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Two Notions of Freedom in Classical Chinese Thought: The Concept of *Hua* 化 in the *Zhuangzi* and the *Xunzi*

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Abstract This essay is an attempt to sketch out two contrasting notions of freedom in the *Zhuangzi* and the *Xunzi*. I argue that to understand the classical Chinese formulations of freedom we should look at the concept of *hua* (transformation or to transform). It is a kind of freedom that highlights the moral and/or spiritual transformation of the self and its entailments on the connection between the self and various domains of relationality. The Zhuangzian *hua* is the transformation of the self in such a way that the self becomes supremely attuned to the complexity of the world and can thus navigate various domains of relationality with extraordinary grace, ease, and efficacy. The Xunzian *hua* is the transformation of the self so that the self can extend its relationality to include the entire world and transform it from a raw and uncouth world to a civilized one through ritual practices.

Keywords Zhuangzi · Xunzi · freedom · *hua* · self

1 Introduction

Modern scholarship on classical Chinese notions of freedom tends to proceed on one of two directions: scholars either claim that there is no concept of freedom but that it is not indicative of a gaping hole therein, or argue that there are notions of freedom but that they are not regarded as particularly worthy ideals within the larger tradition. Chad Hansen is a representative in the first direction. According to Chad Hansen, "there was no concept in ancient Confucian ethics which corresponds to the notion of moral responsibility. Further, there is no controversy in Chinese thought which can be identified with the controversy in the West on the issue of freedom and moral responsibility" (Hansen 1972: 170). Hansen is very careful, however, in making such a statement:

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> In concluding that Confucianism has no doctrine of freedom and moral responsibility, I do not mean to imply that there is a gaping hole in Confucian moral philosophy. In fact, I hope to show that the absence of such a doctrine is quite consistent with the overall moral system described by Confucians, since that overall system differs from typical Western ethical systems in which an account of moral responsibility is required. (Hansen 1972: 170)

Clearly Hansen's observation is based on the crucial but often implicit link between freedom and moral responsibility. He argues that "not only was there no account of moral responsibility in Confucian ethics, but there was no appropriate 'context' for such an account" (Hansen 1972: 170). More concretely, according to Hansen, "The two bases for development of a theory of moral responsibility are absent from the Confucian idealization of the moral system: there is no need for an external normative code of behavior and no need for a theory of the nature of excuse conditions" (Hansen 1972: 176). Such an observation is based on the understanding that the Confucian "[m]oral behavior does not consist in Kantian 'respect for the moral law' or in acting in accordance with moral law without benefit of *any natural inclination*. For Confucianism, moral action is completely natural and ultimately does not even involve moral rules. No excuse conditions are necessary since, obviously, the mind in intuiting what is right in the concrete situation already considers the total situation, not just an abstraction" (Hansen 1972: 176).

I agree with both of Hansen's observations, that there is no conception of freedom that accounts for moral responsibility in classical Confucianism and that this does not represent a gaping hole in classical Confucianism. In his classic, *Confucius: Secular as Sacred*, Herbert Fingarette makes the famous observation that throughout the *Analects* the image of choice is conspicuously absent (Fingarette 1998: 20). However, this does not necessarily mean that classical Confucians do not have any notion of freedom since freedom does not have to address the problems of choice and moral responsibility. Association between freedom, choice, and moral responsibility is a conceptual presupposition pervasive within the Western intellectual environment, so much so that the association itself is not thematized as a philosophical problem. In fact, the whole project of freedom in the West is to account for choice and moral responsibility, and the philosophical problem of freedom has become a kind of surrogate for the discussion on choice and responsibility. So a natural question is: can the Confucians have a concept of freedom that does not explicitly problematize the issue of choice?[1] This essay is an attempt to address precisely such a question.

The second direction in addressing the idea of freedom in classical Chinese thought is represented by WU Genyou. In his 2006 article, "On the Idea of Freedom and Its Rejection in Chinese Thought and Institutions" (Wu 2006: 3), Wu contends that the conceptions of freedom are abundant in traditional Chinese intellectual tradition. According to Wu, "Chinese traditional thought is replete with divergent concepts of freedom, whether these are ideas or merely notions. However, the ideal of freedom has not been credited as a positive value in human civilization.

[1] Hansen does not explicitly address this question, possibly due to the "natural" coupling between the concept of freedom and the notion of moral responsibility/choice. The implicit assumption of such a conceptual coupling is that freedom and responsibility are co-extensive. This essay is an attempt to de-couple the conceptual pair.

Especially in old monarchical societies freedom is treated as opposed to order" (Wu 2006: 219). Wu disagrees with Hansen that there is no conception of freedom in traditional Chinese intellectual traditions. Instead he argues that there are plenty of concepts and notions of freedom in traditional Chinese thought. But the problem for Wu is that those conceptions of freedom are not regarded as contributing positively to the wellbeing of the society due to its seemingly antagonistic relationship with order.

While I agree with Wu that there are many concepts of freedom in the classical Chinese tradition, I would take issue with him on the observation that freedom in Chinese traditions is often negatively regarded as antithetical to order. On the contrary, I will argue that the classical Chinese, especially the Confucian, notion of freedom is the very foundation of order and meaning. I propose that if we are to properly understand the Chinese ideas of freedom we ought to look at the concept of *hua* 化 (transformation or to transform) in classical Chinese thought.[2] It is the kind of freedom that highlights the accomplishment of moral and/or spiritual transformation. Such a notion of freedom is helpful in moving our discussion of freedom in the Chinese tradition away from the idea of choice or from the focus on *ziyou* 自由, usually translated as freedom in modern Chinese.[3]

The paradigmatic expression of this transformative freedom in the classical Chinese tradition is Confucius's autobiographical note that at the age of seventy he could follow his heartmind's desire without overstepping the boundary of propriety (*Analects* 2.4). Put differently, at that point in Confucius's life, his heartmind's desire is so well aligned with the norm of propriety that there is no struggle on his part to follow the norm of what is right. Importantly, the sense of freedom exemplified in Confucius's life at seventy is an achievement, not a state he is born into. Such an accomplishment requires sustained effort in personal cultivation (*xiushen* 修身) on the part of the agent that transforms himself from the state of uncouth nature to the state of moral refinement. Hence, transformation (*hua* 化) is the key to our understanding of the Confucian sense of freedom. Not surprisingly, the "Daoists" would take issue with the Confucians on the latter's take on transformation and instead offer their own ideals. For the Daoists, self-transformation enables the agent to effectively navigate the world and beyond with supreme ease, captured in the expression of *xiaoyao you* 逍遙遊, carefree roaming, which is the title of the opening chapter of the *Zhuangzi*.

This essay will elaborate on the concept of *hua* 化 in the Daoist and Confucian traditions. I will argue that it is a kind of freedom that is accomplished as the result of

[2] I just came across a book by Xu Keqian 徐克谦, *New Exploration of Zhuangzi's Philosophy: Dao, Language, Freedom and Beauty* 庄子哲学新探:道, 言, 自由与美 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju 中华书局, 2005). In this book, Xu uses the conceptions of *you* 游, *hua* 化, *jie* 解, and *fang* 放 to approach Zhuangzi's notion of freedom. I was not aware of Xu's works till now, and his approach bears some similarity with mine, although his discussion of these concepts is brief and his interpretation of *you* is different from mine. Furthermore, he does not look into the relationship between these Zhuangzian notions of freedom and does not provide a framework to situate them. As the readers will see in the following, I will focus on *hua* and *you* and examine their conceptual connections in the *Zhuangzi*. Also I have not seen any scholar comparing *hua* in the *Zhuangzi* and the *Xunzi* as I do in this essay.

[3] Wu Genyou's argument is based upon his analysis of the concept of *ziyou* in classical Chinese texts. While in modern Chinese freedom is usually translated as *ziyou* 自由, it does not mean that the classical Chinese idea of freedom is necessarily limited to *ziyou*. In this essay, I will argue that in fact it is not limited to *ziyou*.

effectively transforming the self along with various domains of relationality. This form of freedom in the classical Chinese tradition deals specifically with the connection between the self and various domains of relationality. To simplify the terminology, in the essay *hua* will be dubbed as transformative freedom. I will use the *Zhuangzi* and the *Xunzi* as representatives of the Daoist and Confucian traditions. My argument is that the Zhuangzian *hua* is the transformation of the self in such a way that the self can effectively navigate between various domains of relationality in the world and beyond whereas the Xunzian *hua* is the transformation of the self such that the self can extend its relationality to include the entire world so as to transform it from a raw and uncouth world to a civilized one through ritual practices.

2 Zhuangzian *Hua* as Self-Transformation in Navigating Relationality

One of the most important occurrences of *hua* appears in Zhuangzi's signature butterfly story. Here Zhuangzi tells us about him being a butterfly in a dream; once awake, he cannot tell whether he is ZHUANG Zhou who dreams he is a butterfly or the butterfly who dreams he is ZHUANG Zhou. As he is musing on the difference and the connection between him as ZHUANG Zhou and the butterfly in the dream, he invokes the notion of *wuhua* 物化. As we will see in the following, *wuhua* is very much a Zhuangzian take on *hua*.

Translators of the *Zhuangzi* almost uniformly gloss *wuhua* as the transformation of things (e.g., Graham 2001: 61, Chan 1969: 190, Watson 1968: 49, Mair 1997: 14). Brook Ziporyn puts it somewhat differently as "the transformation of one thing into another" (Ziporyn 2009: 21). Given the importance of *wuhua* in the *Zhuangzi* and the ambiguity of the English phrase "transformation of things,"[4] it is necessary to point out that the term carries a crucial implication of transformation *with* things, hinting to the fact that things in the world, including humans, are inextricably bonded together in the vast web of interconnectedness and they incessantly transform into each other. As A.C. Graham perceptively comments, "the Taoist does not permanently deem himself a man or a butterfly but moves spontaneously from fitting one nature to fitting another" (Graham 2001: 61). To interpret *wuhua* as transformation with things conveys more explicitly the sense of fitting, key to the concept of *hua* in the *Zhuangzi*. As Zhuangzi puts it in the "Worldly Business Among Men" (*renjian shi* 人間世) Chapter,

> If the channels inward through eyes and ears are cleared, and you expel knowledge from the heart, the ghostly and daemonic will come to dwell in you, not to mention all that is human! This is to transform with the myriad things, here Shun and Yü found the knot where all threads join, here Fu-hsi and Chi Ch'ü finished their journey, not to speak of lesser men! (Graham 2001: 69)

Interestingly, Graham glosses *wanwu zhi hua* 萬物之化 as "to transform with the myriad things," in line with my interpretation of *wuhua* 物化. Here the *Zhuangzi* refers to

[4] It can be either the transformation of things by themselves or by others. While the latter translation is clearly problematic for the *Zhuangzi*, the former does not quite get across the sense of *fitting* change that is key to the text.

a daemonic state in which all of our sense organs are attuned to the way of the world such that it enables us to transform along with the myriad creatures. For Zhuangzi, such a state is not so much a mystical union as a nimble mind that is attuned to the way of the world, or what Lee Yearley calls "intraworldly mysticism" (Yearley 1983: 160).

In Zhuangzi's reflection of his butterfly dream, he holds up the ease of mutual transformation between himself the man and himself the butterfly, between the waking state and the dream state, as the ideal of effortless and natural transformation. In Xu Keqian's words,

> In Zhuangzi's imagination the free spirit ought to break the boundary (between him the man and the butterfly), so that Zhuang Zhou can transform into a butterfly and butterfly Zhuang Zhou. In this way, the "self" can "transform" into not-self (*fei wo* 非我) as well as into other things, such that "my" spirit is completely liberated from "my" limitation imposed by the petty physical body and enters into the realm of infinite freedom. This story can be regarded as Zhuangzi's beautiful dream of freedom. (Xu 2005:149)

As expressed in the *Book of Changes*, change is the way of the world such that everything in the world is in a continuous process of transformation. For Zhuangzi we as humans should not seek to halt such a natural process or impose our will on it. Rather, we should transform ourselves along with the world. This attitude is captured in the famous discussion on death in "The Teacher Who Is the Ultimate Ancestor" (*da zong shi* 大宗師) Chapter.

Zi Yü falls ill, but his attitude toward his own transformation is that of supreme tranquility and detachment: "to get life is to be on time and to lose it is to be on course; be content with the time and settled on the course, and sadness and joy cannot find a way in. This is what of old was called 'being loosed from the bonds'; and whoever cannot loose himself other things bind still tighter" (Graham 2001: 88). Sadness and joy are the bondage that entangles us in the world, and to be liberated from this bondage one needs to disentangle oneself from both sadness and joy so that they have no impact on our engagement with the natural transformation of the world. When Zi Lai is on the verge of death and his wife and children are bewailing him, Zi Li warns them: "Don't startle him while he transforms (*wudahua* 無怛化)" (Graham 2001: 88). This *wudahua* 無怛化 vividly encapsulates the Zhuangzian attitude toward transformation, namely we should not stand in the way of the natural transformation by adding sadness or joy to the process.

Clearly *wuhua* 物化 in the *Zhuangzi* can be understood both descriptively and prescriptively. On the one hand, it describes the natural state of affairs in the world, and on the other hand, it prescribes what our attitude toward such a natural state of affairs should be. It is precisely these two aspects of *wuhua* that crystallize what is at stake for the Zhuangzian notion of freedom, namely the intimate connection between nature and freedom. The descriptive aspect of *wuhua* pertains to nature while its prescriptive aspect pertains to freedom.

Some contemporary interpreters of Zhuangzi have taken note of the connection between nature and freedom in his thought. For example, Yang Guorong 杨国荣, in his *Dao Lun* 道论 (*On the Dao*) which is the first of his ambitious trilogy on concrete metaphysics (*jiti de xingshangxue* 具体的形上学), says,

> According to Zhuangzi, the natural state is the ideal state of existence; the development of culture and the formation of social norms lead to human bondage. Only through the return to the natural state of existence (*tian* 天) can we reach the state of freedom (*xiaoyao* 逍遥). It is not hard to see that in the *Zhuangzi* freedom and nature appear to be co-extensive (*chonghe wei yi* 重合为一). (Yang 2011: 275–76)

Yang is representative among modern interpreters in identifying Zhuangzi's conception of freedom with that of nature. In many ways, such an interpretation is well justified and can easily find textual support in the *Zhuangzi*. Indeed, Zhuangzi's musing about his butterfly dream can be seen as his attempt to identify the prescriptive *wuhua* with the descriptive *wuhua*. Interpreted this way, the realization of such identification is seen as the achievement of spiritual freedom.

However, such an interpretation of the Zhuangzian freedom as the identification with nature has some major difficulties. As ZI Yü puts it with regard to death: "it is no new thing after all that creatures do not prevail against Heaven. What would be the point of hating it?" (Graham 2001, 88). Identification with nature can sound like a sense of resignation in the face of overwhelming natural transformation that hardly exemplifies the ideal of spiritual freedom. This explains YANG Guorong's thoughtful critique of Zhuangzi's identification between nature and freedom:

> Nature (*tian* 天) has to do with the way of Heaven (*tian* 天道), in opposition to what is human or the process of humanization (*renhua* 人化). In the former case, the affirmation of the connection between freedom and nature means that Zhuangzi acknowledges human freedom includes the dimension of following the way of Heaven (law of nature); but when freedom (*xiaoyao* 逍遥) is understood only in terms of following nature (*ziran* 自然), human goals or ideals would have been more or less put aside…. Nature itself does not possess the properties of freedom. Only when human beings engage nature, according to our goals and ideals, humanize it and make it ours can nature participate in the realm of freedom. Through humanization of nature, human being realize our goals and ideals…. Zhuangzi, in identifying natural state with free state, not only ignores the distinction between freedom and self-existence (*zizai* 自在), but also pays inadequate attention to the value aspect of freedom. (Yang 2011: 276–77)

Clearly, Yang's critique exposes a serious quandary in identifying freedom with nature. However, I would argue that it is oversimplifying to claim that Zhuangzi regards nature and freedom as identical since this identification is, at the very least, not the whole story in the text. Let us explore some other dimensions in the relationship between nature and freedom in the *Zhuangzi* so as to get a more nuanced understanding. In this regard, *wuhua* provides a very useful ploy, and there is no better case than the butcher's transformation of an ox.

The famous story of the butcher Cook Ding is the ultimate example of supremely attuned senses and daemonically guided actions in transforming a whole ox into a disentangled one. To put it in Zhuangzi's language in the "Worldly Business Among Men" Chapter quoted above, where Zhuangzi explains how to transform with things, Cook Ding has found the knot where all threads of an ox join. To be able to transform a situation, the Heavenly and the human elements need to be properly

aligned and attuned such that neither is trounced by the other. This is aptly summarized in "The Teacher Who Is the Ultimate Ancestor" Chapter:

> Hence they were one with what they liked and one with what they disliked, one when they were one and one when they were not one. When one they were of Heaven's party, when not one they were of man's party. Someone in whom neither Heaven nor man is victor over the other, that is what is meant by the True Man. (Graham 2001: 85)

The True Man "in whom neither Heaven nor man is victor over the other" is precisely someone who has successfully and effectively negotiated the tension between Heaven/nature and human. This is a crucial distinction Zhuangzi makes in the text. Here Zhuangzi is not simply holding up the identification of Heaven/nature and human, beings as the ultimate ideal. Rather, he differentiates between two kinds of Heaven/human relationship, namely Heaven over human or human over Heaven. In Cook Ding's transformation of the ox, if it were a case of Heaven/nature over human, he would not have cut the ox to begin with; if it were a case of human over Heaven/nature, he would have simply hacked his way through the body of the ox and would have to change his chopper frequently. He rejects both. Instead, his is a case in which there is a perfect alignment (*qi* 齊) or attunement (*tong* 通) between Heaven/nature and human. As a result, the job is carried out seamlessly and he does not need to change his chopper over nineteen years after cutting up thousands of oxen.

As the butcher describes it, at the beginning he sees the whole ox, and gradually he is able to discern bone and muscle patterns and eventually discovers what are normally invisible paths inside the ox. The butcher describes how he does it this way: "At that joint there is an interval, and the chopper's edge has no thickness; if you insert what has no thickness where there is an interval, then, what more could you ask, of course there is ample room to move the edge about" (Graham 2001: 64). What is extraordinary in this depiction is Cook Ding's discernment of an interval in a joint (*youjian* 有間) and his realization of the thicklessness of his chopper's edge (*wu hou* 無厚). Neither is apparent from the ordinary perspective. Clearly in the butcher's long years of practice, both he himself and the ox are transformed such that he can run his chopper as if its edge had no thickness while at the same time the intervals of an ox's joints are brought into the open. Put differently, in his cutting of an ox the butcher is no longer his ordinary self, while the ox is no longer an ox to an ordinary person. They are both transformed in the manner that neither stands in the way of the other. This is the picture of perfect alignment or attunement between nature and human. Zhuangzi calls this state "the Great Thoroughware" (*datong* 大通) (Watson 1968: 90) or "the Great Openness" (Ziporyn 2009: 49 foonote).[5] As a result, the world opens itself up, and any resistance drops away. Hence the butcher does not need to hack his way through the ox; instead, his chopper roams between the joints inside the ox, staying intact for more than nineteen years and counting.

What is intriguing is the lesson Lord Wenhui draws after hearing the butcher's explanation. Lord Wenhui declares that he has learned how to nurture life. On the

[5] Graham translates it as "the universal thoroughfare" (Graham 2001: 92). Ziporyn renders it as "Great Openness" (Ziporyn 2009: 49) even though he amends it as *huatong* 化通 by adopting a parallel in the *Huainanzi*. Mair's translation as "the Transformational Thoroughfare" follows the same textual change (Mair 1997: 64).

face of it, butchery and nurturing of life do not seem to have much in common. Putting aside the apparent incongruity of the images of nurturing life and butchery, we should be able to see that here Zhuangzi is using the image of a thickless chopper's edge navigating joint intervals in an ox to convey the idea of an extraordinarily effective way to navigate and negotiate the various domains of relationality and entanglements in life so that one would encounter as little resistance as possible, thus living out one's heavenly endowed years. The expression "*youren youyu* 遊刃有餘" vividly captures that extraordinary way of navigating relationality and entanglement. That is, Cook Ding is able to discern a path that is invisible to an ordinary butcher, as if perceived through a heavenly eye and guided by a daemonic power. Such an extraordinary ability is the embodiment of the perfect alignment between Heaven/nature and a human being.

It is important to note that this perfect alignment between Heaven/nature and human is different from their identification: the former preserves both the natural and the human aspects of the "humanized" world, to use YANG Guorong's word, whereas the latter eliminates the human aspect in favor of the natural aspect. Furthermore, the way Cook Ding is able to carry out his work is not exactly "natural." If by natural we mean following one's endowed nature or native ability, then Cook Ding would have been the most natural at the very beginning of his butchering career. But that is clearly not the case here. Like any other butcher, at the beginning he has to change his chopper frequently. The butcher himself takes that to be clumsiness which might have been "natural" but is nonetheless not valued by the butcher himself. Only after years of practice does he reach the supreme state. This supreme state, the perfect alignment between nature and the butcher, is an extraordinary achievement.

If we want to call the butcher's achieved state "natural" due to its extraordinary grace, ease, and effectiveness, we need to recognize that the "natural" has its dimensions, from the clumsy (nature-human misalignment) to the daemonic (perfect nature-human alignment), and the daemonic is the highest state of being natural. To see the natural this way is to introduce human values into the natural world. This is why "natural" is a human value in the *Zhuangzi*, since it establishes a set of standards and criteria for us to aim at and evaluate. Therefore, unlike what YANG Guorong suggests (Yang 2011: 276–77), it is not really a question of Zhuangzi's rejecting human values while valorizing nature as the ultimate ideal. Rather it is about the training of insights and discernment that enables one to effectively navigate and negotiate one's way in the world. That is where Zhuangzi's notion of freedom should be located.

With respect to freedom, what is of special interest to us is Zhuangzi's use of *you* 遊 in Cook Ding's description of his movement. In its common usage, *you* simply means "to travel." However, in the *Zhuangzi*, it takes on a rather particular array of meanings and a special significance. Even though many *you*s in the *Zhuangzi* can still be dubbed as travel, it is a travel of a spectacular kind, and I will treat such a usage of *you* as a technical Zhuangzian term, rendered as roaming, in order to distinguish it from its common meaning of "travel." In this connection, there are two kinds of roaming in the *Zhuangzi*, one is to roam beyond the various boundaries and the other is within the boundaries. The first kind of roaming, namely roaming beyond the boundaries, is the paradigmatic Zhuangzian *you*, and it has been duly noted by traditional commentators as well as modern interpreters, e.g., roaming between heaven and earth (*you hu tiandi zhi*

yiqi 遊乎天地之一氣), into the infinite (*you wuqiong* 遊無窮), beyond the four seas (*you hu sihai zhi wai* 遊乎四海之外), beyond the dust and grime (*you hu chengou zhi wai* 遊乎塵垢之外), beyond the norm (*you fang zhi wai* 遊方之外), etc.[6] This aspect of the *Zhuangzi* is well represented and celebrated in the Chinese hermetic tradition.

The second kind of roaming, roaming within boundaries, is more subtle and less prominent in the inner chapters and has hence received less attention. Therefore our focus in this essay is on the second kind so as to redress its neglect in the scholarly commentaries while highlighting its importance in the text. We have already seen the case of *youren youyu* 遊刃有餘 in the Cook Ding story, meaning to move the edge of the chopper between the joints with ample room to maneuver. This is a clear case of the second kind of *you*. As Scott Cook perceptively puts it, the Zhuangzian freedom is "the freedom that *roams in between* constraints" (Cook 1997: 540, original italics). It is also interesting to note in this connection that *you* here is used as a transitive verb, meaning "to move something effortlessly," instead of an intransitive verb as it is normally used.

Another famous expression of the second kind of *you* is *chengwu youxin* 乘物遊心 in the "Worldly Affairs Among People" Chapter. *Chengwu youxin* appears in the context of Confucius's lecturing on destiny in the chapter: "to let the heart roam with other things as its chariot [*chengwu youxin*], and by trusting to the inevitable nurture the centre of you, is the farthest one can go. Why should there be anything you have initiated in the reply you bring back? The important thing is to fulfill what is ordained for you; and that is the most difficult thing of all" (Graham 2001: 71). Graham translates *chengwu youxin* as "to let the heart roam with other things as its chariot." It can also be rendered as "to move the heartmind in riding along with things." According to Zhuangzi, to be able to move the heartmind in such a way can fulfill what is heavenly endowed in us.

A third case of roaming within boundaries is found in the expression "*you qi fan* 遊其樊," which means "roaming free inside his (the king's) cage." This appears in the discussion of the fasting of the heartmind (*xinzai* 心齋) between Confucius and Yan Hui in the "Worldly Affairs Among People" Chapter. The larger context of this is a discussion on how a Daoist sage can live an enlightened life while trying to bring his wayward ruler closer to the Way. Zhuangzi, through the mouth of Confucius, proposes the fasting of the heartmind so that the enlightened person, as Graham notes, "no longer has deliberate goals, the 'about to be' at the center of him belongs to the transforming processes of heaven and earth. Then he will have the instinct for when to speak and when to be silent, and will say the right thing as naturally as a bird sings" (Graham 2001: 69). Here Zhuangzi makes an intriguing remark,

> To leave off making footprints is easy, never to walk on the ground is hard. What has man for agent is easily falsified, what has Heaven for agent is hard to falsify. You have heard of using wings to fly. You have not yet heard of flying by being wingless; you have heard of using the wits to know, you have not yet heard of using ignorance to know. (Graham 2001: 69)

[6] For example, Xu Keqian, in his discussion of *you*, focuses exclusively on this transcendent dimension of *you* (Xu 2005: 146–49). It also appears to be what Yang Guorong has in mind when he interprets Zhuangzi's conception of freedom. Fu Fen'ge, in declaring that "Zhuangzi's freedom is freedom of the spirit, not freedom of the action" (Fu 2009: 295), also highlights this transcendent dimension of freedom.

As Graham points out insightfully here, Zhuangzi is making an observation that "it is easy to withdraw from the world as a hermit, hard to remain above the world while living in it" (Graham 2001: 69). This is precisely the kind of roaming that takes place within the boundaries of the worldly affairs without being bound by them, as opposed to transcending such boundaries by leaving behind the worldly affairs.

But what is the relationship between these two kinds of *you* in the text? Zhuangzi addresses this in the "Worldly Affairs Among People" Chapter when discussing the expression *you qi fan* 遊其樊. Here Zhuangzi, uncharacteristically as Graham observes (Graham 2001: 71), talks in some length about obligation to the parents and duty to the ruler. Through the mouth of Confucius, Zhuangzi lays out two constraints for living in the world, namely destiny (*ming* 命) and duty (*yi* 義). The former refers to one's filial love of one's parents and the latter a minister's service to his lord. According to Zhuangzi, there is no escape from these two supreme constraints. This means that, for a Zhuangzian, these two constraints constitute the ultimate limiting condition for living in the world. One can leave behind other norms and boundaries, except these two. Interestingly though, there is very little discussion on filial love in the text, whereas there is significant effort devoted to the topic of serving the state. All three previous examples of roaming within the boundaries pertain to dealing with the king. This suggests the thorniness of the issue of serving the state whereas one's filial love of parents is much less problematic for Zhuangzi.

However, Zhuangzi is clearly struggling with the idea of duty to the state. In "The Sorting Which Evens Things Out" (*qi wu lun* 齊物論) Chapter, he recommends that we should "Forget the years, forget duty, be shaken into motion by the limitless, and so find things their lodging-places in the limitless" (Graham 2001: 60). This advice is offered in the context of discussing how to settle a disputation and adjudicate various alternatives. Here Zhuangzi does not exactly see duty as an ultimate limiting condition for living freely and instead advocates leaving it behind, in contradiction to the passage in the "Worldly Affairs Among People" Chapter as we saw previously. Such a rejection of duty to the state is even more pronounced in some of the Outer Chapters. The most famous example can be found in the "Autumn floods" (*qiu shui* 秋水) Chapter, wherein Zhuangzi compares someone who serves the state to an enshrined dead tortoise and asks the king's two emissaries: "Would this tortoise rather be dead, to be honored as preserved bones? Or would it rather be alive and dragging its tail in the mud" (Graham 2001: 122)? Once the two emissaries reply that the tortoise would prefer the latter, Zhuangzi demands that they leave him alone, "Away with you! I shall drag my tail in the mud" (Graham 2001: 122). I do not think the tension between these two kinds of *you* 遊 is satisfactorily resolved within the text. Although we can "help" Zhuangzi resolve the tension by making one *you* a higher kind and the other lower, such a "solution" does not take seriously the conceptual tension and the existential struggle involved therein.

Some contemporary interpreters have recognized these two aspects of *you* in the *Zhuangzi*. For example, FU Fen'ge 付粉鴿 summarizes the two nicely as "letting the body roam in the world while letting the heartmind roam beyond the world (*youshen yu shijian er youxin yu shiwai* 游身于世间而游心于世外)" (Fu 2009: 302). However, she does not problematize the tension between the two. Furthermore, when she says that Zhuangzi's idea of freedom is that of spirit but not of action (Fu 2009: 295), she is following the well-established mainstream interpretation of the Zhuangzian freedom as

freedom beyond boundaries or transcendent freedom, not within boundaries or immanent freedom. However, it is hard not to see the story of Cook Ding as an astonishing case of freedom of action. When she touches upon the immanent dimension of *you* in the text, she interprets it in purely passive terms as solely about preservation of one's life. Such an interpretation does not give full credit to the active vision of freedom in the *Zhuangzi*, even in the effort to preserve life. For example, in the *Sanmu* 山木 Chapter, Zhuangzi instructs his disciple not to be tied down by either usefulness or uselessness. Rather, he should aim at settling at the "midway between good for something and good for nothing" (Graham 2001: 121). Furthermore, "roaming adrift over the Ancestor of the myriad things you treat things and refuse to be turned into a thing by things" (Graham 2001: 121). This expression of "*wuwu er bu wuyuwu* 物物而不物於物" captures the stunning nimbleness and agility of the agent, articulating the extraordinarily active aspect of the Zhuangzian freedom. Furthermore, it validates our interpretation of the ideal Zhuangzian freedom as the perfect alignment between nature and a person, rather than the identification between them, since the identification of a person with nature would have turned a person into a thing.

Conceptually *you* and *hua* are closely tied in the *Zhuangzi* in depicting a consummate state of freedom in the world and beyond. The intricate relationship between the two terms is evident throughout the *Zhuangzi*. For example, the opening chapter, *Xiaoyao You* 逍遙遊 (Roaming with Ease), begins with the *hua* of a huge fish Kun into a big bird Peng. Clearly Zhuangzi is not talking about the magic of physically changing from a fish to a bird, but rather the spontaneous roaming (*you*) of the world from a fishlike state to a birdlike state, without being stuck in one or the other (*hua*). In the *Da Zong Shi* 大宗師 Chapter, we find Zhuangzi claiming that "Therefore the sage will roam where things cannot escape him and all are present. That he finds it good to die young and good to grow old, good to begin and good to end, is enough for men to take him as their model; and how much more that to which the myriad things are tied, on which we depend to be transformed just once!" (Graham 2001: 86). Here *you* is depicted as the mode of being of a sage while *hua* refers to the power of nature/divine. Indeed, roaming can even be considered a particular case of transformation in the *Zhuangzi*, namely to transform (*hua*) by roaming (*you*). *You* depicts a special kind of freedom that seeks to navigate between various domains of relationality within the natural and human boundaries or beyond by roaming and transforming along with the world in the *Zhuangzi*. Such a form of freedom is characterized by the ease and efficacy in the mutual transformation of oneself and the world by roaming along with the world.

3 Xunzian *Hua* as Self-Transformation in Extending Relationality

In contrast with Zhuangzi's *hua* as transformation *with* things, the overwhelming concern of *hua* in the book of the *Xunzi* is the transformation *of* things by a gentleman or a sage. Repeatedly demonstrated in the *Xunzi* (as well as in other Confucian classics), the central concern of *hua* is *hua wanwu* 化萬物 and *hua wanmin* 化萬民, namely, to transform myriad things and the mass. Within the Confucian tradition, *jiaohua* 教化 (to transform through education) serves as the paradigm of *hua*, and this is clearly the case in the *Xunzi*. *Jiaohua* seeks to transform the world by first transforming oneself and then bringing everybody else along on the road to moral perfection.

The relationship between a Xunzian gentleman and things in the world is best captured in this statement from the "On Self-Cultivation" (*xiushen* 修身) Chapter of the *Xunzi*: "the gentleman works external things; the petty man works for external things" (*junzi yi wu*, *xiaoren yi yu wu* 君子役物, 小人役於物) (Knoblock 1988: 2.5). It prizes cultivation of intention and purpose (*zhi yi xiu* 志意修), dedication to the Way and justice (*dao yi zhong* 道義重), and introspection (*neixing* 內省) over wealth and eminence (*fu gui* 富貴), political power (*wang gong* 王公) and external things (*wai wu* 外物). This crystallizes the Confucian ideal of transformative freedom that conveys a strong sense of moral autonomy and effectiveness in cultivating the self and reconstituting human relationships rather than letting considerations for wealth, power and fame dictate the moral agent's actions. Such an autonomy and effectiveness is the result of vigorous moral cultivation through which a strong moral agency emerges.

The key to the moral exemplar's self-transformation and his transformation of the human society into a moral community lies in the practice of *li* 禮, ritual. Among the classical Confucians, Xunzi provides the most articulate account for the reason behind the Confucian faith in the transformative power of *li*. Xunzi describes the origin of ritual this way:

> How did ritual principles arise? I say that men are born with desires which, if not satisfied, cannot but lead men to seek to satisfy them. If in seeking to satisfy their desires men observe no measure and apportion things without limits, then it would be impossible for them not to contend over means to satisfy their desires. Such contention leads to disorder. Disorder leads to poverty. The Ancient Kings abhorred such disorder; so they established the regulations contained within ritual and moral principles in order to apportion things, to nurture the desires of men, and to supply the means for their satisfaction. They so fashioned their regulations that desires should not want for the things which satisfy them and goods would not be exhausted by the desires. In this way the two of them, desires and goods, sustained each other over the course of time. This is the origin of ritual principles. (Knoblock 1994: 19.1a)

In other words, ritual practice (*li* 禮) is the civilizing force that transforms (*hua* 化) the disorderly human desires into satisfactory fulfillment. This civilizing effect makes ritual practice an ideal means to accomplish what the Confucians hope to achieve, namely harmony and fulfillment, in personal, familial, social, political, economic, and moral domains. Conceptually, there is a direct link between *hua* and *li* in the *Xunzi* in that *hua* is accomplished through *li*.

In order to convince his contemporaries, especially the ruling elite, of the transformative power of the Confucian program, embodied in the *li*, in addressing what Graham calls the deepening "metaphysical" crisis (Graham 1989: 107) during the classical period, Xunzi provides a detailed account about how *li* is supposed to work. According to Xunzi, the practice of *li* is effective both personally and collectively: on the personal level, it offers the appropriate fulfillment of human desires and provides the method for moral cultivation; on the larger scale, it transforms the world from a chaotic and crude one to a harmonious and fulfilling one in all dimensions, including the economic, social, political, and moral. Let us take a closer look at Xunzi's prescription of how *li* works.

First, *li* offers proper fulfillment of human desires. Xunzi famously glosses ritual as nurture (*li zhe yang ye* 禮者養也) (Knoblock 1994: 19.1b). Clearly the nourishing

function of ritual is front and center in Xunzi's thought. In Xunzi's historical imaginary, the very origin of ritual has to do with managing and fulfilling human desires, as was quoted earlier. The purpose for establishing *li* is to make sure that "desires did not overextend the means for their satisfaction, and material goods did not fall short of what was desired. Thus both desires and goods were looked after and satisfied" (Watson 1963: 89).[7] In the Confucian tradition, a fulfilling material condition is viewed as an indispensable precondition for a flourishing human community.

However, in order to create material conditions that fulfill human desires, we inevitably move into the moral realm, confronting issues like equity and justice in the distribution of materials, which is the second function of *li*. This is the moral dimension of *li* in the economic-socio-political realm. In this connection we find Xunzi stating that the ritual and justice system is established by ancient kings "to apportion things, to nurture the desires of men, and to supply the means for their satisfaction" (Knoblock 1994: 19.1a). Here *li* is associated with two concepts, *yi* 義 and *fen* 分, both of which lie at the very heart of promoting the material and moral wellbeing of the human community in the Xunzian formulation of a ritual order.

Yi 義 is often translated as righteousness, justice or, simply, morality.[8] It is sometimes, as in the above quote, coupled with *li* as in *liyi* 禮義, "ritual principle and moral duty" or "ritual and justice," but it is often used independently as a moral value in itself. The significance of *yi* 義 in Xunzi's thought can be seen in the "On the Regulations of a King" (*wang zhi* 王制) Chapter wherein *yi* is regarded as *the* distinguishing characteristic of human beings: "Birds and beasts have awareness, but lack a sense of morality and justice. Humans possess vital breath, life, and awareness, and add to them a sense of morality and justice. It is for this reason that they are the noblest beings in the world" (Knoblock 1990: 9.16a). This is Xunzi's famous statement about the differences among different forms of existence in the world. What differentiates animals from human beings is the sense of morality and justice possessed by human beings. This very much echoes the Mencian sentiment, their apparent differences notwithstanding. According to Sato, Xunzi's contribution to the development of the concept of *yi* lies in his effort to make it the moral constituent of *li*: "by combining *yi* as a moral value with *li* as a concrete method for tightening various levels of social bonds, [Xunzi] proposed a viable prescription for attaining order and peace of the human world" (Sato 2003: 351).

Fen 分 means proper distinctions in social relationships and roles. It is cognitively related to the concept of *bian* 辨, to distinguish or to differentiate. *Fen*/*bian* points to the necessity of moral distinctions, such as nobility and baseness, greatness and pettiness, high and low, etc., and social distinctions, such as lord and minister, parent and child, husband and wife, elder and younger siblings, etc., both in terms of personal cognition and social arrangement so as to maintain a proper familial, social, economic, political, and moral order. It crystallizes the principle behind the famous saying in the *Analects* 12.11, "let the lord be a true lord, minister a true minister, father a true father, and son a true son." In the *Xunzi*, the relationship between *li* and *fen* is captured in the phrase "To employ ritual principles in dividing the largess and to be equitable in every case and

[7] I am using Burton Watson's translation here. Knoblock's translation is: "They so fashioned their relations that desires should not want for the things which satisfy them and goods would not be exhausted by the desires. In this way the two of them, desires and goods, sustained each other over the course of time" (Knoblock 1994: 19.1a). The first sentence is rather unclear.

[8] Here I am following the discussion of *yi* in Sato Masayuki's study of Xunzi (Sato 2003: 346–351).

unbiased" (Knoblock 1990: 12.3). This is a response to an inquiry about the way of a lord in the *Jundao* 君道 Chapter. In other words, ritual is the most equitable and proper way to delineate various social relationships and distribute material resources.

Importantly, as moral concepts, *yi* and *fen* have both a personal aspect and a social aspect, reflected in the ways they are translated and interpreted. Understood in terms of personal virtue, *yi* means righteousness, while on a larger scale it stands for justice, where a hierarchical but equitable familial, economic, social, and political order is observed; on the personal level, *fen* refers to our cognitive distinction between the high and the low, the noble and the base, while socially it is expressed in terms of the distinction and arrangement in various familial, social, and political relationships. Such dual purports of *yi* and *fen* point to the all-encompassing potency of *li*, material and moral, personal and collective. That is, on the one hand, *li* nurtures human beings materially through equitable distribution of material goods in fulfilling human desires and through proper reconstitution of familial, social, and political relationships in establishing a just and harmonious world order, while on the other hand it is powerful in fundamentally reshaping the moral character of a person through appropriately distinguishing various mental inclinations and impulses, cultivating the benign ones into moral virtues while regulating the baser instincts.

This power of *li* to reshape a person's moral constitution is its third function. According to Xunzi, proper ritual practice can literally transform human nature by elevating the nobler moral inclinations and intellectual capability while sublimating[9] the base instincts like greed, jealousy, and selfishness. As David Wong observes, "rituals are especially effective in shaping and channeling human feeling because they regulate and partially define occasions on which human beings have strong feelings of the sort that can become moral feelings" (Wong 2000: 149). This transformative power of *li* is crucial in establishing the efficacy of the Confucian program of moral cultivation from Xunzi's perspective.

Xunzi is well-known for arguing that human nature is bad (*xing e* 性惡), positioning himself against his famous predecessor Mencius, who maintains that human nature is good (*xing shan* 性善)—even though many commentators have duly noted that their actual positions are much more nuanced and much less black and white.

> Human nature is evil; any good in humans is acquired by conscious exertion. Now, the nature of man is such that he is born with a love of profit. Following this nature will cause its aggressiveness and greedy tendencies to grow and courtesy and deference to disappear. Humans are born with feelings of envy and hatred. Indulging these feelings causes violence and crime to develop and loyalty and trustworthiness to perish. Man is born possessing the desires of the ears and eyes (which are fond of sounds and colors). Indulging these desires causes dissolute and wanton behavior to result and ritual and moral principles, precepts of good form, and the natural order of reason to perish. (Knoblock 1994: 23.1a)

Xunzi defines the badness of human nature in terms of our susceptibility to greed, aggression, jealousy, hatred, violence and indulgence in sensuous desires. The image Xunzi uses, famously, in transforming bad human nature into a virtuous one is the

[9] This is Bryan Van Norden's word (Van Norden 2000: 121).

straightening of a piece of warped wood: "a warped piece of wood must first await application of the press-frame, steam to soften it, and force to bend its shape before it can be made straight" (Knoblock 1994: 23.1b). Likewise, the transformation of human nature from bad to good requires vigor and persistence. Clearly, in Xunzi's mind, such a process is arduous and lengthy.

As Sato observes, "the perfection of humanity could be attained by the internalization of the concept of *li*; it would be changed from external rituals and social norms into the morally based internal psychological condition which would be acquired by contemplative activities rather than social practices" (Sato 2003: 383). This echoes the observation by most commentators that Xunzi is an externalist when it comes to moral cultivation. As Erica Brindley puts it, "Because Xunzi views the self as possessing multiple, competing agencies—some of which hold ultimate sway over human actions when we do not concertedly attempt to overcome them—he not surprisingly endorses a type of moral self-cultivation that relies heavily on the guidance of external authorities" (Brindley 2010: 90). But how does this internalization of external norms take place? This has to do with the inculcation of order within a person through observing the *li*. Chaos, both external and internal, is problematic for Xunzi. We have already seen the power of ritual in harmonizing and regulating the material (external) condition in our earlier discussion. It is also important to recognize that ritual is a potent means to harmonize and regulate the emotional (internal) life. In Xunzi's word,

> Rites trim what is too long, stretch out what is too short, eliminate excess, remedy deficiency, and extend cultivated forms that express love and respect so that they increase and complete the beauty of conduct according to one's duty. Thus elegant adornment and gross ugliness, the sounds of music and the sobs of crying, contented happiness and grief-stricken distress are all opposites, yet rites use them all, substituting and changing them as the occasion requires. Elegant adornment, music, and happiness are what sustain tranquility and serve auspicious occasions. Gross ugliness, weeping, and sorrow are what sustain anxiety and serve inauspicious occasions. Hence their utilization of elegant adornment does not go so far as to be sensuous or seductive, nor gross ugliness so far as to produce emaciation or self-neglect. Their use of music and happiness does not go so far as to be wayward and abandoned or indolent and rude, nor do weeping and sorrow go so far as to produce despondency or injury to life. Such is the middle course of ritual. (Knoblock 1994: 19.5b)

In other words, *li* strikes a balance between excess and deficiency in our emotional responses to personal and social circumstances as both of these tendencies lead to chaos, internally and externally.

However, this moral externalism presents us with a conundrum that has been at the heart of a fascinating and fruitful debate among contemporary interpreters of Xunzi. The issue is this: given Xunzi's position that human nature is bad, how can he on the one hand maintain an externalist position on moral cultivation which argues that the moral good comes from outside while on the other hand not fall victim to the charges of "brainwashing" and moral heteronomy? Doesn't the externalist position on morality necessarily lead to the denial of autonomy and

integrity for the moral agent? As pointed out earlier, in Xunzi's vision, the Confucian gentleman exhibits a strong sense of moral agency that "works external things" (*yiwu* 役物) instead of "works for external things" (*yi yu wu* 役於物) (Knoblock 1988: 2.5). Xunzi's moral externalism seems to contradict his own vision of moral autonomy.

Contemporary scholars can be roughly divided into two groups on their interpretations of Xunzi's take on human nature, and I call them "compatibilists" and "incompatibilists." Both groups naturally position the Xunzian stance vis-à-vis the Mencian stance. The first group, e.g., SATO Masayuki, argues that Xunzi's account of human nature complements, instead of contradicting, Mencius's account, and the two are compatible with each other.[10] The second group, represented most powerfully by Philip J. Ivanhoe, maintains that the Mencian and the Xunzian accounts of human nature are fundamentally incompatible.[11] Both accept some version of moral externalism.

The compatibilist interpretation of Xunzi appears to be in a better position to deal with the problem of moral autonomy. However, even for the compatibilist, serious issues remain. For example, Aaron Stalnaker's interpretation of Xunzi in his groundbreaking monograph, *Overcoming Our Evil: Human Nature and Spiritual Exercises in Xunzi and Augustine* (Stalnaker 2006), can be regarded as embracing some version of the compatibalist line. He tries to tackle the thorny issue of moral autonomy by arguing that within the Xunzian moral system, the heartmind is the ultimate moral agent, the "craftsman," that seeks to shape our impulses, thoughts, and practical abilities (Stalnaker 2006: 158). Unfortunately, such a solution runs into some textual difficulties. For example, in the *Xing E* 性惡 Chapter, Xunzi clearly regards "the heartmind's love of profit" (*xin hao li* 心好利) as the inherent nature of human beings (Knoblock 1994: 23.2a). Such a profit-loving heartmind is obviously ill-suited to be the ultimate moral arbitrator of our impulses and actions. Furthermore, if we were to grant that the heartmind could indeed perform the function of a moral agent, Xunzian moral externalism would have already yielded to Mencian moral internalism. This is tantamount to saying that the Xunzian moral system is fundamentally incoherent, which is clearly not Stalnaker's position in the book. Even if it is entirely acceptable to argue for the incoherent nature of the Xunzian moral system, interpretative charity obligates us to find some plausible and credible way to interpret the text coherently and that is what Stalnaker does admirably in the book in any case.

Bryan Van Norden addresses this issue by arguing that Xunzi postulates two mental states, desire (*yu* 欲) and approval (*ke* 可) and that "[a]pproval simply trumps desire" (Van Norden 2000: 124). Since approval can always override desire, Van Norden argues that Xunzi can rely on approval as the ultimate moral agent. However, as David Wong points out, if "the mind's approval can cause an agent to act contrary to

[10] For example, Sato argues that "Mencius emphasizes the *human* in 'human nature,' which is the distinctive essence of the human species; whereas XUN Zi emphasizes the *nature* in 'human nature,' which is shared by all creatures" (Sato 2003: 251, original italics).

[11] In Ivanhoe's view, "The difference between the theories of Mencius and Xunzi on human nature and moral education is not just one of degree but of kind. It is not that Xunzi thought it is more difficult to develop one's innate moral sense, he did not believe we *have* an innate moral sense at all. Morality is something we can and must acquire in order to lead a fully satisfying life, but we can acquire it only by coming to understand and appreciate the accumulated wisdom of human culture; it is not something we have an innate feeling of or taste for" (Ivanhoe 2000: 245, original italics).

what the agent desires most immediately, but what the mind approves is ultimately based on what it will take to best satisfy over the long term the total set of the agent's desires … there cannot be as dramatic a contrast between Xunzi's and Mencius' views of agency as Van Norden claims there is" (Wong 2000: 140–141). So we are back in the same quandary.

David Wong is sympathetic to the compatibilist interpretation of Xunzi in pointing out that even though Xunzi's explicit account of human nature is that it is bad, many passages in the *Xunzi presuppose* a more benign understanding of human nature, e.g., our natural love for, grief and remembrance of lost parents (Wong 2000: 148). This means that Xunzi's explicit account of human nature can be regarded as a kind of corrective of the more optimistic Mencian account. Wong finds inspiration in David Nivison's earlier studies of Xunzi, which argue that "Xunzi must assume that human beings just have a sense of duty. This sense of duty, for Nivison, amounts to a capability of performing moral duty for its own sake and not for self-interested reasons.… Nivison observes that the sense of duty as an original feature of human nature need not have any particular *content*" (Wong 2000: 147, original italics). That content needs to be inculcated from vigorous learning and ritual practices. Wong furthers Nivison's argument by reconstructing a more nuanced picture of the Xunzian take on human nature and its potential for transformation:

> The natural feelings that rites and music work upon are not yet moral in content. They are primitive responses not yet refined and regulated by moral rules. One originally delights in harmony and in wholeness of various sorts, with no thought that it is somehow morally right.… The proposed reconstruction is consistent with Xunzi's claim that morality is constructed out of self interest. But he now has a picture of human nature that allows him to explain the transformation from self interest to a love and delight in morality. On this view, we love it because it expresses, channels, and strengthens some of our natural human feelings. (Wong 2000: 149)

Following Nivison, Wong makes an important distinction between natural feelings and moral feelings: e.g., the feeling of a debt of gratitude for a kindness or gift: "Such a feeling, as an innate impulse, need not be interpreted as a moral feeling, but simply a strong impulse to return good for good. It becomes a moral feeling after the rules of morality are devised.[12] The rules come to govern and even be embedded in the intentionality of the feeling (feeling that it is one's duty to return good for good)" (Wong 2000: 150). Wong attributes this reconstructed and more sophisticated view on human nature to Xunzi:

> Human nature is not evil because it contains nothing but selfish desire and feeling. It is evil because these kinds of desire and feeling *dominate* in conditions of insecurity and lack of order. It is evil in precisely the sense that Xunzi says it is: without the transforming effect of rites, music, and righteousness, human beings would act for themselves. So interpreted, Xunzi's claim has a great deal of plausibility to it. It also should be noted that love and grief may be expressed in a wide range of ways, only some of which are

[12] We can clearly see where the *Laozi* stands on this.

> compatible with morality. These feelings must be moralized in order for them to result in moral behavior. (Wong 2000: 150)

In other words, moral cultivation changes the structure of the heartmind such that the more benign feelings are nurtured and come to rule over the malign instincts within the heartmind. When this happens, the proper moral order in the heartmind emerges. Clearly, Xunzi's moral teaching attempts to facilitate the emergence of a coherent moral agent through regulating and sublimating various impulses and desires and unifying various tendencies, hence setting the heartmind in proper order.

To set the heartmind in proper order, or self-unification as Stalnaker puts it (Stalnaker 2006: 156), one must properly integrate its warring elements. This is the creed of focusing the heartmind and integrating the intention (*zhuanxin yizhi* 專心一志) in the *Xunzi*. Xunzi describes *zhuanxin yizhi* this way in the following passage.

> Now, if the man in the street were induced to cleave to these methods, engage in study, focus his mind on a single aim [*zhuanxin*], unify his intentions [*yizhi*], ponder these principles, accomplish them each day over a long period of time, and to accumulate what is good without slacking off, then he could penetrate as far as spiritual intelligence and could form a Triad with Heaven and Earth. Thus the sage is a man who has reached this high state through accumulated effort. (Knoblock 1994: 23.5a)

As Stalnaker explains it,

> Uniting one's heart/mind and focusing its attention on the Way are the means to perfect one's accumulation of goodness; this, then, is what Xunzi means by "artifice." Through this conscious, goal-oriented work one's "customs," that is, habits, change to become consonant with ritual propriety, and in parallel the orientation of one's heart/mind gradually shifts, even in its very "substance" (*zhi* 質). This seems to be a reference to the *qing*, "dispositions," which Xunzi regards as the "substance" of the innate endowment. In other words, if practiced assiduously, Confucian spiritual exercises will reshape what is innate so thoroughly that one's dispositions shift, and thus one's largely chaotic innate desires eventually become consonant with the Way; for Xunzi such a state of developed Confucian virtue is genuine human flourishing. In the end, this shifting of intent and disposition is so complete and far reaching that Xunzi can only call it *hua* 化, a "transformation"; the path of Confucius is a "transforming Way." (Stalnaker 2006: 158)

This is Xunzi's prescription on how to overcome the scattering and fragmentation of our heartmind, torn by conflicting and contradictory impulses and tendencies. Consequently, a coherent and cogent moral agent would emerge from this cultivation.

Once the moral agent emerges and grows, s/he can extend the power of her/his moral virtues to encapsulate the world in transforming it from a chaotic one to a harmonious one. This is further elaborated in the following passage from the "Nothing Indecorous" (*bu gou* 不苟) Chapter:

> For the gentleman to nurture his mind, nothing is more excellent than truthfulness. If a man has attained perfection of truthfulness, he will have no other concern than to uphold the principle of humanity and to behave with

> justice. If with truthfulness of mind he upholds the principle of humanity, it will be given form. Having been given form, it becomes intelligible. Having become intelligible, it can produce transmutation. If with truthfulness of mind he behaves with justice, it will accord with natural order. According with natural order, it will become clear. Having become clear, it can produce transformation. To cause transmutation and transformation to flourish in succession is called the "Power of Nature"…. Heaven and Earth are indeed great, but were they to lack truthfulness, they could not transmute the myriad things. Sages to be sure are wise, but were they to lack truthfulness, they could not transmute the people…. It is to just such truthfulness that the gentleman cleaves, and just this truthfulness forms the foundation of his government, so that wherever he may dwell, those who are of his own kind will come to him. If he persists in it, he will obtain it; but if he gives up, it will be lost. By persisting in it and obtaining it, it will become easy for him. Having become easy for him, his conduct will become individual. Being individual and not giving up, he will be fulfilled. Brought to fulfillment, his talents completely realized, continually progressing, and never reverting to his beginnings, he has indeed undergone transmutation. (Knoblock 1988: 3.9a-c)

In this passage, Xunzi singles out *cheng* 誠 as a grounding virtue for the Confucian sage to transform (*hua*) the uncouth world into a moral world. *Cheng* is often translated as sincerity or integrity.[13] For Xunzi, in order to transform the world into a moral one, the sage is required to be sincere, authentic, act righteously, and accord with the natural order of things. More specifically, as Xunzi states here, "To keep a sincere heartmind and humaneness is to be given form. To be given form is to be divine. To be divine is to be able to transform"; "To keep a sincere heartmind and to act righteously is in accordance with the natural order. To be in accordance with the natural order is to be clear. To be clear one can change. To change and transform in reaching successive flourishing is called the heavenly virtue."

Here the connection between the formation of powerful moral agency and the establishment of a harmonious sociopolitical order in Xunzi's conceptualization of *li* becomes crystallized. Xunzi is following the established Confucian formula that locates the power of ritual practice in the vision that *li* effectively links up the moral cultivation of an individual person to the moral transformation of the entire world. This is expressed most elegantly in the *Great Learning* 大學 on the relationship between one's virtue and its power to transform the world, summarized as the teaching of *xiu* 修, *qi* 齊, *zhi* 治, and *ping* 平:

> When things are investigated, knowledge is reached; when knowledge is reached, the intention is fulfilled; when the intention is fulfilled, the heartmind is aligned; when the heartmind is aligned, the person is cultivated [*xiu* 修]; when the person is cultivated, the family is regulated [*qi* 齊]; when the family is regulated, the state is put in order [*zhi* 治]; and when the state is put in order, there is peace under the Heaven [*ping* 平]. (Wang 2006: 4–5)

[13] In the classical dictionary *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* 說文解字, *Cheng* 誠 is glossed as 信 or trustworthy. David Hall and Roger Ames, in their philosophical translation of the *Zhongyong*, gloss *cheng* as creativity (Ames & Hall 2001: 30). An Yanming provides a useful detailed discussion of *cheng* in Chinese thought (An 2005).

Clearly the Confucians see a natural progression of ethical transformation from the personal to the familial, the social, and the political, so that the entire world can live in justice, peace, prosperity, and moral fulfillment. This is an extraordinary accomplishment that results from a moral agent's transformation of various domain of relationality by extending the fruits of moral cultivation from oneself to encompassing the whole world. In Xunzi's conceptualization, *li* is the vehicle to reaching such a grand transformation.

The Xunzian faith in the potency of ritual practice lies in *li*'s echoing of the cosmic order:

> Through rites, Heaven and Earth are conjoined,
> The sun and moon shine brightly,
> The four seasons observe their natural precedence,
> The stars and planets move in ranks,
> The rivers and streams flow,
> And the myriad things prosper.
> Through them, love and hate are tempered,
> And joy and anger made to fit the occasion.
>
> They are used to make inferiors obedient and to make superiors enlightened. Through a myriad transformations nothing becomes disorderly; but if one is divided in his loyalty to them, he will be brought to ruin. Surely it is true that the rites are indeed perfection! (Knoblock 1994: 19.2c)

Put simply, ritual brings proper order from the natural world to the human world by making appropriate distinctions in the human world so that there is no chaos and confusion. In so doing, ritual practices help human beings negotiate the relationship between the cosmic (heavenly), the natural (earthly), and the emotional (human) components of the world in harmonizing all the relationships involved. In Paul Goldin's word, "The rituals of the Sage Kings identify the natural order, and augment it, by confirming the distinctions that people are bound to make by nature" (Goldin 1999: 81). Bryan Van Norden characterizes such a description of *li* as objectivist and "monist" (Van Norden 2000: 160), in countering the view that Xunzi advocates a conventionalist understanding of *li*.

For Xunzi, "just as Heaven is the limit of highness, Earth the limit of depth, and the boundless the limit of extension, so the sage is the ridgepole of the Way" (Knoblock 1994: 19.2d). Here we see the famous triad in the classical Chinese intellectual tradition, consisting of heaven, earth, and human. This triad constitutes the parameters of the classical Chinese intellectual efforts. Depending on the text or particular chapters of a text, the meaning of these terms, especially "heaven," changes. Heaven usually refers to the mystery of the orderly natural world and/or the ultimate divine moral authority, earth is the junior partner of heaven, often representing the manifested, visible, and more grounded aspect of the natural world, and human is represented by the consummate exemplar of a sage. Heaven is generative and creative, earth is accommodating and nurturing, and the sage is transformative and exemplifying. The sage is hailed as one of the cornerstones of this triadic order. This is further elaborated in the following passage:

> [W]hen Heaven and Earth conjoin, the myriad things are begot; when the Yin and Yang principles combine, transformations and transmutations are

> produced; when inborn nature and conscious activity are joined, the world is made orderly. Heaven is able to beget the myriad things, but it cannot differentiate them. Earth can support man, but it cannot govern him. The myriad things under the canopy of heaven and all those who belong among living people depend upon the appearance of the sage, for only then is each assigned its proper station. (Knoblock 1994: 19.6)

The role assigned to the sage is simply extraordinary. The ideal Xunzian sage is one who can effectively transform human relationality in consonance with the divine and natural order such that each person can play a proper and fulfilling role within the society and find his place in the grand scheme of the world. Such a vision of effective transformation is daring, magical, or even miraculous, although this also explains the sentiment expressed in the *Analects* 8.7 that the burden of a Confucian scholar-official is heavy and his journey is long. With the ambition to morally transform the entire world, it is no wonder that his burden is heavy and his journey is long.

To sum up our discussion of Xunzi's conception of *li*, it should be clear to us that *li* has an all-encompassing power in transforming the material and moral conditions of the world, both personally and collectively. Personally, *li* fulfills a whole host of human desires and provides the right method to nurture the emergence and growth of human moral agency; collectively, it transforms a chaotic and uncouth world to a harmonious and fulfilling one in economic, social, political, and moral realms. *Li* is precisely the link in the personal and the collective transformation (*hua*) in that through ritual practices a moral agent's, especially a sage's, personal virtue is gradually extended to transforming the whole world in bringing everybody along on the road to moral perfection. In contrast with Zhuangzi's transformative freedom (*hua*), which is realized through effective navigations and roaming (*you*) of various domains of relationality, Xunzi's *hua* is achieved through the vigorous practice of *li*, which extends one's own moral accomplishment to covering the whole world. Clearly Zhuangzi and Xunzi present us with two distinct visions of transformative freedom (*hua*). I will argue in the concluding part of the essay that such a distinction can be better appreciated in terms of their radically different understandings of the nature of the ideal, cultivated, self.

4 Relational Self and Freedom

In both the *Xunzi* and the *Zhuangzi* the condition of the self is front and center in their meditations on freedom. In this connection, they both take personal cultivation and transformation as the point of departure. However, their end points are radically different. In Xunzi's formulation of transformative freedom we see a moral agent, usually a wise Confucian sage, who gradually extends his moral power through ritual practices to ultimately encompass a whole host of relationality, especially human relationality, until the entire world is encapsulated such that the crude world can be transformed into a moral one. On the other hand, in Zhuangzi's exploration of transformative freedom we witness a deft and nimble Daoist who is so attuned to the complexity of the world that he becomes extraordinarily effective in navigating and roaming between and beyond various domains of relationality, human and natural.

Clearly they represent two distinct types of transformative freedom, as the result of two different kinds of cultivation. The Xunzians cultivate ritual skills that seek to transform various domains of relationality. For them, this is the genesis of a meaningful and fulfilling human world, as the consequence of the sagely transformation of the raw and uncouth world, in partnership with nature (Heaven and Earth). By contrast, the Zhuangzian cultivation tends to focus more on discernment of the potentials that lie in the invisible or even the undesirable realms of the natural and human world, in order to navigate relationality with greater efficacy and ease. Both kinds of cultivation can be seen as skill-like and represent "a perfection of a unique and ultimate skill: the skill of becoming a fully realized human being and embodying the Way in the full range of one's actions" (Slingerland 2003: 9). Such skills are not simply technical in nature, but rather have a strong soteriological purport, relating an individual to a larger normative cosmic order: "Heaven, the Way, *wu-wei*, and Virtue are intimately linked to one another" (Slingerland 2003: 9).

This profound difference between the Zhuangzian and Xunzian notions of transformative freedom points to their distinct characterizations of the nature of the *ideal* self. It has long been argued that traditional Chinese philosophy, including Confucianism and Daoism, operates on the premise of a relational conception of self. However, what has been missing in the scholarly discussion is that Daoists and Confucians have rather different conceptions of the *ideal* self. Both the Confucian and the Daoist projects start with the premise that the everyday ordinary self is relational, but their end points are drastically different. The key to that difference lies in the transformation (*hua*) of the everyday relational self into an ideal self.

For Zhuangzi, in the ideal state the relational self is realigned such that it attunes perfectly to the vicissitudes of the world; for Xunzi, the relational self expands to encompass the entire world. Put differently, for Zhuangzi, the everyday relational self is misaligned such that oneself and the world stand in the way of each other's movement. The solution lies in perfectly realigning human agency and nature in a way that relationality no longer constitutes an obstacle in one's actions. On the other hand, for Xunzi the everyday relational self is limited and petty as in a petty person (*xiaoren*小人). To overcome this pettiness, a person needs to engage in the ritual practice so that a moral agency can emerge, and then expand and enlarge the cultivated self to encompass all in the world so that the transformation of the personal self can gradually lead to the transformation of all. Evidently their teachings present starkly different ways of dealing with the everyday relational self.

As pointed out earlier, the relationship between a Xunzian gentleman and things in the world is characterized as that "the gentleman works external things; the petty man works for external things" (Knoblock 1988: 2.5). There is clearly a strong sense of agency on the part of a sage or gentleman in dealing with the world, and that strong sense of moral agency is to be maintained and extended through moral cultivation and personal transformation. This very much echoes Confucius's sentiment that "human beings can make the Way great, but the Way cannot make human beings great" (*Analects* 15:29). A strong and expansive moral agency, exemplified in the ideal of a Confucian sage, is what Xunzi places all of his hope on in order to reach and sustain a fulfilling human life in this world.

By sharp contrast, Zhuangzi is rather uneasy about the relationality of being in the world. This sentiment is vividly captured in a famous story from "The Mountain

Tree" Chapter, one of the Outer Chapters. A cicada is about to be preyed upon by a mantis who is oblivious of its own imminent danger of being attacked by a magpie, with the latter in each pair taking advantage of the former's self-deception and illusory sense of safety. When Zhuangzi sees this, he is alarmed: "It is inherent in things that they are ties [*sic*] to each other, that one kind calls up another" (Graham 2001: 118). He remains gloomy for three days! Clearly, the relationality of the everyday self is problematic for Zhuangzi.

Zhuangzi's solution is to carefully realign oneself with the vicissitudes of the world such that neither would stand in the way of the transformation of the other. The entire text of the *Zhuangzi* is filled with fantastic tales about the author's freedom to express himself as a carefree butterfly, a useless tree, a consummate butcher, a daemonic diver, a Confucius, a giant bird, and a happy fish, among others, all of which are examples of supreme attunement to the world in its endless multiplicity and complexity. They are representations of the Zhuangzian vision of freedom as effective self-transformation in navigating and negotiating various domains of relationality in the world and beyond.

As discussed previously, to achieve the perfect alignment with the world in its multiplicity and complexity is not to eliminate the human agency or to identify the human agent with nature. Rather, Zhuangzi advocates that "roaming adrift over the Ancestor of the myriad things you treat things and refuse to be turned into a thing by things" (Graham 2001: 121). This Zhuangzian expression "treating things but not being turned into a thing by things" (*wuwu er bu wuyuwu* 物物而不物於物) provides an interesting contrast with the Xunzian expression "the gentleman works external things; the petty man works for external things" (*junzi yi wu, xiaoren yi yu wu* 君子役物, 小人役於物) quoted earlier. Both are expressions of freedom in their conceptual frameworks. In light of our discussions in this essay, we conclude that while the Xunzian expression exhibits a strong sense of moral agency in command of world affairs, the Zhuangzian expression represents the ideal of adeptly transforming the self along with things without turning into things. Or to use our language here, the Zhuangzian expression points to the perfect alignment or attunement between nature and a person. The ideal Xunzian agency is commanding and expansive, whereas the ideal Zhuangzian agency is subtle and elusive.

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