

The Dao Admits of No Admixture: Mysticism and Moral Realism in Zhuangzi's Writings¹

JOSEPH EMMANUEL D. STA. MARIA

ATENEO DE MANILA UNIVERSITY

Abstract

Recent philosophical scholarship tends to cast Zhuangzi's philosophy as promoting moral relativism. This is especially true with Chad Hansen's interpretation of Zhuangzi's writings. This article seeks to challenge this dominant relativist reading by showing that such a reading does not align with the numerous normative and evaluative remarks that can be found in Zhuangzi's work. Furthermore, this article aims to show that it is more plausible that Zhuangzi's metaethical view is that of moral realism instead of moral relativism. This is because a moral realist interpretation of Zhuangzi's philosophy fits more, not only with the aforesaid

¹ This article is based on the author's thesis "Being Sent by Dao: A Defense and Exposition of Zhuangzi's Mysticism and Mystical Metaethics," which was submitted as a requirement for graduation in his Master of Arts course in Philosophy.

evaluative and normative remarks of Zhuangzi's writings, but also with the mystical elements found in the same writings.

Keywords: *Zhuangzi, Moral Relativism, Moral Realism, Mysticism*

Recent philosophical scholarship on Zhuangzi has portrayed him as espousing moral relativism. This is especially true of Chad Hansen's interpretation of Zhuangzi in his works *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought* and "Guru or Skeptic? Relativistic Skepticism in the Zhuangzi."² In the latter work, Hansen claims that his relativist interpretation has changed the paradigm of philosophical scholarship on Zhuangzi's writings, such that "Today, it is more common for a work on Zhuangzi to discuss skepticism or relativism than mysticism."³ In this article, I argue that, despite this paradigm shift, moral realism—the opposite of moral relativism—can still be a viable label for Zhuangzi's metaethical view. Specifically, I believe that it is more plausible to ascribe moral realism to Zhuangzi's writings, because it avoids interpretive

² Chad Hansen, *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Chad Hansen, "Guru or Skeptic? Relativistic Skepticism in the Zhuangzi," in *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi*, ed. Scott Cook (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 128–62.

³ Hansen, "Guru or Skeptic?," 128.

difficulties that the moral relativist view faces. It also takes into serious consideration the mystical elements of said writings. In light of this then, my article shall proceed as follows: Beginning with a description of the moral relativist view of Zhuangzi's writings as exemplified by Hansen's work, it will then point out the interpretive difficulties that this view runs into. Following this, the article will discuss the mystical elements of Zhuangzi's writings concluding with an explanation of how Zhuangzi's mysticism makes it more likely that Zhuangzi's metaethics is moral realist.

Zhuangzi as a Moral Relativist

The gist of the moral relativist interpretation of Zhuangzi can be stated as follows: For Zhuangzi, all *daos* or “ways” are equally good since there is no superior (moral) viewpoint by which to judge them. Now, what exactly is a *dao*? For Hansen, *daos* are “wholesale guiding structures that include ways of describing and categorizing things for action. The norms of meaning and epistemic norms are included along with those of ethics. All such norms make up our comprehensive view or a ‘form of life.’⁴ In short, a *dao* can be considered as one's “point of view.” This point of view in turn is the corollary of one's particular upbringing or the circumstances of one's life.

⁴ Hansen, “Guru or Skeptic?,” 134.

Hansen reads Zhuangzi as believing that one cannot use the dao that one adheres to, in order to judge an alternative dao. The very standards of evaluation that a person follows is part of that person's dao and so is incommensurable with another dao.⁵ A very simple example of this would be two people facing each other. Since they are at different locations, they will literally have different views. For instance, the tree that is on the right for one of them will be on the left for the other—strictly speaking there is no way to reconcile these opposing views. Thus for Hansen's Zhuangzi, evaluating one dao by way of another is an exercise in futility. It merely shows the failure of people to understand that they follow ultimately different daos. A point arguably supported by Zhuangzi's own comment on the perennial debates between the Confucian and Mohist philosophers. Zhuangzi says:

And so we have the “That’s it, That’s not” of the Confucians and Mohists, by which what is *it* for one of them for the other is not, what is *not* for one of them for the other is. If you wish to affirm what they deny and deny what they affirm, the best means is Illumination.⁶

Indeed, for Hansen, the “illumination” that Zhuangzi talks about is precisely the realization that people have different

⁵ Hansen, *A Daoist Theory*, 275–76.

⁶ Zhuangzi, *Chuang-Tzu: The Inner Chapters*, trans. Angus Graham, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2001), 52.

(and irreconcilable) points of views or daos based on their unique circumstance or “position” in life.⁷

Neither can there be an appeal to a supreme, objective, moral point of view such as nature or Heaven (*Tian* 天). For Zhuangzi, as Hansen reads him, nature or Heaven is merely the totality of all things. It does not serve as a normative ground. It merely gives birth to all beings, including all daos, but is biased towards none of them.⁸ Appealing to nature or Heaven though is precisely what certain contemporaries of Zhuangzi have tried to do in legitimizing their moral philosophies. Mencius for instance attempts to legitimize the Confucian dao, or way of life, over its rivals by postulating that the Confucian virtues are but the inevitable development of the natural feelings of the human heart-mind (*xin* 心)⁹, which in turn were placed there by Heaven.¹⁰ By showing that all human daos are natural and that nature itself does not serve as a ground for normativity, Zhuangzi thus disabuses thinkers like Mencius of their confidence in the normative supremacy of their respective dao.

⁷ Hansen, *A Daoist Theory*, 281.

⁸ This is what Hansen understands to be the message of the story about the pipes of heaven, earth, and man, found in the second chapter of the *Zhuangzi*. See: Hansen, *A Daoist Theory*, 274–75.

⁹ *Xin* although strictly representing the heart is translated in philosophical literature often as “heart-mind” because in Classical Chinese Philosophy it is generally considered as the seat of both the cognitive and affective faculties of the human being. See: John Berthrong, “Xin (Hsin): Heart and Mind,” in *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Antonio Cua (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), 795.

¹⁰ Hansen, *A Daoist Theory*, 277.

The above is a summary of the moral relativist interpretation of Zhuangzi. However, this interpretation runs into some difficulties because of how Zhuangzi's writings themselves fail to square with it. That is to say, if Zhuangzi is advocating the idea that all daos are equally legitimate, and that there is no ultimate standard by which to evaluate their normative value relative to one another, then it would seem difficult to account for certain (strong) evaluative and normative statements that he himself writes about. For instance, there are areas in Zhuangzi's writings where he seems to be clearly pointing to a way of life that is superior to all others, and in pointing this out, he concomitantly gives a negative evaluation of the way of life of people in general. An example is the anecdote near the end of the chapter "Equalizing Assessment of Things." Through the character of Zhang Wuzi, Zhuangzi tries to show how the sage is distinct from the rest of the masses. He says:

Those who dream of drinking wine cry and sob at daybreak, while those who dream of crying and sobbing go to work the fields and hunt at daybreak. Being situated in their dreams, they do not know of their dreaming. In the midst of dreaming they even interpret a dream, awaken and afterward know of their dreaming. Moreover, there will be a great awakening and afterward they will know of this [life's] being a great dream; but

the misguided consider themselves to be awake, knowing this presumptuously. A lord! A herdsmen! Such certainty! Confucius and you—both of you are dreaming. I am saying you are dreaming— even this is a dream. This is known by the name of the Great Deception. Ten thousand generations pass and at once meet with a great sage that can unravel it; this will be a brief encounter with him.¹¹

As Wayne Gary Kreger says, the basic message of this passage seems to be that the people suffer from a kind of ignorance of the true state of reality—metaphorically spoken of as a dream—and that only the sage is free from such ignorance.¹²

A more individual example of Zhuangzi criticizing a dao is when he scolds his friend Huizi who was considered a member of the “School of Names” or terminologists.¹³ Zhuangzi believed Huizi to be too immersed in logical hair-splitting to enjoy the ideal kind of life. As Zhuangzi says:

Now you [i.e., Huizi], on the other hand, treat your spirit like a stranger and labor your vitality,

¹¹ Wayne Gary Kreger, “The Experience of Knowing: Illusion and Illumination in the Zhuangzi and the Platform Sūtra,” (Master’s Thesis, University of British Columbia, 2010), 19–20.

¹² Ibid., 19–21.

¹³ See: Fung Yu-Lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 83–87.

leaning against a door screen reciting your
disputations or nodding off across your desk.
Heaven chose your physical form, and here you
are using it to crow on about “hardness” and
“whiteness!”¹⁴

Zhuangzi is also known to criticize Confucius himself and his way of life as in the chapter “Markers of Full Virtuosity,” where the character Toeless gives a negative evaluation of Confucius:

Toeless told Old Dan, “As an aspirant to be a perfected being, Confucius is not quite there. Why does he pretend to have a train of disciples? He seems to be seeking something fantastic and strange like a good name. Doesn’t he understand that the perfected being considers it like handcuffs and shackles?”¹⁵

From this it seems clear that the message Zhuangzi is trying to relay is that acting out of a desire for a good name is normatively worse than otherwise. And so, there are certain

¹⁴ Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, trans. Brook Ziporyn (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2009), 38. With regards to “hardness” and “whiteness” Ziporyn says that “their relationship to specific white and hard beings, and to what degree they can exist in separation from one another, were among the topics hotly debated by the ancient Chinese logicians, including Huizi.” See: Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi*, 38, n.18.

¹⁵ Jung Lee, *The Ethical Foundations of Early Daoism: Zhuangzi’s Unique Moral Vision* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 21.

“forms of life” or daos that can be worse than others. It should also be noted that in this story Confucius is further described by Toeless as punished by Heaven,¹⁶ conveying that Zhuangzi did not consider Heaven or nature as normatively neutral.

Finally, aside from negatively evaluating certain ways of life or actions, Zhuangzi gives positive evaluations or portrayals of what appear to be ideal lifestyles. An example would be Zhuangzi’s description of the Genuine Human Being in the chapter “The Great Source as Teacher”:

The Genuine Human Beings of old slept without dreaming and awoke without worries. Their food was plain but their breathing was deep. The Genuine Human Beings breathed from their heels, while the mass of men breathed from their throats. Submissive and defeated they gulp down their words and just as soon vomit them back up. Their preferences and desires run deep, but the Heavenly Impulse is shallow in them.¹⁷

Here, Genuine Human Beings are contrasted with the majority of humanity and it is implied that the former live more ideal lives than the latter. This is further supported by the fact that this passage that I quote is only a part of a lengthier description of the Genuine Human Being, which

¹⁶ Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi*, 36.

¹⁷ Ibid., 40.

seeks to show and praise his ideal state.¹⁸ Thus by contrasting the masses of men with the Genuine Human Being in this aforementioned description, it is implied that these masses of men live precisely un-ideal states.

I believe that these examples are sufficient to portray that Zhuangzi's writings do not express the idea that all daos are ultimately of equal normative value. Rather, there seems to be a certain way of life which Zhuangzi, with categorical conviction it seems, considers as "better" than others. In order to have an idea as to what this ideal way of life is, it is necessary to look into the mystical elements of Zhuangzi's writings.

Zhuangzi's Mysticism

In order to see whether there are mystical elements in Zhuangzi's writings, a definition of "mysticism" is first required. In agreement with Thomas McConochie, I shall adopt Steven Katz's definition of mysticism from the latter's book *Comparative Mysticism: An Anthology of Original Sources*.¹⁹ This definition states that "Mysticism is the quest for the direct experience of God, Being, or Ultimate Reality, however these are understood, that is, theistically or non-theistically."²⁰ For our purposes, this definition can further

¹⁸ Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi*, 39–42.

¹⁹ Thomas McConochie, "Mysticism in the *Zhuangzi*," (PhD Diss., University of New South Wales, 2017), 48.

²⁰ Steven Katz, ed., *Comparative Mysticism: An Anthology of Original Sources* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3.

be divided into two parts, namely, “the quest for direct experience,” and “God, Being, or Ultimate Reality.”

Let us look at the latter part first. Is there anything in Zhuangzi’s writings that seem to fit the description of god, being, or ultimate reality? I believe that “dao” itself is, for Zhuangzi, something that can arguably be considered as ultimate reality. What does it mean, however, for something to be ultimate reality? Wesley Wildman provides a most basic definition of ultimate reality, as that which all determinate reality ontologically depends on as its “whence.”²¹ Although Wildman does not explain more explicitly what “whence” means, it can be inferred from the few things that he says about it, that it simply signifies that which determinate reality is, in the final case, ontologically dependent on.²² From this definition, other descriptions of the ultimate reality can be deduced.

The first definition is that ultimate reality, as that which all other realities depend on, cannot itself have ontological dependencies on anything else; indeed, as Wildman says, ultimate reality would not be *ultimate*, if it did.²³ A corollary of this is that ultimate reality is of a categorically different

²¹ Wesley Wildman, “Really Ultimate Reality,” *Theology and Science* 15, no. 3 (2017): 261, accessed November 25, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2017.1335061>.

²² Wildman though does say that the term “whence” is something he borrowed from Friedrich Schleiermacher, but he does not explain more. See: Wildman, “Really Ultimate Reality,” 262.

²³ Wildman, “Really Ultimate Reality,” 262.

kind than the determinate realities that depend on it. As Wildman says, ultimate reality is not a being similar to any other kind of being, “because otherwise it would be subject to the structures and dynamics of being.”²⁴ Being subject to the structures and dynamics of being would mean that ultimate reality would somehow be conditioned by, and depend on, these aforesaid structures and dynamics for its own existence. This, again, would prevent it from being the ultimate reality. Wildman’s description of ultimate reality can be understood as one which indicates its “transcendent” aspect, since it precisely brings to light how ultimate reality transcends, or is beyond the nature of, its non-ultimate counterpart(s).

In Zhuangzi’s writings, *dao* is described with this similar sense of transcendence over beings. Specifically, in the chapter, “The Great Source as Teacher,” *dao* is said to have:

Its own tendency and consistency, but without any deliberate activity or definite form. . . . Being its own roots and its own foundation, it exists firmly even when heaven and earth are not yet there. It makes the spirits and the Lord-on-High divine, generates both heaven and earth. It is above the summit without being high, beneath the nadir without being deep. It precedes heaven

²⁴ Wildman, “Really Ultimate Reality,” 262.

and earth without being of long duration. It is elder to the earliest antiquity without being old.²⁵

Here, *dao* is described as that which antedates and generates “heaven and earth.” It should be noted that the compound word *tiandi*, translated as the phrase “heaven and earth,” does not mean Heaven as the supreme deity or power, but rather, the entirety of the visible world.²⁶ *Dao* is also said to be that which made the spirits and the Lord-on-High,²⁷ divine. It is *dao* that made them what they are. Thus, *dao* might be understood as that which all beings, visible and invisible, depend on for their existence. Conversely, *dao* itself is described as being its own root and foundation, which implies that it is not dependent on anything else for its existence. Finally, that *dao* is described as having no form, as well as paradoxically being above the summit without being high, being beneath the *nadir* without being deep, and being elder to the eldest antiquity without being ancient, arguably indicates that *dao* is not conditioned and limited by the structures and dynamics of beings, particularly the spatio-temporal dimensions of which phenomenal beings consist.

²⁵ Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi*, 43–44.

²⁶ Eske Møllgaard, *An Introduction to Daoist Thought: Action, Language, and Ethics in Zhuangzi* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 6.

²⁷ The god of the Shang dynasty, which was appropriated by the Zhou dynasty and conflated with their own god, Heaven. See: Confucius, *Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, trans. Edward Slingerland (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2003), xviii.

However, ultimate reality is not merely understood as transcendent to its non-ultimate, but also immanent in it. Indeed, immanence and transcendence unavoidably go together as mutually determinative characteristics of ultimate reality.²⁸ As Chin Tai-Kim explains:

Both transcendence and immanence are relational notions that relate the ground to the grounded beings. If the unconditioned ground is interpreted to be ontologically transcendent to the grounded beings, there arises a task of explicating their relationship that overcomes their *chorismos* [i.e., separation]. The region of such relationship is the region of the ground's immanence in the grounded beings. If, on the other hand, the unconditioned ground is interpreted to be ontologically immanent in the grounded beings, their relationship is secured, but the unconditioned status of the ground must be restored. A suitable notion of transcendence must be re-introduced to reserve the ontological dignity of the unconditioned ground. Transcendence and immanence thus defy

²⁸ Chin Tai-Kim, "Transcendence and Immanence," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55, no. 3 (Autumn 1987): 537, accessed September 10, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1464069>.

separation; they exist in a tension in any reflective conception of ultimate reality.²⁹

Is there however any indication, then of dao's immanence in Zhuangzi's writings? In chapter two of the *Zhuangzi*, Zhuangzi appears to state the omnipresence of dao in a brief rhetorical question: "Wherever we walk, how can the Way [i.e., dao] be absent?"³⁰

Perhaps a better indication of dao's immanence can be found in the lines immediately succeeding the above cited description of dao, in the chapter "The Great Source as Teacher."

Xiwei got it [i.e., dao] and thereby put the measure around heaven and earth. Fuxi got it and thereby inherited the matrix of vital energy. The Big Dipper got it and thereby has remained undeflected since antiquity. The sun and moon got it and thereby have continued without ceasing since antiquity. Kanpi got it and thereby inherited the power of Mt. Kunlun. Pingyi got it and thereby roams the great rivers. Jien Wu got it and thereby dwells on the heights of Mt. Tai. The Yellow Emperor got it and ascended the clouds of Heaven. ZhuanXu got it and thereby occupies the Dark Palace. Yu Qiang got it and

²⁹ Chin Tai Kim, "Transcendence and Immanence," 145–146.

³⁰ Zhuangzi, *Chuang-Tzu*, 52.

thereby took his place at the Northern Extremity. The Queen Mother of the West got it and thereby took her seat on Mt. Shaoguang—no one knows her beginning or her end. Pengzu got it and thereby remained alive all the way back from the time of Shun Youyu down to the time of the Five Tyrants. Fu Yue got it and thereby ministered to Wuding, who took possession of the world, rode upon the Dong-wei galaxy, mounted upon the Qiwei constellation, and assumed his place arrayed among the stars.³¹

Dao in this passage is described as being attained by various entities. By attaining dao, these entities were able to achieve what they were “meant to do or be.” For instance, the Big Dipper attained dao and therefore remained undeflected—it never swerved from its course in the sky. The sun and moon also attained dao and from then on have also remained constant in their movement in the heavens. Likewise, Pengzu, who is known in Chinese folklore as an extraordinarily aged person, attained dao, and was able precisely to live for such a long time. At any rate, this passage merely shows that dao exists immanently in the world through these beings that receive it.

There are other places in Zhuangzi’s writings that can substantiate the idea that dao is immanent in phenomenal

³¹ Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi*, 44.

reality. For instance, McConochie cites the character Xuyou's description of his teacher ³² which appears to describe the all-encompassing (and therefore immanent) nature of dao. The context of Xuyou's story is this: Yierzi went to see Xuyou and the former described to him how the Sage-King Yao taught him (Yierzi) to devote himself to benevolence and righteousness. Xuyou scoffs at Yierzi saying that Yao's teaching will make sure that he will no longer be able to "wander along the free and unrestrained path."³³ Xuyou then gives a description of his own teacher: "My teacher! My teacher! My teacher chops up the myriad things, yet is not righteous. My teacher blesses all people, yet are [sic] not humane. My teacher is older than antiquity, yet is not ancient. My teacher covers Heaven and bear [sic] up Earth, and carves up all forms, but is not skillful [sic]."³⁴ According to McConochie, the teacher described here is not any human being, but dao.³⁵ This can be inferred from the descriptions given to Xuyou's teacher such as being older than antiquity yet not being ancient. This echoes the description above of dao as being elder to the eldest antiquity, but not being old. Also, that his teacher is what

³² McConochie, "Mysticism in the Zhuangzi," 260. The character Xuyou is also found in the chapter "The Great Source as Teacher" See: Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi*, 48–49.

³³ McConochie, "Mysticism in the Zhuangzi," 260.

³⁴ Ibid., 261.

³⁵ Ibid., 263.

“carves up all forms” can be understood as his teacher being what gives things their shape, that is to say, what produces them. However, more importantly, Xuyou’s teacher is described as covering heaven and bearing up the earth. As McConochie implies, this imagery gives the sense that Xuyou’s teacher encompasses or pervades all things.³⁶ This then indicates the immanence of dao in the world.

Finally, according to McConochie, the notion that dao is encompassing is also seen in a description of it from chapter two of the *Zhuangzi*, “Equalizing Assessments of Things.” McConochie calls this description as “Dao Pervades and Unifies,” and I cite here part of his translation of it:

If we take stalks and pillars, the ugly and the beautiful, the strange and the grotesque, dao (道) pervades (tong 通) them and makes them into one. Their division is their completion. Their completion is their ruin. Hence, all things are without [total] completion or ruin. They return to pervade (tong 通) into one. Only one who is truly intelligent understands how they pervade (tong 通) into one.³⁷

³⁶ McConochie does not explicitly say that it is this specific description that gives the idea that dao is all-encompassing. What he does say is that the entire anecdote itself is what gives the idea. See: McConochie, “Mysticism in the *Zhuangzi*,” 260.

³⁷ McConochie, “Mysticism in the *Zhuangzi*,” 276.

Here, dao is explicitly described as pervading (*tong* 通) things and making them into one (*weiji* 為一). How this specifically occurs can be explained by another Zhuangzian scholar, Harold Roth:

[T]he Way [i.e., dao] pervades everything and in pervading them unifies them. They are unified to the extent that each and every thing contains the Way within it; and they are unified in that, from the perspective of the Way within, each thing is seen to be equal. Because they attain this Way, sages can have the same perspective.³⁸

From what has been said above, it seems safe to assume that for Zhuangzi, dao is the ultimate reality that is both transcendent and immanent in relation to the world. Dao is transcendent in that it existed before the world and generates it, while of itself it is not generated and is dependent on nothing. Being dependent on nothing, dao is unconditioned by the structures and dynamics that constitute the rest of beings, such as space and time. However, dao is also immanent in the world, because it pervades things. Furthermore, it is implied through Zhuangzi's descriptions that dao is the normative order of the cosmos. It is that force which moves things into

³⁸ Harold Roth, "Bimodal Mystical Experience in the 'Qiwulun,'" in *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi*, ed. Scott Cook (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 43, n.61.

becoming “what they are meant to be;” it is dao that sets the heavenly bodies on their proper course, and it is also dao that bears up the earth. Dao is also the normative order for human beings in the sense that the human agents who attained dao became “what they were supposed to be” according to history. This idea that dao is the normative or moral order that humans should follow can, perhaps, be further made explicit when discussing the first part of the definition of mysticism, and how it can be found in Zhuangzi’s writings.

Again, this first part of the definition of mysticism consists of the statement “the quest for direct experience (of God, Being, or Ultimate Reality).” According to scholars of Zhuangzi’s writings such as the aforementioned Harold Roth, Thomas McConochie, and also Livia Kohn, there indeed are such indications of this quest.³⁹ To be specific, there are places in Zhuangzi’s writings that appear to portray ascetic practices that are a means of inducing union with dao. Roth collectively calls these practices the “apophatic method.”⁴⁰ According to Roth, “apophasis” or “apophatic” is traditionally “associated with a particular mode of approach to the nature of God in the writings of Christian mystics, the so-called *via negativa*, in which God is described

³⁹ McConochie, “Mysticism in the Zhuangzi,” 228–229; 286–298.

⁴⁰ Harold Roth, *Original Tao: Inward Training (Nei-yeh) and the Foundations of Taoist Mysticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 228.

using negative language.”⁴¹ However, Roth’s own usage of “apophatic” or “apophasis” means “a method of negating the self in order to facilitate an experience of the Absolute, however conceived.”⁴² This method involves “a systematic process of negating, forgetting, or emptying out the contents of consciousness (perceptions, emotions, desires, thoughts) found in ordinary experience based in the ego-self.”⁴³ For the mystic, the point of this negation is, precisely, to experience the ultimate reality in an unmediated way.

Now, Roth implies that this apophatic method appears to be a common characteristic of mysticism through the different religious traditions of the world. This is corroborated by another scholar of mysticism, Robert Forman, who coins the term “Forgetting Model” to describe a common practice among mystics of different religious traditions. This appears similar to the apophatic method.⁴⁴ As its name implies, this forgetting model entails the “forgetting” or removal from one’s consciousness all of its usual contents, such as “every thought, sensation, emotion.”⁴⁵ Forman claims that such a model can be inferred from the writings of mystics in the different religious traditions. To support this,

⁴¹ Roth, *Original Tao*.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid. Cf. Richard Jones, *Philosophy of Mysticism: Raids on the Ineffable* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2016), 5.

⁴⁴ See: Robert Forman, *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 3–49.

⁴⁵ Forman, *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*, 39.

he examines the writings of Meister Eckhart, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and Buddhaghosa.⁴⁶ The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* for instance says:

[L]ook thou forsake, with a strong and a sly [subtle] and a listy contrition, both thy bodily wits (as hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and touching), and also thy ghostly wits, the which be called thine understandable workings, and all those things the which may be known with any of thy five bodily wits without-forth; and all those things the which may be known by thy ghostly wits within-forth; and all those things that be now, or yet have been, though they be not now; and all those things that be not now, or yet may in time for to come, though they be not now. . . . [T]hrough the overpassing of thyself and all other things, and thus making thyself clean from all worldly, fleshly, and natural liking in thine affection, and from all things that may be known by the proper form in thy knowing, thou shall be drawn up above mind in affection to the sovereign-substantial beam of the godly darkness, all things thus done away.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Forman, *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*, 30–33.

⁴⁷ *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Treatises*, trans. Justin McCann (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1952), 140–41, quoted in Forman, *Problem of Pure Consciousness*, 32.

The author of *The Cloud* urges his reader to first cease giving attention to the five senses and to the sensory data that is perceived through them. He then admonishes him to forsake even those “ghostly wits,” which, as implied by Forman, means those mental faculties that produce mental content independent of the five senses, such as the imagination, understanding, and memory.⁴⁸ This, of course, also means abandoning the aforesaid mental content that these ghostly wits create. It is only by turning away from these sense and mental faculties, and by also abjuring the content that they produce, that the human souls can be brought up to experience the Divine.

Meister Eckhart similarly says in his sermons that only when the human soul forgets its usual mental and sensual experiences, and the functioning of its mental and sense faculties, can the Divine Word be spoken within it and actively work through it.⁴⁹

They must know that the very best and noblest attainment in this life is to be silent and let God work and speak within. When the powers [i.e. the mental and sense faculties] have been completely withdrawn from all their works and images, then the Word is spoken. . . . And so, the

⁴⁸ Forman, *Problem of Pure Consciousness*, 32.

⁴⁹ Meister Eckhart, *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, trans. Maurice O’C Walshe (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2010), 33.

more completely you are able to draw in your powers to a unity and forget all those things and their images which you have absorbed, and the further you can get from creatures and their images, the nearer you are to this and the readier to receive it. . . . In this case [i.e., in such a state] the spirit had so entirely absorbed the powers that it had forgotten the body: memory no longer functioned, nor understanding, nor the senses.⁵⁰

Although not mentioned by Forman, mystical practices in Hinduism also appear to corroborate the apophatic or “forgetting model.” In the Yoga Sutras, for instance, Patanjali describes the “eight limbs” or steps of yoga that lead to union with the Atman or Supreme Self:

The eight limbs of yoga are: the various forms of abstention from evil-doing (yama), the various observances (niyamas), posture (asana), control of the prana [breath] (pranayama), withdrawal of the mind from sense objects (pratyahara), concentration (dharana), meditation (dhyana), and absorption in the Atman (samadhi).⁵¹

⁵⁰ Meister Eckhart, *Complete Mystical Works*, p. 33.

⁵¹ Patanjali, *How to Know God: The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*, trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (Hollywood, CA: Vedanta Press, 1953), 140–41.

The fifth step, *pratyahara*, involves purifying the mind from attachments to all sensible and mental content, so that it may concentrate—the sixth step, *dharana*—on only one mental object, for example, the image of the god Isvara.⁵² This image, in turn, serves as a means to guide the mind into unity with the ultimate reality.

Once the mind achieves a singular focus on this one mental image—no longer interrupted by any disturbances or any desire to focus on other objects—it then reaches the level of meditation, or *dhyana*. The last stage, *samadhi*, is when the true Self, namely, the Atman or Purusa, reveals itself to the meditator. This can be regarded as the meditator's direct experience with ultimate reality. *Samadhi*, however, is of two types: that with support, and that without support.⁵³ In *samadhi*, with support, the meditator becomes aware of the ultimate reality, through becoming one with the mental image that represents such a reality as, for example, the aforesaid god Isvara. In such a state, the meditator is still aware of the duality between his own consciousness and its object. However, in *Samadhi*, without support, this duality is ultimately transcended; there is no longer any “object” to focus and meditate upon, since the meditator becomes wholly absorbed in the ultimate reality, and becomes one

⁵² Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, 2nd ed., trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 73–76.

⁵³ Eliade, *Yoga*, 73–76

with it.⁵⁴ Mircea Eliade describes the consciousness of the meditator in this state as an “entasis of total emptiness, without sensory content or intellectual structure.”⁵⁵ However, this does not mean that the consciousness is absolutely empty, but rather, it is only empty of objects or specific determinations of being. Such determinations of being can no longer exist in the meditator’s consciousness, precisely because he has become one with pure being itself.⁵⁶

Now, in Zhuangzi’s writings, there do appear portrayals of practices that can be categorized under the Forgetting Model. Indeed, these practices are what Roth similarly considers as examples of the Apophatic Method in Zhuangzi’s work. One example is the story between Confucius and Yan Hui about fasting the heart-mind, found in the fourth chapter of the *Zhuangzi*. In this story, Hui says that he plans to go to the state of Wei and be of service to its abusive ruler, with the hope of reforming the latter. Confucius is skeptical of Hui’s chances of success despite the elaborate schemes that the latter proposes. Confucius then tells Hui to fast his heart-mind. He says:

Unify your intention [zhi 志]! It is better to listen with your heart/mind than to listen with your ears, but better still to listen with your qi than to

⁵⁴ Eliade, *Yoga*, 79–80, 91.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 93.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 95.

listen with your heart/mind. Listening stops with the ears and the heart/mind stops with matching things up [fu 符] but qi is tenuous [xu 虛] and waits upon things. Only the Way [i.e., dao] will gather in tenuousness . . . Tenuousness is the fasting of the heart/mind.⁵⁷

After precisely fasting his heart-mind, Hui says that “Before I find what moves me into activity, it is myself that is full and real. But as soon as I find what moves me, it turns out that ‘myself’ has never begun to exist.”⁵⁸ Confucius then congratulates Hui and the latter is arguably able to fulfill his mission successfully.

According to Edward Slingerland, in the story above, the heart-mind is metaphorically depicted as a stomach, the contents of which must be fasted away, so that only qi remains.⁵⁹ *Qi*, because it is empty (qi originally meant vapour or air)⁶⁰ or tenuous, allows “room” for the dao to gather in the heart-mind. In other words, the sense and mental faculties, along with the data that they store, should be put aside to allow direct experience with the ultimate reality that is dao. This process of fasting the heart-mind fits with

⁵⁷ Edward Slingerland, *Effortless Action: Wu-Wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 183.

⁵⁸ Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi*, 27.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁶⁰ Chung-ying Cheng, “Qi (Ch’i): Vital Force,” in *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Antonio Cua (New York: Routledge, 2003), 615.

Roth's understanding of the Apophatic Method. Indeed, if one compares the process of fasting the heart-mind with the process of forsaking the bodily and ghostly wits found in the *Cloud of Unknowing*, one can see that both processes appear to have similar structures.

In the *Cloud of Unknowing* one must forsake one's "bodily wits," meaning the five senses, and then one's "ghostly wits," meaning the other mental faculties that produce mental content without being dependent on the senses, such as one's understanding. This in turn also seems to be the case with the fasting of the heart-mind. Hui is first urged not to listen with his ears, which implies abnegating the sense faculties and the sense data in his consciousness. Then he is urged not to listen even with his heart-mind, which implies abnegating the non-sensory mental faculties, as well as the non-sensory content of his consciousness. Instead, Hui should listen using his qi leading to the heart-mind becoming empty, similar to how a stomach is such when having fasted. It is in the emptiness, then, of the heart-mind that dao can gather. Dao, gathering within Hui's heart-mind, apparently leads to mystical union with dao, which entails direct experience of it, as is corroborated by Hui's realization that he has never begun to exist. In other words, Hui has lost his sense of self because of experiencing his oneness with dao (and arguably the oneness of all things by virtue of dao being immanent in all).

Another example of the apophatic method that Roth says can be found in Zhuangzi's writings is the story of "sitting and forgetting," which appears to be a supplementary account of the abovementioned story of the fasting of the heart-mind. Like the story of the heart-mind fasting, this anecdote is a dialogue between Confucius and Yan Hui, where the latter is shown as removing the contents of his mind, or consciousness. However, the "sitting and forgetting" anecdote illustrates a more detailed account of this removing process. It goes as follows:

Yan Hui said, 'I am making progress.' Zhongni [i.e., Confucius] replied, 'What do you mean?' 'I have ceased to think of benevolence and righteousness,' was the reply. 'Very well; but that is not enough.' Another day, Hui again saw Zhongni, and said, 'I am making progress.' 'What do you mean?' 'I have lost all thought of ceremonies [i.e., ritual/*li* 禮] and music.' 'Very well, but that is not enough.' A third day, Hui again saw (the Master), and said, 'I am making progress.' 'What do you mean?' 'I sit and forget everything.' Zhongni changed countenance, and said, 'What do you mean by saying that you sit and forget (everything)?' Yan Hui replied, 'My connexion [sic] with the body and its parts is dissolved; my perceptive organs are discarded. Thus leaving my material form, and bidding

farewell to my knowledge, I am [sic] become one with the Great Pervader. This I call sitting and forgetting all things.’ Zhongni said, ‘One (with that Pervader), you are free from all likings; so transformed, you are [sic] become impermanent. You have, indeed, become superior to me! I must ask leave to follow in your steps.’⁶¹

Here, Yan Hui is shown to gradually remove from his mind (or heart-mind) the various mental contents that he, as a follower of Confucius, is expected to retain in his consciousness such as, precisely, benevolence and righteousness, as well as rituals and music.⁶² However, he goes beyond this, and even “forgets” his own body along with its senses. This process culminates in him attaining unity with the “Great Pervader (*datong* 大通),” which is most likely *dao*—as shown above, *dao* pervades (*tong* 通) all things.

A final example of what is arguably an instance of the apophatic method in Zhuangzi’s writings—although Roth

⁶¹ Zhuangzi, “The Great and Most Honored Master,” trans. James Legge, Chinese Text Project, accessed June 15, 2017, site edited and maintained by Donald Sturgeon, <http://ctext.org/zhuangzi/great-and-most-honoured-master>.

⁶² Yan Hui is known to be Confucius’ best disciple in the *Analects*. See: Amy Olberding, “Introduction,” in *Dao Companion to the Analects* ed. Amy Olberding (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 7. To see the significance of music in Confucius’ moral program see: Confucius, *Analects*, xxiii; Hagop Sarkissian, “Ritual and Rightness in the *Analects*,” in *Dao Companion to the Analects* ed. Amy Olberding (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 95–116.

does not consider it as such—is the story of Cook Ding and his cutting of the ox. This story is found in chapter three of the *Zhuangzi*, titled “The Primacy of Nourishing of Life.” In this story, Ding is a butcher in the service of King Hui. The latter saw him practicing his trade and was astonished at the skill that he showed. Ding is described as follows:

Wherever his hand smacked it, wherever his shoulder leaned into it, wherever his foot braced it, wherever his knee pressed it, the thwacking tones of flesh falling from bone would echo, the knife would whiz through with its resonant thwing, each stroke ringing out the perfect note, attuned to the “Dance of the Mulberry Grove” or the “Jingshou Chorus”. . .⁶³

King Hui then asks Ding how his skill could reach such heights.⁶⁴ Ding answers that what he cares for is *dao* which is “beyond mere skill.”⁶⁵ He further says:

When I first started cutting up oxen, all I looked at for three years was oxen, and yet still I was unable to see all there was to see in an ox. But now I encounter it with the spirit [i.e., *shen* 神] rather than scrutinizing it with the eyes. My

⁶³ Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi*, 22.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

understanding consciousness, beholden to its specific purpose, comes to a halt, and thus the promptings of the spirit begin to flow. I depend on Heaven's unwrought perforations [i.e., *tianli* 天理] and strike the larger gaps, following along with the broader hollows. I go by how they already are, playing them as they lay. So my knife has never had to cut through the knotted nodes where the warp hits the weave, much less the gnarled joints of bone. A good cook changes his blade once a year: he slices. An ordinary cook changes his blade once a month: he hacks. I have been using this same blade for nineteen years, cutting up thousands of oxen, and yet it is still as sharp as the day it came off the whetstone.⁶⁶

Now, Ding's account is reminiscent of the apophatic method, because it involves the setting aside of one's sense and mental faculties. Specifically, Ding has to let go of trusting his eyes, and eventually, even his understanding consciousness. Only then was he able to cut the ox perfectly, according to its natural patterns or Heaven's "unwrought perforations." In other words, what Ding arguably recounts is ultimately the process of attaining union with *dao*, which Ding says is what

⁶⁶ Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi*, 22.

he cares for and which he hints is that which is truly behind his ability to perfectly chop oxen (instead of skill).

From all that has been discussed, then, it seems that Zhuangzi does write of attempts or “quests” to directly experience dao or ultimate reality.⁶⁷ Consequently, it can be concluded that Zhuangzi’s writings include elements of mysticism. Indeed, it seems that, for Zhuangzi, an ideal human state is precisely achieving mystical union with dao. How though does understanding Zhuangzi’s mysticism lead to the conclusion that his metaethical view is more plausibly moral realism than moral relativism?

Zhuangzi’s Mystical Moral Realism

To defend the idea that Zhuangzi holds a moral realist metaethical view, it would be good to have a definition of moral realism, first. Moral realism can be described as the idea that “moral properties and/or facts exist and are in some way independent from people’s judgments.”⁶⁸ To be more precise, I shall borrow from Kevin DeLapp’s definition of moral realism since I think it squares more with what Zhuangzi’s writings implies. This definition states that moral realism is “The view that moral values exist in a way that is causally and evidentially . . . independent from beliefs

⁶⁷ For a more detailed demonstration of how a quest for direct experience of ultimate reality can be identified in Zhuangzi’s writings, see: McConochie, “Mysticism in the Zhuangzi,” 286–382.

⁶⁸ Andrew Fisher, *Metaethics: An Introduction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 180.

of anyone and everyone . . . such that evidence and beliefs do not determine or constitute those values, though they may adequately and reliably measure or reflect them.”⁶⁹ That moral value is causally independent means that “if moral values are ever known, it is through a kind of ‘discovery’ about something that already exists, rather than an invention of something new.”⁷⁰ Similarly, that moral value is evidentially independent means that such values “are distinct from our standards of discovery and justification, that is, the standards or process of justification may be invented by us, but the objects of the discovery are not.”⁷¹

Is there any notion in Zhuangzi’s writings that moral values exist independently of any person’s beliefs? I believe there is, and it lies in the idea that dao itself is not only the ontological ground, but also the normative ground of the universe. Again, this can be seen in the description of dao mentioned above: things receive dao and in doing so become what they are supposed to be. To reiterate, the celestial bodies, once having received dao, become unswerving in following their appointed course in the heavens. The historic personages, such as Pengzu, after receiving dao, become what they were known to have been. Xuyou’s above mentioned reference to dao as his “teacher”

⁶⁹ Kevin DeLapp, *Moral Realism (Bloomsbury Ethics)* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 17.

⁷⁰ DeLapp, *Moral Realism*, 13.

⁷¹ Ibid.

likewise suggests that dao is a normative principle that can serve as a guide to people. This is especially plausible considering that Xuyou considers his teacher superior to the ancient sage-kings, who in turn are the moral exemplars of the Confucians. By doing so, Xuyou, and Zhuangzi through him, is arguably suggesting that dao can serve as a better moral guide than Confucianism. The story of Cook Ding also implies that dao is a normative guide. It is Cook Ding's care for dao that allows him to cut the ox in the most optimal manner. In other words, it is not by trusting his senses, his understanding, or even his "skill," that Ding is able to act in the best way (or the most normative way) in the situation given to him. Rather, he is able to do this by precisely abnegating these things and attaining dao.

However, I believe that it is the story of Yan Hui's heart-mind fasting where the notion of dao as the ideal normative guide can be better seen. Again, in that story, Hui initially plans to reform the King of Wei. To convince his Master Confucius that his plan will work, Hui gives a number of strategies such as becoming "punctilious in bearing," becoming "unified and focused," and becoming "internally upright but externally adaptable."⁷² Despite sounding ingenious and fool proof, these strategies prove inadequate for Confucius, who still thinks that Hui is taking his heart-mind

⁷² See: Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi*, 25–26.

as his instructor.⁷³ But what is interesting is that the advice that Confucius gives is not simply another “better” strategy, or at least not in the same spirit as those of Hui’s. Rather, he tells Hui to engage in the apophatic method aimed to achieve union with dao. After experiencing this union through introvertive mystical experience, and then returning to the world in an arguably mystically enlightened state, Hui then is able to execute his mission in the proper manner. This story (and even that of Cook Ding’s) shows then that it is only by achieving union with dao, and not relying on the ability of one’s heart-mind to produce schemes and principles, that one is able to discover the best action to take. Or, to say it alternatively, it is only by being mystically united with the normative order of the world that one is able to precisely act in accord with it.

Zhuangzi’s description of the ideal person, namely, the “Genuine Human Being,” also corroborates the idea that dao, instead of the heart-mind, is the ideal normative principle to follow. The description says that the Genuine Human Beings:

did not plan their affairs in advance. In this way, they could be wrong or they could be right, but without regret and without self-satisfaction. . . . The Genuine Human Being understood nothing about delighting in being alive or hating death.

⁷³ Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi*, 26.

They emerged without delight, submerged again without resistance. . . . This is what it means not to use the mind [i.e., heart-mind] to push away the Course [i.e., dao], not to use the Human to try to help the Heavenly. Such is what I'd call being a Genuine Human Being.⁷⁴

In this passage, the Genuine Human Being is said not to plan his affairs in advance. This indicates that the Genuine Human Being does not rely on his heart-mind and its capacity to scheme or strategize (which is precisely Yan Hui's fault in the story of the fasting of the heart-mind). The Genuine Human Being is also portrayed as being unaffected by the normal things that cause people joy or aversion, such as being alive and dead, respectively. This suggests that the Genuine Human Being no longer takes the heart-mind into serious consideration because it is arguably this heart-mind, and its conventional understanding of things, that is the source of the aforesaid joys and aversions. Indeed, it can be surmised that because dao makes all things one by pervading them, then the person who becomes one with dao through the apophatic method, also becomes one with all things. Consequently, the experiences of living and dying lose their significance for that person since, being one with all things, such experiences are neither a gain nor a loss.

⁷⁴ Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi*, 40.

Finally, in the penultimate sentence of the above-cited passage, Zhuangzi says explicitly that the normative guide, which the Genuine Human Being adheres to, is precisely *dao*, instead of the heart-mind.

Taking all of this into consideration, it can indeed be said that Zhuangzi promotes a kind of moral realism since, for him, the ground of normativity or morality is the same ground for the existence of all things, namely, the ultimate reality that is *dao*. Needless to say, *dao* as ultimate reality is causally and evidentially independent from the beliefs of any person. Although people might “discover” *dao* through practicing the mystical apophatic method, people themselves in no way invent it. Indeed, it is arguably the other way around, that is, it is *dao* which generates people and all things.

Conclusion

In this article I have argued for the viability of a moral realist reading of Zhuangzi’s metaethical view. I have initially shown that the dominant moral relativist interpretations of Zhuangzi’s work still runs into interpretive difficulties, because in his writings, Zhuangzi expresses strong evaluative statements that do not appear to square with moral relativism. On the contrary, these statements seem to suggest that Zhuangzi preferred a certain form or way of life over others. This way of life in turn appears to be the mystical way of life, or in other words, the way of life geared

towards attaining direct experience of ultimate reality. By exploring Zhuangzi's mysticism, I have shown that Zhuangzi does believe that there is an objective source of morality, which is independent from anyone's beliefs. This source is dao itself, which is the ontological ground and normative order of the universe, and the ultimate reality of Zhuangzi's mysticism. Zhuangzi does not believe that all ways of life, or all daos, are equally good or legitimate. Rather, it appears that for him it is the way of life that is mystically attuned to dao, understood as the ultimate reality, which is the ideal and superior manner of existing.

Bibliography

- Berthrong, John. "Xin (Hsin): Heart and Mind." In *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy*. Edited by Antonio S. Cua. Abingdon: Routledge, 2003.
- Cheng, Chun-ying. "Qi (Ch'i): Vital Force." In *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy*. Edited by Antonio S. Cua. Abingdon: Routledge, 2003.
- Confucius. *Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. Translated by Edward Slingerland. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2003.
- DeLapp, Kevin. *Moral Realism (Bloomsbury Ethics)*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.

- Eliade, Mircea. *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*. 2nd ed., Translated by Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
- Fisher, Andrew. *Metaethics: An Introduction*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2014.
- Forman, Robert K.C. *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Hansen, Chad. *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- . “Guru or Skeptic? Relativistic Skepticism in the *Zhuangzi*.” In *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi*, edited by Scott Cook, 128–62. New York: State University of New York Press, 2003.
- Jones, Richard H. *Philosophy of Mysticism: Raids on the Ineffable*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2016.
- Katz, Steven T., ed. *Comparative Mysticism: An Anthology of Original Sources*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Kim, Chin-Tai. “Transcendence and Immanence.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55, no. 3 (Autumn 1987): 537–49. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1464069> (accessed September 10, 2017).
- Kreger, Wayne Gary. “The Experience of Knowing: Illusion and Illumination in the Zhuangzi and the Platform Sutra.” Master’s Thesis, University of British Columbia, 2010.
- Lee, Jung H. *The Ethical Foundation of Early Daoism: Zhuangzi’s Unique Moral Vision*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- McConochie, Thomas John. “Mysticism in the Zhuangzi.” PhD Diss., University of New South Wales, 2017.

- Meister Eckhart. *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*. Translated by Maurice O'C Walshe. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2010.
- Møllgaard, Eske. *An Introduction to Daoist Thought: Action, Language, and Ethics in Zhuangzi*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2007.
- Olberding, Amy. "Introduction." In *Dao Companion to the Analects*, edited by Amy Olberding, 1–17. Dordrecht: Springer, 2014.
- Patanjali. *How to Know God: The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*. Translated by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood. Hollywood, CA: Vedanta Press, 1953.
- Roth, Harold. "Bimodal Mystical Experience in the 'Qiwulun.'" In *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi*, edited by Scott Cook, 15–32. New York: State University of New York Press, 2003.
- . *Original Tao: Inward Training (Nei-yeh) and the Foundations of Taoist Mysticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- Sarkissian, Hagop. "Ritual and Rightness in the Analects." In *Dao Companion to the Analects*, edited by Amy Olberding, 95–116. Dordrecht: Springer, 2014.
- Slingerland, Edward. *Effortless Action: Wu-Wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Treatises*. Translated by Justin McCann. Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1952.
- Wildman, Wesley. "Really Ultimate Reality." *Theology and Science* 15, no. 3, (2017): 260–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2017.1335061> (accessed November 25, 2017).
- Yu-Lan, Fung. *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, New York: The Free Press, 1997.

Zhuangzi. *Chuang-Tzu: The Inner Chapters*. 1981. Translated by Angus Charles Graham. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2001.

———. “The Great and Most Honoured Master.” Translated by James Legge. Chinese Text Project. Site edited and maintained by Donald Sturgeon. <http://ctext.org/zhuangzi/great-and-most-honoured-master>. (accessed June 15, 2017).

———. *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. Translated by Brook Ziporyn. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2009.