



East
Asian
History

NUMBER 9 · JUNE 1995 THE CONTINUATION OF *Papers on Far Eastern History*

Institute of Advanced Studies
Australian National University

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This is the ninth issue of *East Asian History* in the series previously entitled *Papers on Far Eastern History*. The journal is published twice a year.

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Subscription Enquiries Subscription Manager, *East Asian History*, at the above address
Annual Subscription Australia A\$45 Overseas US\$45 (for two issues)

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Cover calligraphy Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿, Tang calligrapher and statesman

Cover picture From the photograph-album of Rewi Alley: "After tiffin, Henli, August 1930," Kathleen Wright Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

SEVEN DIALOGUES FROM THE *ZHUANGZI*

史 Jean François Billeter

Translated by Mark Elvin

I present here a selection of dialogues from the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 that have not been widely quoted previously, or commented on.^{1, 2} They have long been left in the shadows with those parts of the work regarded as less important, not being attributed to the authorship of Zhuangzi himself but to his disciples, either direct or indirect.³ They would, however, seem to deserve to be lifted out of this relative obscurity, and I have suggested translations here to which I have attempted to give something of the coherence, vigour, and verve of the originals.^{4, 5} First and foremost, though, I am proposing a way of interpreting them, being convinced that, for the understanding of texts such as these, philosophical rigour and learning are not enough. We have also to consider, or so it appears to me, the experience on which they are based. Their strangeness, in my view, is not primarily due, as one might be inclined to think, to their being Chinese or ancient, but to their being creations of

/note Liu Ganxiao, *Zhuangzi zhexue ji qi yanbian* [The philosophy of Zhuangzi and its evolution] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui-kexue Chubanshe, 1987) which uses different methods to reach the same conclusions as Graham, save in some details. The seven dialogues presented here come from chapters 17, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, and 32.

⁴ [The translations from the *Zhuangzi* are therefore taken from Professor Billeter's French versions rather than from the Chinese originals. Transl.]

⁵ There are two complete translations of the *Zhuangzi* into French. That by Léon Wiegier was published in his *Les pères du système taoïste* (Hien-hien: Mission Catholique, 1913), and the series reissued in France by Cathasia and Les Belles Lettres from 1950 on is entitled "Les Humanités d'Extrême-Orient." That by Liou Kia-hway, *L'oeuvre complète de Tchouang-tseu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989) was later included in the series *Philosophes taoïstes* (Paris: Pléade, 1980). The first is often an approximate paraphrase rather than a translation and retains only a historical interest. The second is more serious but has substantial inadequacies. The best rendering into a western language is Burton Watson, *The complete works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968). That by Graham, *Seven inner chapters*, is neither exhaustive nor always convincing in its details, but should be considered as an important complement to Watson because of its introduction and critical commentary.

¹ The present study is part of a research project on the *Zhuangzi* made possible thanks to the help of the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange in Taipei.

² (This essay originally appeared in French as "Études sur sept dialogues du *Zhuangzi*," in *Études chinoises* 13.1-2 (Spring-Autumn 1994). Notes added by the translator are enclosed, like this one, in braces. Transl.)

³ The first seven chapters of the work are attributed to Zhuangzi (otherwise known as Zhuang Zhou 莊周), who died around 300 B.C.E. Some texts that are probably due to him are assembled in chapters 17 to 27 and in chapter 32, together with others that are by unknown authors who were either close to

/him or his disciples. Three groups of texts may be differentiated in the rest of the thirty-three chapters that make up the work, coming from three schools or currents of thought that were to varying degrees influenced by Zhuangzi's thought. It is thought that the latest texts date from the beginning of the second century B.C.E., in other words from the beginning of the Empire. On these questions, see Angus C. Graham, *Chuang-tzu. Theseven inner chapters and other writings from the book Chuang-tzu* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981), where the various strata that constitute the book are presented and analysed separately. See also Graham, *Disputers of the Tao. Philosophical argument in ancient China* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1989), pp.172-4. Among recent Chinese publications we should

⁶ The convention has been adopted here of using double quotes (1) for the citation of the *ipsissima verba* of a writer, where the source is explicit, (2) to indicate direct speech, and (3) for titles of chapters, with single quotes for all other purposes, including the marking off of particular terms and phrases from these citations for discussion, except where embedding requires an alternation of doubles and singles. (Transl.)

⁷ We still have today three brief treatises by him on three paradoxes. See Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, pp.82–95, and also Jean-Paul Reding, *Les fondements philosophiques de la rhétorique chez les sophistes grecs et chez les sophistes chinois* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1985), pp.386–434.

⁸ A historical person about whom little is known. The chapter of the *Hanshu* on bibliography attributes to him a work that would seem to have been of Daoist inspiration, but has been lost. In another passage in the *Zhuangzi*, a short dialogue at the end of chapter 28 (“Rang wang”), he is presented as a ruler who became a hermit in order to reach the Way, but failed. Other versions of this second dialogue may be found in the *Lüshi chunqiu* (Springs and Autumns of Mr Lü) (Beijing: Xuelin Chubanshe, 1984), book 21, chapter “Shen wei,” vol.4, p.1454, and in the *Huainanzi* (Taipei: Shijie Shuju, 1974) book 12, “Daoying xun,” p.195.

⁹ Chapter 17, “Qiushui.” I have used the following editions: Qian Mu, *Zhuangzi zuanjian*, 4th ed. (Hong Kong: Dongnan Yinwu Chubanshe, 1962), and Chen Guying, *Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1983), which are convenient and trustworthy, in the first instance; and where the text presents difficulties, Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 4 vols (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1961), and Wang Shumin, *Zhuangzi jiaoquan*, 3 vols (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1988), as supplements. Since the present essay is not a philological study I have not justified my translation in every detail. Sinologists will easily see, by consulting these editions, the readings that I have had to choose between in certain places, and the choices that I have made.

¹⁰ In other words he had received the education given to well-born people at this time, which was of Confucian inspiration. *Ren* 仁 (‘benevolent’) and *yi* 義 (‘just’) are Confucian virtues.

minds that had a sharp sense of the intrinsic strangeness of human existence, with the consequence that we can only grasp their truth by discovering, or rediscovering, this underlying strangeness for ourselves.

I

Gongsun Long was a philosopher famous in ancient China, having been born around 320 and dying around 250 B.C.E. He is generally described as a ‘sophist’ by present-day historians because of his reputation for defending paradoxes that ran counter to common sense.^{6, 7} In an imaginary dialogue in the *Zhuangzi* he addresses a certain Mou, who was the ruler of the kingdom of Wei,⁸ and confides to him the deep unease in which he finds himself:⁹

Gongsun Long asked Mou, the ruler of Wei: “When I was young I studied the Way of the former kings, and later I learned how to be benevolent and just.¹⁰ I combined identity and difference, I distinguished hardness and whiteness.¹¹ I proved the truth of what others held to be false, and the falsity of what others took to be true. I created difficulties for the Hundred Schools of thought, refuting all the arguments of my opponents, and believed myself to be invincible. The sayings of Zhuangzi have, however, been reported to me and their strangeness has thrown me into confusion. I do not know if my arguments are less good than his, or if I am his inferior in intelligence. I can no longer decide on anything. Can you tell me what one does in a case like this? ...”¹²

Gongsun Long, once sure of his intellectual superiority, finds himself so discomfited that he begs for help, but the ruler, instead of answering his question, asks him another:

Mou leaned on his elbow-rest, breathed deeply, lifted his eyes towards the sky and said, smiling: “Have you never heard tell of the frog who lived at the bottom of a well and said one day to the tortoise of the Eastern sea: ‘How happy I am! I emerge from my well to jump onto the rim. I go back to rest at the place where a brick is missing from the wall. When I dive into the water, the water buoys me up under my armpits and cheeks. When I walk in the mud, it covers my webs as high as my ankles. And when I look around me at the mosquito larvae, and the crabs and tadpoles, it is clear to me that none of these little beasts enjoys a happiness like mine! Nothing surpasses the joy of having an expanse of water to oneself and of occupying an entire well. Why do you not come, Sir, at some time to see for yourself?’ ...”

The ruler strengthens his hold upon his listener’s imagination by inventing a droll situation:

“... But the tortoise of the eastern sea had not even put his right paw in when his right knee was jammed [in the mouth of the well], so that he was obliged to back out. Having withdrawn a little, he then spoke of the sea: ‘A thousand leagues (he said) will give you no idea of its immensity, a thousand fathoms no idea of its depth. In the time of Yu¹³ there were floods in nine years out of

ten, but its waters were not increased. In the days of Tang¹⁴ there were droughts seven years out of eight, but for all that it did not shrink. Never to be in motion, either for a moment or over time, never to grow or to diminish no matter what the amount of water it receives, that is the so much greater joy of the eastern sea! The frog felt stunned and crushed. ...”

The frog is stupefied, as Gongsun Long had been after he had heard tell of Zhuangzi. He has had the same kind of revelation. Leaving the frog in his discomfiture, the ruler now speaks directly to Gongsun Long:

“... And you, you who are not even able to tell true and false apart, would you claim to encompass within your vision that of which Zhuangzi talks? One might as well ask a fly to carry a mountain on his back, or a millipede to gallop across the Yellow River—you would not be able to! You, who are incapable of understanding words just a little bit subtle, and who merely take advantage from having the upper hand for a moment or two, aren't you like that frog in the well? At this very time Zhuangzi is treading the ground by the Yellow Springs¹⁵ or rising into the blue above. Unaware of either North or South he lets himself be carried wherever he may be and loses himself in the unfathomable. Unaware of either East or West, he leaves the primal darkness to reach the great Way.¹⁶ And now it happens that you, in your confusion, think you can ask from him a reckoning as to this, that, or the other distinction, or catch him out in some argument. One might as well measure the extent of the sky by looking through a tube, or gauge the depth of the earth with an awl—such instruments are ludicrous! Be off, and leave this place! ...”

The prince then mocks him further:

“... Have you not heard of the young fellow from Shouling who tried to copy the gait of the people of Handan,¹⁷ and who not only tried in vain, but at the end did not even know how to walk the way he had originally? He had to go home on all fours. Be off or else you'll forget what you used to know how to do and will lose your livelihood! ...”

In consequence,

... Gongsun Long stayed open-mouthed, with his tongue sticking to his palate; then fled at a run.

The author of this dialogue, who was probably a disciple of Zhuangzi, was aiming to discredit Gongsun Long, and through him the other sophists and logicians of the age. It is well-known that Zhuangzi's thought in good measure developed from contact with these thinkers, and in particular from contact with one of the best-known of them, Hui Shi 惠施. In its ensemble it forms a powerful reaction to this encounter.¹⁸ From this point of view, the foregoing text has a historical interest, testifying to the vigour of the debates about ideas at the beginning of the third century B.C.E. It is also a fine example of the imagination Zhuangzi and his continuators possessed.

¹¹ 'Bringing together identity and difference' (*he tongyi* 合同異) and 'separating hardness and whiteness' (*li jianbai* 離堅白) are conventional expressions that indicated discussions among philosophers at this time. The first phrase refers to the relationships of identity and difference between objects labelled with the same name; and the second to the relationships between an object and its different qualities (for example, between a stone and its hardness and whiteness). The general sense of the terms was 'philosophic quibbling'. See A. C. Graham, *Later Mohist logic, ethics, and science* (HongKong: Chinese University Press, 1978), pp.170–6.

¹² Alternatively, "Might I ask you about *his* method, *his* secret?"

¹³ The legendary founder of the Xia dynasty.

¹⁴ The legendary founder of the Shang dynasty.

¹⁵ The underground world of the departed.

¹⁶ *Dalong* 大通, 'the great way of communication', a term more or less synonymous with *da dao* 大道, 'the great Way'.

¹⁷ The capital of the state of Zhao, one of the great cities of that age, situated in the southern part of what is today Hebei province. Shouling was a town in the state of Yan further north.

¹⁸ Cf. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, pp.176–87.

¹⁹ Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1990.

²⁰ François Roustang considers these and other problems in *Influence*, but devotes a more systematic examination to them in *Qu'est-ce que l'hypnose ?* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1994). I discovered hypnosis as the result of reading *Influence*, and later more specialized works, as well as through discussions and a practical initiation. In my view, the three best introductions in French—which are the versions cited in this article—are the following: Jay Haley, *Un thérapeute hors du commun: Milton H. Erickson* (Paris: Desclé de Brouwer, 1984; new ed., Paris: Épi, 1990) [in English: Jay Haley, *Uncommon therapy: the psychiatric techniques of Milton H. Erickson, MD* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1973)]; Sydney Rosen, ed., *Ma voix t'accompagnera, Milton Erickson raconte* (Paris: Hommes et Groupes, 1986), a collection of texts with commentaries [in English: Sydney Rosen, *My voice will go with you. The teaching tales of Milton H. Erickson* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982)]; and Milton H. Erickson, *L'hypnose thérapeutique, quatre conférences* (Paris: ESF, 1986) [in English: Milton H. Erickson, *Healing in hypnosis* (New York: Irvington Publishers, 1983)]. The bibliography, especially that in English, is of considerable dimensions. The basic work is Ernest L. Rossi, ed., *Collected papers of Milton H. Erickson*, 4 vols (New York: Irvington, 1980).

²¹ I have not been able to locate it in the works cited in the previous note, and assume that I must have read it in some other publication on Erickson.

* * *

I have long had a particular taste for this dialogue and others linked to it. Recently, following an unexpected association of ideas, I have come to believe that I understand the cause of the effect that they have had on me. These dialogues are not only remarkable for their verve, but also for a deeper truth.

The unexpected association was that of these dialogues with Ericksonian hypnosis. A first exploration of this domain showed the texts in a new light, and, beyond this, did the same for certain aspects of Zhuangzi's thought. In the present study, which must be considered as a preliminary essay, I will try to present this discovery to the reader.

It is necessary to begin by saying something about Ericksonian hypnosis. Milton H. Erickson (1901–80) was an American psychiatrist and psychotherapist who revived the practice of hypnosis. He used it in a more varied and effective way than his predecessors. As François Roustang has shown in his *Influence*,¹⁹ Erickson's practice is of more than merely great psychological interest. It raises fundamental problems since it calls into question some of our most deeply-rooted conceptions about the relationship between waking and sleeping, the conscious and the unconscious, and the mind or spirit and the body.²⁰ Erickson was aware of this but never made any abstract statement on these matters. He always expressed himself regarding his profession in concrete terms, either by describing cases or telling anecdotes. He shared with Zhuangzi a preference for examples.

Here is one of his stories.²¹ He relates that he found himself one day in the waiting-room of an airport where there was a mother accompanied by several young children. It was late in the evening, and the children were over-excited. The young woman, who was exhausted, tried to get them to sleep, but without success. There was nothing she could do to deal with their agitated state. Erickson decided to help her. He got up and went to buy a newspaper at a kiosk, resumed his seat and began to tear the pages of the paper into long strips in a calm but visible manner. One after the other, the children started to watch what he was doing. Erickson imperturbably arranged the paper strips on the ground in front of him in such a way that they formed a circle enclosing a cross. The children were spellbound. One of them asked him why he was arranging the paper in this way. "It's what I do before I go to sleep," he answered. At this the children sank almost immediately into sleep.

The children were tired, they needed to sleep, but were prevented by over-excitement from doing so. Erickson had altered their state of mind by attracting their attention to an unexpected show. A disassociation had taken place within them. Captivated by his trick, their consciousness had ceased affecting their bodies, and their bodies had, in a certain sense, seized the opportunity and taken the initiative. Absorbed by the external show, their consciousness had let their bodies act according to their own needs, which was to let themselves go to sleep.

What relationship is there between this story and the notions of hypnosis and hypnotic trance used by Erickson to explain how he dealt with his patients? Contrary to what its etymology suggests, the term 'hypnosis' does not indicate a state related to sleep, but a waking condition or rather, more exactly, a complex of waking conditions some of which are familiar to us while others are exceptional, or even unknown in our society. I propose to define them as states *in which consciousness, though awake, refrains from interfering with the spontaneous activity of the body*—but this definition must be treated with caution. Anyone who tries to discuss hypnotic states with a certain degree of rigour immediately encounters problems of language under which lie conceptual problems. One finds oneself caught up in inextricable contradictions when one tries to take them into account by means of current notions of 'subject', 'consciousness', 'body', and 'mind', etc. The rejection of hypnosis by the greater part of the intellectual and learned world at the present day can only be explained in this way: the rejection is dogmatic, a defensive reaction in the face of data that are profoundly disconcerting from the point of view of certain representations that are fundamental to our intellectual universe. Thus no language exists today that allows us to speak adequately about hypnosis in general terms—even though the jargon of the practitioners of therapeutic hypnosis is continually becoming richer and more subtle, it is no substitute. The word 'hypnosis', which we cannot dispense with under present circumstances, is itself an obstacle to understanding the phenomenon.²²

I have therefore to move forward cautiously and state more precisely the sense of my definition. By 'body' I mean, not the body of someone other that we perceive or represent, but *my body*, the body of whose intimate presence I am always aware. By it I mean *my body such as I feel it to be*.²³ This body manifests itself in the form of 'what's happening' or 'activities', or even more generally of *activity*: *my body is activity*.

When I make myself aware of this activity, whatever its momentary form may be, I myself become the 'subject of perception'—but how are we to represent this subject to ourselves? Should we think of it as a complex of events that is exterior to the activity we perceive, and distinct from it? If we stop reasoning in abstract fashion and observe what is going on, we will agree that this 'subject' is itself activity, that it is an activity intimately linked to the activity that we observe. The consciousness that we have of our activity is a phenomenon that lies within this activity. It is a qualitative modification that displays itself here and there inside our activity with the effect that, here and there, this activity becomes in a certain fashion visible to itself from within—and gives rise, with varying intensity, to that particular feeling which gives meaning to the term 'I'. In the abstract we think of the subject and the object as two separate entities, placed facing each other in a mutual correspondence—but here there is no distance between them. We are also inclined to conceive of consciousness as a permanent receptacle that receives a transient contents, but now we perceive ourselves as being rather made up of a permanent

²² In *Qu'est-ce que l'hypnose?*, Roustang suggests defining it as a 'paradoxical waking', by analogy with 'paradoxical sleep', which is a useful clarification.

²³ Spinoza starts from a similar position. "The human body exists in accordance with our awareness of it" (*Hinc sequitur ... Corpus humanum, prout ipsum sentimus, existere*), *Ethica* pars 2, prop. xiii, corollarium. See the translation by R. Misrahi, *Ethique* (Paris: PUF, 1990), p.13. I leave to one side the philosophical discussions to which the definition I have suggested may give rise, and confine myself here to presenting my idea in a summarized form.

²⁴ It is evident that we are dealing here with a radical redefinition of the body. I am proposing it as a means of removing the conceptual difficulties that block our understanding of hypnosis in general and in particular the hypnotic phenomena that are implied in the dialogues in the *Zhuangzi*. I am also attempting to conceptualize what seems to me to be the anthropological paradigm on which the philosophy of *Zhuangzi* is based. I only sketch one aspect of this paradigm here. Nothing is said, for the moment, about the way in which it allows us to think about our relationships with the external world. Some indications on this subject will be found in my study of the 'Qi wu lun'. [Translated in our following issue. Ed.]

activity that here and there, momentarily and in variable fashion, acquires the quality of consciousness.

Activity is continuous while the consciousness that I have of it transforms itself, varies in extent and in intensity, or disappears entirely, as in dreamless sleep for example. It is thus not adequate to say, as I did a moment ago, that the body is the activity *that I feel*. What we have to understand by 'body' is not only the activity that I feel as mine at a given instant, but also *all that activity which is the prolongation of that activity and which I do not feel at that particular instant*, or that I never feel. The body is to be compared to a *night*—a night in which our consciousness is immersed and from which it nonetheless separates itself within its interior like a light that is sometimes diffuse and at others concentrated and strong.²⁴

That, then, is what I meant by 'body' when I said of the children at the airport that their consciousness had allowed "their bodies" to act. That, too, is the sense that I give to the term when I define hypnosis as the states where consciousness that, although awake, refrains from interfering with the spontaneous activity of the 'body'. But I encounter another difficulty when I say that consciousness "refrains from interfering"—for, how can I maintain that something that I have just defined as a *quality* of the activity of the body may interfere or not interfere with this activity? The reader will have to excuse this logical incongruity and direct his or her attention to the phenomenon that is so described. He or she is well aware that 'consciousness', which is to say the conscious part of our activity, may abstain from interfering in the 'activity' of the body, or in other words the rest of our activity. We know from experience this relative detachment of one part of our activity from another.

In certain of these states our 'consciousness' takes on one task and delegates to the body the responsibility of fulfilling another. I talk with a friend while driving my car. I leave to my body the responsibility of driving, limiting myself to supervising from a distance the way in which it fulfills this subordinate function. This is a form of hypnosis. A variant form: I am alone at the wheel of my car, and I let my body drive while my mind is elsewhere, focussed upon some external or internal spectacle. All forms of distraction and reverie belong to hypnosis. Another case: I delegate to my body the responsibility of driving and while it is driving, I make myself the witness of the activity that unfolds. By practising a sort of waking sleepwalking I observe what my body is doing without me. This form of hypnotic split is partly linked with the sense of what is beautiful, since it leaves me free to evaluate the gestures made by my body and to give them as necessary, by means of slight adjustments, an extra precision and elegance. Certain creative activities play on this kind of disassociation. In the interpretation of a piece of music, for example, while consciousness lets the body play, new effects may arise from this playing that I welcome as providential surprises and integrate into the interpretation as it proceeds. A dialogue is thus set up between the consciousness and the active body where the split that is characteristic of the hypnotic

trance is found again. We can observe in ourselves analogous phenomena every day. We spontaneously create in ourselves this kind of split when for a moment we suspend the activity of our consciousness in order to allow a memory buried deep in the depths of the body to float back up to the surface. Or again when, in order to let our imagination search for a metaphor that we need to express an intuition, we let the expressive and associative powers of the body find it for us. The same occurs when we 'reflect': we leave it to these powers to discover the relationship that we intuitively feel exists between two ideas.

We thus practise hypnosis much as Monsieur Jourdain spoke prose; we enter and leave these states without even being aware of it. Other forms of hypnosis are not spontaneous but induced. The simplest form of induction consists in putting oneself in a state of repose, in a posture that favours maintaining immobility for a prolonged period, to allow oneself to develop a slow, deep breathing, to permit the development of the other natural consequences of this change in one's mode of activity,²⁵ and to adopt an attitude of absolute non-intervention with regard to internal phenomena, which now manifest themselves to the consciousness with much greater force than do external phenomena. It is enough if consciousness limits itself to observing silently the spectacle of the activity of the body and its metamorphoses. Later on, it may, if appropriate, act upon these phenomena in a particular fashion, resorting to a sort of mild incitation. One comes across many variants of this technique in the different religions of the world; they utilize either the motionlessness of the body, or a rhythmic and repetitive bodily activity such as dancing, singing or recitation.

One may put oneself into a hypnotic state either unintentionally or intentionally. The help of someone who has had experience and inspires confidence may be useful: in some cases it is indispensable. It should be emphasized that it is always a matter of *assistance*. In spite of what fairground hypnotists have caused people to believe, the hypnotic trance is not a form of sleep that allows them to manipulate unconscious creatures however they please. Erickson established once and for all that the hypnotist can do nothing without the consent, or indeed even the active collaboration of his subject. He has shown that the hypnotherapist can do nothing but *accompany and guide* his patient. His action with respect to the over-excited children at the airport was, from his point of view, effected by means of hypnosis. Instead of telling them that they had to go to sleep, which would have had no effect, he captured their attention, induced in them a disassociation, and used it to communicate with them in two registers: at one level he explained to them why he was arranging the strips of paper on the ground; at another he suggested to them that the time had come to go to sleep—and he was understood. He thus led them in the direction that they themselves felt the need to go.

²⁵ These consequences are first and foremost that one feels increasingly removed from the world outside, and less and less concerned with it, and this feeling is accompanied by a progressive weakening of the need to act, and even of the idea itself of action, while at the same time it feels as if the flow of time is slowing down, with a corresponding ever more intense intuition of the spatial extent of one's own body, and so on.

²⁶ {The original text has “un *solve et coagula* alchimique.” Transl.}

²⁷ Erickson, *Ma voix t'accompagnera*, p.21.

²⁸ Thus, for example, he says: “I would like to talk to you now about the question of interpersonal communication, which is what hypnosis really consists of. And I would like you to remember the importance of this question of human communication.” Erickson, *L'hypnose thérapeutique*, p.19.

²⁹ “It is of no great concern to me to specify when I am using hypnosis and ... when I am not. I don't have to tell you when I am using a polysyllabic word and when I am using one of two syllables. All that matters is that you understand me.” *Ibid.*, p.194.

³⁰ “I enter a trance in order to be more receptive to the intonation and the inflections of what my patients are saying. Also to train myself to hear better and to see better. I fall into a trance and forget the presence of others.” Erickson, *Ma voix t'accompagnera*, p.60. Elsewhere he says, “when the therapist is in a state of trance he will not only suffer less from his own anxiety, he will also be more receptive to his own unconscious associations. In consequence the therapist will be much better placed to help the patient dissolve the latter's own anxiety, to explore his internal potentialities, and to discover different ways of looking at situations.” *Ibid.*, p.32.

This modest example illustrates one of the mechanisms fundamental to hypnotherapy. The patient's life is made painful by a pattern of behaviour that he (or she) cannot modify unaided. The therapist helps him to enter a state in which his conscious activity, that has been imposing on him a pattern of behaviour that generates anguish or pain, stops interfering with the activity of his body and allows the body to suggest a new behaviour-pattern to him that is more in accord with his real needs. A relationship imposed by consciousness on the body is replaced by one proposed by the body to the consciousness. Either immediately, or else by stages, an alchemical dissolution and recrystallization takes place.²⁶ Erickson helped countless people to resolve their internal conflicts by leading them to allow this transformation to take place within themselves, and so regain their freedom of action. He obviously had a concept very different from Freud's of the unconscious—or of the body, in the language I have adopted here. He saw it as the locus of all successful adaptations, of all the learning processes essential to life, and of all creative surprises. He saw in it life itself.

Erickson gave various definitions of hypnosis. He presented it as “the evocation and utilization of unconscious learning processes,”²⁷ but also as an art of communication.²⁸ His writings are full of observations on the part played by hypnosis in everyday communication—on the states of consciousness into which we put ourselves to communicate with others, on the double and triple registers that we use simultaneously for that purpose, on the various forms of non-verbal communication that accompany speech, and so on. He himself was a virtuoso in the art of communicating. At times he put his patients into a hypnotic state without their being aware of it.²⁹ He put himself into a hypnotic state when he was speaking with them in order to perceive in a more immediate and certain fashion everything that they were expressing both voluntarily and involuntarily.³⁰ His humour was invigorating and completely unpredictable. His followers have been more concerned about methodology and have formulated certain typical procedures. One of the commonest is the following. The therapist asks the patient to sit down and to relax. He puts him (or her) at ease by his own attitude—his posture, breathing, and tone of voice. He asks the patient to experience to the full the various sensations that this relaxation induces in him. He helps him find this letting-go by means of a regular rhythm that he gives to his own speech, by deliberate repetitions, or the suggestion that he fix his gaze on a point in space the more easily to ‘forget himself’. The patient falls first into a light trance and then a deeper one: he allows himself to distance himself from the external world, to which he is soon only linked by the voice of the therapist. The patient may talk to the latter if he wishes, but, in the state of deep repose that he has entered, he usually no longer has the desire to do so and prefers to respond to the questions the therapist asks by means of slight gestures. The therapist is then able, by his words, to take the patient off on a journey.

My voice will go with you contains the complete story of such a voyage.³¹ Erickson learned by accident during a seminar that one of his students, Kathleen, was affected by a vomiting phobia, a syndrome that is one of those psychiatrists term the 'social phobias': she had a pathological fear of contacts with others and was gripped by an irresistible desire to vomit when she had to meet them, and this provided her with a welcome excuse for avoiding such encounters. Erickson suggested that she sat beside him and, once she was in a trance, spoke to her about the penguins and sea-lions in the Antarctic and their adaptation to their environment. He called up the image of whales who feed on plankton, and so have to pass tons of sea-water through their mouths every day. Likewise the images of the sharks who filter water through their branchia in order to extract the oxygen from it. He described to her how the green woodpecker predigests the insects she catches for her fledglings and regurgitates them into their gullets, and observed that the breast-feeding practised by human beings seemed to him, all things considered, to be more convenient. Beast-feeding is a natural form of exchange with the environment, he told her, and vomiting is another, one that there is no reason to fear. The body knows when it has to vomit. Our physical reactions, he added, are more intelligent than our mental reactions. After further developing this way of thinking, in order to consolidate the change that had taken place in the patient's system of representations, he invited her to come out of her trance.³²

What had happened? In her trance, Kathleen had been almost totally cut off from the outside world; only Erickson's voice was still reaching her. Her attention had been entirely directed toward the impressions, images, and scenes that had followed one after the other inside her. Thanks to the dissociation characteristic of a trance, she had allowed these to unfold without interfering with them. She had regarded them as a spectacle that was alien to her even while she knew that this spectacle was emanating from herself, that it was her own memories, experiences, and desires that were on show. This distancing did not cause the spectacle to be without interest or to lack vividness, but on the contrary it made it more intense and moving. For it to come into existence, to grow, and develop its dramatic effects, it was enough that she fell into a state of trance, kept herself in it, and allowed Erickson to talk directly to her deepest and most secret concerns.

What Erickson did was to appeal to Kathleen's imagination in such a way as to persuade her to regard the vomiting of which she was so frightened as a natural phenomenon, and the body that did the vomiting as an intelligent body which knew what it was doing. He then induced her to *forget* all that. The upheaval that had occurred during the hypnosis session would in this way remain out of the reach of conscious recall. Psychoanalysis would have required that she move back from the symptom to the trauma that had caused it in the first place, and would have made her relive this trauma. Psychoanalysis makes the cure depend on becoming conscious of this initial trauma but, in Erickson's view, it is *forgetfulness* that the patient needs in order to recover

³¹ In "Kathleen: the treatment of a phobia," pp.85-92.

³² The French original has an appendix, omitted here, giving a fuller account of this hypnosis session.

her (or his) pleasure in living and her freedom of action. He was often content to help his patients to modify the meaning of a symptom, because one change leads to another, and a partial rearrangement will, in the end, prompt the larger rearrangement that the patient needs if he or she is to live better.

The work that I have cited does not make clear what the effect was of this therapeutic session. It is likely that, having changed her view on vomiting, Kathleen no longer stopped herself meeting others, and began to find in this the pleasure that she had denied herself previously. Erickson often put right in a single session cases that would have taken months or years elsewhere, or that appeared incurable. There were also patients with whom he concerned himself for much longer periods.

* * *

After the insight provided by this brief excursus, let us return to the dialogue between Gongsun Long and the ruler of Wei. In it we shall rediscover several characteristics typical of the hypnotherapeutic interview.

Someone had quoted the sayings of Zhuangzi to Gongsun Long. Their strangeness has “thrown him into confusion.” He has lost his self-regard and no longer dares to express an opinion on anything. He feels doubt about himself, and speaks to the ruler as might a man who is going through a serious crisis and asks a psychotherapist for help. Even so, the ruler does not answer immediately:

Mou, the ruler, leant on his elbow-rest, breathed deeply, raised his eyes towards heaven, and said, smiling: ...

Faced with a man who is tense and anxious, the ruler begins by himself relaxing and making himself comfortable. By doing this he is showing that he is not letting himself be caught in the trap in which the person talking to him is held, and that he does not share his anxiety. The deep breathing of the prince will affect that of Gongsun Long and calm him down. His gaze lifted towards the heavens will likewise have an effect on him, since it indicates that the ruler is preparing himself to visualize something within himself. A sign of this sort naturally invites the person to whom he is talking to set in motion his own visual imagination. The smile, for its part, is an invitation to smile.

The ruler's behaviour is close to that often adopted in hypnotherapy to induce a hypnotic trance. Instead of answering the question that has been raised, and by so doing engaging with the discourse of the questioner, and thereby imprisoning him even further in his cares, the ruler asks him an unexpected question:

“Have you never heard tell of the frog who lived at the bottom of a well, and who said one day to the tortoise of the Eastern sea ...”

The ruler addresses himself to Gongsun's imagination, and draws him after him into a deep well full of water, where it is agreeable to live. He uses concrete images to evoke the sensations that one feels there:

“When I dive into the water, the water bears me up under my armpits and my cheeks. When I walk in the mud, it covers me up to my ankles.”

Gongsun Long does not object. He lets himself be drawn into the imaginary journey that the prince has taken him on, and he allows the images to act upon him. The ruler strengthens his hold on his listener's mind by introducing a scene worthy of Lewis Carroll:

“But the tortoise of the Eastern sea had not even put his left paw in before his right knee was jammed [in the mouth of the well], obliging him to back off; and after he had withdrawn somewhat, he spoke about the sea.”

Having managed to make Gongsun Long think of himself as being happy in the water of the well, the ruler suddenly expands the space in which he is immersed: this is no longer the well but the sea of the sea-dwelling tortoises, the incommensurable sea. The frog is struck dumb by the revelation of this new space, just as Zhuangzi's words had struck Gongsun Long dumb. *De te fabula narratur*, the ruler might have said.³³ The discovery of this infinitely greater world makes the world in which he has been confined until then seem of no account.

In psychotherapy the story would stop at this point. The therapist would be happy to have made a beginning by giving his patient a glimpse of a space of freedom within his reach. But, since this is a polemical text, the ruler follows up his advantage, rebuking Gongsun Long directly:

“And do you, you who are not even capable of telling true and false apart, do you claim to behold what Zhuangzi speaks of?... And are not you, unable to understand words that have even the slightest subtlety and who merely profit from this or that momentary advantage, are not you like the frog in the well?”

He tells him that the spaces in which Zhuangzi moves about are immeasurably greater than the minuscule intellectual world within which he wants to confine him:

“Even at this moment Zhuangzi treads the ground by the Yellow Springs, or rises into the blue empyrean. Unaware of either South or North, he lets himself be carried as he may be, losing himself in the fathomless. Knowing neither East nor West, he leaves the primal darkness to reach the great Way.”

Gongsun Long's intellectual tools are definitely inadequate:

“And now, in the confusion in which you find yourself, you think you can call him to account over this or that distinction, or quibble with him over some argument or other. One might as well measure the expanse of the sky by looking through a tube, or plumb the depths of the earth with an awl. Such tools are an absurdity. Be off from here!”

The ruler concludes by delivering a mortal thrust:

³³ I.e., ‘It is of you that the story is told’.

“Have you never heard of the young man from Shouling who tried to mimic the gait of the people of Handan, and not only failed in this but in the end was even unable to walk as he had done before? He had to go home on all fours. Be off, or you will forget what you do know, and lose your livelihood!”

Gongsun Long stood open-mouthed, his tongue cleaving to his palate; then he ran away.

Although this dialogue is primarily polemical, those who inherited Zhuangzi’s legacy may have used it for therapeutic purposes. They may have told it to people who found themselves in distress similar to that of Gongsun Long, in order to help them free themselves from a mental universe that was too narrow and in which they were suffering from being imprisoned. The dialogue would then have served the same function as the stories that Erickson told his patients: these were often examples of sudden cures that suggested to them that they too would be cured, and that this might happen in an equally unexpected fashion.

II

³⁴ This dialogue forms the beginning of chapter 24, “Xu Wugui.” It is followed by another whose opening is approximately the same, but which later turns towards another theme. This latter is of less interest and I have therefore omitted it here.

³⁵ A minister of Marquis Wu, the ruler of Wei.

³⁶ Literally, “appear to be staring at the sun.”

³⁷ Literally, “seem to have lost the One” (*nüo wang qi yi* 若亡其一). The commentators take this sybilline phrase to mean either that they are so concerned with what they are doing that they have forgotten themselves, or that they have forgotten the purpose of the hunt or even the hunt itself.

³⁸ Literally, “like a hook (*gou* 鉤).” The translation is hypothetical.

In the first dialogue we saw the ruler practising some of the procedures that are used in Ericksonian hypnosis. We shall find some of these once more in the following dialogue. This time, it is not a ruler inflicting a somewhat heroic remedy on a philosopher in difficulty, but a hermit who visits a ruler and opens new horizons before him:³⁴

Through the good offices of Ru Shang,³⁵ [the hermit] Xu Wugui obtained an audience with Marquis Wu of Wei. “How worn-out you look, Master,” said the Marquis, to console him; “no doubt you have agreed to pay me a visit because your life in your mountain forest has become [too] painful.”—“Why do you console me with such words? It is you,” replied Xu Wugui, “who have need of consolation from me. When you follow your appetites and give free rein to your tastes and aversions, you are attacking the substance of your life. When, however, you curb your tastes and aversions, your ears and your eyes suffer from such treatment. It is thus for me to bring consolation to you, not for you to give me yours!” The Marquis, abashed, did not reply. ...

Instead of reassuring him with pleasant words or giving him good advice, Xu Wugui leaves him for a moment to his thoughts, then broaches a topic that seems to have nothing to do with what has just been said:

... A short time later, Xu Wugui began again: “Let me tell you how I judge [hunting-]dogs. Those of the lowest quality stop when they have caught enough to stay their hunger, and are no better than cats. Those of an intermediate nature put on an intimidating appearance.³⁶ Those of the highest degree seem to have forgotten themselves.³⁷ I am even more skilled at judging horses than dogs. Those who can move as straight as a chalked line, or in curves like those of a sickle,³⁸ or make angles like those drawn by a set-square, and circles as if

turned by a pair of compasses,³⁹ are horses of whom a realm may be proud. They are not as good as those of whom the whole world may be proud. These latter have an innate capacity.⁴⁰ They look haggard and distraught, as if they had lost themselves.⁴¹ They catch up and overtake all the others, leaving a cloud of dust behind them,⁴² in such a fashion that no one knows where they are." The marquis was delighted, and broke out laughing ...

The method is the same as that we have already seen. Instead of setting out to reason with the ruler on the art of how best to conduct his life, Xu Wugui abruptly changes register and talks about dogs and horses. He awakens in him the desire for a different existence. That, for Xu, is enough.

The dialogue continues outside the reception-hall:

... When Xu Wugui came out, Ru Shang said to him: "I am curious to know how you set about making our ruler happy in this fashion. In the hope of pleasing him, I have given him extensive interpretations of the meaning of the *Songs*, the *Documents*, the *Rites*, and the *Music*. I have gone thoroughly over the secret treatises on the art of war.⁴³ I have submitted for his consideration proposals that have on countless occasions led to success, but he has never even smiled once. What did you talk to him, Master, to make him so happy?"—"I talked to him about the art of judging dogs and horses," responded Xu Wugui.

Xu Wugui is as curt with the minister as with the marquis. His secret is to have spoken to the marquis as to a human being. To bring this home to the minister he again uses a circuitous approach, and, to start with, a surprise:

"I talked to him about the art of judging dogs and horses," responded Xu Wugui. "Was that all?" asked Ru Shang. "Have you never heard tell of the people who are exiled to Yue?"⁴⁴ Xu Wugui asked him. "When they have been away from their homeland for a few days, they are delighted to meet an old acquaintance. When they have been away for some weeks or months, they have only to encounter someone they have seen once in their own land to be overjoyed. When a year has gone by it is enough for them to happen on someone who merely looks like their fellow-countrymen to feel beside themselves with happiness. The longer the separation, the more one feels out of sorts, isn't that the case? When someone has taken refuge in the wilderness, where brambles and creepers⁴⁵ block the paths where martens and weasels scamper, and lives there alone for a long time, he rejoices when he hears the sound of a human footstep. He would rejoice even more were he [again] to hear his brothers or his parents gossiping and laughing beside him. It seems to me that a long time has passed since anyone, chatting and joking at our ruler's side, caused him to hear the language of a true human being!"

By conjuring up this touching scene, he talks to him more powerfully of the ruler's loneliness than any direct language could have done. We should note that the notion of 'the true human being' (*zhenren* 真人), whose meaning is often problematic in the *Zhuangzi*, here has an entirely concrete sense: it is the person whose is neither embarrassed nor diminished by any convention, who is a whole person, and speaks to others as whole persons.

³⁹ Some commentators regard these four comparisons as applying to the shape of the horses rather than to the figures that they execute in dressage.

⁴⁰ In contrast to the acquired capacities of trained horses.

⁴¹ Again, "as if they had lost the One," as in note 36 above.

⁴² Taking *yi* 軼 in the sense of 'overtake' and not as a graphic variant of *zhe* 轍, 'rut'.

⁴³ Literally, "The Golden Tablets and The Six Quivers." We still have today a treatise on the art of war entitled *Liu tao* 六發 [The six quivers], or alternatively *Taigong bingfa* 太公兵法 [The military art of Taigong], which is of Han provenance. It is probable that it is this work that is indicated.

⁴⁴ Presumably the semi-sinicized state in south-eastern China, but possibly the Yue (or Viet), non-Chinese tribes in southern China.

⁴⁵ The botanical identification of these plants is problematic.

⁴⁶ On the probable historical context see Reding, *Fondements philosophiques*, pp.296–300.

⁴⁷ The fourth part of chapter 25, “Zeyang.”

⁴⁸ Also known as Ji Liang. See the chapter “Weice” in the *Zhanguo ce* [Strategies of the Warring States].

⁴⁹ Master Hua also appears in a dialogue in chapter 28, “Ruo wang,” in the *Zhuangzi*, that is also to be found in the *Lüshi chunqiu*, book 21, chapter “Gui sheng.”

III

The third dialogue does not have the same psychological density as those just discussed. We first of all overhear in it the political debates that centred on war and peace during the second half of the fourth century B.C.E. Most of the characters are historic, although commentators are not altogether certain as to their identities. It is possible that its point of departure was an actual situation.⁴⁶ What is beyond dispute is that its author, like those of the two preceding dialogues, wanted to present a radical conversion:⁴⁷

King Ying of Wei made a treaty with Marquis Tian Mou [of Qi], and the latter broke it. The King of Wei was enraged and wished to despatch someone to assassinate him.

When Gongsun Yan, his minister of the army, heard of the king's intention, he was overcome with shame and said [to the monarch]: “You are at the head of a state that has ten thousand war-chariots and yet you entrust your vengeance to a commoner. Rather give me two hundred thousand men in armour, and I will attack the realm of Qi, reduce its population to slavery, carry off the horses and cattle, and put the king of Qi into such a fury that he will develop ulcers on his back, after which I shall take possession of his capital. When General Tian Ji tries to flee, I will strike him on the back and smash his spine!”

When Jizi [a celebrated pacifist]⁴⁸ heard this talk he was overcome with shame and said to the king: “If one were to be building a defensive wall ten fathoms high and then gave the command to demolish it when it had reached seven, the forced labourers who had built it would see in it a hideous mess. It is now seven years since there has been no armed conflict, and [this peace] has become the foundation of your reign. Gongsun Yan is an inciter of troubles, and is not to be listened to!”

When Huazi [a militant pacifist]⁴⁹ heard these words spoken, he was overcome with disgust and said to the king: “The person who incited you to attack Qi is an inciter of troubles. The person who wished to persuade you not to attack Qi is also an inciter of troubles. And anyone who felt it good enough merely to tell you that both of them are inciters of troubles would likewise be one himself.”

“What should I do, then?” asked the king.

“Search for the Way, that's all!” ...

This advice leaves the king perplexed. Hui Shi, his minister, then chooses this moment to introduce a certain Dai Jinren who renders the monarch even more disconcerted:

... When Hui Shi heard tell of all this, he introduced Dai Jinren. This latter asked the king:

“Do you know what a snail is?”

“Yes.”

“At the end of the left horn of a snail there was a kingdom called Buffet, and at the end of the right horn was another kingdom called Smack. They argued

over territories and so never stopped fighting one another. [On every occasion] the corpses lay strewn on the ground in thousands and the victor [of the moment] pursued the vanquished for fifteen days before going back home.”

“Aren’t you telling me drivel?” asked the king.

“If you will permit me, I will explain what it means. In your opinion, is there any end to the Six Directions?”⁵⁰

“No.”

“Do you realize that when one has travelled in one’s mind through the Limitless, on one’s return the kingdoms in which one [habitually] moves about seem [so small that they] hardly exist?”

“Indeed.”

“Among these realms is Wei. In Wei there is [the capital city of] Liang. Within this capital is Your majesty. Is there any difference between Your Majesty and the King of Smack?”

“None.”

When the visitor had taken his leave, the king was bewildered, as if he had lost everything. ...

In hypnotherapy one calls this a ‘reframing’. Dai Jinren has led the king to see his own ambition and his thirst for revenge in a new perspective. He has made him understand that, no matter what advice his advisors give him, they were inciters of troubles because they confine him in his old mental universe, rather than freeing him from it. The king recognizes this at the end of the dialogue, which goes as follows:

When Dai Jinren had gone out, Hui Shi [again] presented himself before the king. “That visitor was a great man (*daren* 大人)⁵¹,” the king observed to him; “even the greatest sages could not compare themselves with him.” “Blow into a flute,” replied Hui Shi, “and you will get a fine sound. Blow onto the guard of your sword, and you will get a barely audible whistling. Everyone sings the praises of [the sage-kings] Yao and Shun, but, compared with Dai Jinren, these praises are a barely audible whistling!”

This dialogue ends with a powerful image. Yao and Shun were the two ancient mythical sovereigns whom Confucian teaching presented as perfect rulers, those whom every ruler should try to make himself imitate. According to Hui Shi, who ends the dialogue, they amount to nothing in comparison with Dai Jinren, a sage who dwelt in obscurity. This Hui Shi is none other than the philosopher mentioned at the start of this essay when we discussed Gongsun Long. He was a minister of the King of Wei, and seems to have been a man of peace both in his political teaching and his actions.⁵²

IV

There are other dialogues that may be illuminated in a slightly different fashion by juxtaposing them with Ericksonian hypnosis. We have seen that the hypnotherapist willingly puts himself into a state of trance that heightens

⁵⁰ The points of the compass, plus up and down.

⁵¹ This term seems to indicate that Dai Jinren belonged to a particular Daoist school some of whose texts have been included in the *Zhuangzi*. The present dialogue would appear to be part of this corpus. On this subject, see Graham, *Inner chapters*, pp.142–3.

⁵² On this, see Reding, *Fondements philosophiques*, pp.347–50.

⁵³ In the course of the narrative that opens chapter 23, “Gengsang Chu.”

his sensitivity to all the subtle signs sent to him by his patient. In this respect hypnosis is an art of perception. When he does this the hypnotist makes use of propensities that are common property and of which we all of us make some use, though in varying degrees. All he does is to develop them by using them in a conscious and sustained manner. He thus acquires what might seem to witnesses who are not well-informed to be a gift of second sight, but which is only a natural faculty operating to its full capacity.

In a narrative that takes up the first part of chapter 23, and which is too long to be reproduced here in its entirety, we see the character of ‘Laozi’ demonstrating this kind of a gift of second sight. A certain Nanrong Chu has come to ask the secret of wisdom from a hermit called Gengsang Chu, a disciple of Laozi. At one point, Gengsang Chu says that he is unable to help him to make any further progress in his quest, and suggests that he goes to talk to Laozi. He tells him:⁵³

“... My talent is undoubtedly inadequate to induce a transformation in you. Why don’t you go to the south to see Laozi?” ...

Following this:

... Nanrong Chu made up some provisions, travelled for seven days and seven nights, and arrived at Laozi’s dwelling. Laozi asked him: “Was it Gengsang Chu who sent you?” He answered in the affirmative. Laozi then asked him: “And why have you come followed by all these people?” Nanrong Chu was bewildered and glanced behind him. “Don’t you understand what I mean?” Laozi came back at him. Nanrong Chu hung his head, abashed, then raised his eyes and said, with a sigh: “I no longer know what to answer, and, at the same time, I have forgotten what the question was that I came to ask.” ...

Laozi has instantly seen how many useless worries burdened down Nanrong Chu’s mind. He has grasped, better than the visitor himself, the situation that the latter was in. He disconcerts him, lets him mumble for a moment under the impact of the surprise, then asks him to explain, nonetheless, the reason for his coming:

“But what was it all about?” Laozi asked him. “If I have no knowledge,” explained Nanrong Chu, “people treat me like a halfwit; but if I [seek for] knowledge, then there I am in a state of worry. If I refrain from kindness, I harm others; but if I [make myself] practise it, there I am in a state of bother. If I refrain from practising justice, I damage others, but if I do practise it, there I am completely obsessed by it. I don’t know how to get out [of these dilemmas]. These three problems torment me, and it is about them that I have come to consult you, on the recommendation of Gengsang Chu.” “Just a moment ago I looked at you between the eyes,” said Laozi, “and I knew what condition you were in. What you are saying confirms me in my opinion. You have the distraught appearance of someone who might have lost his father and mother and is looking for them in the depths of the sea with a [long] boathook. You are disorientated and adrift. You long to reunite with your true self but have no idea how to set about it. You are to be pitied!” ...

In what follows we see Laozi helping Nanrong Chu to escape from these dilemmas and to reach that calm of the soul to which he aspired.

There is a telling detail in this passage. Normally, when I am listening to someone talking to me, I concentrate on following what he is saying. Without realizing it, I show him that I am following by giving him slight indications with my head, my eyes, my face, and my hands, etc. Without being aware of it, I also note the timbre of his voice, how he looks at me, the gestures he makes, how he carries his head, and his posture. I communicate with him in two registers, whose relationships I can alter if I want to: I can reduce a little the attention I am paying to his words and correspondingly increase that which I direct towards the bodily activity he presents when he is talking to me. One part of me goes on following his discourse, while another part becomes disengaged from this movement and is transformed into a mirror, or—rather—into a sensitive photographic plate that, being itself in a state of calm relative to the person who is talking to me, captures the moving image that emanates from that person. Now, when I adopt this way of hypnotic listening, my facial expression is not the same as it is in normal listening. My gaze no longer conveys by its movements my participation in the ebb and flow of the conversation, but stops and rests on my interlocutor without however focussing on any particular point. Such must have been the undirected gaze that Laozi let rest on Nanrong Chu. He put himself facing the latter in a state of global receptivity; he made himself the impassive but attentive spectator of the person opposite him and at once grasped, by a kind of X-ray clairvoyance, what was going on inside this person, and that gave him the power to act upon the latter by means of this inspired short-cut: “And why have you come followed by all these people?”

V

We shall meet this type of action again in the next dialogue. But in this case it is not a matter of a question posed unexpectedly by a sage to someone who has come to question him, and which then and there leaves this person with no wish or will to move. This time the mere *evocation* of such a sage, and his power to resolve confusion, is enough to produce a comparable effect. Here is this remarkable dialogue:⁵⁴

Tian Zifang⁵⁵ was sitting beside Marquis Wen of Wei, keeping him company. As Tian had several times spoken well of a certain Xi Gong, the marquis asked him: “Is this Xi Gong your master?” “No,” answered Tian, “he’s someone who lives in my part of the city. I have praised him because, when I have heard him speak of the Way, I have on several occasions found what he has had to say to be of good sense.” “Don’t you have a master, then?” went on the marquis. “Indeed I do,” said Tian Zifang. “Who is your master?” the marquis asked. “Master Shun, from by the eastern city wall,”⁵⁶ Tian answered. “Why, then, have

⁵⁴ The opening of chapter 21, “Tian Zifang.”

⁵⁵ Personal name Wuzi. Friend and counsellor of Marquis Wen, who ruled Wei from 424 to 387 B.C.E.

⁵⁶ The name ‘Dongguo Shunzi’ indicates that he lived near the outer wall (*guo* 郭) of the capital. ‘Shun’ has the sense of ‘following the current,’ ‘moving in the same direction as events,’ or ‘accompanying them.’

⁵⁷ *Yuan yi! quande zhi junzi!* 遠矣全德之君子. Another possible reading is “the man who has maintained his potentiality (*de* 德) intact.” To say “how far removed from me he is” has the additional implication of “how unfathomable he is!” In classical Chinese one does not say that the sense of a word is “deep” but rather that it is “distant.”

⁵⁸ [Latin *candidus* = ‘shining white, fair, clear, honest, lucid’. Transl.]

⁵⁹ The second dialogue, above, ends with this *zhen*.

⁶⁰ This contrast occurs frequently in the *Zhuangzi*. The key text for this theme may be taken to be the dialogue between Zhuangzi and Hui Shi at the end of chapter 5, “De Chongfu,” or perhaps the following formula from chapter 32, “Lie Yukou”: “To know the Way is easy, but not to speak of It is hard. To know It and not to speak of It is the means whereby one reunites with Heaven. To know of It but to speak of It is the means whereby one reunites with humankind.”

you never mentioned him?” “Because his manner is without art,” replied Tian Zifang. “He looks like a human being but he is as empty as is Heaven. He acts *in accordance with circumstances*, while always maintaining his artlessness. He is pure and welcomes all beings into himself. Any beings that are behaving in a fashion contrary to the Way have only to look him in the face to understand, and their will vanishes. What could I say in the way of good of such a man?”

Tian Zifang took his leave. Marquis Wen remained stupefied and did not utter another word for the remainder of the day. Then he called together those ministers who were present at Court and said to them: “How far removed from me is the man whose capacity is entire!⁵⁷ I used to believe that there was nothing more exalted than the maxims of the sages, than humanity and justice. But I have heard my master speak and in consequence I have a body that has disintegrated, and any wish to move has left me. My mouth is clamped shut, and I no longer want to speak. The ideas that I had made my own were only figures of clay. As to my kingdom of Wei, it is nothing to me any longer but a burden.”

The wisest course might be to add nothing to this, to mix no explanations with the effect that this unfamiliar tale makes upon us, and to see in it the quintessential expression of a style of thinking far removed from ours. Let us make an effort all the same to see clearly from what its curious charm arises.

Irony, first of all. The marquis did not know of the existence of Master Shun, who nonetheless lived near him. He learns of him by chance. It never occurred to Tian Zifang, who is simultaneously councillor to the marquis and the disciple of Master Shun, to mention his master because, as he himself explains, Master Shun leads a life so unobtrusive that it is hard to say anything about him, even anything good. Tian has several times reported the words of a certain Xi Gong regarding the Way, because Xi Gong *talks* about the Way. Master Shun does not. But when Tian Zifang talks about him, what he says strikes the marquis as a revelation.

“His manner is artless” (*qi wei ren zhen ye* 其為人真也), he observes. A literal translation of this might have been: “His manner of being a human being is true.” The rendering ‘artless’ is somewhat daring, but seems to me right here, and it allows us to translate *ba●zhen* 葆真 elegantly as ‘maintain his artlessness’, two sentences further on. ‘Artless’ {*candide* in the French original} also evokes by its etymology⁵⁸ the idea of whiteness and hence that of an undifferentiated state, which is present in *zhen* 真 ‘true’ in the *Zhuangzi*.⁵⁹ In what does ‘the true being’ or the artlessness of the sage consist?

“He looks like a human being,” says Tian Zifang, “but he is as empty as is Heaven” (*ren mao er tian xu* 人貌而天虛). While appearing human, he lacks that which is proper to a human being: nothing he does is intentional, calculated, artificial, constrained, or narrow-minded. This is the ‘human’ element as seen by the *Zhuangzi* as opposed to the ‘Heavenly’ (*tian* 天).⁶⁰ In contrast to the human order, which is one of contriving and coercion, the order of Heaven is that of the natural and the spontaneous. The sage’s manner of being and acting makes him appear ‘as empty as Heaven’ because no

ambition can be discerned in him, no project, no personal intention, and no preconceived idea whatsoever.

‘He acts *in accordance*, while always preserving his artlessness” (*luan er bao zhen* 緣而葆真): since he is not pursuing any particular end, he acts as is suitable to each occasion and encounter, according to what the moment requires, and he does so without ever losing his freedom of action. ‘Act according to circumstances’ [*agir selon* in the French] is a free translation of *luan* 緣, which means ‘to follow’, as for example in ‘to follow a way’.⁶¹

‘He is pure and welcomes all beings into himself’ (*qing er rong wu* 清而容物): he welcomes them all without making distinctions or enforcing measures of exclusion, accepting them as they are. We should remember that the sage being described is called *Shun*, which is ‘he who goes in the direction taken by things,’ ‘who accompanies them.’

These few formulae define very exactly the attitude of receptivity described earlier, that of the hypnotic trance that one puts oneself into in order to perceive in depth the condition of a person in one’s presence. On such an occasion one has that ‘artlessness’ which is the absence of calculation, one is ‘as empty as is Heaven’ because one has cleared out all preconceived ideas, one ‘welcomes all beings into oneself’ because one allows all the messages that these beings send to one either intentionally or subconsciously to penetrate into one, and one at once makes a synthesis of them. Finally, if appropriate, one spontaneously ‘acts in accordance’.

How, though, does it happen that when Master Shun looks at ‘beings who are behaving in a fashion that is contrary to the Way,’ these beings ‘understand’ what is amiss and their ‘will vanishes’? This is once again a natural phenomenon. Someone who is speaking to me and whose mind is full of what he (or she) is saying unconsciously transmits signals to me that inform me about his state of mind and his intentions.⁶² He expects me to transmit similar signals back. He needs these partly for reassurance, and partly to gauge the impact on me of what he is saying, so that he can reorientate it in response to my reactions, and so on. If, however, as I listen to him, I put myself into a state of deep receptivity, in other words into a state of hypnotic trance, I will have plunged into complete relaxation and will have stopped emitting the reassuring signals that he is expecting of me. Feeling the basis of communication slipping away beneath him, he may be struck with a hidden giddiness and stop. Subliminally aware of my attitude of non-participation, his own stratagems may suddenly seem absurd to him, and he may forthwith abandon a game that no longer functions.⁶³ “He understands, and his will vanishes,” says the *Zhuangzi*. Beings who ‘behave themselves in a fashion contrary to the Way’ are thus those who have not abandoned their ‘will’, whose minds remain darkened by their calculations, desires, or fears, and who in consequence see neither what is happening within themselves nor what is happening around them. The ‘Way’ seems to be a form of activity that a human being attains when he or she *stops exerting his or her will*.

⁶¹ The inspiration comes from some lines by Rimbaud: “Donc tu te dégages / des humains suffrages, / des communs élans! / Tu voles selon [...]” (“You thereupon leave behind / Plaudits from humankind, / Commonplace passions! / Flying with circumstance [...]” Transl.) These occur in “Alchimie du verbe” in *Une saison en enfer*.

⁶² These signals were discussed earlier in this essay and are today described collectively as ‘body language’. Gregory Bateson and others have shown that this language is a necessary complement to verbal expression. It has the function of a metalanguage by means of which we show those to whom we are talking what our intentions are when we are talking to them, and hence the sense in which we want them to take our verbal messages—whether as orders or as suggestions, as disingenuous or ironic comments, as truths or as lies, and so forth. It can happen that our body-language betrays us and sends a message that contradicts the verbal message. On phenomena of this sort see G. Bateson, R. Birdwhistell, E. Goffman, E. T. Hall, et al., (texts assembled and presented by Yves Winkin), *La nouvelle communication* (Paris: Seuil, 1981).

⁶³ Psychoanalysts sometimes have the occasion to observe this sort of wordless and instantaneous conversion. François Roustang notes (in *Influence*, pp. 167–8) that the patient, from the first contact with the psychoanalyst, unconsciously tries to impose on the latter a relationship of a type that he desires. He imposes it from the outset through body-language. If the psychoanalyst is not aware of this stratagem he will become locked into the relationship that is imposed on him and reduced to powerlessness. If, on the other hand, he freely goes along with the patient’s game, but without being taken in by it, if he takes on the role assigned to him instead of having it forced on him, the patient soon feels that his strategy is not working and abandons it. Without fail, the freedom of the psychoanalyst arouses freedom in the patient. The psychotherapist has done nothing other than ‘welcoming into himself all beings’. It is enough for him to look his interlocutor ‘in the face’ for this latter to ‘understand and his will to vanish’. François Roustang notes that psychoanalysts observe this kind of phenomenon but cannot integrate it with psychoanalytical doctrine since this doctrine regards all important changes as resulting from an increase in awareness mediated by language.

⁶⁴ This dialogue occurs at the start of chapter 32, “Lie Yukou,” but may also be found in the *Liezi*, chapter 2.

⁶⁵ That is, Liezi, Master Lie, the figure who appears in a number of passages in the *Zhuangzi*, and to whom was later ascribed the authorship of the *Liezi*, an apocryphal work of the fourth century CE. See A. C. Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu* (1960; rev. ed., New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

⁶⁶ Liezi’s master. At the end of chapter 21 there is a description that has become famous of his giving his pupil a lesson in shooting with a bow.

⁶⁷ Free rendering of *cheng* 誠, ‘sincerity’. ‘Goodwill’ or ‘the desire to do good’ give a better sense of what is at issue in the present context.

VI

In the next dialogue we meet with a phenomenon that Erickson would surely have seen as connected with hypnosis, but which in the first instance has its origin in body-language. It can happen that our posture, our gestures, our facial appearance, the quality of our voice, or other more subtle forms of expression, unintentionally give away to others matters that we would have preferred to hide from them, or of which we ourselves are unaware, and that this lands us in unexpected situations. Others often record and decode in an entirely unconscious fashion the messages that we send to them in this way. This is what happens here.⁶⁴

Lie Yukou⁶⁵ left for the state of Qi, but when half-way there turned round and came back. He met with Bohun Wurun,⁶⁶ who asked him why he had retraced his steps.

“I was alarmed.”

“At what?”

“Five out of ten of the soup-sellers served me before anyone else, and offered me a meal!”

“What is frightening in that?”

“The goodwill⁶⁷ of which I have been unable to rid myself shone through, and bestowed on me some sort of impressive bearing—whose nature is unclear to me—that once apparent imposed itself on the minds of these people and induced them to show me, unthinkingly, more respect than they would have to an old man.” ...

Liezi has still not shed his ‘goodwill’, in other words his desire to do good, to make himself useful, and to intervene in the lives of others by giving them good advice. He had wanted to remain hidden, like the true Daoist sage, but something in his style of behaviour had let the soup-sellers glimpse his real attitude. His body-language (‘some sort of impressive bearing—whose nature is unclear to me’) had given him away. He felt himself caught in a trap, since if others revered him as a sage, they would put themselves under his authority and entrust him with solving their problems. So, he goes on:

“It is from situations of this sort that vexations arise. The soup-sellers live by selling their soups, and don’t earn much. If people like these, whose profits are meagre and power of little account, receive me in this fashion, what sort of a welcome might I expect from a ruler [like the King of Qi] who has ten thousand chariots of war? I would [no doubt] find him exhausted by the responsibilities of his state, and his psychological energies worn away by government business. He would [no doubt] transfer these tasks to me, and further demand that I distinguish myself in their handling. This is what is filling me with apprehension.”

“You have seen clearly,” exclaimed Bohun Wuren, “but even if you stay at home, people are going to come thronging round you.” ...

Liezi is clear-sighted enough to spot the danger lying in wait for him, but Bohun Wuren foretells that he is not at the end of his troubles. His master-

like bearing, which he *still retains* within himself, will continue to show itself externally and attract people in crowds. The story confirms this as it proceeds:

Some time later, Bohun Wuren went to Liezi's house and saw the ground outside the door covered with sandals. He remained standing, his face toward the north, and his cheek creased by the staff on which he was leaning. Then he left without saying a word. Alerted by his doorkeeper, Liezi snatched up his sandals and ran after him barefoot, catching him up by the door [of the courtyard]:

"Since you've come here, don't you have a solution for me?"

"No point," replied Bohun Wuren. "I warned you people would throng around you and here they are, thronging. This is not so much a proof of your ability to attract them as of your inability to stop them crowding in. There's no sense in turning your own nature upside-down in this way. It is not the people who surround you who will warn you [of danger]. Their chattering is nothing but poison. Why do you associate with them? They understand nothing and comprehend nothing. People of skill waste their energies; people of intelligence torment themselves; but the man without abilities looks for nothing. He eats his fill, and goes hither and thither, drifting off like a boat that has slipped its moorings. He is empty, and goes where chance takes him.

VII

Last of all, a particularly enigmatic text. In the first dialogue we found Gongsun Long in a state of deep anxiety because he had heard someone speaking of certain things that Zhuangzi had said. In this last tale it is Zhuangzi himself who is shaken. The text seems to preserve the memory of a crisis that he underwent and which may have been a decisive moment in his life. This is A. C. Graham's hypothesis,⁶⁸ which I have in my turn adopted.

The *Zhuangzi* has fifteen or so anecdotes, varying in their degree of detail, where Zhuangzi appears in person. Some of them contain short conversations that he may in fact have had, in particular with his friend Hui Shi, and which he may well have recorded himself. Others are most probably based on his sayings and doings, but their form clearly reveals that they are stories transmitted and written down by his disciples. The text that follows has a unique quality that obliges us to put it into a separate category. There is an irrational element in it, possibly resulting from a dream, that could only have had a meaning for the person to whom it happened, and this thus gives it a seal of authenticity. It is also the only text in which a disciple of Zhuangzi is mentioned by name, and this furnishes a supplementary indication that it is genuine. We can imagine either that Zhuangzi attached some importance to recording the name of the disciple with whom he had spoken when this crisis struck him, or else that it was the disciple who made a note of their discussion. The first of these two alternatives seems the most likely. We should note that if Zhuangzi had a disciple at the time that this happened,

⁶⁸ Graham, *Inner chapters*, pp.117–18, and idem, *Disputers of the Tao*, p.176.

⁶⁹ Graham, *Inner chapters*, p.117.

⁷⁰ Penultimate part of chapter 20, “Shanmu.”

⁷¹ *Wang qi zhen* 忘其真 literally means ‘forgetting what was true in it,’ or ‘what was truly proper to it.’ The word *zhen*, ‘true’, has here the particular meaning given to it by the school of Yang Zhu, and indicates a person’s life, the most precious thing that that person possesses. (Cf. A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, p.57.) *Wang qi zhen* thus means that ‘it was forgetful of its life’, or ‘forgetful of itself’. The expression has the same sense as the parallels *wang qi shen* 忘其身 and *wang qi xing* 忘其形 in the preceding sentences.

⁷² *Wu gu xiang lei* 物固相累 literally means ‘beings are linked the one to the other’; the fate of one is linked to the fate of the other.

⁷³ One reading takes this as ‘three months’, but this does not fit well with the *qingjian* 頃間 ‘after some time’ or ‘not long afterwards’ of the next sentence.

⁷⁴ *Shou xing* 守形 literally means ‘I was keeping to forms,’ or in other words, objects. This rendering follows Watson, *Complete works of Chuang Tzu*, p.219. Graham (*Seven inner chapters*, p.118) translates *xing* as ‘body’. The word has this sense a few sentences above in the text (where *wang qi xing* describes the praying mantis as ‘forgetful of its body’, in other words ‘forgetful of itself’). He renders the sentence *wu shou xing er wang shen* 吾守形而忘身 by ‘in caring for the body I have been forgetting what can happen to me’. This translation, which seems to be somewhat forced, reduces the interest of the passage considerably.

then he must have been a master and been providing instruction. Since he mentions his own master—and this is the only locus where any mention is made of Zhuangzi having had a master—he must at this time have belonged to a school. Graham’s conclusion is that this crisis triggered his conversion from a philosophical position that belonged to one of the schools of this time to a new philosophical orientation. That this anecdote is one of the only two in which the philosopher is called by his family and personal name—Zhuang Zhou—rather than by his family name followed by the honorific *zi* 子—Zhuangzi, ‘Master Zhuang’⁶⁹—justifies the supposition that it comes from a relatively early date, when Zhuangzi was still little known.

Here is this remarkable testimony:⁷⁰

One day when Zhuang Zhou was strolling in the park of Diaoling, he saw a strange magpie come from the south, with a wingspan of seven feet and eyes an inch across. It brushed against his forehead as it passed him and alit in a clump of chestnut trees. “What is that odd bird,” wondered Zhuang Zhou, “that has huge wings yet flies badly, that has huge eyes but does not see where it is going?” Holding up his skirts he quickened his step, levelled his crossbow [at the bird] and took aim. Just then he saw a cicada resting in a shady corner that it had just found, forgetful of itself. Behind it a praying mantis was hiding, ready to rush upon the cicada, and with only its prey in mind, also forgetful of itself. The strange magpie was behind the mantis, thinking of nothing but how to profit from this situation, again forgetful of itself.⁷¹ Zhuang Zhou was terrified at what he saw, and said: “Beings are thus chained the one to the other.⁷² Each one of them draws on himself [the appetite] of another!” [Struck by this idea] he tossed away his crossbow and ran off. It was then, however, that the guardian of the park saw him, and started to chase after him, abusing him with insults. After he had returned home, Zhuang Zhou remained upset by this for three days.⁷³

“Why have you been in so dark a mood for some time now?” asked [his disciple] Lin Ju, who was keeping him company. Zhuang Zhou replied: “My mind darkened by things,⁷⁴ I had become forgetful of myself. My gaze was deep in muddy water that I thought was clear! My master told me, ‘Whithersoever you go, respect the rules.’ During my walk at Diaoling, I was forgetful of myself. The strange magpie brushed against my forehead, went into the grove of chestnut trees, and forgot itself. And the guardian of the park took me for a [common] poacher! That is why I am unhappy.”

The clumsy magpie that grazes the forehead of Zhuangzi is the element that gives this tale its intrinsic strangeness. For a moment Zhuangzi wonders at this bizarre apparition, then his hunting instincts take over. He follows the bird, levels his weapon at it, and waits for the right moment to loose off. Just then, however, his attention is caught by the cicada, then by the praying mantis who was threatening the cicada, and then by the magpie who is threatening the praying mantis. He realizes that he himself is threatening the magpie, and so stands at the starting-point of a concatenated sequence of violence and destruction. No doubt he feels at the same time the presentiment

that he too is caught in this fatal chain, and that at the very moment he is aiming at the magpie and thinking himself master of the situation, some unknown being whose presence he has not noticed is lying in wait for him, ready to pounce. He throws away his weapon, takes flight, and discovers with terror that the guardian of the park has spotted him and is chasing after him, cursing him roundly.

Why did this misadventure have such an impact on him? Why did he remain upset by it for three days? Because he had realized that, as he said, he had allowed his mind to be “darkened by things.” His mind darkened by the thought of his prey, he had permitted himself to “forget himself,” just like the cicada, the praying mantis, and the magpie. It seems to me that this discovery would not have perturbed him as much as it did if he had not glimpsed through it something more fundamental. He must have grasped that consciousness when ‘darkened by things’ or by *a thing* becomes thereby a form of unconsciousness. Consciousness of *a thing* precludes the consciousness of *other things* as well as of *oneself*, which necessarily makes it a form of “forgetfulness of oneself.” In a dangerous world that, too, is a trap: someone who is aware of *one thing* is thereby blind to all the rest and can at any time become the prey of the dangers that are lying in wait for him.

It must have been in this particular fashion that in the park at Diaoling the limits of consciousness were revealed to Zhuangzi. He must on the instant have grasped that the feeling of mastery that it conveys is an illusion, because it is never anything but a phenomenon of a secondary kind, a glow of light standing out against the blackness of surrounding night. At that moment he must have had the fundamental intuition on which his philosophy is based, or one of these intuitions.

This interpretation agrees with that proposed by A. C. Graham.⁷⁵ In his sketch of the probable path followed by Zhuangzi he suggests that he may have had the Confucian education that well-born young men of that time received, and which instilled in them the duties associated with their rank, the first and foremost of these being to serve their ruler. Later on Zhuangzi would have adhered to the ideas of Yang Zhu, who called on the members of the ruling class to question themselves about these obligations, and to ask whether or not it was in their personal interest, or indeed even in the general interest, in an age where intrigue, treason, and violence reigned everywhere, for them thus to place themselves at the service of the state.⁷⁶ During one part of his life Zhuangzi himself probably propagated these ideas. Later, following the crisis of which we probably have an account in the story of the magpie, he would have begun to develop his own philosophy. It is still in his early role as a master in the school of Yang Zhu that he appears in this text.

A. C. Graham has identified several terms that are characteristic of the Yang school, and whose presence supports his thesis.⁷⁷ When Zhuangzi cries out, in the dialogue, “my gaze was deep in muddy water that I thought was clear!” he is using an image that figures prominently in a short treatise from

⁷⁵ Graham, *Inner chapters*, pp.117–18.

⁷⁶ On this important movement of ideas, see Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, pp.53–64. This would explain the presence in chapters 28–31 of the *Zhuangzi* of a corpus of texts that reflect the positions of the school of Yang Zhu rather than those that Zhuangzi later developed. Even after he had changed his orientation it may have been the case that the adherents of the Yang Zhu school continued to regard him as one of their members, and thus rightly or wrongly attributed to him certain texts that were circulating amongst them, texts that were subsequently incorporated into the *Zhuangzi*.

⁷⁷ See Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, p.176. These are, notably, *zhen* 真 in its sense of a person's ‘life’ (see above, note 71) and *xiang lei* 相累, the ‘beings linked by a chain the one with the other’ (see note 72). As to *shou xing* 守形, ‘obsessed by things’ or ‘preserving one's body’ see note 74 above.

⁷⁸ "It is in the nature of water to be clear, but when mud makes it turbid, its clarity is not apparent. It is in the nature of a human being to live for a long time, but when external matters disturb him, this longevity does not come to be. Things should serve to nourish his nature, and not his nature to nourish [other] things." See *Lüshi chunqiu*, book 1, chapter "Ben sheng."

Yang Zhu's school that is included in the *Lüshi chunqiu*.⁷⁸ Zhuangzi's sentence seems to mean: "My consciousness was disturbed by external matters, just as a stretch of water may be made turbid by mud." The following sentence, "My master told me, 'Whithersoever you go, respect the rules'," seems to refer to the advice to be prudent that Zhuangzi's master, an adept of the school of Yang Zhu, would have given him: "To safeguard that which is most precious to you, namely your life, avoid conflicts that serve no purpose, adapt yourself." This is the prudence that he reproaches himself for having, it would seem, lost when he let his mind be darkened by the magpie and his setting off to knock it down in a park where hunting was forbidden.

In Graham's view, Zhuangzi would have realized when this crisis took place that taking care of oneself as preached by the school of Yang Zhu could only secure a deceptive safety, since violence and death are everywhere and spare no one. He would have realized that true wisdom lies in lucidity and in the acceptance of death. In my opinion, a careful reading of the tale of the magpie allows one to form a more precise idea of what was going on in his mind. It is probable that the faith of the adepts of the Yang school in a human being's ability to guarantee his (or her) security by means of a simple analysis as to what is in his interest appeared naive to him. The human being, or so he must have said to himself, is not the master of his life. His consciousness, which gives him the illusion of mastery, blinds him. Consciousness is simultaneously vision and blindness. Most often it is a blindness that delivers a person to the forces that assail him from without, but also from within himself. I cannot but help thinking that the vision of the strange magpie is the form that the inner powers, those of dreams or the unconscious (or of the body, in the sense that I gave it earlier), took on at that moment for Zhuangzi." What is remarkable in this story is that the attacks by the internal powers and by the external ones are put on the same footing. For consciousness these assaults are indeed both equally external.

I somehow feel that there was a relationship between such a revelation as this and the philosophy that Zhuangzi developed later, in which one can detect a constant fascination with that enigmatic, fragile, and threatened phenomenon that is human consciousness. It is easy to imagine a link between an experience of this nature and Zhuangzi's extremely sensitive awareness of the effect that forces rising out of the body exert on consciousness, no less than the unexpected effect that someone through these same forces sometimes exerts on others. This sensitivity is manifest in the dialogues that we have just read, and this inclines one to think that, if they are not the personal work of Zhuangzi himself, they must at all events be faithful to his inspiration.

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