: a space that is undisturbed by the coming and going of things, and which illuminates all things equally. It's to identify with awareness (Chapter 1.1, Theme 1).

I call this, letting both alternatives proceed.

Chuang Tzu is again making use of the vernacular of philosophical argument. By the usual rules of argument you must commit to saying of a thing either, It's x, or, It's not x. Only one of these alternatives is allowed to proceed, to be used henceforth in the discussion. (This makes sense. It's frustrating when the person you're talking to is evasive, using words to mean now this, now that.) Chuang Tzu, however, allows both alternatives to proceed, such that you are free to say of things, now, They're x, now, They're not, as required by the situation.

Mary's brain says, Abortion is allowable. The monkey keeper (the world, fate, Jane) says, It's not. Mary allows both alternatives to proceed. She has found the pivot of the path, from where she sees that abortion is neither allowable nor unallowable, and from where she can say, It's allowable, and now, It's unallowable, in alignment with her circumstances.

8

Penumbra and Shadow

Penumbra,* putting a question to Shadow, says:
One moment you're active, the next you're still.
One moment you're sitting, the next you're standing.
Why this lack of self-control?

Shadow says:
Is it that I have things I wait on, according to which I act so?
Is it that the things I wait on have things *they* wait on, according to which *they* act so?

Is it that I'm waiting on a snake's scales, a cicada's wings?

How would *I* know what makes me now act so, now not so?

& Penumbra is like my brain, my thinking self. My brain sees itself as an independent, self-determining sort of thing. When my body doesn't comply with its agendas, it gets frustrated. Sometimes exasperated. 'Body, we're meant to be reading. Why are you so fidgety? Body, we're meant to be getting up. Why are you so sleepy?' From Brain's point of view, Body lacks discipline and self-control.

My body is like Shadow. Like Shadow, my body doesn't know why it does this and that, and it couldn't care less! In fact, it feels Brain's questions are tedious. 'Really? This old routine? I thought we'd been over this. Fine, I'll explain it again. Look, we're all just small parts in an infinite causal network. Stuff happens in the world—I don't know what—and

Penumbra … The lighter, outer edge of a shadow.

now I feel an urge to stand. *I* feel an urge to stand, and then *you* usually say, as if it were your very own idea, Let's stand. It's a bit tiresome, you know, that you keep forgetting this. Sometimes you get fixated on an idea, a plan of action, and then you're edgy with me and with everything else in the world that doesn't immediately fall into line with your little plan.'

~

This story is a segue from Chuang Tzu's passive method to his active method.

In the previous sections we've been learning the passive method. We've been de-fusing from our brain's assertions and agendas, which has freed us to see the path, the harmonious isness of things.

In the following two chapters we'll learn the active method. Having de-fused from our brain's assertions and agendas, we'll learn how to get in touch with our *energetic* sense of engagement with things. We'll see that this energy waits on things. It responds to things in an attentive, attuned, harmonious way. Like Shadow. Without deliberate control. Trusting of spontaneously arising inclinations and urges. Exquisitely responsive to the environment. In perfect harmony with the environment.

9

Chuang Chou and the butterfly

Once, Chuang Chou* dreamt he was a butterfly.
A vivid, vibrant butterfly
who didn't know about Chou.

Suddenly he awoke, and was a startled, surprised Chou
who didn't know:
Was the butterfly in Chou's dream?
Is Chou in the butterfly's dream?

Chou and the butterfly—there's definitely a difference.
Let's call this, things change.

& Why does Chuang Tzu refer to himself in the third person? Because he doesn't identify with Chuang Chou, he identifies with consciousness. He's Of a Flock (Chapter 1.1), the ever-present field of awareness *in which* things—tables, chairs, butterflies, Chous—come and go.

~

The wisdom of not knowing.

Says my brain: Come on, we all know that the butterfly was in Chou's dream. Butterfly brains cannot dream up a human.

Yes, Brain, we do all know that. The story itself tells us that in its opening line. This story isn't inviting us to engage in an epistemological inquiry into whether the butterfly was in Chou's dream or Chou was in the butterfly's dream. This story is a metaphor.

Chuang Chou … Chuang Tzu (Master Chuang). Chuang is his family name. Chou, his given name.

In the moment of waking from a dream, have you ever felt that the dream was real, while also being unsure? '*Did* that thing happen, or was it just a dream?' In that moment you genuinely didn't know. Chuang Chou's not knowing whether the butterfly was in Chou's dream or Chou is in the butterfly's dream is a dramatized—a metaphorical—representation of the moment when going-by-this-or-that-aspect-of-a-thing-and-saying-It's-*x* ceases and you don't know what's so of the thing, and thus behold the path (section 4). It's like the dawn or dusk moment when your brain falls silent and you awake to the wordless, dream-like wonder of the world (section 7).

~

Things change.

The difference between Chou and the butterfly represents the difference between any one moment and any other. In any one moment you find yourself immersed in a field of things, and from moment to moment (to say nothing of day to day, decade to decade) this field of things changes.

Now I am hungry. Now, full. Now I'm a hiker roaming the countryside. Now, an invalid bound to a bed. Now I have the body of a twenty-year-old. Now, of a fifty-year-old.

Who am I *really?* Which of these experiential worlds, which arrangement of things, is the *real* me?

None of them. Each is just a transient arrangement of things. The real me is the ever-present here-and-now field of awareness, the that *in which* things come and go.

Chuang Tzu, sitting down to write this story, has realised: When awareness was aware of flitting about as a butterfly, it was aware of flitting about as a butterfly. When it was aware of being a startled, surprised Chou, it was aware of being a startled, surprised Chou. And now? I—awareness—am in this moment aware of my eternal presence and of how things change. I do not identify with that butterfly, nor with that Chou, though I was present with each. Things come, things go, and I am always present.

~

Discussions that make things equal.

Chou and the butterfly. Three nuts in the morning, four in the evening, and four in the morning, three in the evening (section 4). These things are definitely different. And from the pivot of the path (section 4), or from the perspective of Of a Flock (awareness), we see that they are equal. Each is equally a full field of things, a full allotment of experience. Each has inherent so-ness and OK-ness (section 4).

~

Butterfly flight.

Butterfly flight is the perfect metaphor for Chuang Tzu's philosophy of mounting the isness of heaven-and-earth and taking the reins of the disputing six energies, thereby wandering without constraint (Chapter 1.3). Butterfly rides on the wind and gives way to even the slightest breeze. She knows not where she is going, but trusts her inner urges and promptings. And she arrives at the flower. She doesn't identify with some cocoon self or butterfly self. *She* is movement-sensation-impulse at one with the here-and-now isness of heaven and earth.

2

The cook and the ox

The cook is unravelling an ox for Cultured Benevolent Lord.

As his hand touches
and shoulder leans
and foot steps
and knee bends—
sher-wooshhh!
(he guides, he *plays* the knife)
sher-wishhh!
Not a sound not in tune.
In time with the Mulberry-Grove Dance.
In step with the Sacred-Chiefs Corroboree.

Cultured Benevolent Lord says:
O, bravo!
How does skill arrive at this?

The cook, putting the knife down, replies:
What your subject cares about is the path.
He's moved on from skill.

When your subject first began unravelling oxen, he had eyes only for oxen.
After three years, he never attempted to see a whole ox.
And now, your subject meets the parts with his daemon and doesn't scrutinise them with his eyes.

His administrative thinking stops and his daemon's longing goes forth,

yielding to the natural grain,
striking at large gaps,
guiding through large openings,
going by the given structure.
To skilfully pass through a joint—that's something he never attempts, much less a large bone!

Good cooks replace their knife every year, because they cut.
Common cooks replace their knife every month, because they hack.
Well, your subject's knife is nineteen years old. It has unravelled several thousand oxen and its edge is as if freshly issued from the grindstone.

The sections have space between them, and the knife-edge lacks thickness.
Using something that lacks thickness to enter where there's space—one's scope in which to wander is vast. Indeed, the knife has room to spare.
That's why after nineteen years the knife-edge is as if freshly issued from the grindstone.

Still, when I come across a knot, I see the difficulty it presents.
Warily, cautioned—my gaze stilled; my action slowed—I move the knife ever so subtly.
And poof! The knot unravels itself like a clod of soil crumbling to the ground.
Lowering the knife and straightening up I'll look around, at a loss for the cause of it.
My intention fulfilled, I wipe the knife and put it away.

Cultured Benevolent Lord says:
Marvellous! I've heard the cook's words and learned from them how to nourish life.

& A key to nourishing life: Enter the space between things, facilitating them to unravel along their natural seams.

~

This is a comic scene.

In Chuang Tzu's day a lord would never be seen down in the kitchen. Kitchens were not the chic places of celebrity chefs that they are today. Kitchens were grimy sweathouses of slaughter and blood. When the Ritualist philosopher Mencius said, A noble person stays away from the kitchen, he wasn't poking fun at the noble person's fragile sensibilities. He was praising the noble person's gentle and benevolent nature. He was saying that we *should* stay away from the kitchen. And it's not that he was opposed to killing animals. Mencius was up for eating a steak or sacrificing a goat. He simply thought that while butchery is an appropriate activity for lowly folk, it is not an appropriate activity for a noble person, a sage.

Chuang Tzu laughs at this moral cowardice and snobbish hypocrisy. He steps square into the reality of life and says, The butchery of the kitchen is the very place where the sage resides.

Chuang Tzu elevates this most lowly and brutal of life's tasks to the status of high art. Cultured Benevolent Lord describes the cook's bloody work as an exquisite dance and music performance. By linking the cook's movements with the Mulberry-Grove Dance and Sacred-Chiefs Corroboree—two ancient politico-religious ceremonies—he's saying that the cook's acts are acts of sacred ceremony that bring about good order in the world.

~

This story is not about a cook carving up an ox.

The cook's knife has unravelled thousands of oxen over a period of nineteen years and is still as sharp as if freshly issued from the grindstone. Its edge isn't just sharp, it lacks thickness altogether. It *never* makes contact with the meat, but only ever enters the space *between* the sections of meat. This is not an actual knife or an actual ox. It's a metaphorical knife and a metaphorical ox.

The ox is a situation. (Think of a situation, a problem, you're dealing

with. This situation is your ox.)

The knife-edge that lacks thickness is awareness that lacks ego. A state of mind in which you have de-fused from words and found the pivot of the path, where things are neither that nor this (Chapter 2.4).

When we approach situations with egoless awareness, we can navigate them calmly, allowing them to unravel along their natural seams, knowing that this unravelling is nourishing.

~

Unravelling problems.

The way to unravel (solve) a problem is to locate the space between its parts, occupy that space, and then let the parts unravel (fall apart).

~

Seeing the space between the parts.

Our brain's labels and agendas are like cookie cutters: simplistic shapes that we impose onto things. To see things directly, in all their complexity and nuance, put your brain's words aside (let your administrative thinking stop). In silence, observe *the given* structure of the situation (its natural grain). You will see that it is made up of parts, and that there is space between the parts.

~

Letting your daemon's longing enter the space between the parts.

Your daemon's longing is your felt sense of aliveness, your felt inclinations, urges, promptings.

So, with your brain's words off to the side—

With the given structure of the situation clear before you—

Feel your way into the space between the parts. Allow your response to *emerge.*

In a difficult situation, slow right down. Take care that your brain, your administrative thinking, does not hijack your awareness and start hacking at the difficulty.

~

The cook's intention is fulfilled.

When you identify with your administrative thinking, your intention is a specific outcome. Hacking away at things, sometimes you get the cut you want, sometimes you don't.

When your intention is to *unravel* the situation, your intention is that the situation unravels along its natural seams. With this intention your intention is always fulfilled.

~

But if you want a specific thing, why *not* hack?

To get a specific cut of meat, good cooks and common cooks hack at the oxen of the world—and their knives blunt. We're all familiar with this blunted knife. Weariness. Frustration. Resignation.

~

Unravelled situations are nourishing.

An unravelled ox nourishes the people it feeds.

An unravelled situation nourishes the process of life.

The things we now love and cling to are the products of unravelled oxen, of once whole situations that broke apart and thus fed the current situation.

Situations rarely unravel in the way that we intend or want upfront. Situations unravel in unplanned, unexpected, undesired ways. But if we allow them to unravel, they will nourish us.

6

The fire and the firewood

A name constrains by treating a person as a log of firewood.
The fire that passes from log to log
knows not their exhaustion.

& A key to nourishing life: Identify with the fire, rather than the firewood.

~

Firewood and fire.

I see my friend and, pointing her out to you, I say, 'That's Chloe. See her slender figure and green-grey eyes. Eyes like a sunrise over a tea-tree lake.' Depending on your patience, on and on I could go, itemising her character traits, her loves and hates. In doing so I'm describing a log of firewood. A thing amid the world of things.

The consciousness and life energy that looks out from behind those tea-tree-lake eyes is not this log of firewood. She's the fire alight on this log.

A name constrains by treating a person as a log of firewood.

Old Longears's wailing disciples (previous section) had identified Old Longears with a physical body, a log of firewood. The log was exhausted (he died), and so they wailed.

But look, not a single log. At one point this log, and at another, that, for his body was not a single log from birth through to death. It was a series of logs. At one point the body of an infant. And then, a teenager. And then, an adult. And then, an old person. Again and again one log was exhausted and the fire moved on to the next.

Over the years Old Longears's disciples had pointed out their venerable teacher. Pointing to his body, they'd said, There's Old Longears. And then there they were with the latest log: a corpse. No fire alight on *that* log, to be sure. Just a cold cinder. But because they'd never been aware of the fire, because they'd constrained him to being this and that log, there they now were with the sadness that their beloved Old Longears had been reduced to this cold cinder.

As Chuang Tzu says in Chapter 2.2, 'If you identify with your body, you condemn yourself to await its exhaustion.' Likewise in regard to others. If you identify your friend with their body, you condemn yourself to watch on in despair as this body, this log of firewood, is exhausted.

The fire that passes from log to log knows not their exhaustion.

If the fire is never exhausted, where is Old Longears's consciousness and life energy now that his body is a corpse?

Well, where is the flame when you blow out a candle?

But Chuang Tzu says that the fire isn't exhausted.

No. He says that the fire doesn't *know,* doesn't *experience,* the exhaustion that the firewood does. Your body changes, like a series of burning logs, each in turn breaking apart and dissolving to ash. Your consciousness and life energy exhaust now this log, now this log, and aren't themselves exhausted. They're always present and whole, aflame.

Yes, a time comes in the series of logs when a log isn't able to support a flame. Then the fire goes out, is exhausted. But this vanishing of the fire is not something the fire experiences. Where there's no fire, there's no fire. Fire is not present where it is absent. Fire exists in a cosmos in which fire is ever present.

Yes, Old Longears died. The flame went out. But from the point of view of Old Longears, he never died. He arrived with the season and resided on the current. Was forever alight on now this log, now this log, never knowing their exhaustion. He was the mythical charioteer of Chapter 1.3: He mounted the isness of heaven-and-earth and took the reins of the disputing six energies, and thereby wandered without constraint.

1

The one-footed cripple Majestically Decrepit

In Lu there's a one-footed cripple, Majestically Decrepit.
The number of people who follow him and who follow Second-Born Ni*—there's as many who follow one as the other.

Constant Season,* putting a question to Second-Born Ni, says:
Majestically Decrepit is a one-footed cripple,
yet the number of people who follow him and who follow you, Venerable Master—it's a fifty-fifty split between the folk of Lu.
Standing, he doesn't teach.
Sitting, he doesn't discuss.
But people go to him empty and come away full.
Could it really be he has a wordless teaching that, lacking outward form, makes the mind complete?
What sort of person is this?

Second-Born Ni says:
Venerable Master is a sage.
Me—I've just been dawdling and haven't gone to him yet, that's all.
And if *I'm* going to adopt him as my teacher, need we wonder about folk who aren't like me?
Why only Lu Dukedom?
I'll entice the whole world to come follow him.

Second-Born Ni … Confucius. (Second-Born Ni is his courtesy name.)
Constant Season … One of Second-Born Ni's disciples.

Constant Season says:
He's a one-footed cripple, and *your* respected elder.
Common, yet far above.
In that case, what are we to make of the unique way he uses his mind?

Second-Born Ni says:
Death and birth are big events, but he doesn't fluctuate with them.
Even if heaven and earth upturned, he wouldn't be lost with them.
He sees that he's like an actor in a costume, so he doesn't get shifted about with things.
He leaves the changing of things to fate and keeps to his core task.

Constant Season says:
What do you mean?

Second-Born Ni says:
Looked at in regard to their difference, the liver and gallbladder are Chu and Yueh.*
Looked at in regard to their similarity, the myriad things are all one.*

Someone like this—he doesn't know what his ears and eyes ought to approve, and lets his mind wander on the harmony created by his charisma.
In regard to things, he looks at how they're one and doesn't see what they've lost.
He looks at losing his foot as he'd look at shaking off a clod of soil.

---

the liver and gallbladder are Chu and Yueh … Similar things (the liver and gallbladder) are worlds apart (Chu and Yueh). Chu is a large, civilised kingdom; Yueh is a small, barbarian kingdom nestled up against Chu's eastern border. The liver is a large, important organ; the gallbladder is a small, bile-filled organ nestled up against the liver's right edge.
one … Equal, the same.

Constant Season says:
For his own benefit he uses his attention to discover his mind, and he uses his mind to discover the constant mind.
How does it benefit *others* to congregate around him?

Second-Born Ni says:
No one sees their reflection in turbulent water, but in still water.
Only stillness is able to still people's stillness.

Of things that receive their fate from the earth, the pine and cypress stand out. In winter, summer, green throughout.
Of things that receive their fate from heaven, Shun* stands out. Affirming the whims of fortune, he was able to affirm his nature, and thus affirmed everyone's nature.

A sign that someone maintains the attitude that they're at the moment of inception is the absence of fear.
A brave officer boldly leads the charge into an army of nine hosts. If someone who's motivated by reputation and who's able to will himself forward is like this, need we wonder about someone who makes heaven and earth his ministers, and the myriad things his royal residence; who regards his trunk and limbs as but a pavilion, and his ears and eyes its musicians and wall hangings; who treats as one what his knowing knows, and whose mind never tastes death?
Such a person—he chooses the day and ascends the stage.
Others—they follow someone like this.
But such a person—why would *he* consent to make others his business?

Shun … An earth-dwelling god who provided benevolent rule over the Realm Under Heaven back in mythic times. Although his degenerate relatives treated him abominably, he always treated them with respect. He remained constant—evergreen—throughout the seasons of fate.

& Could it really be he has a wordless teaching that, lacking outward form, makes the mind complete?

Chuang Tzu uses words to help free us from our attachment to words (Chapter 2). But a problem with words is that instead of being freed by them, we can get bound up in them. When Chuang Tzu writes about the large bird Of a Flock, hoping to awake us to awareness, there is a risk that we simply see a large bird and that we then chirp our little hearts out either laughing at it or revering it (Chapter 1.2).

Much better, then, to have a *wordless* teaching, right?

Of course not. A wordless teaching communicates nothing (which is to say, it allows the student to infer *anything*). Chuang Tzu—a man not at all shy about using words—is parodying all those teachers and students who yap on endlessly about how one should just be silent.

And yet—there *is something* about silence. To see the path we have to find that wordless place that is the pivot of the path. We have to let going-by-this-and-that-aspect-of-things-and-saying-They're-*x* cease (Chapter 2.4).

If *I'm* going to adopt him as my teacher, need we wonder about folk who aren't like me?

People who don't dawdle, who don't put off doing what matters. (Second-Born Ni—Confucius—dawdles by engaging in endless study and self-improvement.)

He sees that he's like an actor in a costume, so he doesn't get shifted about with things. He leaves the changing of things to fate and keeps to his core task.

An actor doesn't identify with the costume, script, and props. She identifies with herself, and so she experiences no distress when presented with a new costume, script, and set of props. Likewise, Majestically Decrepit doesn't identify with a particular body and set of circumstances. He identifies with his life energy (Chapter 3.1), his daemon (Chapter 3.2), his charisma—and so he experiences no distress when his body and circumstances change.

Like an actor, his core task is to fill the part here-and-now given to him. It isn't an actor's business to choose the costume, script, and props. An actor leaves these things to the playwright and set designers. Likewise, Majestically Decrepit leaves the changing of things to fate.

Of course an actor could, and actors often do, complain that the costume/set/script is sub-standard. Having some other costume/set/script in mind they blow up the difference between the two to be like the difference between Chu and Yueh. But a great actor does not do this. A great actor takes the costume/set/script at hand and *makes* it great by filling it with her charisma. She sees that the costume/set/script is merely a costume/set/script, no different to any other costume/set/script. Likewise, Majestically Decrepit sees that a one-footed body is as good as any other. It is a mere costume in which he dresses himself so as to get on with his core task: to play his part, and play it well.

Looked at in regard to their similarity, the myriad things are all one.

As just discussed, different costumes are one in that they are all equally costumes with which to play.

Another example of how different things are one (equal) is the story of the monkeys and the seven nuts (Chapter 2.4). Whether it's three nuts in the morning and four in the evening, or four in the morning and three in the evening, it's seven in total. Each arrangement is equal. Each is a full allotment of nuts. Likewise, no matter what arrangement of things you have before you in this moment, you have a full allotment of experience.

By looking at things in this way, Majestically Decrepit sees that having a foot and not having a foot—each is a different but equal arrangement of things.

He lets his mind wander on the harmony created by his charisma.

Charisma is the quality of a person who is settled in their body and environment. It's like water settled in a bowl (section 3). It turns an unwanted arrangement of things into a harmonious isness of things.

The harmony created by his charisma is the harmonious isness of things.

Instead of using his mind to label and evaluate things, Majestically Decrepit lets his mind wander on the harmonious isness of things.

He uses his attention to discover his mind ...

By being attentive, he discovers his mind at work. He sees that when his mind looks at how things are different, it can blow the difference up to be as great as the difference between Chu and Yueh. When his mind looks at how things are similar, it sees that the myriad things are all one (equal).

... and he uses his mind to discover the constant mind.

Once you see your label-making mind, you then see the constant mind: the ever-present awareness *in which* your label-making mind is doing its thing.

When Majestically Decrepit, not knowing what his ears and eyes ought to approve, lets his mind wander on the harmony created by his charisma, this wandering mind is the constant mind. (It wanders *and* is constant in the way that a charioteer on a moving chariot both wanders and is constant. The charioteer—the constant mind—is an ever-present constant, still and present, wandering through ever-changing scenery.)

A sign that someone maintains the attitude that they're at the moment of inception is the absence of fear.

You are forever in the here and now, forever at *the beginning* of what's next.

With this attitude, fear vanishes. We feel fear when we're facing potential loss, when we're staring down an approaching end. A frightened soldier looking out upon an army of nine hosts sees a wall of impending death. A fearless soldier—a person with charisma—sees an open arena in which to take his next step.

He chooses the day and ascends the stage.

Like an actor donning a costume and stepping onto the stage.

What costume? What stage?

The costume of the moment. The world stage.

Perhaps the costume is that of a soldier and the stage is a battlefront. Perhaps the costume of a footless cripple and the stage a room full of people looking for peace. Perhaps the costume of a pregnant woman and the stage a society hostile to her desire to have an abortion (as per our discussion in Chapter 2.4).

What costume is being handed to *you* in this moment? What stage happens to be before you? Here is your moment, your chance at greatness. Why not don the costume and ascend the stage? No need to look around, to look nervously behind you to see who's following. No need to bully others into playing this and that role. *Your* role is this: to don the costume and ascend the stage. To mount the isness of heaven-and-earth and take the reins of the disputing six energies (Chapter 1.3).

1

Four friends facing death together

Four men—Mr Blue, Mr Hue, Mr See, and Mr Sigh—are talking among themselves when one of them says:
Which of you can think of nothingness as the head, life as the spine, and death as the rump?
Which of you knows that death and life, existence and demise, are one body?
He and I are friends.

The four men look at each other and laugh.
They are of one mind. Each man is in the happy company of friends.

~

It comes to pass that Mr Hue falls ill.
Mr Blue calls in on him and says:
Amazing! The Maker of Things is using you to make this contorted thing.

A large hump protrudes from his back,
his vital organs stacked inverted above it.
His cheeks are down in the hem of his gown,
his shoulders above his crown.
A row of knobby vertebrae point to the sky.
The yin-yang energies are all awry,
but his mind is calm and untroubled.

He hobbles over and looks at his reflection in the well, and says:
Indeed! How the Maker of Things is using me to make this contorted thing.

Mr Blue says:
Do you hate it?

Mr Hue says:
Perish the thought! What's there for me to hate?

Let's suppose that bit by bit he's changing my left arm, using it to make a rooster.
Going by this I'll keep watch on the night.

Let's suppose that bit by bit he's changing my right arm, using it to make a slingshot pellet.
Going by this I'll seek owls for the roast.

Let's suppose that bit by bit he's changing my buttocks, using them to make chariot wheels, and that he'll use my daemon to make a horse.
Going by this I'll take advantage of the situation. Will I ever again have to change a harness?

To get is being in season.
To lose is going with the current.
When at ease with the season and residing on the current, sorrow and joy cannot enter.
This is what the ancients mean by, the noose is unravelled.
If you don't manage to unravel it yourself, things will pull it all the tighter.

Besides, that things don't get the better of heaven is nothing new.
What's there for *me* to hate about it?

~

It comes to pass that Mr Sigh falls ill.
He's gasping on the verge of death, his wife and children surrounding him, weeping, when Mr See calls in.

Mr See says:
Enough! Shoo! There's no distressing change here.

Leaning against the doorway he converses with Mr Sigh, saying:
Amazing! The Maker and Changer—
What will he use you to make?
What will he use you to accomplish?
Will he use you to make a rat's liver?
Will he use you to make an insect's legs?

Mr Sigh says:
In the relationship between father-and-mother and son, the father and mother need only give the order—east, west, south, north—and the son follows.
The relationship between yin-and-yang* and man is no less than that between father-and-mother and son.
If they announced my upcoming death and I didn't listen, that would mean I'm obstinate. How would that be any fault of theirs?

Imagine if a great blacksmith was casting metal and the metal leapt about, saying, I demand to be Mo Yeh!*
The great blacksmith would surely consider it to be inauspicious metal.
Having happened on the form of a human, if I were now to say, Only a human! Only a human!—
The Maker and Changer would surely consider me to be an inauspicious human.

The moment I think of heaven and earth as a great foundry, and the Maker and Changer as a great blacksmith, where can I go and not approve?

---

yin-and-yang … The forces that give birth to all things. Yin is female; yang, male.
Mo Yeh … A legendary sword.

Completely content, I fall asleep.
Pleasantly surprised, I awake.

& Which of you can think of nothingness as the head, life as the spine, and death as the rump?

Death is not a future event that lies ahead of you. Death lies forever behind you. (It's the rump.) As you pass from one moment to the next, past you is dead.

The future? (The head?) Look around. The future is nowhere present. It doesn't exist. It's a nothingness.

Between the two is life (the spine). Forever here-and-now present.

The Maker of Things is using me to make this contorted thing.

The Maker of Things is nature. The that which makes all things.

When at ease with the season and residing on the current, sorrow and joy cannot enter. This is what the ancients mean by, the noose is unravelled. If you don't manage to unravel it yourself, things will pull it all the tighter.

Echoing Chapter 3.5:

> Happening to come, Master was in season.
> Happening to depart, Master went with the current.
> When at ease with the season and residing on the current, sorrow and joy cannot enter.
> The ancients called this, the Supreme God's noose has been unravelled.

The Supreme God is nature. His noose is the noose he places around our necks at birth, condemning us to death. If you don't manage to unravel this noose yourself, things will pull it all the tighter: the more you bemoan death, the tighter its grip around your neck. But when you're at ease with the season and residing on the current, the noose is loosened and unravelled.

That things don't get the better of heaven is nothing new.

Heaven means nature. (Heaven is the sky. By extension, it's the sky god, the god who reigns over and orders the world. By further extension, it's nature.)

Pleasantly surprised, I awake.

This calls to mind Chuang Tzu's butterfly dream (Chapter 2.9). After dreaming of being a butterfly, suddenly he awoke and was a startled, surprised Chou.

Just as Chuang Tzu identified with neither the butterfly nor Chou, but with the that which was present with each (awareness; life energy), Mr Sigh does not identify with his present body, but with the that which is forever here-and-now present (awareness; life energy).

Now, and now, and again now, he (awareness; life energy) blinks and, pleasantly surprised, beholds a world spread out before him.

1

Insects that live in water don't hate having to change ponds

(from Chapter 21)

Animals that eat grass don't hate having to change pastures.
Insects that live in water don't hate having to change ponds.
They go along with the small differences and don't lose the large constant,
so delight and anger, grief and joy, don't enter some vacancy in their breast.

All under heaven is the that in which the myriad things are one.
Attain this that in which they're one, and identify with it,
and your four limbs and hundred joints will be but dust and dirt,
and death and birth, end and beginning, will be but day and night,
and none of them able to disturb you, much less the distinctions drawn by gain and loss, misfortune and good fortune!

All under heaven is the world beneath Of a Flock's wings (Chapter 1.1). It's the panorama of things here and now spread out before you and existing *in* your field of consciousness. These myriad different things are one in the way that the images in a mirror are one, or that the images in a painting are one: they are parts of a whole.

Identify with this and that thing and you must suffer when that thing ceases to be, or is not present. But identify with the field *in which* things exist—your here-and-now field of consciousness—and you are beyond harm. Things come, things go. And you—awareness—are ever-present, undisturbed.

Identify with awareness and you are like a cow that likes grass, a fish that likes water. A patch of seaweed comes, or goes? A hill comes, or goes? Things come, and go? These small differences do not distress you. The large constant (grass—water—awareness) is present. You are fine.

Coda:

The usefulness of Chuang Tzu's useless philosophy

4

This large earth

(from Chapter 26)

Master Hui says to Master Chuang:
Your words are useless.

Master Chuang says:
Only when a person knows the useless can you begin to talk with him about uses.

The earth isn't bounded. It's large.
But the amount of it a person uses is only the bit beneath his feet.
Given this, if we took the surrounding ground and removed it, all the way down to the Yellow Springs, would he still have something useful?

Master Hui says:
It would be useless.

Master Chuang says:
Well then, that the useless is useful is clear.

This story complements the stories in Chapter 1 where Master Hui compares Master Chuang's philosophy to a large, useless gourd (Chapter 1.7), and a large, useless tree (Chapter 1.8).

In worldly terms, Chuang Tzu's philosophy is useless. Imagine saying to your boss, or your client, that you're aware of awareness. Now imagine saying to your boss, or your client, that you can do the thing they want done.

So, we go about doing things. Like the bit of ground beneath your feet, knowing how to do things is very useful.

But to what end are we engaged in all this doing? For what purpose? Is it not just one thing after another? A moment of pleasure and contentment now and then; and then we're at it again: lamenting the presence of this and that annoyance; anxiously striving to get hold of now this thing, now that. Always one thing after another, with no larger context in which to make sense of all this striving and doing.

But once we awake to awareness—the ever-present that *in which* things exist (like vast, ever-present earth, *in which* the bit of ground on which you now happen to stand exists)—we're free to sit back and enjoy, and to lean into and engage with, the ceaseless flow of things changing. We're now free to chariot on the world (Chapter 1.3), to float about on the rivers and lakes (Chapter 1.7).

This is the usefulness of the useless, the usefulness of being aware of awareness, the usefulness of Chuang Tzu's philosophy. Prior to being aware of awareness we're marooned on a tiny piece of land in a vast, hostile, meaningless world of things. But when we're aware of awareness all the world is ours to enjoy.

1

The wheelwright down at the bottom of the hall

(from Chapter 13)

Up at the top of the hall Outstanding Duke is reading a book.
Down at the bottom of the hall Wheelwright Flatten is hewing a wheel.
Putting his mallet and chisel aside he goes up and puts a question to Outstanding Duke, saying:
I venture to ask, whose words is Your Grace reading?

The duke says:
The words of a sage.

The wheelwright says:
Is this sage alive?

The duke says:
Dead.

The wheelwright says:
So what My Lord is reading is just the dregs of the once living-spirit of an ancient, no?

Outstanding Duke says:
When the Lonely One reads a book, who's the wheelwright to have an opinion!

If you can explain yourself, the Lonely One will allow it.
If not, you die.

Wheelwright Flatten says:
Your subject sees it in terms of his work.
When hewing a wheel, if you're too slow it's easy going but the wheel ends up wobbly. If you're too fast it's a hard slog and the ends don't meet.
Neither too slow nor too fast—
Your subject feels it in his hands and responds from his heart.
He can't put it into words.
There's a knack to it, in the spaces.
He can't impart it to his son and his son isn't able to receive it from him, which is why your subject is seventy years old and still making wheels.

The ancients, along with what they couldn't teach, are dead.
So what My Lord is reading is just the dregs of the once living-spirit of an ancient, no?

& This book that you're reading is just the dregs of Chuang Tzu's lived life, his once living-spirit. High-quality dregs, but dregs all the same. Dear friend, let's enjoy these tasty dregs, but let's not be satisfied with them. May they make us thirsty for actual wine. May they motivate us to go find our own pitcher of living spirit and get properly drunk.

My fellow book-reader, let's take care not to squander our lives dallying at the top of the hall reading other people's words. Let's make sure to get down into the courtyard and make wheels.

Let's learn the knack of navigating the space between things (Chapter 3.2).

4

Empty boats

(from Chapter 20)

A man is crossing a river in a boat when he sees an empty boat approaching on a collision course.
Even though he's a hot-tempered fellow, this doesn't make him angry.
But now he sees there's someone in the boat, so he calls out to them to alter their course.
When this first call isn't heeded, he calls out again.
And when *this* isn't heeded, he calls out a third time and throws in a torrent of abuse.

Before, he wasn't angry. But now he is.
Before, the other boat was empty. But now there's someone in it.

When you see that other people are empty boats, even if you're a hot-tempered person you'll never be angry.

& Other people are empty boats adrift on the cause-and-effect currents of the world. When we see this we are free to engage with others in a harmonious manner, like a man in a boat who harmoniously navigates the empty boats adrift on the river. But when we imagine that other people have free will (when we imagine that the other boats have people in them), when they collide with our goals we rage against them.

~

An objection.

Free Will says: Watch this. I will now choose to lift my left arm. See? I chose to do that. And just as I chose to do that, others choose to do what they do.

Chuang Tzu: Why did you lift your arm just now?

Free Will: Because I chose to.

Chuang Tzu: That's a superficial answer. Let's be more specific. Perhaps you chose to lift your arm because you wanted to?

Free Will: Yes, I wanted to lift my arm. I wanted to show you that my arm is under my control. And I did. So there you go, I exist.

Chuang Tzu: Did you choose to want these things?

Free Will: Um …

Chuang Tzu: See? Your want was given to you.

Free Will: But I could have chosen *not* to lift my arm. *I* lifted my arm. Nobody else. It was *me* who did it. I *chose* to!

Chuang Tzu: So you keep saying. But the thing is, you *didn't* choose not to. Why not?

Free Will: Because I chose *to* lift my arm.

Chuang Tzu: Which brings us back to the beginning.

~

Wise people have always seen that free will does not exist.

Ancient India. The Buddha said, When this, then that. When this isn't, that isn't. When these conditions are in place, this event follows. When these conditions aren't in place, this event doesn't follow. If you want this or that to happen only a fool demands it (only a fool appeals to free will). A wise person gets to work putting the right conditions in place.

Ancient Greece and Rome. The Stoics said, People do wrong because they don't know any better, just as people do math wrong because they don't know how to do it right. If you want someone to do right only a fool demands it (only a fool appeals to free will). A wise person assesses the other's ability and provides what education they can.

Ancient Judea (Roman period). Jesus, dying on the cross, said of those who hung him there, 'Forgive them. They don't know what they're doing.' Jesus understood that his Jewish and Roman siblings were acting

how they *had* to act, given the conditions that were in place; given their level of education.

Ancient China. Chuang Tzu says, Only a fool rages against a boat adrift on the current. Only a deluded person imagines that there's a person in the boat (that the boat has free will). A wise person sees that the boat is empty and *must* follow the current, and so she calmly uses what skill she has to navigate the current.

~

In Chapter 3.2 the cook explains how he unravels oxen. He never attempts to hack through solid bone. (He never rages at empty boats to alter their course.) He sees the presenting structure of the ox and lets his daemon's longing enter the space between the parts. (He sees the pattern of the currents and navigates their flow.) He's able to do this because he has stepped to the side of *his own* ego. (His administrative thinking has stopped.) He doesn't attribute free will to himself, and he doesn't attribute it to the ox. If he did, he'd be angry with himself for not making better progress, and he'd be angry with the ox for not unravelling in the way he wants it to unravel. But because he sees that free will does not exist (that neither he nor the ox has free will) he is free to calmly and productively navigate what *does* exist: the presenting pattern of meat, bones, and tendons.

~

People often insist that free will *must* exist because if it doesn't we are robbed of all dignity.

Two answers.

One. Is it dignified to rage against an empty boat?

Two. You are the grandest of mythical beings that has ever been imagined in the entirety of world literature. You are the unfathomably large bird Of a Flock (awareness): your wings spread to the horizon (Chapter 1.1). And you are the grandest of charioteers ever imagined: your chariot is heaven and earth; your team of horses, the six energies (Chapter 1.3). The mythical bird Of a Flock. The noble charioteer of heaven and earth. Dear friend, what is more noble, more dignified than that?

Theme 5

Cautionary tales

1

When the springs dry up

(from Chapter 6)

Fish thrive together in water,
people thrive together on the path.
Those who thrive together in water meander about the pond and their nourishment is provided.
Those who thrive together on the path have no business to attend and their livelihood is assured.
And so it is said:
Fish forget each other in the rivers and lakes,
people forget each other on the ways of the path.

~

When the springs dry up and the fish are left stranded together on the land, panting at each other with humid breath, moistening each other with spit, it's not as good as forgetting each other in the rivers and lakes.
Everyone's praising Yao* and condemning Chieh* isn't as good as forgetting both and changing with the path.

Yao … A virtuous god.
Chieh … A tyrant.

I once worked with troubled youth. These young people were often verbally and physically aggressive towards me. Sometimes this aggression didn't bother me; I experienced feeling calm amid the storm and was able to navigate the behaviours with the same ease with which I navigate a pothole when riding a bicycle. At these times my brain was silent and I was energetically present and attentive. My actions arose spontaneously from somewhere inside me, somewhere beneath the level of conscious judgment and planning.

Sometimes, however, this aggression did get to me. In those moments I'd be thinking judgmental thoughts; thoughts like: 'You little shit. This is just bad behaviour.' (How dare there be a pothole. This council is incompetent beyond belief!) My body was tense and my mood agitated. My brain busy with words, busy trying to work out what to do, how to get these defiant kids to do what I wanted them to do. Meanwhile—bump! Kethump!

When the aggression didn't bother me, I was like a fish wandering the rivers and lakes. I had no agenda, no business to attend, aside from engaging with the presenting circumstances.

When the aggression got to me, I was like a fish stranded on dry land. Desperate for water, my colleagues and I would pant at each other with humid breath, panting our rules and standards. We would huddle together and moisten each other with spit, telling each other how good we are and how bad these badly behaved kids are. Praising Yao and condemning Chieh.

Of course, when you're a fish stranded on dry land it's only natural to pant and spit. This is your ego crying out in panic: I'm about to asphyxiate. I need moisture, now!

The trick is to realise that the ego is mistaken. Instead of panting and spitting, a better way to find moisture is to slip into the rivers and lakes.

How to slip into the rivers and lakes? How to find the path?

Find the *pivot* of the path, where neither this nor that finds its counterpart (Chapter 2.4), where you forget right and wrong, Yao and Chieh.

Be the cook unravelling the ox (Chapter 3.2). He has no business to attend, no agenda to push. He lets his administrative thinking stop and

his daemon's longing go forth, entering the space between things, allowing them to unravel along their natural seams.

Allow things to unravel in this way and the new arrangement will nourish you. Your livelihood is assured.