

nonhuman species, ecosystems, or planets. If Confucius admonished against concerning oneself with nonhuman spiritual beings until the moral needs of humans have been fully addressed, Mencius would seem prepared to exhort us to engage in appropriate moral action toward all the humans around us before we begin considering moral action toward nonhumans. The Confucian sage-king is generally one who engenders moral harmony among human beings, not one who inflames sentimental solicitude for oxen, cute puppies, or adorable dolphins. Mencius supported the king who felt compassion for an ox—not because oxen are inherently worthy of sentimental compassion, but rather because he could use that incident to teach the king how to rule his human subjects with appropriate moral concern. Mencius did not chide the king for having ordered the death of an innocent sheep!

13. See Guo Jingfan's edition in *Concordance to Zhuangzi* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Yenching Institute, 1956), 46; and *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Zhuangzi*, trans. Victor H. Mair (New York: Bantam Books, 1994), 169.

14. Translation mine. The term "hundred clans" here is exactly the same term (*baixing*) found in *Daode jing* 49, where the sage is said to treat them as children. Wang Bi's commentary shows that the final line is to read "straw and dogs": to read the term "straw-dogs" into the text is unwarranted exegesis.

15. I would argue that it is necessary to take into account here the intellectual history of ancient China, for "benevolence" is not just a term of common discourse, but a technical term in the vocabulary of the classical Confucians, particularly that of Mencius. One can, in fact, read this passage as a direct argument against Mencius's teaching that one should cultivate a set of moral feelings (compassion, respect, shame, etc.) that he alleges to be intrinsic to human nature.

16. See further my entry, "Taoism," in *Philosophy of Education: An Encyclopedia*, ed. J. J. Chambliss (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1996), 633–36.

17. See further my entry, "Taoism," in *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*.

18. Norman J. Girardot, "Taoism," in *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, 1st ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1979), 1631.

19. See Kirkland, "Taoism," in *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*.

20. On the translation of the term *jian* ("restraint"), see my textual notes in "Self-Fulfillment through Selflessness."

21. James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1986), 11. I address these matters more fully in my article, "Self-Fulfillment through Selflessness."

22. Translation mine. I use the edition reproduced in *Zishu ershiba zhong* (Twenty-eight Classical Texts) (Taipei: Guangwen, 1979), 1:621–24. The passage in question (624, line 6) is found in section N of Rickett's 1965 translation (p. 167); section XIV.2 of his 1998 translation (p. 54); and section XXIV of Roth's translation (Roth translates *yunqi* as "revolving the vital breath"). See W. Allyn Rickett, *Kuanzi: A Repository of Early Chinese Thought* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1965); *Kuanzi: Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays from Early China*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); and Harold D. Roth, *Original Tao: Inward Training (Nei-yeh) and the Foundations of Taoist Mysticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 92.

23. Text, p. 622, translation again mine. Cf. Rickett, *Kuanzi* (1965), 161 (section D); Rickett, *Kuanzi* (1998), 44 (section VII.1); Roth, *Original Tao*, 62–64.

## Metic Intelligence or Responsible Non-Action? Further Reflections on the *Zhuangzi*, *Daode jing*, and *Neiye*

LISA RAPHALS

Russell Kirkland has argued persuasively against reading a specifically interventionist ecological sensibility into the *Zhuangzi*, *Daode jing*, and *Neiye*, the three preeminent "Daoist" texts of Warring States and Han vintage. His discussion centers on what he calls "responsible non-action" as a central tenet of the moral reasoning of ancient or classical Daoism.<sup>1</sup> Classical Daoists, he argues, unlike both classical Confucians and modern Westerners, accepted *all* the processes of life and death, including the destructive ones. They thus eschewed heroic redemptive action by humans either on behalf of others or to "fix" or "improve" the world; indeed, ancient Daoist moral reasoning specifically precluded such intervention. In summary, Kirkland's arguments suggest that, however much Daoism (broadly understood) may seem resonant with an "ecological" sensibility, interventionist misreading of these texts would allow the ends to justify the means.

In response, I want to examine these problems and texts from another point of view. These texts suggest several possibilities for what I will call noninterventionist action. By this I mean modes of action that are indirect, work at a distance, and do not involve heroic, deliberative, or even necessarily deliberate intervention. In these texts, Daoists frequently did intervene in these ways. Their modes of action differed from the contemporary model of heroic intervention and included the extended effects of individual self-cultivation, transform-

ing the people by exemplary rulership, and the use of a peculiar kind of wily and foresighted intelligence. Finally, I want to introduce a note of healthy skepticism.

### Noninterventionist Action

In the "Mastering Life" chapter (19) of the *Zhuangzi*, Confucius is faced with the situation of someone apparently drowning in the flood. The falls at Lüliang are so precipitous that the water falls from thirty fathoms and races in rapids for forty *li* "so swift that no fish or other water creature can swim in it." Confucius sees a man dive into this maelstrom and, "supposing that the man was in some kind of trouble and intended to end his life, he ordered his disciples to line up on the bank and pull the man out." But, the story continues, after the man had gone a couple of hundred paces, he emerged from the water, strolled along the bank and sang a song. Confucius runs after him and asks whether he has some special way of staying afloat. The "Daoist" explains to Confucius that: "I have no way. I began with what is inborn, grew it by essential nature, and completed it by means of fate." He continues: "I was born on land so I feel at ease on land; that is inborn. I grew up on the water so I feel at ease on water; that is essential nature. I don't know why I do what I do; that is fate!"<sup>2</sup>

Here, the apparent victim not only does not need saving, but also is more adroit than Confucius and his disciples. Indeed, the narrative of the *Zhuangzi* uses the swimmer to show the limits and inefficacy of the heroic intervention Confucius, at least, intended. Confucius does not come off very well. He initially misunderstands the nature of the situation and mistakes the man first for a ghost (and not in need of aid) and then for a suicide. At no point does he himself intervene, beyond ordering his disciples to save the man, which they seem unable to do. (The water was so turbulent that "not even a fish could survive in it," and the swimmer only emerged after a few hundred paces.) In this apparent human crisis, Confucius lacked the means to intervene effectively.

Parenthetically, we might extend this implied critique of heroic intervention as inefficacious to Ruist persuasions on ecological matters. Our accounts of the biographies of the figures known as Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi suggest that their official positions (when they

had them) did not enable them to act, beyond attempts at persuasion. Their persuasions to rulers certainly addressed ecological concerns—the most famous is probably Mencius's Ox Mountain (6A8)—but there is little explicit record of such persuasions having specific effect. Probably more important is the inclusion of *yue ling*, or "monthly ordinance" calendrics, within the *Li ji* that gave agricultural regulation the force of ritual command, at least by Han times, when the *Li ji* was probably compiled.<sup>3</sup>

Here and elsewhere, the *Zhuangzi* rejects or ridicules heroic intervention. Can we, therefore, infer that ancient Daoists rejected any kind of intervention, on either their own or others' behalf? I suggest that these texts present or sanction at least two modes of action that constitute alternatives to heroic ecological intervention. The first is self-cultivation: literal self-preservation through cultivating one's vital essence (*jing*). The second is nurturing others and even "transforming the people" (*hua min*) through indirect action.

### Self-cultivation

In the *Zhuangzi*, Robber Zhi upbraids Confucius for the folly of the so-called sage-kings who sought reputation, made light of death, forgot their origin, and did not "cultivate their fated span" (*shou ming*).<sup>4</sup> In contrast, the tree that is too gnarled for the carpenter is left on the mountains to live out its allotted fate.<sup>5</sup> In the *Zhuangzi*, as in other Warring States texts, everyone is born with an allotted life span, *ming* or *fen*.<sup>6</sup> The problems of fate and fatalism reappear in any number of Warring States philosophical debates.<sup>7</sup> *Zhuangzi* 12 describes the emergence of notions of decree and fate as part of the origin of the world:

In the far beginning there was nothing and nothing had no name. Then One arose from it and there was One but it had no form. Living things acquired it in order to come alive, and it was called power (*de*). The formless had allotments (*fen*) but they were still not divided out, and they were called fates (*ming*).<sup>8</sup>

According to *Zhuangzi* 6:

that life and death are decreed, that there are regularities of night and day, this is Heaven. Everything in which people cannot intervene, this is the nature of living things.<sup>9</sup>

Zhuangzi's Confucius advises his disciple Zigao that "nothing is as good as bringing about what has been decreed; this is what is truly difficult."<sup>10</sup> In these passages everything has its allotment. In Kirkland's reading of classical Daoist ethics, such decrees cannot and should not be interfered with. Classical Daoist ethics also sanctions subtle action through indirection and resonance with natural processes and the action of "fate."

The most straightforward of these modes of indirect action is active self-cultivation. It is in the *Neiye* that one first meets clear references to the personal cultivation of such forces as *qi* (life energy), *jing* (vital essence), and *shen* ("numen"), which "became a central theme in certain versions of modern Taoism, as well as in Chinese medicine."<sup>11</sup> In the *Neiye*, *de*/power is not an intrinsic force, but rather the ability to succeed (as suggested by its homonym *de*/acquire) by constant self-cultivation or "acquisitional agency."<sup>12</sup> The *Neiye* specifies that the cultivation of *de* must be worked on each day:

Respectful and cautious, and avoiding excesses, he daily renews his Power (*de*).

He comes to understand everything in the world and thoroughly examines its four extremities.<sup>13</sup>

These classical Daoist texts represent self-cultivation practices as active interventions upon one's own person that could, depending upon the text and period, permit one to survive through difficult times, enhance longevity, or even (in Six Dynasties Daoism) become an immortal.

### Action at a Distance

Whatever their power to optimize individual survival, could the extended effects of self-cultivation practices in any sense constitute an ecological intervention, however indirect or subtle? The *Daode jing* repeatedly describes the indirect strategies by which "the sage" or sage-ruler causes the people to prosper without, apparently, doing anything at all; indeed, the extent to which *wuwei* informs the *Daode jing* (DDJ) is well known. To cite a few examples:<sup>14</sup>

The sage makes a dwelling in *wuwei* concerns (*wuwei zhi shi*, DDJ 2).

They use *wuwei* and nothing is undone (DDJ 48).

The words of the sage say: I use *wuwei* and the people transform of themselves (*min zi hua*, DDJ 57).

Act by means of *wuwei* (DDJ 63).

*Zhuangzi* 1 describes a numinous man (*shen ren*) of Guye who concentrates his *shen* and "protects creatures from sickness and plague and makes the harvest plentiful"<sup>15</sup> This passage suggests the view that a realized sage can have a nurturing effect on the world at large by acting at a distance. The *Zhuangzi* makes no suggestion that these salvific effects are intended; they appear to be a beneficent byproduct of self-cultivation practices.

Other passages in Warring States and Han texts suggest that self-cultivation also benefits others indirectly. The *Lü shi chunqiu* chapter "Living Out One's Lot" (*Jin shu*) describes how sages used knowledge of yin and yang to understand what benefits the myriad creatures and to live out their allotted lifespans, without augmentation or diminution of what had been allotted them:

Sages investigate the conformity of yin and yang, discriminate what benefits the myriad creatures to live to the greatest advantage, and by making the numinous essence (*jing shen*) tranquil, they preserve their longevity and lengthen it. This lengthening is not a matter of either shortening or extending it, but rather of bringing its [allotted] number to completion (*bi qi shu*). Bringing its number to completion consists in eliminating harm. (*Lü shi chunqiu* 3.2, pp. 3b-4a)

This passage suggests a view that what fate allots is not inviolable, and it requires the activities of a sage or a ruler (discussed below) to guarantee it.

### Transforming the People through Example and Efficacy

Turning to more direct forms of intervention, the rhetoric of several Warring States works on government and military strategy suggest that good rulers, like sages, brought about conditions that enabled

both people and other living things to "complete their *ming*," to live out their allotted spans, in peace.

Sunzi's *Art of War* stresses that the effective general acts with speed and avoids destruction of life and matériel.<sup>16</sup> Xunzi's "Debate on Principles of Warfare" makes it clear that a true king does not punish the people. His military regulations

do not seize those who offer allegiance, do not leave in place those who resist, and do not imprison those who flee for their lives (literally, who flee "for the sake of their *ming*." (Xunzi 55/15/60)

Similarly, in his punitive expeditions

those who submit to the sword he allows to live, those who resist, he kills, and those who flee for their lives (for their *ming*) he treats as precious tribute. (Xunzi 55/15/61)

The *Huainanzi* (HNZ) contains extensive discussions of "transforming the people" (*hua min* or *min hua*), in both the "Art of Rulership" chapter (HNZ 9) and "The Great Family" (HNZ 20).<sup>17</sup> Correspondingly negative rhetoric attaches to vicious rulers like Zhou of Shang, whose subjects and ministers were in such terror that "none could feel certain of his fate" (Xunzi 57/15/85).

### A Skeptical Note

Attempts to apply a paradigm of Daoist action or non-action to the contemporary ecological situation are open to both textual and philosophical objections. But we must also ask whether the present crisis is different in kind, rather than merely in degree, from previous crises, such as the agricultural straits of the Han. E. N. Anderson, Francesca Bray, and others have assessed the magnitude and effects of that crisis and considered the kind of changes it produced in Han government and social policy.<sup>18</sup> We may nevertheless ask: does our current situation entail a degree and kind of interference with nature/Dao that is beyond the conceptual scope of these texts? Is our technological grasp of implements of mass destruction, through atomic warfare in the 1950s and 1960s and now through environmental disaster, simply beyond what these texts envisaged? Unsustainable levels of specifically chemi-

cal pollution, new diseases, and the prospect of global warming suggest the possibility of damage beyond even the power of Dao to reverse.

If we take the current situation to be different in kind and not merely degree, we cannot apply the textual precedents of the past with any felicity to Daoist attitudes toward predictability. Skeptical instincts suggest that we simply do not *know* what Zhuang Zhou would have done. To underscore an obvious point, our sources for Warring States and Han history are such that we have mostly texts. Daoists are not texts, and texts do not act (or not act) with purpose, one way or the other. We need to be careful about inadvertently equating what we might consider to be the logical or philosophical implications of a text with the actions of any person. Texts are not persons; we cannot predict the behavior of Daoist humans from Daoist texts, especially within a tradition that prized "flexible response to circumstances" (*ying bian*) and the ability to deal resourcefully with unpredictable events. Truly unpredictable circumstances might prompt action outside of what we have in our texts.

### Conclusion

Imponderables aside, the textual evidence shows that notions of self-cultivation, indirect action, and action at a distance as the basis for effective rule figured prominently in wide range of Warring States and Han thought. These modes of actions were ascribed to sages, rulers, and generals, all individuals in one or another sense charged with public welfare.

Most moderns would, of course, reject utterly the idea that self-cultivation or action at a distance could address a "real" ecological crisis. That *prima facie* rejection, however, would ignore the porosity of notions of selfhood in a wide range of Chinese thought: the inseparability of "inner" and "outer," the high cultural value of "selflessness," macrocosm-microcosm identifications, and constructions of individuality that differ from Western norms. Any number of practices in both these texts and Chinese folk belief reflect this belief in a porous border between inner and outer, for example, the contiguity of practices for the management of the flow of *qi* in both fengshui and traditional medicine.<sup>19</sup>

Many Warring States and Han accounts of indirect action specifically involve responses to rapidly changing or unpredictable circumstances, what the Greeks called *metis*.<sup>20</sup> I have argued elsewhere at length that this subtle cast of mind thoroughly informed classical Chinese moral reasoning, philosophy, and political thought, but was especially prevalent in Daoist texts such as the *Daode jing* and the *Zhuangzi*.<sup>21</sup> In a recent study, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, James C. Scott argues that a single body of ideas, which he calls high modernism, lies behind a diverse range of ideas. Scott argues that the disasters of the twentieth century come from a neglect of *metis*, and only the presence of individuals of *metis* within high modern societies has prevented even worse harm being done by such grand schemes of human improvement.<sup>22</sup>

The cultural ecologist E. N. Anderson remarks that most of the world's traditional societies "encode in their moral teachings practical wisdom about the environment and the individual's duty to treat it with respect."<sup>23</sup> In the Chinese case, some of these practices may be more directly visible in the texts and practices of the Han synthesists and later Daoists than in Warring States Daoist texts.<sup>24</sup> We risk grave anachronism and misreading if we impute to them specifically interventionist attitudes toward "nature" or ecology that, in fact, run counter to their own ethics. Nevertheless, they may have broad lessons for our own ecological situation in the casts of mind and modes of action they represent. These include notions of porosity of self and metic intelligence. Flexible boundaries between self and other indubitably contributed to Chinese practical wisdom about the environment. Similarly, the resourceful and ingenious attitudes associated with metic intelligence in China and elsewhere may provide alternatives to heavy-handed intervention.

## Notes

1. I use this term to refer to Warring States and Han texts and practices, including both Huang-Lao and immortality practitioners (*fung shi*). For discussion of this terminology, see Livia Kohn, "Two New Japanese Encyclopedias of Taoism," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 23 (1995): 261; and Russell Kirkland, "The Historical Contours of Taoism in China: Thoughts on Issues of Classification and Terminology," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 25 (1997): 59–67.

2. *Zhuangzi* 19:657–58. References are to the edition by Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961). Translations are my own unless otherwise specified.

3. See "Li chi" entry in *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographic Guide*, ed. Michael A. N. Loewe (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China and the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1993).

4. *Zhuangzi* 29:998.

5. *Zhuangzi* 20:667.

6. *Ming* and *fen* have interesting differences from and similarities to Greek *moira* or *aisa*. For discussion, see Lisa Raphals, "Fatalism, Fate and Stratagem in China and Greece," a chapter in *Early China, Ancient Greece: Thinking through Comparisons*, ed. Steven Shankman and Stephen Durrant (Albany: State University of New York Press, forthcoming 2001).

7. Despite Confucius's notorious reluctance to discuss gods, spirits, and fate, the *Zhuangzi* (and the *Xunzi*) attribute discussions of fate to him. Mohists accuse Ruists of fatalism. Both the *Zhuangzi* and the *Xunzi* emphasize the importance of fate but reject fatalism, albeit in very different ways. The *Zhuangzi* stresses the importance of alignment with inevitable change in the fates of peoples and times (and, presumably, endangered species). *Xunzi* de-emphasizes inevitability and attempts to counter the charge of fatalism by stressing free will and the importance of individual action. For both, fate can, in different senses, be mastered and treated strategically. For further discussion see Raphals, "Fatalism, Fate and Stratagem."

8. *Zhuangzi* 12:424. I use both the terms "decree" and "fate" to translate *ming* in order to avoid introducing a kind of crypto-fatalism into the texts.

9. *Zhuangzi* 6:241.

10. *Zhuangzi* 4:160. This phrase could also be translated as "Nothing is as good as following one's destiny."

11. Russell Kirkland, "Varieties of Taoism in Ancient China: A Preliminary Comparison of Themes in the *Nei Yeh* and Other Taoist Classics," *Taoist Resources* 7, no. 2 (1997): 75. For discussion of these translations, see Harold Roth, "The Inner Cultivation Tradition of Early Daoism," in *Religions of China in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 126–27.

12. Kirkland, "Varieties of Taoism," 77.

13. *Guanzi* XVI, 49, 4a–b; *Guanzi*, trans. W. Allyn Rickett, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 48.

14. Passages are numbered according to the Wang Bi edition. For discussion of *wuwei* in other Warring States and Han texts, see Roger T. Ames, *The Art of*

*Rulership: A Study in Ancient Chinese Political Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983), 28–64.

15. *Zhuangzi* 4:160.

16. See Joseph Needham and Robin D. S. Yates, *Science and Civilization in China*, vol. 5, part 6: "Military Technology: Missiles and Sieges" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 19. For Daoist influences on Sunzi's *Art of War*, see Ralph Sawyer with Mei-chün Sawyer, *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China* (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1993), 425 n. 24.

17. For discussion, see Ames, *Art of Rulership*, 99–107.

18. For discussion, see Francesca Bray, *Science and Civilization in China*, vol. 6, part 2: "Military Technology: Agriculture" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); and E. N. Anderson, *Ecologies of the Heart* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

19. See, for example, Anderson, *Ecologies*, 15–16.

20. For discussion, see Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1978).

21. See Lisa Raphals, *Knowing Words: Wisdom and Cunning in the Classical Traditions of China and Greece* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

22. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). High modernism is the attempt to design society in accordance with what are believed to be scientific laws.

23. E. N. Anderson, *The Food of China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 175.

24. Needless to say, Warring States texts presumably reflected, and may have in part derived from, many of these same beliefs, especially shamanism.

## Non-Action and the Environment Today: A Conceptual and Applied Study of Laozi's Philosophy

LIU XIAOGAN

**B**ased on textual and lexicological investigations, this paper attempts to reinterpret the concept of *wuwei* (non-action) and discuss its significance in both the contexts of Laozi's philosophy and current environmental issues. In comparison with general actions, *wuwei* refers to a higher standard of human actions and their results. *Wuwei* is not term with a single meaning, but is a cluster of similar terms and phrases. In fact, *wuwei* represents a different value orientation from prevailing convention and demands the most appropriate manner of actions.

This paper differs from most other works in the discussion of environmental ethics or comparative studies—which have focused on the theoretical aspects of the relations of humans and nature<sup>1</sup>—by focusing on two aspects. The first is the conceptual investigation and interpretation of *wuwei*. The second is a discussion of two cases, namely, the conflagration of Indonesian rain forests and the miserable experience of the Inuit community caused by a campaign conducted by Greenpeace.<sup>2</sup> Superficially, the two aspects have no direct association at all; however, if we believe that Laozi's philosophy conveys profound wisdom and reflection of human societies and history, there must be something universal and applicable. This paper is an attempt at demonstrating how the significant doctrines of Laozi's philosophy may be applied to the modern ecological context. Certainly, this experiment is based on serious textual study and conceptual investiga-