

Lecture 11

Zhuangzi

Zhuangzi

- Lived 369 – 286 BCE (after Laozi)
 - contemporary of Mencius
- Wrote the *Zhuangzi*
 - more philosophical than the *Daodejing*
 - and much different writing style



The Zhuangzi

- playful, comical
- the goal is to change people, not to debate theories
 - personified concepts and locations
 - humor as a learning tool
- de-emphasizes rules of conduct

A trap is for fish: when you've got the fish, you can forget the trap. A snare is for rabbits: when you've got the rabbit, you can forget the snare. Words are for meaning: when you've got the meaning, you can forget the words. Where can I find someone who's forgotten words so I can have a word with him?

– Zhuangzi 26

The Theme of Knowledge

- *Guiding Thesis*: We should exchange our ordinary perspective for ...
 - ordinary knowledge is limited to our own little world
 - hence, no Absolute Truth is available to us (*contra* Confucianism)

- **perspectivalism**
- no one really understands anything

If we're already one, can I say it? But since I've just said we're one, can I not say it? The unity and my saying it make it two. The two and their unity make three. Starting from here, even a clever mathematician couldn't get it, much less an ordinary person! If going from nothing to something you get three, what about going from something to something? Don't do it! Just go along with things.

– Zhuangzi 2

The Theme of Knowledge

- Trying to attain knowledge of the *dao* is a waste of time
- Just act! – *that* is the *dao*

Don't insist but lodge in the usual. The usual is useful. You can use it to penetrate. When you penetrate, you get it. Get it and you're almost there. Just go along with things. Doing that without knowing how things are is what I call the Way.

– Zhuangzi 2

Argument from the Relativity of Distinctions

1. The validity of any distinction depends on ...
 - o monkey trainer story
2. Hence, distinctions are ...
3. So, we can never claim to have Absolute Truth



All subjects may be looked at from two points of view -- from this and from that. If I look at things from another's point of view, I do not see it; only as I know it myself, do I know it.

– Zhuangzi

Argument from Many Appearances

1. The same thing can appear differently to different people, if their perspectives are different
2. And the same thing can appear differently to the same person, if his perspective changes.
3. *So*, the same thing can have many appearances, depending upon the perspective of the perceiver.

If people sleep in the damp, their backs hurt and they wake up half paralyzed. But is this true of an eel? If they live in trees they shudder with fear. But is this true of a monkey? Of these three, which knows the right place to live?

- Zhuangzi 2

Argument from Many Appearances

4. There is no way to determine which appearance is the correct or true appearance
5. *Hence*, claims about the world -- about knowledge and morality -- always distort reality, because ...

Once you and I have started arguing, if you win and I lose, then are you really right and am I really wrong? If I win and you lose, then am I really right and are you really wrong? Is one of us right and the other wrong? Or are both of us right and both of us wrong?

- Zhuangzi 2

From where I see it, the sprouts of benevolence and righteousness and the pathways of right and wrong are all snarled and jumbled. How would I know the different between them?

- Zhuangzi 2

Argument from Many Appearances

7. In order to *not* distort reality, we must ...

Forget the passage of time. Forget the differences. Leap into the boundless and make it your home.

- Zhuangzi 2

Shifting [disagreeing] voices waiting on one another [arguing] may just as well not wait on one another. Harmonize them by means of Heaven's relativity, orient them with the flowing flood, and so live out your years.

- Zhuangzi 2

Argument from Skepticism

1. There is no indubitable criterion to which one can appeal in order to prove that a claim is true
2. But ...
 - butterfly story
3. *Hence*, questions about what is right and what there is can never be settled
4. *So*, we should stop trying to show that we are right



One night, Zhuangzi dreamed of being a butterfly -- a happy butterfly, showing off and doing as he pleased, unaware of being Zhuangzi. Suddenly he awoke, drowsily, Zhuangzi again. And he could not tell whether it was Zhuangzi who had dreamt the butterfly or the butterfly dreaming Zhuangzi.

- Zhuangzi 2

The Theme of Morality

- Rules and education lead to ...
- Pursuing too many virtues is ...
- Acting naturally requires ...
- All this requires openness
 - adjust to others
 - offer less resistance
 - these are the keys to moral behavior

Sheesh! You're just going to get yourself hurt. The Way does not like complexity. Complexity quickly becomes too much. Too much leads to agitation, agitation leads to worry, and worry never solved anything.

- Zhuangzi 4

The Theme of Activity

- Spontaneous, open action results from ...

A good butcher changes his chopper every year because he chips it. An average butcher changes it every month because he breaks it. There are spaces between those joints, and the edge of the blade has no thickness. If you use what has no thickness to go where there is space -- oh! there's plenty of extra room to play about it.

- Zhuangzi 3



The Theme of Activity

- The "true person" is someone who *lacks* education
 - result of learning is ...

It's easy to fake what people do. Faking what Heaven does is hard.

– Zhuangzi 4

The true people of the olden days knew nothing of loving life and nothing of hating death. They emerged without delight and returned without resistance. They came and went briskly, nothing more. They neither forgot their beginning nor sought their end. They enjoyed what they received, forgot it, and handed it back. This is called not using the mind to block the Way, not using the human to help Heaven.

– Zhuangzi 6

The Theme of Activity

- Zhuangzi advises that following the *Dao* involves avoiding the spotlight -- it just wears one out
 - have no desire for leadership
 - libertarianism, anarchism, individualism

Don't make a name for yourself or follow a plan. Don't take responsibility or claim knowledge. Thoroughly embody what can't be exhausted and wander where you can't be seen. Take everything you get from Heaven but don't consider it again. Just be empty.

Perfected people use their minds like mirrors, not welcoming things as they come or escorting them as they go. They respond without keeping, so they can conquer without harm.

– Zhuangzi 11

Confucianism vs. Daoism

- They can exist together harmoniously *to an extent*, because they emphasize different domains
 - Confucianism: family, politics, society
 - Daoism: nature, creativity, psychophysical health
- But these domains are not entirely distinct
- So there is a basis for conflict

Main Daoist Critique of Confucianism

- Rules, laws, customs are human artifacts, hence rigid and unnatural
- Rules, laws and social roles thwart responsiveness
- Confucians need to take a chill pill

Main Confucian Critique of Daoism

- It is natural for humans to be ...
- So Daoists should want to be ...
- But Daoists act unnaturally, contrary to their own principles, because ...
- And as far as education and training goes, ...

For Next Time

No readings!

Quiz #4 on February 27, yo.