

A REALIST DAOISM: READING THE *ZHUANG-ZI* WITH LAO ZI'S DAOIST REALISM

WAI LOK CHEUNG

ABSTRACT: *A realist Daoism is best illustrated through contrasting with something less robust. Chad Hansen's Daoism may be understood as a linguistic constructivism and is thus a good candidate. I challenge his interpretation of the Zhuang-Zi and respond with a realist understanding of daos. The resultant realist Daoism is to be understood given a Daoist realism from Lao Zi's Dao-De-Jing, whose realist flavour is constituted by some dao sometimes, if not always, outrunning us. The present paper thus situates Zhuang Zi better as inheriting Daoism from Lao Zi, contributing to classical Daoism with a relativity that is realist. I submit a sinological hypothesis about wu-wei, from a theory of wei that grapples with the two senses of the Chinese word: one about doing, another fictitiousness. I venture further a philosophical hypothesis that in a realist Daoism, an artificiality that is bad, such as hypocrisy, differs from some other artificiality that though involves pretence is of real Daoist value. The present Daoist realism comes with a Dao externalism, illustrated with a wanderer wandering in nature, when their paths outrun them. Even with a dao, instead of the Dao, the externalism enables an artist's performance in their own style having a success condition that also outruns them, such that one always could have done better. A humanism that entails the possibility of an aesthetic competence embodying the Dao is explored.*

Keywords: *Daoism, moral relativism, realism, wu-wei, Zhuang Zi*

There have been various interpretations of Zhuang Zi's Daoism. I offer a realism reading of the *Zhuang-Zi*, whose contours shall be clearest when silhouetted against the linguistic Daoism proposed by Chad Hansen. The decision to use Hansen's theory to demonstrate my realist Daoism is thus justified by his particular focus on language. He explains Zhuang Zi's Daoist relativity with a linguistic conception of *daos* (道), and I understand his linguistic Daoism as a constructivism. Relative to him, the reality of *daos* is constituted by linguistic convention, which has a sociality dimension. My charitable interpretation of his theory along the line of realism is thus with the reality of the social interaction through language, setting up a contrast with my own realist Daoism. In the first section, I begin with his interpretation of Zhuang Zi as a sceptic

CHEUNG, WAI LOK (張煒樂): Independent Scholar, Hong Kong, China. Email: hongkonggray@gmail.com

with the difficulty in epistemically determining whether one is following a particular *dao*. I then discuss, in the second section, his linguistic solution to Daoist relativity, which, as he interprets the *Zhuang-Zi*, logically entails a cosmic neutrality. In the third section, I discuss a Daoist value that is value in nature, and contrast nature thus with cosmos and with humanity. In the fourth section, I facilitate a discussion of Hansen's linguistic Daoism as a realism through constructivism, and contrast it with my realist Daoism through textual analysis of a passage from the *Zhuang-Zi*. The sinological hypothesis about *wu-wei* (無為, 無偽) contrasts Hansen's linguistic Daoism with Lao Zi's Daoist realism from *Dao-De-Jing*. At a first approximation, the Daoist flavour of Lao Zi's realism is illustrated with a wanderer wandering in nature, taking the path metaphor – if a metaphor at all – literally. In the last section, I substantiate my realist Daoism with a Daoist realism through a Daoist humanism, with implications for aesthetics. I do not only contribute to classical Daoism thus, but also to a humanism understanding of the significance, or meaning, of life through my realism understanding of Zhuang Zi's Daoism.

1. SCEPTICISM: INTERPRETIVE POSSIBILITY

Hansen interprets Zhuang Zi as a sceptic and offers his Daoism as one that differentiates *daos* – paths that one is to take – with interpretative *daos* based on the following *Zhuang-Zi* passage. I will put forward his theory, before presenting my suggestion through distinguishing rules, procedures, and processes. The importance of a correct *dao* outrunning an agent per my *Dao* externalism will be illustrated with implementation of some procedures while failing to comply with some rule. The comparison between Hansen's theory with *daos* in its plurality and rule-following given alternative set of procedures brings out whether there is a correctness, or at least appropriateness, condition of following a *dao*.

Zhuang Zi writes,

Nie Que asked Wang Ni, saying, “Do you know, Sir, what all creatures agree in approving and affirming?” “How should I know it?” was the reply. “Do you know what it is that you do not know?” asked the other again, and he got the same reply. He asked a third time, “Then are all creatures thus without knowledge?” and Wang Ni answered as before, (adding however), “Notwithstanding, I will try and explain my meaning. How do you know that when I say ‘I know it,’ I really (am showing that) I do not know it, and that when I say ‘I do not know it,’ I really am showing that I do know it.” And let me ask you some questions: “If a man sleep in a damp place, he will have a pain in his loins, and half his body will be as if it were dead; but will it be so with an eel? If he be living in a tree, he will be frightened and all in a tremble; but will it be so with a monkey? And does any one of the three know his right place? Men eat animals that have been fed on grain and grass; deer feed on the thick-set grass; centipedes enjoy small snakes; owls and crows delight in mice; but does any one of the four know the right taste? The dog-headed monkey finds its mate in the female gibbon; the elk and the axis deer cohabit; and the eel enjoys itself with other fishes. Mao Qiang and Li Ji were accounted by men to be most beautiful, but when fishes saw them, they dived deep in the water from them; when birds, they flew from them aloft;

and when deer saw them, they separated and fled away. But did any of these four know which in the world is the right female attraction? As I look at the matter, the first principles of benevolence and righteousness and the paths of approval and disapproval are inextricably mixed and confused together – how is it possible that I should know how to discriminate among them?” Nie Que said (further), “Since you, Sir, do not know what is advantageous and what is hurtful, is the Perfect man also in the same way without the knowledge of them?” Wang Ni replied, “The Perfect man is spirit-like. Great lakes might be boiling about him, and he would not feel their heat; the He and the Han might be frozen up, and he would not feel the cold; the hurrying thunderbolts might split the mountains, and the wind shake the ocean, without being able to make him afraid. Being such, he mounts on the clouds of the air, rides on the sun and moon, and rambles at ease beyond the four seas. Neither death nor life makes any change in him, and how much less should the considerations of advantage and injury do so!”¹

Hansen comments,

Gaptooth’s [(Nie Que’s)] question reminds us that the basis of Zhuangzi’s skepticism is the multiplicity of perspectives and the way those different perspectives project term distinctions in novel contexts. If all things agreed on their projections, would that not be certain? Wang Ni’s answer goes to the problem of interpretation. How would I know that all things agreed in their *shìng* [(是)]? It cannot merely be because they accept the same codebook. Learning a *dao* is learning to interpret it in action. There are multiple *ways* to do this, just as there are multiple ways to do any other action. Thus, even given some particular *dao*, we cannot tell when someone has knowledge of it without presupposing a *dao* of interpreting the first *dao*. Then we can worry about how to interpret the interpretive *dao* and so on. (Hansen 1992, 293)

Relative to Hansen, with regard to a particular *dao*, there are different ways of interpreting it in action, constituting different interpretive *dao*. In order for anyone to judge whether a certain person is doing the right thing through following a *dao*, one has to know both what that *dao* is, and what his interpretive *dao* of that *dao* is. Given the subject’s behaviour, there is some epistemic possibility of interpretation to be ruled out by the attributor of success. Consider a verbal behaviour a woman emitted when producing the sound with the phonology of ‘nay-ga’. Ignoring situation, our

¹ The Adjustment of Controversies 11. I will use James Legge’s English translation throughout except noted otherwise. The following is the original Chinese text: “齧缺問乎王倪曰：「子知物之所同是乎？」曰：「吾惡乎知之！」「子知子之所不知邪？」曰：「吾惡乎知之！」「然則物無知邪？」曰：「吾惡乎知之！雖然，嘗試言之。庸詎知吾所謂知之非不知邪？庸詎知吾所謂不知之非知邪？且吾嘗試問乎女：民溼寢則腰疾偏死，鱗然乎哉？木處則惴慄恂懼，猿猴然乎哉？三者孰知正處？民食芻豢，麋鹿食薦，螂且甘帶，鴟鴞耆鼠，四者孰知正味？猿，獮狙以為雌，麋與鹿交，鱗與魚游。毛嬙、麗姬，人之所美也，魚見之深入，鳥見之高飛，麋鹿見之決驟。四者孰知天下之正色哉？自我觀之，仁義之端，是非之塗，樊然殽亂，吾惡能知其辯！」齧缺曰：「子不知利害，則至人固不知利害乎？」王倪曰：「至人神矣：大澤焚而不能熱，河、漢沍而不能寒，疾雷破山、風振海而不能驚。若然者，乘雲氣，騎日月，而遊乎四海之外。死生無變於己，而況利害之端乎！」”（齊物論11）

interpretation of what the person is doing depends on our presupposition about whether she is speaking English or Mandarin, and whether she is condemning someone, or just pointing at something. Given this epistemic indeterminacy of interpretation, we must be sceptical about our understanding of others.² We are to be aware of our interpretive ignorance.

Although there could have been reasonable doubt with regard to the person's morality, with more information about the situation, such as the person being pointed at, though Black, is a fine gentleman, it is epistemically determined that she is speaking Mandarin, singling out the Black man, perhaps to gesture he is the owner of the restaurant. However, if we were to call into question the morality of the speaker, and bring in epistemic possibility of her being a racist, then indeed we are to consider that she might have been speaking English, condemning the owner of the restaurant with racial slur. Although there could have been times when a moral person did not follow her *dao*, it is clearly a *dao* of a racist that moral persons must not follow. I will use an example of a clumsy terrorist later in this section to illustrate what it is when an immoral person, given his particular *dao*, faulted at his interpretative *dao*.

From book learning or socialisation mediated by language, we would have come in contact with some – to use Hansen's terminology – discourse *dao*. A discourse *dao* is like a music score, with different musician interpreting the same music score differently following their respective performance *dao* (Hansen 2003, 216). The identification of some discourse *dao* instead of some other – unintended and thus constituting misinterpretation – need some linguistic competence in following some given linguistic rules. Hansen discusses *ming*^{name} (名),

I will attribute the following perspective on language to all Chinese philosophers of the period: Language is a social practice. Its basic function is guiding action. The smallest units of guiding discourse are *ming*^{names}. We string *ming*^{names} together in progressively larger units. The salient compositional linguistic structure is a *dao*^{guiding discourse}. The Chinese counterpart of interpretation is not an account of the truth conditions. Rather to *interpret* a *dao* is to *perform* it. The interpretation of a *dao*^{guiding discourse} starts from the interpretation of the *ming*^{names} that compose it. In learning a conventional name, you learn a socially shared way of making discriminations in guiding your action according to a *dao*^{way}. (Hansen 1992, 3-4)

In failing to follow the *dao* in interpreting *ming*, one shall have started at the wrong place with a wrong discourse *dao*. Subsequent performance *dao* shall have been irrelevant in moral evaluation.

Following a *dao* is similar to walking a path. There are various ways of walking it, but one gets to the destination all the same, if not at least with some other fork down the road. Consider the following three objects using the judiciary as an example: rule, procedure, and process. A justice rule of law is complied with when justice is served. Given a same judicial decision, implementing some judicial procedures increases fairness. However, procedure implementation runs the risk of non-compliance of the

² Similar epistemic indeterminacy shall arise from interpretive strategy like Dennett's (1979).

rule, such as when the defendant of a murderer raises a reasonable doubt in a criminal trial; that is the risk of a fair trial. There are various series of processes that constitute the same implemented procedure: consider the process of jury selection outputting different jurors contingent on arbitrary features of some citizens. So, are *daos* rules or procedures?

Although following a *dao* is similar to walking a path, such that, like procedures, the decidability of the success of implementation is outcome independent, there is the question of whether one arrived at the right destination unanswered while walking. Consider rules of procedure; when complied with, it is epistemically decided that the procedure had been implemented. Analogous to the possibility of implementing some procedures without having followed a rule, one could have walked down a path without having got to the destination. An internalist conception of *dao* would have described *daos* as procedures thus. If it is thus decidable without evidence of the eventual outcome that one followed the right *dao*, then, wherever a path led, one followed the *Dao*.

A *Dao* externalism entails the possibility of wrong *daos*, such that one possibly walked down the wrong path. Consider someone wandering in Jerusalem, but wants to get to Damascus. One reads a map, and decides correspondingly the path to take upon each fork. The procedure of map-reading and navigation could have been not fully implemented, such as when one bets on a fork while being too tired under harsh sunlight. One could have also fully implemented it, but with an outdated map. In these cases, one would have walked down a path that did not lead to Damascus, constituting its wrongness; those are paths that one must not have walked. Therefore, although following a *dao* is similar to walking a path, following the *Dao* is similar to walking the right path. If, for example, the justice rule of law is the right rule of law, then a judge following the *Dao* would have been him following the justice rule of law; following alternative rules of law would have not been a judge following the *Dao*, though some *daos* nonetheless. One strives to follow the right rule, but, at a given time, with one's limitation, one does not always know, through implementing the appropriate procedures, one complied with the correct rule. Living one's life constitutes one's performance, and whether one's performance constituted success is not always answered while, or even before, one's performance. I shall, in section 5., discuss *Dao* externalism using competence in aesthetics.

The performativity of following the *Dao* distinguishes rule and procedure in the following way. Given the justice rule of law, could the implementation of two distinct sets of judicial procedures be just as good with regard to achieving justice? If justice is the goal, then indeed there are various ways of performing the judicial function. Given that it is sometimes epistemically undetermined what an agent's goal is, evidence thus sometimes underdetermined ethical judgment about one's action. Consider a psychopath with the goal of maximisation of suffering, but decides to achieve it with all his plans detailed for public access. Is he performing his terrorism clumsily, or following the *Dao*, through exposing, thus failing, a best suicide of humanity? Is he walking his path wrong, or is his botching part of his skilful performance? This, I think, constitutes Hansen's scepticism motivated by some interpretive ignorance. Without

epistemically determining the morality of the agent, we might not know the correct interpretation of her behaviours. We do not always know which particular *dao* the agent is following, especially with differences among subsequent interpretive *daos*, and thus discourse *daos* and performance *daos*. With this, I shall turn to the alleged moral relativism of Zhuang Zi.

2. PERSPECTIVISM: LINGUISTIC RELATIVITY

With the perspectivity Zhuang Zi identifies in various passages, Hansen proposes a moral relativism understanding of Zhuang Zi's Daoism. Notably, relative to him, Zhuang Zi believes that all moral doctrines are of the same worth. Instead of engaging with Hansen about moral relativity, I focus on his linguistic solution to the difficulty it poses using indexicality and demonstrativity and provide an explanation of the corresponding linguistic phenomena that shall compete with his application of his linguistic theory. I then present my view about moral perspectivity from the following *Zhuang-Zi* passage later in this section.

Zhuang Zi writes,

Nan-Guo Zi-Qi was seated, leaning forward on his stool. He was looking up to heaven and breathed gently, seeming to be in a trance, and to have lost all consciousness of any companion. (His disciple), Yan Cheng Zi-You, who was in attendance and standing before him, said, "What is this? Can the body be made to become thus like a withered tree, and the mind to become like slaked lime? His appearance as he leans forward on the stool today is such as I never saw him have before in the same position." Zi-Qi said, "Yan, you do well to ask such a question, I had just now lost myself; but how should you understand it? You may have heard the notes of Man, but have not heard those of Earth; you may have heard the notes of Earth, but have not heard those of Heaven." Zi-You said, "I venture to ask from you a description of all these." The reply was, "When the breath of the Great Mass (of nature) comes strongly, it is called Wind. Sometimes it does not come so; but when it does, then from a myriad apertures there issues its excited noise; have you not heard it in a prolonged gale? Take the projecting bluff of a mountain forest – in the great trees, a hundred spans round, the apertures and cavities are like the nostrils, or the mouth, or the ears; now square, now round like a cup or a mortar; here like a wet footprint, and there like a large puddle. (The sounds issuing from them are like) those of fretted water, of the arrowy whizz, of the stern command, of the inhaling of the breath, of the shout, of the gruff note, of the deep wail, of the sad and piping note. The first notes are slight, and those that follow deeper, but in harmony with them. Gentle winds produce a small response; violent winds a great one. When the fierce gusts have passed away, all the apertures are empty (and still) – have you not seen this in the bending and quivering of the branches and leaves?" Zi-You said, "The notes of Earth then are simply those which come from its myriad apertures; and the notes of Man may just be compared to those which (are brought from the tubes of) bamboo – allow me to ask about the notes of Heaven." Zi-Qi replied, "Blowing the myriad differences, making them stop [proceed] of themselves, sealing their self-selecting – who is it that stirs it all up?"³

³ The Adjustment of Controversies 1: "南郭子綦隱几而坐，仰天而噓，嗒焉似喪其耦。顏成子游立

Hansen comments,

So we are to understand the pipes of earth on analogy to pipes of men. They are blown at the whim of the windmaker and silent when the windmaker stops. These are all natural sounds. Language, like other animal noises, must be treated as a natural sound... Heaven (nature) creates *all* the *systems* of discriminating things from each other and of choosing using that discrimination system. The system of natural sounds includes human languages marking these distinctions. Language is on a par with the sound of waves, the twitter of birds, and the slapping of beavers' tails on the water... Every *dao* (doctrine) about what distinctions to make and what choices [to] follow is equally natural and equally a part of the natural world. The natural *dao* includes *all* linguistic *dao*... Language is neither unnatural, inherently wrong, nor inimical to the cosmos. On the contrary, all language is *equally* natural. All doctrines are *equally* the pipes of heaven. Heaven blows on all the pipes, not just one, preferring neither the Confucians' nor the Mohists'." (Hansen 1992, 274)

Relative to Hansen, *dao* is linguistic. Doctrines are written using language, and the equal worth among languages because of the equal worth of sounds in nature constitutes the equal worth among doctrines. His linguistic conception of *daos* permits his inference thus that all *daos* are of equal worth. Given it is moral worth in question, thus constituted is his moral relativism.

The linguistic theory of *dao* explains relativity using the contextuality of demonstrativity. It is sometimes epistemically indeterminate whether '*shi*' is translated in English as 'this' or 'yes'. Even if pragmatic context sometimes decides it, Hansen judges it to be a case of semantic ambiguity (Hansen 1983, 33-4). Notice the genealogical possibility that the semantic ambiguity is constituted by past practice, in which Ancient Chinese makes judgment in situation, with the practical issue at hand, given the salience of the solution with its alternatives. It is in pragmatic context that one affirmed one thing instead of another in the corresponding situation; the English demonstrative, therefore, is a development in natural language from a tradition with a higher intellectuality. Affirmation in language about things in general differs from when in situation, very often with particular options at hand. The performativity of the Chinese language, in contrast to the representationality of European languages such as English, might have thus clarified the peculiarity of Ancient Chinese with what seems to be a case of semantic ambiguity.

Contextuality differs from semantic ambiguity in the following way. The contextuality of '*shi*' interacts with the situationality of choices. At a fork, affirming

侍乎前，曰：「何居乎？形固可使如槁木，而心固可使如死灰乎？今之隱几者，非昔之隱几者也。」子綦曰：「偃，不亦善乎而問之也！今者吾喪我，汝知之乎？女聞人籟而未聞地籟，女聞地籟而未聞天籟夫！」子游曰：「敢問其方。」子綦曰：「夫大塊噫氣，其名爲風。是唯无作，作則萬竅怒呿。而獨不聞之蓼蓼乎？山林之畏佳，大木百圍之竅穴，似鼻，似口，似耳，似枅，似圈，似臼，似洼者，似污者；激者，謫者，叱者，吸者，叫者，譟者，突者，咬者，前者唱于而隨者唱喁。泠風則小和，飄風則大和，厲風濟則眾竅爲虛。而獨不見之調調、之刁刁乎？」子游曰：「地籟則眾竅是已，人籟則比竹是已。敢問天籟。」子綦曰：「夫吹萬不同，而使其自己也，咸其自取，怒者其誰邪！」”（齊物論1）

one direction eliminated all others; relative to Hansen, in *shii*ng one path, all else are *feied* (非) in actuality. However, it is only in situation that some *dao* is not chosen; some other *daos* have not been denied because they had never been an option without the wanderer having ever reached that valley. The positivity in affirmation contrasts with the intellectuality of, for example, Confucians and Mohists, because debate involves the negativity of denial and rejection. Consider a Daoist wandering without anyone standing in his way, daring a debate, or even blocking it. Thus, contrary to Hansen, there shall have been no *feii*ng, because the eliminated possibilities have to be opportunities foregone in situation. Certainly, it does not follow that it is always a good thing; what if a Confucian stopped such Daoist wanderer because he has just turned back from a raging fire? The Daoist could have debated with the Confucian about not seeing any smoke, *feied* his judgment, and walked towards his eventual demise. But if he were to *fei* his original chosen *dao*, he might have arrived at his wanted destination through another route. A dead man could not have gotten anywhere, and the Confucian sage got him home. Therefore, *shi-fei* is constituted by judgment that is not only choices of action, but involves language, and this illustrates the contextuality of ‘*shi*’ through the situationality of choices. To *shi* a path is to verbally affirm it, often followed by walking it. There is no *feii*ng if there is no disagreement, and, except with a radically split mind, it is only with an alterity, such as in a debate between Confucians and Mohists, that there is any disagreement.⁴

This raises the question of whether Hansen’s relativism is a moral relativism. If there is a morality of life, then the Daoist’s *dao* there and then is a wrong *dao* because he would have lost his life through burning in a wildfire. Are all *daos* of equal worth only with regard to skilful performance in pursuit of some given goal? Consider the difference in natural sounds. Given a naturally shaped tree, it is in virtue of winds blowing in a right direction at a right speed with a right intensity that some sounds instead of another or even none at all be produced. Trees are the way they are without anyone having designed them to produce sounds, and thus the naturalness of the sounds. However, if it were the goal of trees to produce sounds, such sound production is their success, and it catches the attention, auditorily, of someone wandering in nature. Trees that are naturally the way they are do not have such a goal, and it is our perceptual constitution that singled out some features instead of another. It is in this way that, given the success of a tree in making sounds, the sounds are of equal worth. If trees are to make sounds, trees that do not are with less worth.

Relative to the Daoist, given the history of the actual world, some *daos* must not have been followed. The paths not to be taken will have led to some painful death, and that would have constituted him as a failure of, for example, wandering freely and enjoying his life. If, furthermore, on a morality of life, one is morally obligated to be alive, action with the outcome of cessation of life, such as death, is thus morally prohibited. On such morality of life, all immortal beings are of equal moral worth

⁴ One, or one’s Freudian ego, could have of course *feied*, for example, impulses from one’s Freudian id to walk a path that one’s Freudian superego wants not, without the superego being constituted by any alterity – be it the ethos, or any religious godhead.

because they have all perfected their morality; those that would have died are of less moral worth. However the sounds a tree make, making any constitutes its worth that is equal to any other sound-making tree.⁵

A Daoist succeeding in getting to his wanted destination is just as good as another who did so. Given a wanted destination of a Daoist, are there destinations that he ought not have wanted? Are there goals a Daoist is not justified to set? Consider, again, a morality of life. If he wanted to go to Megiddo, without him knowing a war to start there soon, it would have been a place he ought not have wanted to go. The Confucian sage would have advised him not to have even planned going there. If all he wanted is a place good for his nourishment, then indeed there are many other places that are just as good, constituting their equal worth relative to him. On the other hand, given Megiddo to be where he wanted to go, there are also many paths that led there. If all he wanted is getting there, then all paths are thus of equal worth relative to him. Similar Daoists are thus of equal worth, leading their life good relative to them respectively, and their life is thus also of equal worth in a way that natural sounds are. In living the life they wanted, they are all getting to their wanted destination all the same. With such equality, their respective perspectives are also of equal worth. As with the cosmic indifference towards animals, including human beings, in nature having life, let me turn to a moral nihilism that may be interpreted of Zhuang Zi, or, perhaps better, Lao Zi.

3. NIHILISM: COSMIC NEUTRALITY

The skill of *Wen Hui's* cook, known typically as Cook *Ding*, poses a question that Hansen considers the Hitler problem. Allegedly, the murdering skill of the Nazis may be seen as on a par with the cutting skill of Cook *Ding* with regard to how well one does it, and that makes one wonder whether the *dao* of a Nazi is of the same, if not greater, worth as the *dao* of any Jewish victim. I, after stating Hansen's view, insist a difference between nature and cosmos – two things that do not seem distinct in his discussion. I then present a naturalness measure with which one may appraise global warming, from the cosmic perspective, to be just as good as restoration of climate with temperature of pre-industrial level.

Zhuang Zi writes,

His cook was cutting up an ox for the ruler Wen Hui. Whenever he applied his hand, leaned forward with his shoulder, planted his foot, and employed the pressure of his knee, in the audible ripping off of the skin, and slicing operation of the knife, the sounds were all in regular cadence. Movements and sounds proceeded as in the dance of “the Mulberry Forest” and the blended notes of the “King Shou”. The ruler said, “Ah! Admirable! That your art should have become so perfect!” (Having finished his operation), the cook laid

⁵ Note the disanalogy in perfection of sound-making with making the most sounds in relation to a perfection of immortality. The goal of making sounds differentiates trees that do from those that do not with sound-making; the goal of immortality differentiates persons that are from those that are not with immortality. There are indeed degrees of perfection, and longevity would have thus differentiates the moral worth of different persons. Trees, after all, are not more worthy because it makes sounds.

down his knife, and replied to the remark, “What your servant loves is the method of the Dao, something in advance of any art. When I first began to cut up an ox, I saw nothing but the (entire) carcass. After three years I ceased to see it as a whole. Now I deal with it in a spirit-like manner, and do not look at it with my eyes. The use of my senses is discarded, and my spirit acts as it wills. Observing the natural lines, (my knife) slips through the great crevices and slides through the great cavities, taking advantage of the facilities thus presented. My art avoids the membranous ligatures, and much more the great bones. A good cook changes his knife every year; (it may have been injured) in cutting – an ordinary cook changes his every month – (it may have been) broken. Now my knife has been in use for nineteen years; it has cut up several thousand oxen, and yet its edge is as sharp as if it had newly come from the whetstone. There are the interstices of the joints, and the edge of the knife has no (appreciable) thickness; when that which is so thin enters where the interstice is, how easily it moves along! The blade has more than room enough. Nevertheless, whenever I come to a complicated joint, and see that there will be some difficulty, I proceed anxiously and with caution, not allowing my eyes to wander from the place, and moving my hand slowly. Then by a very slight movement of the knife, the part is quickly separated, and drops like (a clod of) earth to the ground. Then standing up with the knife in my hand, I look all round, and in a leisurely manner, with an air of satisfaction, wipe it clean, and put it in its sheath.” The ruler Wen Hui said, “Excellent! I have heard the words of my cook, and learned from them the nourishment of (our) life.”⁶

Hansen comments,

Some accuse Zhuangzi of a view which entails that Hitler was just fine. That comes from reading him as if he were Mencius. Mencius, not Zhuangzi, thinks that whatever is natural is good. Zhuangzi intends, I argue, to *undermine* that naive naturalist ethics by observing that whatever is actual is natural. He does *not endorse*, but *questions* the valuation of the natural. All valuation, he would argue, comes from *within* some *dao* perspective. Zhuangzi’s relativism does not allow us to say that Hitler’s perspective is *just as good* as our own. All it says is “Hitler happened.” It was a consequence of natural laws that it happened. One cannot get *any* particular evaluation from the hinge of *daos*, the cosmic perspective... Any evaluation – *okay, equal, lower than, wonderful* – presupposes a *shi-fei* point of view... Zhuangzi would, no doubt, condemn Nazi skills from many of the perspectives he regularly adopts. Each would be a limited or partial perspective. The cosmic perspective neither approves nor condemns *not treats as equal*. So what? (Hansen 1992, 290)

⁶ Nourishing the Lord of Life 2: “庖丁為文惠君解牛，手之所觸，肩之所倚，足之所履，膝之所踣，砉然騞然，奏刀騞然，莫不中音。合於《桑林》之舞，乃中《經首》之會。文惠君曰：「諱！善哉！技蓋至此乎？」庖丁釋刀對曰：「臣之所好者道也，進乎技矣。始臣之解牛之時，所見无非牛者。三年之後，未嘗見全牛也。方今之時，臣以神遇，而不以目視，官知止而神欲行。依乎天理，批大郤，導大窾，因其固然。技經肯綮之未嘗，而況大軋乎！良庖歲更刀，割也；族庖月更刀，折也。今臣之刀十九年矣，所解數千牛矣，而刀刃若新發於硎。彼節者有間，而刀刃者無厚，以無厚入有間，恢恢乎其於遊刃必有餘地矣，是以十九年而刀刃若新發於硎。雖然，每至於族，吾見其難為，怵然為戒，視為止，行為遲。動刀甚微，謦然已解，如土委地。提刀而立，為之四顧，為之躊躇滿志，善刀而藏之。」文惠君曰：「善哉！吾聞庖丁之言，得養生焉。」”（養生主2）

Although, as Hansen interprets him, relative to Zhuang Zi, Hitler is not, from Zhuang Zi's many adopted perspectives, of equal worth to some other person, such as Zhuang Zi himself, Zhuang Zi and Hitler are of equal worth otherwise. From Zhuang Zi's perspective, Hitler is with less worth than, for example, Ludwig Beethoven, but from the cosmic perspective, Hitler just 'happen[s]', and he is neither better nor worse than other human being.⁷

Consider a nature rule of life. Its compliance is constituted by a natural life. How is a life natural? It is when one, for example, acted on one's natural inclination naturally. This raises the question of what it is for an inclination to be natural. Is a lion preying on a deer acting on its natural inclination? My answer is affirmative, and its predation in the jungle is simply it acting naturally on its natural inclination. The deer – the prey – is also acting on its natural inclination when it escapes. When it was hunted, the two, in its natural habitat, constitutes an ecosystem that is itself nature taking its natural course naturally. Consider a deer that, when not hunted, eats its offspring; that is bad because it is not its natural inclination to have its own offspring murdered. On the other hand, it is just as good as part of wildlife even if hunted in nature. It is indeed the perfection of animality that animals – wildlife in nature – constitutes some goodness from the perspective of nature. The life of animals may, therefore, be understood with a nature rule.

What, then, is nature? Is it merely the environment? Notice that the environment one is embedded in on Mars does not constitute nature. At best, it would have been a Martian nature, with a corresponding Martian wildlife. The cosmic contingency that there is life on Earth, and the anthropocentrism that seems to have entailed that we constituted the Earth as a special planet in the Universe, conceals the life-dependency of nature. Some animals embedded in their environment constitutes wildlife in nature, but not anything embedded anywhere constitutes anything in nature. If nature is constituted by some biology, then there is a difference between the cosmic perspective and the perspective of nature, for the cosmos is presumably indifferent between the biological and the non-biological – except when the energy level of a biological system is more favourable.⁸ Before investigating a biological conception of nature, let me present a synthetic theory of biology to contrast the perspective of nature with the cosmic perspective.

Consider now a synthetic conception of biology. Atoms fuse to constitute molecules, and some molecules combine to constitute proteins, which are thus synthetic. Some arrangement of proteins constitute some deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), which interacts in a larger system that duplicates itself. On a biological conception of nature, through this synthetic conception of biology, nature is constituted by proteins – their distribution, combination, composition, numerosity, duration, and so on.⁹

⁷ Indifference differs from neutrality, in that neutrality does not even treat two objects as equal. Since there is no strong evidence that Hansen distinguishes between cosmos and nature, I will leave the difference unaccounted for in this section.

⁸ Cosmos favours nature thus.

⁹ See Dawkins (1976).

In contrast to the synthetic conception, my vitality theory of biology describes biology with life. Plants have life, and so do single-cell organism such as amoeba; that is how they are biological systems. Thus, with the biological theory of nature, what is of value in nature is life. It is its numerosity and duration that increased natural goodness through a better naturalness of the corresponding environment. The synthetic conception, although enabling comparison among biological systems and physical systems through the corresponding chemistry and their equilibrium of energy level, is not suitable for the perspective of nature. From the cosmic perspective, the interaction between energy and organisation might have favoured a physical system with better sustainability regarding energy. Even if Adolf Hitler murdered millions, from such perspective, it was just the cosmos taking its cosmic course. It thus seems a cosmos rule of life is not preferred.

What, then, is a nature rule of life, if vitality constitutes naturalness? Consider the eaten deer. It would have led a better life if it had had a longer life, but it – the animal – running wild, with its natural animality, is of equal worth, in nature, to the winning lion. Contrast this with humanity. If, with a nature rule of life, we see animals and human beings acting on natural inclinations naturally as having equal worth, what is a humanity rule of life? Vitality constitutes natural goodness, and a human being led a bad life if he is tortured to death against his wishes. What, then, constitutes human goodness? With psychology, sustaining satisfaction seems to have constituted psychological goodness, with better psychological well-being. Consider psychology questionnaires that assess personal welfare through self-rated subjective well-being on a scale. This, however human-made, also constitutes nature, given that minds are part of nature. There is also a naturalness dimension to human psychology. Now suppose happiness, constituted by a satisfied subjectivity embedded appropriately in a favourable environment, to be constitutive of psychological goodness in nature. A happy fish instantiates some psychological goodness, and its happiness is also good from the perspective of nature because it pertains to life. However, the goodness of its happiness is not good in nature in itself. An unhappy but longer life would have thus been of higher natural value than a happy but shorter life; consider a wealthy but unhealthy gourmet. He eats good food and fine dine every night, eventuated with a much shorter life. Preserving life essence is more natural than some life-consuming enjoyment that is indeed valuable from the humanistic perspective, such as a performance art – of real great aesthetic value – constituted by the artist's suicide, but such humanism outruns vitality precisely because it is a humanism. The question is whether and how humanism measures naturalness. The power to act on self-respect constitutes dignity, and it is more important than happiness with regard to humanity. To act on respect for someone within a domain is to intend all (and, through only one rule, only) what the subject intends that one intended within that domain. A child respected their father in sleeping early if he should have intended that they intended so within the restriction of daily routine. The naturalness of respect evaluates humanity as part of nature. In section 5., I will elaborate a Daoist humanism through a Daoist aesthetic.

An illustration of natural value is Richard Sylvan's last man (Routley 1973). Suppose the Earth is left with only one person alive, and he is going to die. If he were to set a fire that will burn down a forest, would it have been a worse world after his death? A world without any more living human being with a burned down forest is worse than one with the corresponding forest intact, illustrating how good a world is independent of humanity. One understanding is that an intact forest, constituting an ecosystem with the corresponding wildlife in its original habitat, is valuable in nature. Therefore, there is value in nature.¹⁰ Furthering Sylvan's suggestion, ecological diversity, or ecodiversity, which goes beyond biodiversity, is good because of its naturalness. Biodiversity, allegedly, is achievable through having a very comprehensive zoo. How it is that, in contrast, nature taking its natural course naturally entails a better diversity within an ecosystem is to be further explored in environmental philosophy. A Daoist conception of naturalness ends the discussion somewhere here.

On naturalness, the recent climate change that eventuated with the present situation of global warming is not bad *tout court*. The atmosphere of the Earth has become a system with an modified equilibrium of a higher energy level, measured along the dimension of temperature. Indeed, the melting of glaciers have increased the sea level, bringing about climate refugees through the ocean covering low-lying land with sea water, disturbing human habitation. What if the deserted fostered growth of some amphibian species? What if, worse still, the Arctic and the Antarctica became habitable by more animals of different species? What if some virus buried in the glaciers is released, infecting us with diseases that most of those with the natural immunology against them had long gone without their genes having passed down because not selected for, and animals of all non-human species thus thrive, and wildlife restores itself, with deer running wild on the deserted Manhattan island? Furthermore, ecodiversity might have also improved. Relative to almost all human beings, it is a worse world because of our eventual demise, but relative to nature, it is better. On the other hand, even without increase in naturalness, from the cosmic perspective, it is just as good as long as the system has an equilibrium of a higher energy level, and that such physical system is sustainable. The problem is with humanity. Persons have the right to life and also right to welfare, whereas animals only the latter. Although longevity increases naturalness in some situation, it does not constitute a moral right for animals. If this is the humanity perspective, then we may interrogate the naturalness of some anthropocentrism through a Daoist humanism. If dignity, through self-respect, has its moral priority, then we may also investigate similar notions in animal psychology.¹¹

4. REALISM: DAOIST CONSTRUCTIVITY

Although it is controversial how Hansen's moral theory is a realist one, I propose understanding the realist aspect of his theory through a Daoist constructivity. He

¹⁰ This is contrasted with a natural value from the right of plants (Taylor, 1981).

¹¹ When treated unfairly by human beings, animals might reject the offer. See Brosnan & de Waal (2003). Through unequal consideration via unequal treatment, this expressed difference in moral worth, indicative of a difference in dignity, is detectable by some non-human animals.

focuses, for the following *Zhuangzi* passage, on the importance of language for Zhuang Zi. I disagree, and provide an interpretation of Hansen's theory at best as a constructivism. My argument is exegetical, especially in querying, through a sinological hypothesis about *wei*, whether his constructivism, as I interpret him, can cater for the concealment of *daos*. The upshot is a radically different theory from Hansen's that treats the developed mind, or *cheng-xin* (成心), favourably.

Zhuang Zi writes,

If we were to follow the judgments of the predetermined mind, who would be left alone and without a teacher? Not only would it be so with those who know the sequences (of knowledge and feeling) and make their own selection among them, but it would be so as well with the stupid and unthinking. For one who has not this determined mind, to have his affirmations and negations is like the case described in the saying, "He went to Yue to-day, and arrived at it yesterday." It would be making what was not a fact to be a fact. But even the spirit-like Yu could not have known how to do this, and how should one like me be able to do it? But speech is not like the blowing (of the wind); the speaker has (a meaning in) his words. If, however, what he says, be indeterminate (as from a mind not made up), does he then really speak or not? He thinks that his words are different from the chirpings of fledgelings; but is there any distinction between them or not? But how can the Dao be so obscured, that there should be "a True" and "a False" in it? How can speech be so obscured that there should be "the Right" and "the Wrong" about them? Where shall the Dao go to that it will not be found? Where shall speech be found that it will be inappropriate? Dao becomes obscured through the small comprehension (of the mind), and speech comes to be obscure through the vain-gloriousness (of the speaker). So it is that we have the contentions between the Literati and the Mohists, the one side affirming what the other denies, and vice versa. If we would decide on their several affirmations and denials, no plan is like bringing the (proper) light (of the mind) to bear on them.¹²

Hansen comments,

A tao¹³ is a scheme of classifications (names) which generates a pattern of behavior via its influence on affective attitudes – desires and aversions. To have learned how to use a name is to classify or divide things in the way one's linguistic community does and to have the appropriate pro and con attitudes. Taos are, thus, linguistic. They are systems of names that lead to conventionally appropriate behavior. Any claim that there is some tao that cannot be told is significant and distinctive only against a background assumption that taos are normally interpreted as prescriptive discourse.

The claim that taos are linguistic, while heretical, would not be surprising to students of classical Chinese thought were it not for the dominance of the traditional view. All the

¹² The Adjustment of Controversies 4: "夫隨其成心而師之，誰獨且無師乎？奚必知代而心自取者有之？愚者與有焉。未成乎心而有是非，是今日適越而昔至也。是以無有為有。無有為有，雖有神禹，且不能知，吾獨且奈何哉！夫言非吹也。言者有言，其所言者特未定也。果有言邪？其未嘗有言邪？其以為異於鷦音，亦有辯乎，其無辯乎？道惡乎隱而有真偽？言惡乎隱而有是非？道惡乎往而不存？言惡乎存而不可？道隱於小成，言隱於榮華。故有儒、墨之是非，以是其所非，而非其所是。欲是其所非而非其所是，則莫若以明。"（齊物論4）

¹³ 'tao' is an alternative romanisation of '道' to 'dao'.

philosophy of the pre-Han period exhibits a fascination with the importance of language (an interest abandoned by the Han). The first chapter of the *Tao Te Ching*, for example, begins with parallel assertions about taos and names. In Chuang-tzu's "Ch'i/equalize Wu/thing-kind Lun/discourse" almost every mention of tao is paralleled with a similar claim about language. The character tao/way is used thirteen times in the chapter, and eleven of those times the claim about taos is introduced, followed, or explained by a claim about yen/words:language, wei/call:say, or the paradigmatic linguistic distinctions *shih-fei*. (Hansen 1983, 36-7)

Hansen's linguistic theory of *dao*, though explained the relativity Zhuang Zi identifies, is at best understood as constructivist; *daos* are as real as they are constituted through conventionality, but nothing more. Through members of society interpreting *mings*, they are socialised in one way instead of another, constituting some cultural value – with some already constituted by their ancestors. Relative to one society instead of another with a certain culture, some action is of propriety that would not have been, and members of the society, through following such cultural *daos* in its culturally appropriate way, shall have been perfecting its culture individually and also collectively. Notice however that even if Confucian propriety is constituted by Confucian humanity, Hansen's Daoist propriety might not have been constituted by anything except that it is a matter of fact that some animals that human beings are acted one way instead of another in some built nature.¹⁴ What is good for survival until adulthood of members of the group with successful mating and child-bearing, constituted by individual biological goodness in the collective, could have been without particular value for humanity, but only with regard to animality. That is the sociality of the *daos* thus constituted through convention that has value in nature, without yet attributing humanistic goodness to humanity with regard to dignity. The reality of the constructivist *daos* is constituted by the reality of the animality of human beings.

Whatever the verdict on whether a Daoism need to accommodate the reality of humanity, Hansen's linguistic, and even constructivist, conception of *dao* is incompatible with Zhuang Zi's idea in the following:

- (1) 道惡乎隱而有真偽？言惡乎隱而有是非？道惡乎往而不存？言惡乎存而不可？

which James Legge translates into English as

- (2) But how can the Dao be so obscured, that there should be "a True" and "a False" in it? How can speech be so obscured that there should be "the Right" and "the Wrong" about them? Where shall the Dao go to that it will not be found? Where shall speech be found that it will be inappropriate?

The path metaphor breaks down in the following way, if *cun* (存) and *you* (有) are sometimes similar. See *you* in an earlier passage:

¹⁴ See Dennett (2006) for a cultural explanation of religion with an evolutionary theory of culture.

(3) 是今日適越而昔至也。是以無有為有。

which James Legge translates into English as

(4) ‘He went to Yue to-day, and arrived at it yesterday.’ It would be making what was not a fact to be a fact.

you is something positive, in contrast to the negative *wu* (無). Just as the world could not have what it does not have, such as a fact of arriving earlier than departure through having an impossible temporality, an object also could not actually have what it actually does not have – if *dao* is an object that could have the property of being real or being fictitious. A *dao* that is actually not real could not have actually had the property of being real. A *dao* actually real for an agent is possibly fictitious, from the possibility of the agent having an alternative constitution. This is when, for example, what was indeed a real path turned out not to be because the individual has radically changed his mind, or an artist changed her style. The *Dao* is necessarily real, if not also of a necessary necessity.

A realism about *daos* thus enables the following understanding of (1). Given the mind-independence of *daos*, there could have been a *dao* that an agent does not know of. This is when the *dao* is concealed, or *yin* (隱). Perhaps this is in contrast to its being *ming*^{bright} (明), and it would have been the case that the *dao* is *ming*^{bright} when the Confucians and the Mohists both knew the truth and the path is clear; hence the last sentence of the *Zhuang-Zi* passage.¹⁵ A description of some way as a *dao* is false, or even nonsensical, when it is not indeed a *dao* – when it was only fictitiously a *dao*, and thus a fictitious *dao*. If one wanted to arrive at Damascus, only paths that led you there constitute real *dao*; all else seems to be a *dao* but is not a real *dao*. If they are, they are so only fictitiously, and in proclaiming those fictitious *daos* real, one only pretends that they are real *daos*. Only real *daos* could have *ming*^{bright}ed; *ming*^{bright}ing a fictitious *dao* is similar to walking down the wrong path.¹⁶ If, beyond merely verbally proclaiming a fictitious *dao* real, one acted as if it were real, one would have walked down that path and be led not to the wanted destination. Daoism prohibits doing this. This thus enables an understanding of the latter part of (1):

(5) 道惡乎往而不存？言惡乎存而不可？

¹⁵ There will be some brief discussion on ‘莫若以明’ in the subsequent section when ‘道樞’, something Hansen translates as ‘hinges of *daos*’, is touched upon.

¹⁶ The phonological similarity with *ming*^{name} invites the question of whether the *Dao* can *ming*^{bright}. It is real, but it is unclear whether it is compatible with any reading of the opening passage of *Dao-De-Jing*. One hypothesis is with the metaphysical necessity of the reality of the *Dao*, though knowable, its necessary necessity is not. Risking confusing its epistemology with its metaphysic, the necessity of the reality of the *Dao* would have been infinitely iterated if it can. The corresponding perfect reflexivity shall not be humanly achievable.

One could have walked a path that does not exist, and although some sentence exists, its utterance is not permitted because false or even nonsensical. The former part of (1):

(6) 道惡乎隱而有真偽？言惡乎隱而有是非？

brings in an understanding of *wu-wei* which translates from

(7) 無為

as being without fictitiousness, with a corresponding sinological hypothesis that Lao Zi, or the author of *Dao-De-Jing*, lacks, or at least avoids using, the corresponding word, with which he would have written the following.

(8) 無偽

Daoism, therefore, prohibits the fictitious. The question is what belongs to it.

Furthermore, one interpretive controversy is against the Hansen's claim about *cheng-xin*, which he evaluates negatively.

So from some perspective for *shing* we distinguish stalks and pillars, lepers and beauties. Yet, for things however strange and incongruous, some *dao* passes through them and treats them as one. In distinguishing and ranking them, they become *cheng*^{complete} in our mind. By becoming complete or fixed they are damaged." (Hansen 1992, 283)

Let me further my textual analysis here.

(9) 未成乎心而有是非，是今日適越而昔至也。

is translated by James Legge into English as

(10) For one who has not this determined mind, to have his affirmations and negations is like the case described in the saying, "He went to Yue to-day, and arrived at it yesterday."

Consider *cheng* to be simply developed, and a *cheng-xin* a developed mind. (9) raises, rhetorically, the absurdity of having the power to make right judgments before having a developed mind with a case of temporal impossibility. The former passage

(11) 夫隨其成心而師之，誰獨且無師乎？奚必知代而心自取者有之？愚者與有焉。

which James Legge translates into English as

- (12) If we were to follow the judgments of the predetermined mind, who would be left alone and without a teacher? Not only would it be so with those who know the sequences (of knowledge and feeling) and make their own selection among them, but it would be so as well with the stupid and unthinking.

If *zhi* (知) in Zhuang Zi's time is constituted by the learning of the Confucian texts, especially in a scholarly manner of rote learning through mere memorisation without practice of any cultivation,¹⁷ then developing the mind, as Confucians do in some different, more standardised, formality, given some traditionally determined conventions, with personal cultivation, is differentiated from a Daoist self-cultivation; a Confucian cultivation is by a teacher, which is another person, an alterity. Following one's developed mind and be one's own teacher constitutes one's independence without an external teacher. It would have been foolish to replace the scholarly learning with what is from within our developed mind. Having a developed mind is temporally prior to having the power to make right judgment.

How would the path reveal itself to us, if we are to teach ourselves? Consider when it is that it is concealed.

- (13) 道隱於小成，言隱於榮華。

which James Legge translates into English as

- (14) *Dao* becomes obscured through the small comprehension (of the mind), and speech comes to be obscure through the vain-gloriousness (of the speaker).

The *Dao*, or *daos*, are concealed from a mind that is underdeveloped, whereas the right words are concealed by the vainglory that Confucians and Mohists strive for. The *Dao* shall have failed to disclose itself in brightness among people who debate just to outcompete another, for it is in virtue of denying what other affirms that they nurse their fictitious intellectual superiority. Daoist *wu-wei* is thus constituted by not adopting these fictitious values – however good it seems to them to be thus well learned –, and refusing to walk these fictitious paths. This illustrates what Daoism prohibits. Since it prohibits fictitiousness, it motivates a realism that is specifically Daoist.

5. HUMANISM: EXTERNALIST BEAUTY

Having contrasted Hansen's linguistic Daoism with my realist Daoism, I shall now elaborate on a Daoist realism from Lao Zi's *Dao-De-Jing*. In its opening, he talks about some *dao*, presumably the *Dao*, that outruns us eternally.¹⁸ Without going into any

¹⁷ 'scholastic' would have had the right connotation, but it is clear that I am not referring to the medieval age.

¹⁸ See Mou (2003) for a reference-fixing understanding of the reference of the term '*Chang Dao*', constituting its rigid designation. See Mou (2018) for his later development of a realism that presupposes a common world within which Hansen's performance *daos* are interpreted. Notably, the entry-side,

textual analysis, I highlight the Daoist flavour of this realism with the fact of something out there beyond human reach, let alone, as Hansen argues, being constituted through human constructivity. Even if, socially, there are *daos* that are of human conventions, sustained through transmission via human language, such constructivity, however real because of the reality of humanity – if not only the animality of human beings –, is contrasted with the present realism that is a Daoist realism. This enables Daoists a cosmic perspective from which one attempts to see things from how they originate, with the naturality of humanity within view. The *daos* that Zhuang Zi talks about, using everyday examples, are to be followable only given such Daoist realism at the background. With too much reliance on the fictitious value that the Confucians and the Mohists promote, one shall not be enjoying what a real Daoist is supposed to enjoy in life. This, thus, justifies the conjecture with the sinological hypothesis about *wu-wei* from the *Dao-De-Jing* as discussed above.

Consider now an interpretation of

(15) 道常無為而無不為。¹⁹

as when the *dao* is the eternal one, when it is the *Dao* because it has not been lost, when it is no longer concealed, or when it was restored thus, it is neither fictitious nor not fictitious. Or, it neither does anything fictitious, nor not does anything fictitious. It is a categorical mistake to apply the predicate ‘being fictitious’ to the *Dao*. This is what makes it a mystery (玄).²⁰ In any case, it is neither through human performance nor not through human performance that the *Dao* is what it is. When it is free of human constructivity, it is nonsensical to ask whether it is without fictitiousness or not. Note, however, per a Daoist humanism, a *dao* constituted through convention can nonetheless be real without fictitiousness – if the construction followed the *Dao*.

As with the sinological hypothesis, Lao Zi writes

(16) 智慧出，有大偽。²¹

using the contentious Chinese character. Xun Zi’s use of the word, which signals human effort, is informative in the formulation of my sinological hypothesis. In short, something could have been artificial without being bad. The artificiality of the Confucian and Mohist debaters is bad in that it constitutes hypocrisy. Some human performance is of real Daoist value. With the sinological hypothesis, I am theoretically committed to a Daoist understanding of the linguistic object ‘為’ either as having two senses but Lao Zi avoids the contemporary use of ‘偽’, or, better still, the two senses

besides the exit-side with which performance is evaluated, is not to be confused as being about ‘a radically different world that is irrelevant to what their debating partners are talking about... [such that] what they have said about this radically different world would be at most fictionally interesting while sounding clever and fancy’ (Mou 2018, 188).

¹⁹ *Dao-De-Jing* 37. See also 48.

²⁰ *Dao-De-Jing* 1.

²¹ *Dao-De-Jing* 18.

are undifferentiated in Lao Zi's philosophy. A starting point is with trying to interpret '為無為'; is it to make fictitious the differentiation of the fictitious from the real?²² With such fictionalisation, the distinction between '偽' and '不偽', per my interpretation of (15), no longer holds.

Hansen, who focuses on the aforementioned Daoist constructivity from the previous section, interprets (15) as "Do nothing arising from deeming and yet nothing can be done without deeming" (Hansen 1992, 230). I at best understand, from the present Daoist realism, his 'deeming', as when one did it following the *Dao*, such that though we are to do nothing that arises from it, nothing can be done without it. To deem, relative to Hansen, is to psychologically affirm something, which Hansen interprets off 'dao' here. I think this is a mistaken interpretation of (15). See, however, Hansen's interpretation of Zhuang Zi's *dao-shu* (道樞).²³

Zhuangzi invites us to consider an Ur-perspective, a view from nowhere. That is the perspective from which *shi* and *bi* [(彼)] do not contrast and complement each other. He calls it the *hinge of daos* (*dao-shu*). This is a hypothetical, unbiased, purely nonpurposive perspective that is prior to *any* system of language. Each pattern of prescriptive *shūing* and *feīing* starts from the center of a circle of infinite possibility. The view from the axis of *daos* is not where nothing can be said. It is rather the point from which *anything* can be said with equal warrant. Once we say something, we step off the axis onto a particular *dao*^{path}. From the axis, we can go out at any angle. We can place no a priori limit on the possible pattern of *shi-fei* discriminations." (Hansen 1992, 283)

The hinge of *daos*, I think, approximates the *Dao* in its undifferentiated form.

Although *Dao-De-Jing* invites a primitivism understanding of the *Dao*, the interaction here of a Daoist realism with Zhuang Zi motivates a humanism that differentiates some human constructivity with a reality, which contrasts the human constructivity that is only of fictitious goodness. Although the myriad things originated from the named, if the scenery depicted in Daoist paintings is what *tiandi* (天地) is, the aesthetic performance of the artist in their artistic creativity through the artwork manifests, via the artist's *dao*, the *Dao*. Certainly, the scenery is more *shanshui* (山水) than *tiandi*, but if the aesthetic competence of the artist embodies the *Dao*, we may leave Hansen's constructivism a realism reading that constitutes a humanism. In artistic creation, some style is developed. An artist, in following their *dao*, aims at following the *Dao*. Given my Daoist realism, even if some *dao* is constructed, it might still outrun the aesthetic agent during their performance. This *Dao* externalism is understood with a wanderer wandering in nature, walking down some paths instead of some others, enjoying oneself, without always being certain of the correctness of the *dao* one is following – even if the path one walks has never been walked by others and the wanderer is its sole pathfinder. It might be internally decidable that they, given their

²² See *Dao-De-Jing* 3 and 63.

²³ The Adjustment of Controversies 5. Note his '故曰「莫若以明」' that signals relevance to The Adjustment of Controversies 4 discussed in the previous section.

own interpretative *dao*, are letting their inclination manifest naturally,²⁴ but one might still be uncertain that such inclination is natural. In painting, one's aesthetic performance manifests one's aesthetic competence. With a better competence, one's aesthetic success depended less on luck. The *Dao*, which the aesthetic competence of some Daoist artists embodies, manifests itself through their aesthetic performance thus, without them always being certain of their aesthetic success. Consider the anxiety of the cook from the *Zhuang-Zi* passage in section 3.

With regard to private life, a beauty conception of life's significance, or meaning of life, describes what an individual is to live for with the significance they project, whose value is aesthetic. Some projection might have ended up neither with nor of any significance, but merely fictitious goodness, and Daoism prohibits living a life with the corresponding aesthetic. The humanism aspect of the present Daoist aesthetic brings out, controversially, values that are artificial but real. If there is a degree of artificiality, sound-making should have contrasted painting with a lower measure. Animals that human beings are can make sound unaided, but have to have instruments to paint with. Daoist painting, however requiring artificial aids such as a brush, can have a high naturalness measure nonetheless. On the other hand, besides belonging to a given community, the *dao* that even an individual artist personally developed could have sometimes outrun the original artist. This is where one needs to practise to perfect one's craftsmanship. Similarly, without appealing to one's society, an individual, in living one's own life, could have also followed their own *dao* without knowing whether it was correct. Notably, one could have, in life, followed a *dao* manifesting the *Dao* without a maximum certainty of one's such success. The performativity of the *Dao* thus contrasts the intellectuality of some Western philosophy with roots in Cartesianism. The aesthetic theory of life, on my present Daoist humanism, therefore interacts naturalness with humanity through their reality. The measure of reality contrasts with fictitiousness.²⁵

With these, let me turn to three passages from *Dao-De-Jing* with the aim of confirming, though partially, my sinological hypothesis about *wu-wei*. Since I will be offering my own reading, I will quote the original text in Chinese.

- (17) 道常無為而無不為。侯王若能守之，萬物將自化。化而欲作，吾將鎮之以無名之樸。無名之樸，夫亦將無欲。不欲以靜，天下將自定。（道德經 37）
- (18) 為學日益，為道日損。損之又損，以至於無為。無為而無不為，取天下常以無事。及其有事，不足以取天下。（道德經 48）
- (19) 為無為，事無事，味無味。大小多少，報怨以德。圖難於其易，為大於其細；天下難事，必作於易，天下大事，必作於細。是以聖人終不為大，故能成其大。夫輕諾必寡信，多易必多難。是以聖人猶難之，故終無難矣。（道德經 63）

²⁴ To use the example from section 1., consider rules of procedure having been complied with.

²⁵ I venture to hypothesise reality a similarity with Heideggerian authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*), which, as I understand it, is fully achieved only when one fully became what one completely wanted of oneself through a fully justified self-respect.

As with (17), collectively, when the *Dao* is undifferentiated, approximated by a nameless wood, society prospers through individuals performing their daily tasks manifesting the *Dao* – as long as those with power can sustain it. As with (18), the *Dao*, even if once lost, is approximately recoverable through the deterioration of the fictitious *daos*. In cultivating uneventfulness of the day, *tianxia* (天下) is restored. As with (19), the sage, in not doing what is great through hypocrisy,²⁶ will have achieved greatness.

6. CONCLUSION

My realist Daoism entails that some *daos* are mind-independent, and, though real, are sometimes concealed. True description of something as constituting a *dao* differs from false or nonsensical description of something that does not in fact constitute any *dao*, but at best fictitiously constitute a *dao* – a fictitious *dao*. Such Daoist realism is thus biased towards real *daos*, for fictitious *daos* are never disclosed because fictitious objects are never concealed – in virtue of human’s projection through fantasy is such fictitiousness constituted. Exceptions, however, can be found through a Daoist humanism with which the Daoist aesthetic favours some human projection of significance with its Daoist reality. The asymmetry between reality and fictitiousness raises a sinological question that would have epistemically determined an answer to what *wu-wei* is, which lends support to my present contention to interpreting Zhuang Zi with the possibility of having walked down a path that does not exist. Even if I imposed a realism on Hansen’s linguistic Daoism through constructivity, there are still passages from the *Zhuang-Zi* that it failed to interpret appropriately. The Daoist realism from Lao Zi’s *Dao-De-Jing* epistemically reinforces the hypothesis with my further interpretation of the text, especially the famous saying ‘道常無為而無不為’.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author acknowledges Yong Huang for discussion, and the anonymous referees of the journal *Comparative Philosophy* for their efficient and effective review process. This paper has benefited much from their comments. The author also acknowledges the Chinese Text Project (<http://ctext.org/>) for the translations of the *Zhuang-Zi* and *Dao-De-Jing* by James Legge.

REFERENCES

- Brosnan, Sarah, and de Waal, Frans (2003), “Monkeys reject unequal pay”, *Nature* 425: 297-299 <<https://doi.org/10.1038/nature01963>>.
 Dawkins, Richard (1976), *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

²⁶ ‘不為大’ is compared and contrasted with ‘大偽’ in (16).

- Dennett, Daniel Clement (1979), “True Believers: The Intentional Strategy and Why It Works”, in Daniel Clement Dennett, *The Intentional Stance* (Boston: The MIT Press), 57-79.
- Dennett, Daniel Clement (2006), *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Penguin).
- Hansen, Chad (1983), “A Tao of Tao in Chuang-tzu”, in V. H. Mair (ed.), *Experimental Essays on Chuang-tzu* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press), 24-55.
- Hansen, Chad (1992), *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Hansen, Chad (2003), “The Metaphysics of Dao”, in Bo Mou (ed.), *Comparative Approaches to Chinese Philosophy* (Aldershot: Ashgate), 204-224.
- Mou, Bo (2003), “Eternal *Dao*, Constant Name, and Language Engagement: On the Opening Message of the *Dao-De-Jing*”, in Bo Mou (ed.), *Comparative Approaches to Chinese Philosophy* (Aldershot: Ashgate), 245-262.
- Mou, Bo (2018), *Semantic-Truth Approaches in Chinese Philosophy: A Unifying Pluralist Account* (London: Lexington).
- Routley, Richard (1973), “Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?”, *Proceedings of the XVth World Congress of Philosophy* 1: 205-10 <<https://doi.org/10.5840/wcp151973136>>.
- Taylor, Paul Warren (1981), “The ethics of respect for nature”, *Environmental Ethics* 3.3: 197-218 <<https://doi.org/10.5840/enviroethics19813321>>.