

TWO PARADIGMATIC STRATEGIES FOR READING ZHUANG ZI'S "HAPPY FISH" VIGNETTE AS PHILOSOPHY: GUO XIANG'S AND WANG FUZHI'S APPROACHES

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ABSTRACT: *One of the most beloved passages in the Zhuang-Zi text is a dialogue between Hui Zi and Zhuang Zi at the end of the "Qiu-shui" chapter. While this is one of many vignettes involving Hui Zi and Zhuang Zi in the text, this particular vignette has recently drawn attention in Chinese and comparative philosophy circles. The most basic question concerning these studies is whether or not the passage represents a substantial philosophical dispute, or instead idle chitchat between two friends. This vignette has not only received much attention as of late, but commentators from at least Guo Xiang onward have taken the conversation as substantial rather than merely charming. Of the traditional readings that take the passage as substantial, there are two main strategies for taking Zhuang Zi as "winning" a substantial dispute: (1) One that argues Zhuang Zi is undermining Hui Zi's position without offering a positive position, and (2) another that argues that Zhuang Zi is undermining Hui Zi's position by offering a positive position. Guo Xiang's "official commentary" is paradigmatic of the first "negative" strategy, while Wang Fuzhi's reading is paradigmatic of the second "positive" strategy. The goal in the present article is to present these two strategies for reading the passage by translating and analyzing Guo's and Wang's annotations, thereby showing how the passage might be and has been taken as more than frivolous chitchat.*

Keywords: *Daoism, Guo Xiang, Happy Fish, Wang Fuzhi, Zhuang Zi*

One of the most beloved passages in the *Zhuang-Zi* 莊子 text is a dialogue between Hui Zi 惠子 and Zhuang Zi at the end of the "Qiu-shui" 秋水 ("Autumn Floods") chapter. While this is one of many vignettes involving Hui Zi and Zhuang Zi in the text, this particular vignette has recently drawn attention in Chinese and comparative

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philosophy circles (see e.g. Ames and Nakajima 2015 and Thompson 2016). The most basic question concerning these studies is whether or not the passage represents a substantial philosophical dispute, or instead idle chitchat between two friends. The short conversation goes as follows.

1. 莊子與惠子遊於濠梁之上。

Zhuang Zi and Hui Zi were strolling on a bridge over the Hao river.¹

2. 莊子曰：「儻魚出遊從容，是魚樂也。」

Zhuang Zi said: “white minnows come meandering about and appearing unrestrained, this is fish happiness.”

[疏] 儻魚，白儻也。從容，放逸之貌也。

(Subcommentary) “*Shu-yu*” 儻魚 are white minnows (*bai-shu* 白儻). “*Cong-rong*” 從容 is an unrestrained appearance.

3. 惠子曰：「子非魚，安知魚之樂？」

Hui Zi said: “You are not a fish, how [do you] understand fish happiness?”

4. 莊子曰：「子非我，安知我不知魚之樂？」

Zhuang Zi said: “You are not me, how [do you] understand my not understanding fish happiness?”

5. 惠子曰：「我非子，固不知子矣；子固非魚也，子之不知魚之樂，全矣。」

Hui Zi said: “I am not you, so I assuredly don’t understand you; you assuredly are not a fish, you not understanding fish happiness is completely so.”

6. 莊子曰：「請循其本。子曰『汝安知魚樂』云者，既已知吾知之而問我，我知之濠上也。」

Zhuang Zi said: “Let us please return to the root of the conversation. You asked the question, “How do you understand fish happiness?”—since you already know that I understand fish happiness in asking me,² my understanding fish happiness is from above the *Hao* River.”

These six lines have not only received much attention as of late, but commentators from at least Guo Xiang 郭象 (252-312 C.E.) onward have taken the conversation as substantial rather than merely charming. For instance, Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (fl. 631–655 C.E.), the author of the (de facto) “official subcommentary” (*shu* 疏) to the *Zhuang-Zi*, referred to it as “pure conversation” (*qing-tan* 清談), which is a technical term referring to an intellectual activity engaged in by Wei-Jin literati in which they discussed nonmundane, philosophical matters (Guo 2012, 605). In using this expression, Cheng is associating Zhuang Zi and Hui Zi’s conversation with this activity, raising it above the merely charming and mundane.

Of the traditional readings that take the passage as substantial, e.g. Cheng’s, there are two main strategies for taking Zhuang Zi as “winning” a substantial dispute: (1)

¹ Translations are the author’s own, using Guo 2012, 605-607. For a modern Chinese rendering, see Chen 2011, 431-432, and for alternative English renderings, see Ziporyn 2009, 76 and Mair 1998, 165.

² The *er* 而 is functioning adverbially, i.e. he is understanding *in virtue of* or *through* asking, not just understanding *and then* asking. Ziporyn 2009, 76 I believe gets this right, whereas Mair 1998, 165 gets it wrong, though both renderings are grammatically possible.

One that argues Zhuang Zi is undermining Hui Zi's position without offering a positive position, and (2) another that argues that Zhuang Zi is undermining Hui Zi's position by offering a positive position. Guo Xiang's (de facto) "official commentary" (*zhu* 注) is paradigmatic of the first "negative" strategy, while Wang Fuzhi's 王夫之 (1619–1692 C.E.) reading is paradigmatic of the second "positive" strategy.³ The goal in the present article is to present these two strategies for reading the passage by analyzing Guo's and Wang's annotations, thereby showing how the passage might be and has been taken as more than frivolous chitchat.

1. GUO XIANG ON THE HAPPY FISH VIGNETTE

The first commentator is Guo Xiang, author of the (de facto) "official commentary" (*zhu* 注) to the *Zhuang-Zi*. The comment in question follows Zhuang Zi's retort to Hui Zi:

6. 莊子曰：「請循其本。子曰『汝安知魚樂』云者，既已知吾知之而問我，我知之濠上也。」

Zhuang Zi said: "Let us please return to the root of the conversation. You asked the question, "How do you understand fish happiness?"—since you already know that I understand fish happiness in asking me,⁴ my understanding fish happiness is from above the *Hao* River."⁵

This is an important point insofar as Zhuang Zi is responding to Hui Zi who is bringing into question one's ability to understand things about non-human animals' perspectives. Many passages throughout the *Zhuang-Zi* text rely on the ability to have the sort of understanding that Hui Zi is denying to Zhuang Zi. Zhuang Zi's response, however, is somewhat obscure, so let's turn to Guo's annotation.

Here is a line-by-line translation of Guo's annotation, and note that lines 2-6 are a detailed paraphrase of the above quoted retort:

1. [注]尋惠子之本言云：⁶

(Commentary) Zhuang Zi returns to Hui Zi's original utterances, saying:⁷

³ For more on Guo Xiang's *Xuan-xue*, see Ziporyn 2003, Fung 1989, and Chan 1963. Qian 2016 (originally published in 1948) remains a classic on Guo, but do read this in conjunction with Yan 2015. Tang 2016 is also essential. For more on Wang Fuzhi's style of *qi*-monism, see Jullien 1999. I must thank Professor Christoph Harbsmeier of the University of Oslo for drawing my attention to that last resource, which I had not even realized was on Wang Fuzhi until he told me—in fact, I paid the resource no mind whatsoever. For those proficient in French, Gernet 2005 is an essential resource on Wang Fuzhi, but is as of yet unavailable in translation.

⁴ Again, the *er* 而 is functioning adverbially, i.e. he is understanding *in virtue of* or *through* asking, not just understanding *and then* asking.

⁵ I translate out the pronominalization of *yu-le* 魚樂 with *zhi* 之 in both cases that it is the object of *zhi* 知 for the utmost clarity, i.e. I translate *zhi* 之 as "fish happiness."

⁶ Translations are the author's own, using Guo 2012, 606-607.

2. 「非魚則無緣相知耳。」

“When one is not a fish, then there are no grounds for understanding [fish happiness]—*simple as that*.⁸

3. 今子非我也，而云汝安知魚樂者，是知我之非魚也。

Now you are not me, yet all the same⁹ ask the question, “How do you understand fish happiness?”—this is to understand that I am not a fish.

4. 苟知我之非魚，則凡相知者，果可以此知彼，不待是魚然後知魚也。

If you really understand that I am not a fish, then in any case when something other than oneself is understood, the other can indeed be known by means of oneself, and (therefore) understanding a fish doesn't depend on being a fish.¹⁰

5. 故循子安知之云，已知吾之所知矣。

Therefore, in asking “how do you understand fish happiness,” you already understand that by which I understand.

6. 而方復問我，我正知之於濠上耳，豈待入水哉！」

Yet all the same you just now respond by asking me [about fish happiness], I understand fish happiness from above the Hao River—*simple as that*—why wait until entering the water!¹¹

7. 夫物之所生而安者，天地不能易其處，陰陽不能回其業；故以陸生之所安，知水生之所樂，未足稱妙耳。

As to that in which things live and find security, heaven and earth cannot change their positions, yin and yang cannot return to its endeavours; thus for that which finds his security in living on the land to understand that which finds its happiness in living in the water is nothing to marvel at.¹²

⁷ Zhuang Zi is the contextually retrievable subject, for if Guo is taken as the subject, then the switch from Hui Zi's utterance to Zhuang Zi's utterance from lines 2 to 3 would be muddled. Instead, Guo is paraphrasing Zhuang Zi's utterance from the line on which Guo is commenting translated above

⁸ I intentionally over translate *er* 耳 because one has to remember that this is Guo paraphrasing Zhuang Zi paraphrasing Hui Zi, so Zhuang Zi's (paraphrased) voice is stating something he does not agree with, i.e. he is being cheeky, while the *er* 耳 in line 6 below is again over translated to show the irony of that *er* 耳 vis-à-vis that in line 2. As usual, *er* 耳 is being understood as a contraction of *er-yi* 而已.

⁹ This *er* 而 is not coordinating two verbs, but is of the form “noun-phrase *er* 而 verb-phrase” in which the *er* 而 ironically introduces the verb-phrase given the noun-phrase. The *ye* 也 marks the *jin-zi-fei-wo-ye* 今子非我也 as a noun-phrase, as does the *fei* 非 which is typically a pre-nominal negative. To get this effect, I translate it as “yet all the same.”

¹⁰ This rendering was proffered by Professor Brook Ziporyn of the University of Chicago (personal correspondence).

¹¹ One must not take this *dai* 待 to be the same as that in line 4 on the grounds that it was used as such in line 4. That is, since *dai* 待 is “depend on” in line 4, it should be “depend on” in line 6. This inference is dubious, as Chinese writers are capable of using the same word in different ways in the same context, and often times do so. Also note that line 6 ends the paraphrased quotation that began with line 2.

¹² The rendering of *gu-yi-lu-sheng-zhi-suo-an, zhi-shui-sheng-zhi-suo-le, wei-zu-cheng-miao-er* 故以陸生之所安，知水生之所樂，未足稱妙耳 was proffered by Professor Brook Ziporyn of the University of Chicago (personal correspondence).

Guo's annotation is at first glance obscure, and (as always) his language is not exactly easy, so one might wonder if he is merely further muddying the waters. Be that as it may, the logic of Guo's comment is clear when restated formally, with the most concise reconstruction as follows.

- P1 (i) If not X, one cannot have understanding of X or (ii) If not X, one can have understanding of X.
 P2 Hui Zi is not Zhuang Zi.
 P3 Zhuang Zi is not a fish.
 C1 Either (i) Hui Zi cannot understand whether Zhuang Zi has understanding of fish, or (ii) he can understand whether Zhuang Zi has understanding of fish.
 P4 (ia) If C1i, then (ic) Hui Zi cannot assert that Zhuang Zi does not have understanding of fish or if C1ii, then (iic) Zhuang Zi can likewise have understanding of fish (at least insofar as the grounds provided by Hui Zi are concerned).
 C2 Either P4ic or P4iic.

That, then, is the logic of lines 2-6 of Guo's detailed paraphrase of Zhuang Zi's concise retort to Hui Zi translated above. P2 ("Hui Zi is not Zhuang Zi") and P3 ("Zhuang Zi is not a fish") are stated in line 3, but should really go without saying, unless it is a fish dreaming the whole scene or some other exotic scenario.¹³ P1i ("if not X, one cannot have understanding of X") is stated in line 2, and is the motivating principle of Hui Zi's denial of Zhuangzi's understanding of fish happiness. P1ii ("if not X, one can have understanding of X") is stated in lines 4-6, and presents the denial of Hui Zi's motivating principle from line 2. Pli ("if not X, one cannot have understanding of X") and Plii ("if not X, one can have understanding of X") must either be presented disjunctively or one be denied, for otherwise Zhuang Zi is guilty of a contradiction. Because then via conjunctive addition Pi ("if not X, one cannot have understanding of X") and Pii ("if not X, one can have understanding of X") would form a contradictory statement by both accepting and rejecting the consequent of Hui Zi's motivating principle.

One could argue that Guo does not take Zhuang Zi to be seriously stating P1i ("if not X, one cannot have understanding of X"), but to merely be restating Hui Zi's false claim as a false claim, or as a claim to be falsified in lines 3-7. While logically possible, that reading is difficult to square with the annotation as a whole, as we shall see. C1 ("Either (i) Hui Zi cannot understand whether Zhuang Zi has understanding of fish, or (ii) he can understand whether Zhuang Zi has understanding of fish"), in turn, follows from P1-3. And C2, in turn, follows from C1 and P4.

A key to this reconstruction is grounded in recognizing that the "*gou-X, ze...*" (苟 X, 則...) in line 4 is conditional, i.e. "if really X, then..." so the possibility of

¹³ Such possibilities are often not resolvable in the landscape of the *Zhuang-Zi*, so the ambivalence of the disjunctive conclusion is perhaps already more in line with the general ethos of the text than the alternatives.

understanding another creature is being proposed on the assumption that Hui Zi understands Zhuang Zi. The assumption is not resolved, but its consequences are cashed out. (Or at least it is not resolved until the underdeveloped line 7.) That is, the logical space is not closed as to whether or not Hui Zi does or does not understand Zhuang Zi and thereby can or cannot meaningfully assert having such understanding. If Hui Zi does not understand whether Zhuang Zi either does or does not understand fish happiness, then he is undermining his initial motivating principle. Given these are the only two possibilities, Zhuang Zi's dilemma is at first glance an impressive negative strategy for "defeating" Hui Zi.

In sum, the statement in line 2 and those from lines 4-6 are, taken together, proposing two possibilities, either Zhuang Zi understands it (lines 4-6) or he does not (line 2). The "simple as that" *er* 耳 (a contraction of *er-yi* 而已) in lines 2 and 6 is ironic; as both possibilities cannot obtain simultaneously, rendering neither "simple as that." That is, we have an exclusive disjunction. Neither disjunct P1i ("if not X, one cannot have understanding of X") nor P1ii ("if not X, one can have understanding of X") is ruled out, but rather P4ic ("Hui Zi cannot assert that Zhuang Zi does not have understanding of fish") and P4iic ("Zhuang Zi can likewise have understanding of fish (at least insofar as the grounds provided by Hui Zi are concerned)") are derived from each disjunct respectively and together form C2. Hui Zi's motivating principle is thus either false or it cannot be used to prove that Zhuang Zi does not understand fish happiness. Both outcomes count against Hui Zi.

The alternative reading mentioned above is that Zhuang Zi (in Guo's paraphrase) is ruling out the line 2 conditional (i.e. Hui Zi's motivating principle), while the other reading which I have been presenting is that Guo is teasing out the consequences of both possibilities, and showing that neither possibility has a desirable outcome for Hui Zi's claim that Zhuang Zi does not understand fish happiness. The strength of the latter is that it does not rule out the possibility that Hui Zi is right, just that if he is right, it is on distinct (or at least more qualified) grounds than those presented. That is to say, whether or not different grounds can be supplied than the *fei-X-ze-wu-yuan-xiang-zhi* (非 X 則無緣相知)-("When one is not X, then there are no grounds for understanding [X]")-grounds is left underdetermined. And again, the *fei-X-ze-wu-yuan-xiang-zhi* (非 X 則無緣相知) grounds do not establish the conclusion that Zhuang Zi does not understand fish happiness. Because they result in either P4ic ("Hui Zi cannot assert that Zhuang Zi does not have understanding of fish") or P4iic ("Zhuang Zi can likewise have understanding of fish (at least insofar as the grounds provided by Hui Zi are concerned)") (i.e. C2). And again, both outcomes count against Hui Zi.

Hui Zi could have retorted that the X in *fei-X-ze-wu-yuan-xiang-zhi* (非 X 則無緣相知) ("When one is not X, then there are no grounds for understanding [X]") is only meant in interspecies terms, not intraspecies terms. If this is how Hui Zi responded, then Zhuang Zi would have to maintain that there is non-trivially similar variability between two tokens of the same type of species as there is between two types of

species. Arguments like that are not unheard of (see e.g. Nagel 1989: 208-209).¹⁴ In fact, much of the *Zhuang-Zi* can be read as motivating such a view. Still, that is not how Hui Zi responds, and his argument is subject to Guo's paraphrased Zhuang Zi's dilemma.

5. 惠子曰：「我非子，固不知子矣；子固非魚也，子之不知魚之樂，全矣。」

Hui Zi said: "I am not you, so I assuredly don't understand you; you assuredly are not a fish, you not understanding fish happiness is completely so."

Given the position Hui Zi has put himself in, his claim cannot be meaningfully asserted, as he is not X, *wo-fei-X* (我非 X), and by his own principle if not X, then no understanding of X, *fei-X-ze-wu-yuan-xiang-zhi* (非 X 則無緣相知). And again, Guo's dilemma is exploring the possibility that when *wo-fei-X* (我非 X) whether the *wo* 我 can or cannot understand X. As Hui Zi is the one attempting to assert this principle,¹⁵ he is the one for whom the dilemma is a problem. Zhuang Zi's (qua Guo's

¹⁴ In an amusing passage, Nagel uses the case of his encounter with the spider to illustrate dangers of projecting one's own values onto another, much like the *Zhuang-Zi*'s Marquis of Lu passage with the forlorn bird, which both use an interspecies case to illustrate intraspecies cases. In easily changing between intra- and inter- species cases, it is strongly indicated that there is non-trivially similar variability between two tokens of the same type of species as there is between two types of species. Otherwise the passage loses its force. The passage deserves to be quoted at length: "One summer more than ten years ago, when I taught at Princeton, a large spider appeared in the urinal of the men's room in 1879 Hall, a building that houses the Philosophy Department. When the urinal wasn't in use, he would perch on the metal drain at its base, and when it was, he would try to scramble out of the way, sometimes managing to climb an inch or two up the porcelain wall at a point that wasn't too wet. But sometimes he was caught, tumbled and drenched by the flushing torrent. He didn't seem to like it, and always got out of the way if he could. But it was a floor-length urinal with a sunken base and a smooth overhanging lip: he was below floor level and couldn't get out. Somehow he survived, presumably feeding on tiny insects attracted to the site, and was still there when the fall term began. The urinal must have been used more than a hundred times a day, and always it was the same desperate scramble to get out of the way. His life seemed miserable and exhausting.... Gradually our encounters began to oppress me. Of course it might be his natural habitat, but because he was trapped by the smooth porcelain overhang, there was no way for him to get out even if he wanted to, and no way to tell whether he wanted to. None of the other regulars did anything to alter the situation, but as the months wore on and fall turned to winter I arrived with much uncertainty and hesitation at the decision to liberate him. I reflected that if he didn't like it on the outside, or didn't find enough to eat, he could easily go back. So one day toward the end of the term I took a paper towel from the wall dispenser and extended it to him. His legs grasped the end of the towel and I lifted him out and deposited him on the tile floor.... He just sat there, not moving a muscle. I nudged him slightly with the towel, but nothing happened. I pushed him an inch or two along the tiles, right next to the urinal, but he still didn't respond. He seemed to be paralyzed. I felt uneasy but thought that if he didn't want to stay on the tiles when he came to, a few steps would put him back. Meanwhile he was close to the wall and not in danger of being trodden on. I left, but when I came back two hours later he hadn't moved.... The next day I found him in the same place, his legs shriveled in that way characteristic of dead spiders. His corpse stayed there for a week, until they finally swept the floor. It illustrates the hazards of combining perspectives that are radically distinct" (1989, 208-209).

¹⁵ In very strong terms nonetheless, using both 固 and 全 (see Dennett 2013, 53-54).

Zhuang Zi's) response does not take him to accept the principle, as the principle forces one who makes any claim about understanding somebody's not understanding X to self-inconsistently tacitly accept understanding of others (*fan-xiang-zhi* 凡相知) in his or her rejection thereof. Hui Zi (qua Guo's Hui Zi) therefore "loses" the dispute regardless of the option he takes, i.e. whether he accepts or rejects his initial claim that "when one is not X, then there are no grounds for understanding [X]" (*fei-X-ze-wu-yuan-xiang-zhi* 非 X 則無緣相知).

As for the last line of Guo's annotation, it begins to hint at the seeds of a positive strategy, but he does not nourish and allow them to germinate. Fortunately, however, Wang Fuzhi's reading picks up on that thread and runs with it.

2. WANG FUZHI ON THE HAPPY FISH VIGNETTE

Wang Fuzhi has an interesting take on the happy fish vignette in his *Zhuang-Zi-Jie* 莊子解 following the Hui Zi-Zhuang Zi dialogue, which starts as follows.

1. 困於小大、貴賤、然非之辨者，彼我固不相知。不相知，則欲以己之有，憐物之無，而人乃滅天。

When constrained by the distinctions between small and large, honourable and lowly, or right and wrong,¹⁶ then others and I assuredly don't mutually understand [one another]. When [we] do not mutually understand, we then take what we possess to pity other beings' lacks, and so humans thereupon extinguish Heaven.¹⁷

Hui Zi's misunderstanding is grounded in his misunderstanding of contrary pairs (i.e. *xiao-da* 小大, *gui-jian* 貴賤, and *ran-fei* 然非). The assumption that Wang, likely following (either directly or indirectly) Guo's *zhu*, is that it is natural for there to be many different perspectives, and that the various perspectives each represent a mode of adapting to and evaluating the world. The fact of adapting to the world via one's "natural allotment" is the common "root" by which Zhuang Zi can claim to "understand fish happiness." When one draws the distinctions that one's nature inclines to and subjects another species to those same distinctions (*bian* 辨), then one is extinguishing Heaven (*mie-tian* 滅天). Hui Zi's misunderstanding is termed "being constrained by" (*kun-yu* 困於) because he cannot see past his own way of drawing such distinctions (*bian* 辨).

2. 夫知彼者，豈必如彼而後知哉？

¹⁶ Note the two subtle differences between line 1's *xiao-da*, *gui-jian*, *ran-fei-zhi-bian* 小大、貴賤、然非之辨 and line 6's *da-xiao*, *gui-jian*, *ran-yu-fei-zhi-bian* 大小、貴賤、然與非之辨, namely, (1) *xiao-da* 小大 is switched to *da-xiao* 大小, and (2) *ran-fei* 然非 uses simple juxtaposition while *ran-yu-fei* 然與非 uses *yu* 與.

¹⁷ Translations are the author's own, using Wang 2016, 222.

As to understanding the other, how could it require being exactly like the other and only then understanding [them]?¹⁸

3. 人自立于濠上，魚自樂於水中，以不相涉而始知之。

Humans are themselves standing above the Hao river, while the fish are themselves happy within the water, on the basis of not mutually wading through [the same environments] and only then does one start to understand this.

What is the *zhi* 之 in line 3 pronominalizing? It is referring to the observation that it is only as different that they can begin to understand one another. That is, Hui Zi needs to recognize that different natures flourish in differing environments and have differing valuations.

4. 人自樂於陸，魚自樂於水，天也。天者，含萬化而未有極者也。使自困於其量，則人入水而憂沈溺，且將憐魚之沈溺，而奚以知其樂哉？

Heaven is humans being of themselves happy on land, fish being of themselves happy in water. As to Heaven, [it] contains myriads of transformations and it has never yet had any limit. If they constrain themselves in their own scope, then they enter the water and worry about sinking and drowning—¹⁹[and] moreover [these humans] then pity fish for their sinking and drowning—how could they then know the happiness of fish?

“Heaven” (*tian* 天) is now explicitly defined as different natures inclining to different ways of flourishing: viz. *X-zi-le-yu-Y* (X 自樂於 Y), where X is a type of being and Y is the environment in which X is happy (*le* 樂). For instance, Hui Zi projects the difficulty he has in water onto the fish, much like the Marquis of Lu and a bird in another *Zhuang Zi* chapter, where the Marquis gives the bird all of the things a human would desire, ultimately killing the bird with his good intentions. The Marquis importantly does not understand the happiness of birds in the manner that Zhuang Zi knows fish happiness.

5. 人之所賤，魚之所貴；人之所非，魚之所然。惠可以知莊，莊可以知魚，此天之不隱于人心者，萬化通一之本也。

What is lowly for humans is what is honourable for fish; what is not so for people is so for fish. Hui can use this to understand Zhuang, Zhuang can use this to understand fish—this is what Heaven does not conceal from people’s hearts [*xin* 心], the root which is [what allows] the unobstructed penetration of all transformations into one continuity.²⁰

¹⁸ Proffered by Professor Brook Ziporyn of the University of Chicago (personal correspondence). He also suggested “why must it imply understanding them precisely as they understand themselves?” as an alternative rendering.

¹⁹ The rendering of *shi-zi-kun-yu-qi-liang, ze-ren-ru-shui-er-you-shen-ni* 使自困於其量，則人入水而憂 was proffered by Professor Brook Ziporyn of the University of Chicago (personal correspondence).

²⁰ The rendering of *wan-hua-tong-yi-zhi-ben-ye* 萬化通一之本也 was proffered by Professor Brook Ziporyn of the University of Chicago (personal correspondence).

Now that it has been claimed that the Y in X-*zi-le-yu*-Y (X 自樂於 Y) is frequently different from the Y in Z-*zi-le-yu*-Y (Z 自樂於 Y) where X and Z have differing natures, Wang now (in line 5) makes the further claim that X-*zhi-suo-jian* (X 之所賤) and Z-*zhi-suo-jian* (Z 之所賤), X-*zhi-suo-fei* (X 之所非) and Z-*zhi-suo-fei* (Z 之所非), etc., are likewise different. (This is starting to smell of the “Qi-wu-lun”’s 齊物論 Wang Ni 王倪 and Nie Que 齧缺 dialogue, in which different creatures draw different distinctions.)

6. 約之於其分，而天人徹，大小、貴賤、然與非之辨悉忘矣。

Complying with this with regards to one’s natural allotment, and so then Heaven and humankind penetrate [one another], and the distinctions between large and small, honourable and lowly, and right and wrong are completely forgotten.

With “Heaven” defined (in lines 4-5) as X-*zi-le-yu*-Y (X 自樂於 Y)—where Y changes if X’s nature changes—to “understand fish happiness” (*zhi-yu-le* 知魚樂) is to forget the particular instances of X (human, bird, fish, etc.) and Y (land, air, water, etc.), and to recognize a general pattern of differing X’s differently evaluating and adapting to differing Y’s. “Heaven” just is this general pattern. It is on the basis of these patterns that Zhuang Zi (for Wang) “understands fish happiness,” and it is on the basis of not recognizing these general patterns, and thereby disrupting things’ abilities to comply with their allotments (*yue-zhi-yu-qi-fen* 約之於其分), that Hui Zi (for Wang) “extinguishes Heaven” (*mie-tian* 滅天).

Wang’s Zhuang Zi’s move works—if it works—because it (a) denies that one has to be exactly like X to understand X (at least in certain respects) (line 2) and (b) recognizes the general pattern of X’s adapting to differing environments with differing valuations (lines 3-6). Thus, (a) Zhuang Zi does not need to be exactly like fish to understand fish (line 2), while (b) Zhuang Zi is happy of himself on the bridge (Zhuang Zi *zi-le-yu* 自樂於 bridge) as a particular human with certain proclivities while fish are happy of themselves in the water (fish *zi-le-yu* 自樂於 water) as fish (line 3), and (it seems) happiness is just to flourish in whatever mode of being and whatever domain of being circumstance has thrown one into and disposed one to cope with. (Note that this pluralism is definitely descriptive, yet perhaps not normative, though *prima facie* this does not seem far off from certain nature-fulfilment theories in the philosophy of well-being.²¹) In not projecting his own valuations onto the fish, to “forget” (*wang* 忘) these valuations as line 6 has it, Zhuang Zi can see that fish value different things as fish.

That all sounds strange at least insofar as one might wonder if that is really what is being stated (however implicitly) in the Happy Fish vignette. One might wonder where Wang is getting this from. But if one looks outside of this particular vignette toward the remainder of the *Zhuang-Zi* text, then one sees that the text frequently acknowledges that there are a variety of perspectives in the world with differing ways

²¹ These are also referred to as “perfectionist theories”. See Fletcher 2016, 77-90.

of being happy of themselves (*zi-le* 自樂), in both intra- and inter- species terms, and that that is just the way the world is.

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Guo Xiang took Zhuang Zi as presenting Hui Zi with a dilemma that showed Hui Zi's claim to be self-refuting, without thereby committing himself to Hui Zi's commitments. Wang Fuzhi, in contrast, takes Zhuang Zi as advocating a positive position against Hui Zi, namely, that Hui Zi is still saddled by the categories of "small and large", "honourable and lowly", and "right and wrong" (i.e. *xiao-da* 小大, *gui-jian* 貴賤, and *ran-fei* 然非), whereas Zhuang Zi (qua Wang's Zhuang Zi) sees beyond any particular nature adapting to and evaluating any particular environment, and recognizes the general pattern of all things adapting to and evaluating their environments. This general pattern is termed "Heaven" (*tian* 天) (lines 4-5).

For Guo, Zhuang Zi defeats Hui Zi at his own game, in Hui Zi's own terms, whereas for Wang, Zhuang Zi introduces a new game in place of Hui Zi's. These, in turn, represent the aforementioned "negative" and "positive" strategies for reading the passage as more than frivolous chitchat.

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