

## Two Ways of Perspectivism: Nietzschean and Taoist

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Gianni Vattimo characterizes postmodernity as follows: “Now if there is one thing that constitutes the content of the idea of postmodernity, and also its logical possibility, it is the negation of the unilinearity of historical time.”<sup>1</sup> But the unlinearity of historical time, typically exemplified by the Hegelian conception of human history, implies the teleological conception of human history associated with the Platonic legacy of one reason, one order, and one world. Vattimo’s characterization of postmodernity can be generalized as the negation of the conception of one reason, one order, and one world. Vattimo’s characterization of postmodernity means that postmodernity is the negation of the very idea of modernity and the Enlightenment Project. At this juncture, it is interesting to recall such critics of the Enlightenment as Vico, Hamann, Herder, and their contemporary admirer Isaiah Berlin. Vattimo’s characterization of postmodernity means the negation of any monolithic design typically exemplified by, among others, Plato’s metaphysics (the prime target of Nietzsche’s criticism), Spinoza, and Hegel. The reason why modernity becomes a target of criticism by postmodernists is that modernity can be located in the onto-theological tradition (to borrow Heidegger’s expression). Put differently, postmodernity means “incredulity towards metanarratives” (to borrow Jean Francois Lyotard’s expression). Postmodernists are skeptical of the (Neo-Kantian notion of) “grounding (*Begrundung*).” Postmodernists disavow foundationalism.

Nietzsche is the proto-postmodernist. Nietzsche’s “God is dead” crystalizes his dismantling of the monolithic edifice of the Christian-*cum*-Platonic legacy. Nietzsche initiated the postmodernist move of deconstructing foundationalism, essentialism, and representationalism. Nietzsche’s excoriation of the Christian-*cum*-Platonic “faith” is, in effect, a general criticism of any form of absolutism such as scientism and various forms of political and social dogmatism. Hence Nietzsche’s perspectivism.

Nietzsche is an anti-representationalist. By anti-representationalism I mean the view which says that it is not the case that linguistic items represent language-independent reality with determinate nature. To an anti-representationalist the idea of language-independent reality with determinate nature makes no sense. The *Ding-an-sich* (language-dependent reality with determinate nature) “deserves a Homeric laugh . . . is actually empty, that is, empty of meaning.”<sup>2</sup> The idea of ‘the thing-in-itself’ is “absurd . . . and only a *fiction added* by us out of the necessity of logic, . . .”<sup>3</sup> The expression ‘thing-in-itself’ is empty of meaning because “we cannot determine any fact ‘in itself’; perhaps it is nonsensical to want to do such a thing.”<sup>4</sup> It is logically possible that there might be “a metaphysical world.” But all humans can say about such a world is that it is “inaccessible” and “incomprehensible.” Further, “knowledge” of such a world is totally irrelevant to human needs, as irrelevant as a chemical analysis of water would be to a boatman facing a storm.<sup>5</sup> All human views are interpretations which are necessarily perspectival. “No, facts is (*sic*) precisely what there is not, only interpretations. . . .”<sup>6</sup> So, “In so far as the

word “knowledge” has any meaning, . . . it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings—“perspectivism.”<sup>7</sup> Each meaning of “knowledge” so far as it has meaning is internal to each perspective. Each interpretation is apposite for each perspective. However perspectivism does not mean that one is forever confined to one’s limited perspective. “The value of the world lies in our interpretation . . . that every elevation of man brings with it the overcoming of narrower interpretation; that every strengthening and increase of power opens up new perspectives and believing in new horizons.”<sup>8</sup> Here we can see that Nietzsche anticipates Gadamer’s sense of “fusion of horizons.” Since there is a multiplicity of perspectives, “the assumption of one single subject is perhaps unnecessary; it is just permissible to assume a multiplicity of subjects.”<sup>9</sup> “The “subject” is not eternal.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, truth is not something out there “that might be found or discovered but something that must be created.”<sup>11</sup>

Yet perspectivism does not mean relativism. Nietzsche merely abhors the “tyranny of the Truth.” Nietzsche says that cultural moral relativism and absolutism are “equally childish.”<sup>12</sup> Concepts of science, while useful for human survival, and certainly more useful than the fictions of metaphysics, which are irrelevant to human needs, and certainly more useful than views of common sense, are still “false.” The world of science matters to us, for it is useful for survival. Nietzsche is something of a pragmatist. Yet “the world *which matters to us* is false, i.e., is not a fact but a fictional elaboration. . . .”<sup>13</sup> “Physics is an interpretation and exegesis of the world (to suit us, if I may say so!) And not a world of explanation.”<sup>14</sup> To illustrate the falsity of laws and theories of science, Nietzsche says that “atomism, it is one of the best refuted theories there are.”<sup>15</sup>

Why is Nietzsche convinced that human views and even laws and theories of science, which he regarded highly particularly when he wrote *Human All Too Human*, are “fictions” and “false”? Why is knowledge impossible? Because human language cannot capture what is constantly shifting and becoming. “Knowledge as such is impossible; so how is knowledge possible?”<sup>16</sup> But all human views, even laws and theories of science, are false because human beings, particularly those who use the Indo-European languages of the subject predicate form which has sired substance ontology force, adjust, abbreviate, omit, paddle, invent, and falsify<sup>17</sup> unceasing processes and changes which are reality in suchness (to adapt a Buddhist phrase). (At this point, one may be tempted to raise the question: How does Nietzsche know that reality as such is becoming? Is this view based on a “metaphysical faith” of his own? Can he peek behind language to intuit reality in suchness?) Nietzsche avows that,

we operate only with things that do not exist: lines, planes, bodies, atoms, divisible time spans, divisible spaces? How should explanations be at all possible when we first turn everything into our image?<sup>18</sup>

We have arranged for ourselves a world in which we live— . . . ; without these articles of faith nobody now could endure life.<sup>19</sup> But the conditions of life might include error.<sup>20</sup>

Westerners apply such concepts as substance, attribute, duration, identity, cause, etc., that is, the language of substance ontology due to the grammar of the Indo-European languages. The

grammar of the subject-predicate form fosters substance ontology.<sup>21</sup> Substance ontology is objectifying (*Verdinglichung*) of the grammar of a particular language group. And every language is contingent. If we get fixated on any particular language or “the metaphysics of language,” we fall prey to “crude fetishism.”<sup>22</sup> The concepts of cause and effect, a duality which “probably never exists” are abstracted from a “continuum” of unceasing changes and processes.<sup>23</sup> Survival necessitates paddling and inventing regular patterns out of the undifferentiated continuum. Nietzsche says that there are alternative grammars and ontologies. Those who saw everything “in flux,” that is, those who were true to reality, those “innumerable beings who made inferences different from ours perished; for all that, their way may have been truer.”<sup>24</sup> Whom does Nietzsche have in mind? Does he have process philosophers in mind? Is Nietzsche saying that process philosophers may have been truer but they perished? True, substance ontology has been the dominant outlook in the West. But there was Heraclitus. In the contemporary Western scene, we find Whitehead, Bergson, William James, and assorted postmodernists who evince affinity for process philosophy. In fact, process philosophy is increasingly attracting the attention of Western intellectuals. Moreover, what should not be forgotten is that Eastern thinkers have been process philosophers. They have all survived. They have not perished. Rather, the Buddhist insight that unceasing reality is ineffable has persuaded them to ponder and prize eloquent silence. The Buddhists have radicalized the thought entertained by Nietzsche as well: that unceasing changes and processes slip through the fingers of language.

Nietzsche’s anti-representationalism is linked to his nihilism. Nihilism is the view that “devalues” the idea of “the highest value” (typically sanctioned by the Christian faith) and denies the unintelligibility of the idea of “what is really, real” (to borrow Wilfrid Sellars’s expression), that is, the idea of the thing-in-itself. “What does nihilism mean? That the highest values devalue themselves.”<sup>25</sup> “*Radical nihilism* . . . is the conviction that we lack the least right to posit a beyond or an in-itself of things that might be “divine” or morality incarnate.”<sup>26</sup> Nihilism means giving up what Thomas Nagel calls “an ambition of transcendence.” “To this extent, nihilism, as the denial of a truthful world, of being, might be *a divine way of thinking*.”<sup>27</sup> Nihilism means denying that we have access to what Hilary Putnam calls “God’s-eye point of view.” Nihilism means renouncing what Heidegger calls “the onto-theological tradition.” Nietzsche says:

...man seeks “the truth”: a world that is not self-contradictory, not deceptive, does not change, a true world—a world in which one does not suffer; contradiction, deception, change—causes of suffering! He does not doubt that a world as it ought to be exists; . . . A nihilist is a man who judges of the world as it is that it ought *not* to be, and of the world as it ought to be that it does not exist.<sup>28</sup>

Nihilism may lead, as is the case with Schopenhauer, and as Nietzsche mistakenly believes, with Hinduism and Buddhism, to pessimism. However, Nietzsche is determined

...to think pessimism through to its depths and liberate it from the half-Christian, half-German narrowness and stupidity in which it has finally presented itself to our century, namely, in the form of Schopenhauer’s philosophy; . . .<sup>29</sup>

Nihilism inspires Nietzsche with:

...the ideal of the most high-spirited alive, and world-affirming human being . . . who wants to have *what was and is* repeated into eternity.<sup>30</sup>

It becomes evident that Nietzsche's idea of eternal return is inextricably intertwined with his creative humanism! Nietzsche relishes "a pleasure and power of self-determination, such as *freedom* of will that the spirit would take leave of all faith and every wish for certainty, . . . Such a spirit would be the *free spirit* par excellence."<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche is averse to the idea of the purpose, oneness, and the truth in any form. Nietzsche is determined to deconstruct "that Christian faith which was also the faith of Plato"<sup>32</sup> and which is the faith of scientism and all forms of monolithic ideologies (including Marxism) as well. He appreciates the plenitude of happenings. Thus Nietzsche's nihilism leads him to creative pluralism; he becomes a champion of creativity.

Nietzsche's notion of eternal return is an integral part of his life-affirming, world-affirming, joyful, and vivacious creative pluralism. In Nietzsche literature are to be found two ways of interpreting Nietzsche's concept of eternal return (*die ewige Wiederkehr*). One is the cosmological interpretation which centers around "the doctrine of "the eternal recurrence," that is, of the unconditional and infinitely repeated circular course of all things— . . ."<sup>33</sup> The other interpretation, which I happen to favor, is a way of affirming and celebrating creative life by testing the cumulative effects of deeds of a creatively splendid life which the free spirit would like to see (thinking in terms of a subjective conditional) repeated infinitely. As the ugliest man is made out to avow in the presence of Zarathustra,

I am for the first time satisfied that I have lived my life. . . . 'Was *that* life?' I want to say to death. "Well then! Once more!"<sup>34</sup> Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate confirmation and zeal?<sup>35</sup>

This is *amor fati*. Love of fate means not fatalism but the celebration of living a creatively splendid life as it is and has been, so much so that one would joyfully accept the course (the fate) of one's life as it is and has been and would (hypothetically) wish to have it repeated infinitely. Further, it also expresses the determination and resolve to realize "the ideal of the most high-spirited, alive, world-affirming human being" in the open-ended future, which on reflection the creative free spirit should be able to wish (hypothetically) to have repeated infinitely.

There is no place for Nietzschean nihilism in East Asian thoughts. For Nietzschean nihilism is a polemical move against the monolithic tradition embodied in the alliance of the Christian faith and the Platonic metaphysics and their progeny. In East Asian thoughts there has been no tradition of monolithic nature. East Asian thoughts are invariably pluralistic.

Let us look at Taoism. In Taoism, we find a form of perspectivism as coupled with pluralism. The example of the four senses of taste and the four senses of beauty is an apt illustration of Chuang Tzu's perspectivism. Humans, deer, centipedes, owls, and crows have different senses of taste. We may pose the question: "Which of the four has a proper sense of taste?" Men, fish, birds, and deer have different senses of beauty. In the same frame of mind, we may ask the question: "Which of these four knows what is truly beautiful in the world?"<sup>36</sup> "In my judgment

the principles of Goodwill and Duty, the path of “That’s it, that’s not”, are inextricably confused.”<sup>37</sup> For Chuang Tzu, what is tasty, what is beautiful, and what is right and wrong are perspectival. Each sense is apposite for each perspective. One should not make a dogmatic pronouncement on which of the four has a proper sense of taste or which of the four truly knows what is beautiful in the world. Nietzsche says that Truth is not “out there” to be discovered. Nor is Taste, Beauty, or what is *ren* or *i* or what is right or wrong (what should be affirmed or be denied) should not be judged by absolute, “objective” standards, so says Chuang Tzu.<sup>38</sup> Chuang Tzu expresses the East Asian sense of the Middle Way. The Middle Way is the endeavor to find some point and some merit in each alternative view and perspective and finds expression in “Letting both alternatives proceed.”<sup>39</sup>

No thing is not ‘other’, no thing is not ‘it’. . . . simultaneously with being allowable, something becomes unallowable and simultaneously with being unallowable it becomes allowable. If going by circumstance that’s it then going by circumstance that’s not, if by going by circumstance that’s not then going by circumstance that’s it. That is why the sage does not take this course, but opens things up to the light of Heaven. . . . what is It is also Other, what is Other is also It. . . . ‘That’s it, that’s not’ from another point of view. . . . Where neither It nor Other finds its opposite is called the axis of the Way.<sup>40</sup>

According to the traditional dualistic Western way of thinking, what is true and what is false, what is right and what is wrong, what is beautiful and what is ugly are mutually exclusive. The applications of the law of non-contradiction and the law of the excluded middle are typical of this way of thinking. Taoists and more generally East Asians are averse to the mutual exclusiveness of opposites. Easterners do not take well to the Western notion of binary opposition. Rather, East Asians favor pairing of mutually complementary relatives (correlatives).

According to Taoism, different perspectives are mutually complementary. Take the image of the wheel in Chapter 11 of *Tao Te Ching*. The thirty spokes of the wheel, which may be compared to different perspectives and/or beings (*Seienden*) converge on the hub (center). The spokes are *you* (beings) and the hub is *wu* (nothing) or Tao. The mutually complementary spokes converging on the hub give rise to rotating, which is again Tao or *wu*. Here it seems plausible to say that there is a double sense of “*wu*,” the first sense being compared to the hub and the second sense to the event or happening of wheeling.<sup>41</sup> It is just that what makes the hub the hub is wheeling. The hub is inseparable from wheeling. The *wu wei* of the hub is what coordinates and harmonizes the motion of the spokes, just as it is the *wu wei* of the sage ruler sitting unobtrusively facing the south that “rules” the multitude. The hub (*wu* or Tao) is the “center” of wheeling. So perhaps we should say that the expression “the hub” and the expression “*wu* or Tao” are co-extensive if not intensionally identical (= not identical in sense in the Fregean sense of sense). For the coordinating of the hub (“an empty center,” to borrow Hans-Georg Moeller’s phrase) is in fact wheeling and conversely.

In Chapter 2 of *Tao Te Ching*, we find several pairs of mutual complementary correlatives. Chapter 2 says in part: “Determinacy (*you*) and indeterminacy (*wu*) give rise to each other, Difficult and easy complement each other, Long and short set each other off, High and low complement each other, Refined notes and raw sounds harmonize (*he*) each other, And before

and after lend sequence to each other.”<sup>42</sup> The pairs of mutually complementary correlatives contrast sharply with Western binary oppositions. In Descartes’s *Meditations* we find striking examples of binary opposition: wakefulness and dreaming, sanity and insanity, real things and unreal things, light and darkness, motion and rest, and the infinite and the finite. Binary opposites are mutually exclusive. By contrast, in Taoism (more generally, in East Asian thoughts) *you* and *wu*, and other pairs of relatives are mutually complementary.

Tao, better, Taoing (to highlight the fact that Tao is a process), is the coordinating and harmonizing of the myriad things and different perspectives. Tao is not a “thing,” but “an empty space,” that is, the absence of particular “things” (*wu*). So it is “nameless,” for it is indeterminate. Tao is “formless,” “invisible,” “inaudible,” “cannot be given any name,” “vague,” “elusive,” “infinite” and “boundless.”<sup>43</sup> Just as the function of the hub of the wheel is to coordinate and harmonize the spokes, so the axis of the Way is to harmonize (without tilting the balance of) differing views and perspectives. For a Confucian to say that his/her view is right and that of a Mohist is wrong, or conversely for a Mohist to say that his/her view is right and that of a Confucian is wrong is to exclude a differing view from consideration of its point or merit as given from its own proper perspective. To weigh a view different from one’s own is to respect a view alternative to one’s own. And deference is at the heart of the East Asian way(s). To respect a differing view is to appreciate the uniqueness of the differing view, in fact, the uniqueness of each and every (initially plausible) particular view. That is what is meant by, to use the translation by A. C. Graham of *Ch’I Wu Lun*:

...the sorting which evens things out. There is only “this” or “that” . . . there are only “thises” and “thats,” . . . Each particular element . . . Has its own *de* . . . *de* is best understood as a particular focus that orients an item in a field of significances such that it achieves its own intrinsic excellence.<sup>44</sup>

Each focus defers to other foci. The rhythm of the interacting and mutually complementary unique and unrepeatable particular “things” (processes) is Tao, field, *wu*, and Heideggerian *Sein*. Taoism is a form of irenic, holistic individualism. In Chapter 37 of *Tao Te Ching*, Tao is compared to “unworked wood,” for it is undifferentiated and indeterminate. Since it is indeterminate, it can be carved creatively in many and varied ways. There are no preset patterns here. The image of “unworked wood” is suggestive of the self-creative processes of the myriad things happening in an open context. The image of “the unworked wood” resonates with William James’s “pluralistic universe.” (Actually, the term “multiverse” would be more apposite.) James is averse to the Hegelian “block universe.” So are Taoists. Both Taoists and James are keen on the idea of open-ended changes and processes. The rhythm of the transformation of the myriad “things” is Tao.

Tao, compared to the hub (“an empty space”) in the image of the wheel, is the “center,” and different perspectives and the happenings of the myriad “things” compared to the spokes are the “periphery.” But the hub does not “determine” the motion of the spokes. The function of the hub is best characterized by *wu wei*. By deferring to the spokes, the hub merely balances and harmonizes the spokes, just as the sage king “reigns” without dominating the people. The sage

king sits facing the south, harmonizing the people in virtue of radiation of virtue. The hub or Tao is the standpoint of the sage. The sage king does not favor the uniqueness of any particular view or perspective. So the sage has “no-self.” By letting alternatives proceed, the sage “stays at the point of rest on the potter’s wheel of Heaven.”<sup>45</sup> The function of the hub is not to bring about the unity of the spokes but to harmonize them. The term “unity” often used to characterize the function of Tao (and the hub) is misleading because it is suggestive of the Platonic notion of the one and the many. The use of the language of the one-many is not naturally ingressive into the Taoist sense of Tao. For this language suggests the Platonic idea that the one “determines” the “many” and “subsumes” the many under it. Further, to compare Tao to the whole and the myriad “things” to parts is equally inapt for Taoism. For parts are “inside” the whole and parts have no uniqueness or particularity. To highlight the “insistent particularity” (to borrow the term from David Hall) and the unrepeatable uniqueness of each perspective and each of the myriad “things,” the ideal model to use is the focus/field model. A field is the harmonizing or mutually interacting dynamical happenings of the myriad things (*foci*). Each focus in a field is unique and unrepeatable. Hence Taoist holistic individualism.

Chapter 42 of *Tao Te Ching* says in part:

Way-ing (*dao-ing*) gives rise to continuity, Continuity gives rise to difference, Difference gives rise to plurality, And plurality gives rise to the manifold of everything that is happening (*wanwu*). . . everything carries *yin* on its shoulders and *yang* in its arms And blends these vital energies (*qi*) together to make them harmonious (*he*).<sup>46</sup>

Tao is continuity and “Multiplicity”, that is, the continuing, dynamical interacting of the “myriad things.” The “pipes of Heaven” (to use Graham’s translation, which should be changed to “pipings of Heaven” to emphasize the fact that pipings of Heaven are processes or happenings) is a good example of Taoing. The pipes of men are blown by men, the pipes of earth are blown by wind. But who or what blows the pipes of Heaven? There is no blower of the pipes of Heaven. There is no cosmic choreographer. The harmony of different sounds is self-generated or happens spontaneously (*jiran*). Tao “emulates what is spontaneously so (*jiran*).”<sup>47</sup>

Chuang Tzu is a process philosopher. Process philosophy is an accurate characterization of East Asian thoughts in general. It is natural for Chuang Tzu to say that there is no permanent substantial self. The history of self is the history of unique, unrepeatable particular process-selves, different metaphors, and different self-descriptions. Each process-self or process-being whether it be K’un the big fish or P’eng the big bird, whether it be the Chuang Chou of wakeful-experience or the butterfly of dreaming-experience, has a name of its own and its own self-description. When the big fish is transformed into the big bird, the change is not “accidental” but “substantial” (in the Aristotelian sense of “accidental” and “substantial” change). It is not the case that the same self (*qua* substantial self) has merely changed in appearance. The reality-appearance distinction is meaningless for Chuang, as it is for Nietzsche. The change is complete. Rather, one process-being ceases to exist, and another process-being comes into existence. There is no continuity between the two process-beings. When Chuang Chou is awake, he is one process-being, and when the butterfly enjoys itself as butterfly flitting and fluttering around in its

own dreaming-experience, the butterfly is a numerically distinct process-being. The butterfly “loses the counterpart of itself.”<sup>48</sup>

Last night Chuang Chou dreamed he was a butterfly, . . . and did not know that he was Chou. . . . Between Chou and the butterfly there was necessarily a dividing; just this is what is meant by the transformation of things.<sup>49</sup> While we dream we do not know that we are dreaming, and in the midst of a dream and interpret a dream within it.<sup>50</sup>

Graham helpfully comments as follows:

The Taoist does not permanently deem himself a man or a butterfly but moves spontaneously from fitting one name to fitting another.<sup>51</sup>

The transformation of things is the change from one process-being to another process-being. When Chuang Chou is awake, he is in reality the Chuang Chou of wakeful-experience. When the butterfly of dreaming-experience is happy being the butterfly that it is, the butterfly is in reality the butterfly not the dreaming Chuang Chou. When Chuang Chou becomes awake, the butterfly ceases to exist, and another process-being comes into existence. Each process-being is equally real, authentic, and valid in itself. All things equally have their own unique reality, authenticity, and validity. In Chapter 2 of *Chuang Tzu*, there is a passage which reads: “How do I know that the dead do not regret that ever they had an urge to life?”<sup>52</sup> Moeller says: “According to Guo Xiang, life and death are equally valid phases of being or segments of change.”<sup>53</sup> Each process-being, each phase of being, and the perspective of each process-being should be experienced for what it is and appreciated in its own proper way. In commenting on the allegory of the happiness of fish alluded to in Chapter 17 of *Chuang Tzu*, Moeller says: “There are different kinds of “happiness,” a fish-happiness, and a man-happiness, and these are not interchangeable.”<sup>54</sup> The point of this allegory seems to be that just as human beings are happy in the human way, so fish must be happy in their own way. One should not judge one kind of “happiness” from the perspective of another kind of happiness. Just as the butterfly experiences and appreciates being the butterfly in its own reality and in its own authenticity, and just as human beings are happy on land, as Chuang Tzu and Hui Shih are, discoursing on different kinds of happiness, so fish must be happy in water. Even if as humans we cannot experience the happiness of fish, we can reasonably assume that they must be happy in their own way. Let fish be happy in their own way. Chuang Tzu’s perspectivism resonates with Heidegger’s sense of *Gelassenheit*. To acknowledge this fact is to appreciate the situational fittingness of each kind of happiness. The perspective of no particular process-being should be devalued in comparison with any other perspective; the value and the validity of no perspective are parasitic on those of another perspective. This is Chuang Tzu’s perspectivism. Perspectivism should not be conflated or confused with a jejune sort of relativism which says that every view is as good as any other view or that every view is as bad as any other view. According to Chuang Tzu’s perspectivism, each and every process-being coupled with its proper perspective is unique and contingent. For Chuang Tzu, the point of “the ultimate awakening” is awakening to the contingency of all process-beings and their perspectives.

You and Confucius are both dreams, and I who call you a dream is also a dream.<sup>55</sup>

Here “dream” expresses the sense of contingency. True, the dreaming-experience of the butterfly is contingent. So is the wakeful experience of Chuang Chou. The contingency of dreaming-experience is on a parity with the contingency of wakeful-experience.

One last comment on Chuang Tzu’s perspectivism. Think of the useless “great tree” which Chuang Tzu talks of towards the end of Chapter 1 (*Hsiao Yao Yu*) of *Chuang Tzu*. The “useless” tree may turn out to be useful if it is planted in a place fit for it, that is, in “the realm of Nothingwhatever, in the wilds which spread out into nowhere.”<sup>56</sup> No one will chop it down. A wanderer may even take a nap in its shade. The tree useless in one circumstance is found useful in another circumstance. Does this example along with other similar examples concerning “abnormal” humans (e.g., a man with a chopped foot) which abound in Chapter 5 of *Chuang Tzu* suggest the postmodernist idea of inversion of values? How about the examples of the salve and a big gourd which are found in Chapter 1 of *Chuang Tzu*? Not at all. For one thing, the idea of inverting values implies the priority of one *relatum* of binary opposition over the other *relatum* and the very idea of priority (of one *relatum* of binary opposition over the other) or the inversion of priority makes no sense to Taoists. Taoists are egalitarians intent on the sorting which evens things out. Rather these examples suggest the Taoist (more generally, the East Asian) sense of situational fittingness. Trying to locate some unique point and some unique merit in each alternative perspective is the spirit of the Middle Way.

One final comment on Tao. A concert pianist plays a Beethoven sonata expertly without consciously noting musical notes. He/she plays the piano unreflectively but not blindly (to paraphrase Heidegger). When an experienced carpenter is engaged in hammering (to borrow a notable example in Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit*) he/she performs the act as he/she is moved by his/her masterly and spontaneous *Umsicht*. The sage king “reigns” unobtrusively, deferentially, and spontaneously. He need not make efforts to remember explicitly the formal code of rulership to conduct himself in a fitting manner. He follows his heart’s desire in his superb performance of the role of kingship, to paraphrase a passage in the Confucian *Analects*. He acts unreflectively but not blindly. The last part of Chapter 26 of *Chuang Tzu* alludes to a fish-trap, a rabbit-snare, and the words. Once one catches the fish, one can forget about the trap. Once one catches the rabbit, one can forget about the snare. Once one catches the ideas, one can forget about the words. The master concert pianist, the consummate carpenter, and the sage king can forget about the words. They are beyond the stage of explicit knowing. So they have “no-knowledge (*wu jih*).” The sage king reigns unobtrusively in a civilized and refined way harmonizing the people. The conduct of the sage king is the paradigm of *wu wei*. The sage king does not dominate or possess the people. Rather he is deferential to “the will of the people,” which is the “will of Heaven.” So the sage king has “no desire (*wu yu*).” The sage king does not favor the uniqueness of any particular view. *Ergo*, he has “no-self.” The master concert pianist, the skillful carpenter, and the sage king have attained Tao. Attaining Tao is becoming a master of the art of living. For Taoists and for East Asians in general, the ideal of life is to become masters of the art of living as embodied in Tao. Hopefully, all human beings should aspire to attain this ideal of living.

## NOTES

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1. Gianni Vattimo, *Nihilism & Emancipation: Ethics, Politics, & Law*, ed. Santiago Zabala and trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 50; Vattimo NE hereafter.

2. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. Marion Faber, with Stephan Lehman. Introduction and notes by Marion Faber (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 1984), 6; HAH hereafter. The numeral refers to the section number.

3. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writing from the Late Notebooks*, ed. Ruediger Bittner and trans. Kate Sturge (Cambridge, UK, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, and Capetown: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 206; WLN hereafter.

4. WLN, p.139.

5. Cf. HAH, 9.

6. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann and trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.I. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, Inc., 1967), p.481; WP hereafter. The numeral refers to the section number.

7. WP, 481.

8. WP, 616.

9. WP, 490.

10. WP, 492.

11. WP, 552.

12. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 345; GS hereafter. The numeral refers to the section number.

13. WLN, 80.

14. BGE, 14.

15. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 345; BGE hereafter. The numeral refers to the section number.

16. WLN, 138.

17. Here I am adopting the string of these words from Nietzsche. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), Third Essay, 24; GM hereafter. The numeral refers to the section number.

18. GS, 112.

19. GS, 121.

20. GS, 121.

21. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. with Introduction and Notes Duncan Lange (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5; TI hereafter. The numeral refers to the section number.

22. Cf. TI, 5.

23. Cf. GS, 112.

24. GS, 111.

25. WP, 2.

26. WP, 3.

27. WP, 15.

28. WP, 585.

29. BGE, 56.

30. BGE, 56.

31. GS, 347.
32. Cf. GS, 344.
33. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecco Homo*, ed. with commentary by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 273-274; EH hereafter.
34. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. with a Preface by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. 317-318, Fourth Part, 19; Z hereafter.
35. GS, 341.
36. *Chuang-Tzu The Inner Chapters*, trans. A.C. Graham (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001), p. 58; *Chuang-Tzu*, Graham hereafter.
37. *Chuang-Tzu*, Graham, p. 58.
38. Cf. *Chuang-Tzu*, Graham, p. 58.
39. Cf. *Chuang-Tzu*, Graham, p. 54.
40. Cf. *Chuang-Tzu*, Graham, pp. 52-53.
41. The double sense of Tao (and *wu*) is suggested by Moeller. See Hans-Georg Moeller, *Taoism Explained From the Dream of the Butterfly to the Fishnet Allegory* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2004), pp. 33-34; Moeller hereafter. He says: "The Dao is both the inner and greater unity of all perfect happenings, is nowhere and everywhere at the same time. It is both the hub and the wheel." I have changed "wheel" to "wheeling."
42. *Dao De Jing*, trans. with Commentary Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), p. 80; *Dao De Jing*, Ames and Hall hereafter.
43. See *Tao Te Ching*; Ames and Hall, Chapter 14 and Chapter 24 in particular.
44. David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking from the Han* (Albany: State University Press, 1998), p. 61; Hall and Ames, TFH hereafter.
45. *Chuang-Tzu*, Graham, p. 54.
46. *Dao De Jing*, Ames and Hall, pp. 142-143. I have changed "way-making" to "way-ing" and "dao" to "dao-ing" to stress the fact that Tao (better, Tao-ing) is a spontaneous process, as aptly illustrated by the event of the pippings of heaven, without any process-maker.
47. *Dao De Jing*, Ames and Hall, p. 115.
48. Here I am adapting Graham's translation of "*wu* losing *wo*" and modifying it. His translation is: "he had lost the counterpart of himself." See *Chuang-Tzu*, Graham, p. 48. So the butterfly may be said to lose "the counterpart of itself."
49. *Chuang-Tzu*, Graham, p. 61.
50. *Chuang-Tzu*, Graham, p. 59.
51. *Chuang-Tzu*, Graham, p. 61.
52. *Chuang-Tzu*, Graham, p. 59.
53. Moeller, p. 51.
54. Moeller, p. 65.
55. *Chuang-Tzu*, Graham, p. 60.
56. *Chuang-Tzu*, Graham, p. 47.





