Dao Companions to Chinese Philosophy

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While "philosophy" is a Western term, philosophy is not something exclusively Western. In this increasingly globalized world, the importance of non-Western philosophy is becoming more and more obvious. Among all the non-Western traditions, Chinese philosophy is certainly one of the richest. In a history of more than 2500 years, many extremely important classics, philosophers, and schools have emerged. As China is becoming an economic power today, it is only natural that more and more people are interested in learning about the cultural traditions, including the philosophical tradition, of China.

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Chapter 23
Daoism and Greek Philosophy

Lisa Raphals

The project of comparing the classics of ancient China with the philosophic class of ancient Greece has a long history. Much shorter is the history of their rigoro informed, and evenhanded comparison. There are several reasons for this. One that, on the Chinese side, such comparisons have been dominated by Confuciani and based on ethics. I begin here by reviewing what has been compared and hc I then survey three areas of comparison between Daoist and Greek philosophy explicit concepts, epistemological methods, and recommendations for how to l in the original sense of *philosophia*. An important body of Chinese-langua scholarship not treated here warrants mention: nineteenth and twentieth-centu Chinese scholars who translated Greek philosophical works into Chinese and whc views were deeply influenced by that engagement. Most important are YAN (1854–1921) and ZHOU Zuoren (1885–1967).

1 Comparisons of Chinese and Greek Philosophy

Initial studies of Chinese philosophy were implicitly comparative by virtue the classical training of most Western exegetes. Several of the important ma twentieth-century studies of China by HU Shi, Joseph Needham, and Benjam Schwartz also contain comparative elements, as well as references to the "axial ag theories of Karl Jaspers. Many of the early comparisons were anecdotal in the sen that they reflected the circumstantial observations or intellectual temperamer

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of their authors. As the field of comparative philosophy developed, comparisons between Chinese and Greek philosophy came to center on Confucianism, either as a "school" of Chinese philosophy, or as a metonym for it in entirety.

Especially influential are F.C.S. Northrop's *The Meeting of East and West: An Inquiry Concerning World Understanding* (1946) and the elaboration of Northrop's ideas by Roger Ames and David Hall. Northrop attempted to generalize broad distinctions between "Eastern" and "Western" cultures, based on an "aesthetic" or "intuitive" East and a theoretical West. Hall and Ames elaborated this distinction, following Northrop's method of comparing broad cultural tendencies. *Thinking Through Confucius* (1978) uses the *Analects* to contrast a Chinese "aesthetic" with a Western "theoretical" sense of order. *Anticipating China: Thinking Through the Narratives of Chinese and Western Culture* (1995) draws on a distinction between chaos and cosmos (order). *Thinking from the Han. Self, Truth, and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture* (1998) contrasts Chinese correlative thinking with Western preferences for transcendence. These various "Wests" all originate with the Greeks. The Chinese philosophy to which they are consistently compared is Confucian.

Another group of comparative philosophers use ancient texts (Chinese and Greek) to address issues in contemporary philosophy through the perspective of virtue ethics. Virtue ethics, originally derived from Aristotle, focuses on the character or virtue of the agent, and what sort of person we should endeavor to be. Interest in comparative ethics has taken on a life of its own, in a dedicated issue of the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* edited by YU Jiyuan in 2002, and in a recent conference in 2007 on ethics in China and Greece in Munich, Germany (King and Schilling 2011).

But comparative virtue ethicists tend to employ specifically Confucian notions of virtue. As YU Jiyuan puts it in his guest editor's introduction to the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* issue on Chinese and Greek ethics:

> Daoism is well known for its amorality and rejection of the Confucian theory of *ren*. Nevertheless, the title of the most important Daoist classic is the *Daodejing*, which is usually translated as "the Classic of the Way and Its Virtue." Laozi has a different understanding of *de* (virtue) from Confucianism, but the ideal life he advocates is a life of *de* (virtue). Zhuangzi also seeks to show a life of *de*, which he understands as the spontaneous life that follows one's nature. Accordingly, Daoism can be regarded as a version of virtue ethics (2002b: 314).

Still, comparisons grounded in virtue ethics tend toward Aristotle and Confucius, and in some cases Xunzi,[1] and philosophical comparisons specific to Daoism are

[1]Aristotle is compared with Confucius (Yu 2007; Sim 2007), Mencius (Yu 2001), Xunzi (Hutton 2002; Cua 2003), the *Zhongyong* or "Doctrine of the Mean" (Plaks 2002), Chinese philosophy (Yu 1999), feminism (Li 1994) and Neo-Confucian ethics (Jiang 2000). By contrast Dorter (2002) compares notions of the mean in Confucius and Plato, and Anthony Yu (2002a) compares Xunzi with Plato's *Cratylus* on naming.

surprisingly few. Although several other studies, edited volumes, and journal issues have addressed comparison (not always philosophical) between Greece and China, none of these specifically treat Daoism.[2]

How, then, does Daoism fit into this picture? I begin with Daoist-Greek comparisons based on (presumably universal) concepts, such as truth. Next I turn to modes of knowledge, since epistemology (and especially skepticism and relativism) has been a focus of Daoist-Greek comparisons. The third section addresses ethics through Daoist and Greek recommendations for how to live.

2 Explicit Concepts

Several important comparative studies of Daoist texts address conceptual categories, comparative linguistics, grammar, and rhetoric. They begin with a series of papers by A.C. Graham, published between 1959 and 1989, on problems of epistemology and language, with particular interest in the *Zhuangzi*. Graham began by attempting to refute generalizations about classical Chinese that disregarded its distinctive grammar and used antiquated assumptions. His study of verbs for "being" in Chinese and Greek explored some of the ramifications of language for ontology (1959). Graham also tried to use Chinese interrogative particles to elucidate Chinese categories of thought, drawing on Émile Benveniste's appropriation of Aristotle's *Categories*. Jean-Paul Reding (1986, 2004) further explored the question of linguistic determinism, and how and whether language and grammar influence thought.

Chad Hansen's *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought* (1992) attempted a unified interpretive theory of Chinese classical philosophy, based on an analysis of the social role of language as a structuring principle of society. In his view, the central problem of early Chinese thought was how society used language pragmatically to guide behavior. This perspective offered a philosophically powerful account of Daoist philosophy, often at the expense of traditional interpretations of early Confucianism. Key to Hansen's approach is the theory, explored in *Language and Logic in Ancient China* (1983), that Chinese differs from Greek and other Indo-European languages in having a "part/whole" rather than "one/many" structure. Thus Chinese nouns refer to parts of a mass, rather than individuals of a type (1983a: 31–34). In this account, skill in using names in ancient China consisted in making correct "cuts" in the mass or "stuff" of reality. The corresponding Greek skill would be to classify individuals correctly as to their "type." Hansen ascribes this "mass noun" structure to the classical Chinese, rather than to Daoism in particular. It would rule out any notion of classes or universals, including anything like a

[2]Reding 1985 and 2004; Shankman and Durrant, ed. 2002, Raphals 2002a, b and 2005.

Platonic "form." For purposes of the present discussion, the point is that Hansen rejects interpretive theories of Chinese thought influenced by Buddhism or Neo-Confucianism. Both, he argues, tacitly apply Indo-European theories of language and mind.

Hansen's book focuses on arguments about correct use of language (names) as a key focus in all early Chinese thought. He marks the doctrinal beginning of Daoism as the point at which Dao becomes an object of second-order reflection. Such reflection reached its maturity in the *Zhuangzi*, the philosophical center of Hansen's book.

A very different research agenda has focused on the Greek "inquiry into nature" (*historia peri phuseôs*) and its Chinese counterparts. Joseph Needham and others (Needham 1956: 32) have ascribed a central role to Daoist thinkers in the history of science in China. More recent comparisons of Chinese and Greek cosmology and medicine do not focus on Daoist texts per se. In particular, the collaborative research of Geoffrey Lloyd and Nathan Sivin on the comparative history of science has deliberately steered away from any focus on "schools of thought" (Lloyd 1996; Lloyd and Sivin 2002).[3] Nonetheless, core Daoist texts, especially the *Zhuangzi* and *Huainanzi*, are central to that comparative history.

What elements of Chinese and Greek philosophy are comparable, and how should comparanda be established? The question of what is comparable has been an object of major debate among intellectual historians in recent years, especially in France, where Jean-Pierre Vernant initiated a comparativist seminar between historians and anthropologists over 40 years ago.[4] It emerged as a major center for comparative study of the ancient world in the 1960s, only to eventually revert back to the study of ancient Greece and Rome.

Lloyd and Sivin argue that it is less fruitful to compare isolated concepts or factors than to compare contexts (Lloyd 1996) or "cultural manifolds" (Lloyd and Sivin 2002): the sum of experience, education, and livelihood in which ideas take shape. They note a specific advantage of comparison: that it is easier to *see* such a manifold when compared against another that is very different. In this sense, comparison is both possible and useful. Their form of philosophical comparison asks who were the "philosophers" of China and Greece, and in what contexts and forms did they engage in debate. They argue the importance of differences between Greek and Chinese argumentation: Greek debate was aggressive and egalitarian while Chinese argumentation attempted to persuade a hierarchical superior (Lloyd 1996, 2004).

[3]The evidence of recently excavated texts has also brought these categories into serious question. See essay by Yates and Allan in this volume.

[4]It was originally hosted by the Center for Marxist Research and Studies. In 1965 Vernant established his own research center, the Center for Comparative Research on Ancient Societies in the sixth section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Detienne 2000, 2001).

Here an important difference of method emerges. Vernant, Lloyd and Sivin differ from their predecessors in that they ground their comparativism in history and anthropology. They always ask how philosophers functioned in society: who were their patrons and students, how did they earn their livelihoods, with whom did they debate, and how the language they used affected and was affected by broader social practices.

3 Methods of Knowing

A second area of comparison has addressed how Daoist and Greek philosophers *know*: What are their methods of reasoning or inquiry? Distinctively Chinese (and distinctively Daoist) ideas of efficacy and strategy enter here. François Jullien depicts a contest between two mutually exclusive models of efficacy by "moralists" and "realists," as a significant dimension of Warring States philosophical thought. For realists, among whom he includes Zhuangzi, efficacy arose not from the capacities of individuals, but from power relations (1995: 39). Other studies have analyzed modes of "skill" knowledge based on the efficacious use of foresight and cunning, the "cunning intelligence" the Greeks called *mêtis*, both in Greek culture and society (Detienne and Vernant 1978) and in China (Raphals 1992). Daoist texts portray wisdom as a "skill" or "knack" that could be developed but not described (Ivanhoe 1991; Raphals 1992, 1994).

The status of rationality is an area of considerable debate, in both comparative terms and within Chinese philosophy. Both Plato and Aristotle make rationality central to what makes us human (*Republic* 353d, Nicomachean *Ethics* 1.7). But the status of rationality, especially in Daoism, is much debated. As recently as 2008, YU Jiyuan wrote: "Whereas the dominant Greek position is to ground happiness in rationality, Daoism holds instead that one should repudiate rationality" (2008: 612). However, the *Zhuangzi* defines the authentic nature (*qing*) of humans as the ability to make discriminative judgments: "Judging it so and not so" [right and wrong]

> is what I mean by *qing* [of humans] (是非吾所謂情也: chap. 5).

Daoist attitudes toward rationality have also been hotly debated. A.C. Graham viewed the *Zhuangzi* as anti-rationalist (1986, 1989, 1992: 99). This view was in turn strongly criticized by Chad Hansen (1991), along with Graham's responses (Rosemont 1991). Hansen argues that Zhuangzi carefully avoids taking the anti-language position of the *Daodejing* and does not reject discrimination (*bian* 辯). He recognizes that names are not constant and so adopts a more skeptical perspective, shifting emphasis from the regulation of society to problems of knowledge. Hansen argues that while the Western paradigm for skepticism is experience or sensation, Chinese skepticism is linguistic.

4 Skepticism and Relativism

Probably the most important area of Daoist comparative philosophy is the comparative treatment of skepticism. Skepticism has been constitutive in the development of modern philosophy, originally through sixteenth-century studies of Pyrrhonian skepticism, and through the responses of Descartes, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant to the challenges posed by skepticism.

One edited volume has been entirely devoted to Zhuangzi and skepticism (Ivanhoe and Kjellberg 1996), and several of its essays take up the theme of skepticism directly. Paul Kjellberg (1996) compares the skepticism of Zhuangzi and Sextus Empiricus. Lisa Raphals (1994) distinguishes between skepticism as a doctrine, as a recommendation for life, and as an epistemological method, and argues that the *Zhuangzi* (in particular, the second chapter or *Qiwulun*) uses skeptical methods rather than skeptical doctrines. Eric Schwitzgebel (1996), by contrast, emphasized skeptical doctrines. In a very different approach from the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* volume, Richard Bosley (2002) starts from Greek philosophy in his comparative discussion of skepticism and dogmatism. According to Bosley, the difference between the (Western) skeptic and the Daoist is that the skeptic invites you to a statement of appearances. The appearances conflict and keep you at a distance from Nature. By contrast, the Daoist shifts according to both discourse and Dao, and is correspondingly close to Dao. (2002: 411). Bosley argues for a complementary dualism (especially to interpret the *Daodejing*) that can "disarm both extreme skepticism and extreme dogmatism" (2002: 412).

A related issue to the question of skepticism in whether the *Zhuangzi* espouses moral relativism. (The general view that it does often leads to the charge that it is "amoral.") A key work here is David B. Wong's *Moral Relativism* (1984), whose final chapter takes the *Zhuangzi* as a premodern antecedent to the kind of moral relativism Wong argues for. Wong asserts that a major Daoist theme is the fact that our moral evaluation categories are social creations; they are not "written into the nature of things" (1984: 206). He reads key passages from the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* as expressions of ethical relativism.[5] But as Joel Kupperman points out, ethical relativism is not the only kind of relativism, and these passages can also be read as "conceptually" rather than ethically relativist (1986: 174–175).

P.J. Ivanhoe argues that the *Zhuangzi's* Dao is more subtle, and Zhuangzi is "neither a strong skeptic nor a strong relativist" (1992: 640). According to Ivanhoe, Zhuangzi believed that one could not describe Dao directly, but he could and did describe sages acting in accord with it. Ivanhoe returns to the relativism question in the skepticism volume. He argues against Chad Hansen's (1983b) view of Zhuangzi as amoral and meta-ethical. Ivanhoe insists that Zhuangzi was a "language skeptic," but not a strong moral relativist (1996: 202), and asserts that Zhuangzi only uses an

[5]E.g., *Daodejing* 18: When the great Dao fell into disuse benevolence and rectitude appeared. *Zhuangzi* 2: When judgments of right and wrong appeared, the Dao was injured.

apparently amoral "god's-eye point of view" as "a kind of therapy to free us from the confines of our cramped and narrow perspective and give us a greater and more accurate appreciation of our true place in the world" (209–210). The point is, this corrective will allow us to regain a natural spontaneity and intuition. For Ivanhoe, this means that Zhuangzi views human nature as basically benign.

5 Recommendations for Life

A third comparative perspective on Daoism and Greek philosophy is the role of philosophy as a recommendation for how to conduct one's life. Pierre Hadot attempts to describe the phenomenon of *philosophia* and the traits shared by "philosophers" in Greco-Roman antiquity, including a kind of "strangeness." As Hadot puts it, the practice of *philosophia* implies a rupture with what the skeptics called *bios* or everyday life. They criticized other philosophers for not observing "the common conduct of life, the usual manner of seeing and acting." For the skeptics this consisted in respecting law and custom, practicing a craft or trade, satisfying basic needs, and "having faith in appearances indispensable to action." But though the skeptics conformed to the common conduct of everyday life, they remained philosophers,

> since they practiced an exercise demanding something rather strange, the suspension of judgment, and aiming at a goal, uninterrupted tranquility and serenity of the soul, that the common conduct of life hardly knew (Hadot 1990: 491–492).

According to Hadot, what characterizes the philosopher is the love of wisdom, which is foreign to the world, and makes the philosopher a stranger in it. Each school of Hellenistic philosophy had its own version of what wisdom consisted in, and of the "sage" who exemplified it. Schools differed over whether any such sages had ever existed, or whether wisdom was a fleeting state that could only be attained during rare moments. Each school expressed its own vision of the world, ideal style of life, and version of a perfected individual (1990: 292–293).

Several comparative philosophers have written on this aspect of Daoism, again, with emphasis on the *Zhuangzi*. Although A.C. Graham probably is best known for *Disputers of the* Dao (1989) and his translation of the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi* (1986), he develops a specifically comparative theory of ethics and moral philosophy in *Reason and Spontaneity* (1985). He uses the *Zhuangzi* as the basis for a new inquiry into the problem of fact and value. His comparandum here is not Greek philosophy, but rather the fact-value problem in nineteenth-century British moral philosophy.

Joel Kupperman (1996) argues that the focus of the *Zhuangzi* is not moral improvement per se, but rather on improving the quality of one's life. The *Zhuangzi* recommends a "carefree" spontaneity and a deliberate detachment from the more conventional goals of reward and reputation. This, according to Kupperman, is more fulfilling than (though not necessarily morally superior to) a life directed toward

adherence to fixed moral norms. Where Kupperman focuses on spontaneity as a recommendation for life, other treatments of the *Zhuangzi* focus on the behavior of sages whose skill embodies, but does not describe, Dao (Ivanhoe 1991), or on accounts of the nature of skilled action (Eno 1996; Yearley 1996).

A very different comparison has been to consider Daoism, or the *Zhuangzi*, alongside the Stoics. Earle Coleman approaches Stoic and Daoist ethics from the perspective of aesthetics, on grounds that the moral and the aesthetic often coincide (2002: 385). He points out that both Stoics and Daoists employ literary devices such as dialogues, stories, paradoxes or poetry to teach us how to live. He focuses on similarities of doctrine between Daoists and Stoics, noting that both enjoin avoidance of extremes, emphasize the importance of self-realization, recommend a simple life, and attempt to live in conformity with Dao or Logos (sometimes by seeming to "do nothing"). Further, both affirm the metaphysical continuity and unity of nature, a unity that involves the "interchange" of opposites, whether yin and yang or *poioun* and *paskhon* (2002: 387). Finally, both are deeply concerned with death and the proper response to it. The one difference Coleman notes is their "seemingly antithetical approaches of discursive reason and intuition" (2002: 394), a contrast that several authors surveyed here might well challenge.

A more recent study by David Wong addresses the nature of detachment, rather than a comparison of Daoism and Stoicism per se. Wong posits two "models" for what detachment might be like. One, which he ascribes to the Stoics as described by Martha Nussbaum, consists of "extirpation" of attachment by refusing to attach intrinsic value to anything that depends on the external world (including family, friends, loves, and life itself). For the Stoics, the only thing that has intrinsic value and complete independence is virtue, in which the soul is at home within itself and dependent on nothing external (Nussbaum 1996: 362–364). Wong argues that a preferable model for detachment is that found in the *Zhuangzi*. The problem, as Wong sees it, is that "extirpating" attachments or special feelings for others removes too much value from human life and deprives life of too much of its humanity. A better course would be to combine the ability to have special feeling for others with an equilibrium that can tolerate, and accept, their loss (Wong 2006: 208).[6] Wong, following David Nivison (1991), argues that detachment does not require disengagement. He cites passages in the *Zhuangzi* such as the story of Zhuangzi's mourning for his dead wife (chap. 18) and a passage which advises:

> in the service of parents there is no higher degree of filial conduct than to live contentedly wherever they may dwell, in the service of a lord no fuller measure of loyalty than to perform his tasks contentedly whatever they may be, without joy and sorrow ever alternating before it (chap. 4, Graham 70).

[6] A missing term here is the view of Lawrence Becker, that special feelings for others have a place in a Stoic good life. In this Becker follows Posidonius rather than Chrysippus. Becker argues that strong and deep attachments can be "encapsulated," so that they will withstand loss (Wong 2006: 211; Becker 1998: 131).

Wong argues that being "without joy and sorrow ever alternating" does not recommend the extirpation of emotions such as filiality or loyalty to a lord. Rather, one is enjoined to fully accept these emotions, but at the same time to cultivate a contentedness that allows for the inevitability of change and the possibility of their loss. Wong further argues that the comparison of Daoist and Stoic (as well as Buddhist) attitudes toward detachment shows the advantages of a "resilience interpretation" of what detachment means over the competing idea of extirpating all feelings or attachments (Wong 2006: 213–216). In this way, the comparison adds to our understanding of how best to practice detachment.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this brief account raises what I believe are two important points for the ongoing comparative study of Daoism and Greek philosophy. The core of both is the need for rigorous, informed, and clearly specified attention to both comparanda. For this reason, studies that compare a specific element in Greek philosophy to a vaguely defined "Daoist" concept (such as yin and yang, or "Eastern philosophy") are not discussed or cited here. For similar reasons, I have deliberately avoided comparisons of genuinely Daoist texts (in particular, the *Daodejing*) with the work of philosophers who use Greek philosophy for their own hermeneutic purposes (in particular, Nietzsche and Heidegger). Such informed comparative discussions are available for Confucian texts, in part thanks to the influence of virtue ethics. This essay has attempted to delineate several areas apt for comparison between Daoist and Greek philosophical texts and their contexts. This field deserves more attention that it has received, and is a fruitful area for future research.

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Chapter 24
Daoism and Science

Lisa Raphals

At first glance, there may appear to be little connection between early Daoist philosophy and science. This essay tackles the problem of teasing out their relationship, on three fronts. The first concerns what we mean by Daoism and what we mean by science. The second addresses Daoist approaches to health and well-being in the broadest possible sense, including self-cultivation practices, medicine, and longevity techniques. The third turns to the association of early Daoism with various technical disciplines such as astronomy, mathematics, and cosmology.

Part of the problem is a tendency to associate Daoism with the *Daodejing* (also known as the *Laozi*), and to read that text anachronistically as a work of quasi-Buddhist mysticism. The *Daodejing* is a profound philosophical and mystical work of antiquity that uniquely combines poetry, aphorism, practical advice, and features a diversity of subject matter. Indeed its subject matter is so diverse that it is not easy to characterize, still, it consistently seems to criticize "knowledge," craft, and cleverness. The "sage" who rules the people:

> empties their minds, fills their bellies, weakens their wills, strengthens their bones. He always keeps the people without knowledge and without desires, and ensures that the wise dare not act (chap. 3).
>
> When the great Dao diminished, cleverness emerged, and there was great hypocrisy (chap. 18).
>
> Eliminate sages; get rid of the wise and the people will benefit a hundredfold .... Eliminate ingenuity; get rid of profit and there will be no more thieves and bandits (chap. 19).

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