

**Dislodging Mundane Wisdom:
Transformative Choices for Cultivation in
the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuāngzǐ* and
the New Testament Gospels**

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I. CATEGORIES AND THEMES OF ‘INSTRUCTION INTERACTIONS’

What will be done in the following paragraphs is an initial attempt to re-categorize some of the major kinds of interactions found in both the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuāngzǐ* [莊子] and the Four Gospels, especially as they point us toward choices that lead to counter-cultural expressions of wisdom and new forms of whole person cultivation. Afterwards, I will explore more systematically the nature of that transformative wisdom found in each text, and elaborate in more detail the linkage between choosing that alternative form of wisdom and its attendant expression in specific kinds of whole person cultivation. In this manner I hope to underscore the significance of all that has been accomplished by this comparative study, especially the innovative results that it has presented.

I.1 *CATEGORIES OF ‘INSTRUCTION INTERACTIVE TEXTS’*

Defoort’s important paper dealing with ‘instruction dialogues’ (Defoort, 2012) faces a significant categorization problem: the example she chose from the 7th chapter of the Inner Chapters [*Yīng Dì Wáng* 養帝王] involves three persons in what we might refer to as a plura-logue, and not just two persons in a dialogue. It is not simply an interaction between a ‘master’ and a ‘disciple,’ but something more dynamic and complicated, and yet all still written down for the sake of ‘instruction’. What is actually present in that interaction (and is adequately described by Defoort in her paper) is a special kind of plura-logue, one where two alternative forms of wisdom and their

attendant practices of cultivation are presented and assessed, leading to an experiential affirmation of a *Zhuāngzǐ* account of sagely wisdom.

In fact, within the Inner Chapters there are only two such plura-logues. Following Defoort's precedent, I will refer to these as 'instruction plura-logues'. The first occurs in the fifth chapter [*Dé Chòng Fú* 德充符] where an aspiring amputee named 'Shushan the Toeless' initially approaches the Ruist teacher, Zhòngní [仲尼 or 'Elder Brother Ní']¹ to become his disciple, yet only to be rejected because he is physically deformed, even though he is obviously virtuous. Subsequently he approaches 'Master Longyears' [Lǎo Dān 老聃],² where he finds acceptance and "sees" the inadequacies of Ruist discipleship. The second plura-logue is the one helpfully described by Defoort, where the disciple is Master Liè [列子], whose original teacher, Master Hú [壺子], is being criticized by an apparently spiritually powerful and anonymous wizard [*shénwǔ* 神巫].³ In order to indicate the error of these criticisms, Master Hú reveals four stages of his own Daoist-inspired cultivation, leading to initial puzzlement, but finally is confirmed in his authenticity and profundity, resulting in otherwise unexplained but frightened departure of the wizard.

Besides these two instruction plura-logues where there were explicit worldviews being put into contention, there are also six other 'instruction dialogues' that are, in fact, master-disciple dialogues, all occurring in the Inner Chapters and not mentioned by Defoort.⁴ That is to say, out of thirty-seven interactions found within the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuāngzǐ*, eight of them serve as 'instruction interactions,' provoking the reader to consider an alternative form of Daoist wisdom and its concomitant expressions of whole person cultivation. Though the themes discussed within these master-disciple instruction dialogues differ, they all serve the purpose of revealing to the disciple (and the reader) the attainments of Daoist adepts. Intriguingly, three of these instruction

dialogues are constructed as fictional conversations between ‘Elder Brother Ní’ and his favorite disciple Yán Huì [顏回],⁵ and so there is immense irony in having this famous pair of Ruist scholars involved in conversations that lead the disciple and the reader to Daoist learning and experiences of the results of Dào-centered cultivation. Notable, in two of these dialogues, it is Elder Brother Ní who advocates the Daoist position.

In the earliest ‘instruction dialogue’ between these two putatively Ruist figures found in the fourth chapter, *Rénjiān shì* [人間世] or ‘The Human World’], Elder Brother Ní teaches his disciple how to respond to a rather unruly princely scion whom the former is to teach. The supposed Ruist Master ends up advocating a Daoist ideal of becoming a ‘mirror of others,’ that is, simply responding in like manner to whatever the nasty royal child does, and so never offending him. This is attained, however, by the Daoist cultivation technique of ‘heart-mind’s fasting’ [*xīnzhāi* 心齋], a process by which one’s rational and emotional states become immune to being moved by the ephemeral twists and turns of human affairs. Precisely this form of cultivation is the goal of all Dào-centered meditative practices, and becomes the answer for issues of governance, teaching, facing death, and questions of ethical concern.

In the last of these instruction dialogues carried on by these two famous Ruist personalities, Yán Huì achieves Daoist liberation through ‘meditative forgetfulness’ [*zuòwáng* 坐忘, literally, ‘forgetting while sitting’ or ‘sitting forgetfully’], so that his teacher, Elder Brother Ní (*alias* Master Kǒng 孔子) is startled into the realization that his disciple has surpassed him. So, in a final literary twist that is intended to shake the reader’s presuppositions, Elder Brother Ní ends up requesting to become his former disciple’s student! Here we have all the makings of a denigrating rhetorical strategy to nudge readers into a Dào-centered wisdom that will prompt them to explore the same kind of cultivation practices experienced by Yán Huì and other Daoist adepts.

I.2 THEMATIC CONCERNS IN ALL INTERACTIONS WITHIN THE INNER CHAPTERS

Obviously, a comprehensive categorization of interactive themes and their rhetorical strategies would demonstrate just how creative and deconstructive the instruction interactions and other literary interactions within the Inner Chapters are. Here we can offer only an initial summary of the major themes found in the instruction interactions. Subsequently, I will apply that list of themes comparatively to identify how similar kinds of interactions within the Four Gospels function in their own historical and cultural context.

One of the main themes addressed in the instruction interactions (included also in eleven out of the thirty seven interactions) found within the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuāngzǐ* deals with Daoist ways of governance. These interactions are regularly opposed to Ruist advocacy of ‘humane government’ [*rénzhèng* 仁政], believing that in the end these prove to be cruel and insensitive to many who live under this style of government. Instead, a Dào(ist)-inspired sagely ruler becomes a ‘Perfect Human’ or ‘Consummate Person’ [*zhìrén* 至人] by meditative wandering that allows one to adjust to any political situation with total equanimity.

Another major theme is the understanding and cultivated approach to one’s own and one’s friend’s deaths. In three interactions⁶ the main clue for the acceptance of death is that one’s destiny is not to be denied, but to be accepted, since ‘life’ is actually belonging to all forms of ‘transformation’ [*huà* 化]. The human physical form is only one kind of life, and Daoist understandings of the continuance of life in other forms suggests that ‘life’ is conserved even though it does not abide in one particular physical form across time. This is not necessarily advocating some form of reincarnation, but it is accepting a conservation of Dào-centered life that is privileged in all interactions with sentient and non-sentient beings.

Still another prominent theme deals with the proper way to teach those who are seekers, including rulers, rulers-in-waiting, and those seeking long life through Daoist meditative techniques and practical forms of cultivation. Two stories in this realm are worth mentioning. The first is the dialogue between a skillful cook and his ruler (3rd chapter, the famous story of Bǎo Dīng [庖丁] carving an ox), and the second found in the 6th chapter, portrayed as a half-hearted seeker named *Nánbó Zīkuí* (given the name ‘Sir Sunflower of Southunc’ (Mair, 1998:56) who seeks to be taught by a female Daoist adept named Nǚ Yǔ (lit. ‘Female who walks alone’).⁷ In the former instruction dialogue, the cook explains how he wields his butcher knife so that it never needs to be sharpened, and so reveals the paradoxical Dào-centered way that is never harshly forceful, but able to do all that is required by a butcher preparing meat for the kitchen. What is remarkable about the second instruction dialogue is that, as in a number of other dialogues within the Inner Chapters, when the seeker first asks, he is soundly rejected by the adept, normally because he is seen as ‘wasting the Master’s time’. Nevertheless, if the seeker persists in asking, he will obtain some advice or explanation. Here a kind of ‘negative psychology’ is obviously at work within the dialogue, and yet its goal is not to ‘succeed’, but to portray a transformative choice affirming Dào(ist)-centered wisdom and unexpected forms of whole person cultivation practices. Because the seeker continues to ask, Nǚ Yǔ finally explains that she experienced a series of three stages of meditative cultivation, achieved after three, seven and nine days of practice respectively. The final state of existence is described as ‘putting life beyond one’. There is described here an attitude possessed by Daoist adepts that even the basic concerns related to survival and impending death cannot change.

What adds color and sarcastic value to that story is that, as a result of the seeker’s further questioning, Nǚ Yǔ provides the ‘geneology of her teachers,’ starting from one named ‘Son of

Assistant Ink,’ and then through others including ‘Bright Vision’ and ‘Murky Mystery,’ and beginning with the Great Master, ‘Would-be Beginning’ (Mair, 1998:57). Clearly, the names of the Daoist teachers reflect the states of consciousness and existence that are the goals of their Dào-centered living.

Those interactions that contain principled critiques against humane governance, logical forcefulness, and virtuous exertion in their Ruist and rationalistic modes are meant to lead one to a special insight. In what might be seen as an instruction soliloquy, but is actually an instruction dialogue framed in a dream,⁸ that insight is ultimately given by this unusual means to a carpenter. Having passed a “useless tree” on a working trip in another state, the carpenter dreams that the tree speaks to him, pointing out that it is precisely because of the tree’s uselessness that it can live a long life and so fulfill its Dào-intended longevity.⁹ This is surely the ‘usefulness of uselessness’ [*bùyòng zhī yòng* 不用之用], a form of paradoxical wisdom about life promoted within this canonical Daoist text.

1.3 THEMATIC CONCERNS IN INSTRUCTION INTERACTIONS IN THE FOUR GOSPELS

Where the biographical narrative related to the birth, growth, teachings, ministries, and sacrifices of Rabbi Yeshuah dominate the gospels in a way unparalleled in the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuǎngzǐ*, and the worldview it portrays as a consequence is radically different in character, what we are interested in noting here are the likenesses in literary forms, paradoxical claims, and rhetorical strategies that move the disciples (and the reader) toward a transformative experience prompted by an encounter with ‘the Holy Spirit’.

First of all, and most prominently, the Gospels contain more or less fifty parables, some being just a few sentences in length, and others fully worked out as captivating stories for listeners

(and readers).¹⁰ Embedded in many of these are pithy literary sayings, surprising twists in the story line, and conclusions that point to the nature of the ‘kingdom of God’ or the life that is informed and molded by the ‘word of God’.¹¹ Notably, the majority of these parables are expressed within the framework of instruction plura-logues, so that oftentimes the intended purpose of the parables are made explicit only within the larger context of the interactive discussions before and after the parable/parables are presented.

From another angle it is important to note that the intentions bound up in the use of these parables are not merely educative, but also strategic. ‘The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you [all], but not to them [others outside the circle of disciples]’ (Matthew 13:11). The outcome, then, leads to a paradoxical experience: ‘Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand’ (Matthew 13: 14-15). This is stated as a fulfillment of an ancient Hebrew prophecy from Isaiah 6: 9-10.¹² For religious conventionalists these are certainly shocking claims! Much like the initial seeker running after a Daoist sage, a main point of these parables and instructive responses is to shake one out of complacency, and move one toward a transformative interest in taking part in the kingdom of God. Consequently, one is either provoked toward such a commitment, or put off by the radicality of the claims associated with this form of self-reflective spiritual cultivation.

As we have seen within certain Daoist instruction plura-logues, there are also many interaction plura-logues within the Four Gospels that pit the conventional wisdom of the Jewish religious leaders against the wit and allusive insights of Rabbi Yeshuah. Jewish traditions of ritual cleanliness are portrayed as not offering authentic spiritual cleansing (Mark 7:1-23); conventional understanding of the ‘Sabbath rest’ does not allow for ‘work’ that would sometimes prevent truly humane acts and miracles of healing from taking place (Luke 13:10-17); confounding claims made

by Rabbi Yeshuah about being the ‘son’ of the ‘Heavenly Father,’ and so ‘making himself equal to God’ (John 8:48-59 and 10:30-33) – a matter involving blasphemy and worthy of capital punishment – is countered by a *chreia*, an authoritative reference to a passage in Psalm 82 where a reference to those serving as judges refers to them as ‘gods’ (John 10:34ff), and so silences his critiques. There is a dislodging rhetoric at work here, where Jewish theological and religious authorities are trumped by the strategic questions raised by this strange rabbi from northern Israel.

Where one cannot find an emphasis within Rabbi Yeshuah’s teachings that directly parallels and elaborates on the critiques of conventional ways of governance, Rabbi Yeshuah characterized his way of life in contrast to the authoritarian styles of rulership in his own day,¹³ and though he himself had authority as the ‘teacher’ and ‘lord’ of his disciples, he exemplified a form of ‘servant leadership’ that was startling for even his closest followers.¹⁴ Though he referred to political situations where ‘a kingdom divided against itself’ would bring political and cultural disaster,¹⁵ this was not a matter that he elaborated within his teachings. Even though all this is the case, Rabbi Yeshuah did not avoid arguments and conflicts with local Jewish leaders, charging some of the ‘teachers of the law and Pharisees’ with emphasizing ritual practices while ‘neglecting’ what is far more important before God (and humans), that being ‘justice, mercy and faithfulness’.¹⁶ Here even the political implications of ‘suffering for righteousness sake’ were made all the more explicit and terrifying, especially when he characterized discipleship as ‘carrying one’s cross,’¹⁷ for the cross was unquestionably a political tool of judgment and treason and a cruel oppressive punishment used by the prevailing Roman colonial authorities. Notably, Rabbi Yeshuah set out the platform of his own way of life by citing an ancient prophecy from the book of Isaiah, indicating his preferential concern for presenting the good news of the kingdom of God to the poor, providing freedom to prisoners and oppressed persons, and seeking an economic adjustment of all

institutions according to standards known as ‘the year of Yahweh’.¹⁸ The direct political implications of such an alternative way of governance is undeniable.

Here it should be highlighted that Rabbi Yeshuah’s notable emphases related to ‘the poor’ and ‘the oppressed’ were major themes within Jewish scriptures and religious life, but were not practiced in ways that would resolve the problems of those marginalized persons. As a consequence, he urged those who followed him or would want to become disciples to ‘be generous to the poor,’¹⁹ and to reach out to ‘the poor, the crippled, the lame, [and] the blind’ (Luke 14:13 and 21) in ways that parallel remarkably the claims in the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuāngzǐ* regarding the ‘usefulness of uselessness’. In contrast to other styles of teacher-student or master-disciple relationships, Rabbi Yeshuah called the ‘weary and burdened’ to share his way of life, because he would not ‘lord it over them,’ but receive them in gentleness and compassion (Matthew 11:28-30).

So, in ways also transgressing mundane wisdom that associated the accumulation of wealth with divine blessing, Rabbi Yeshuah urged a young wealthy person (and possibly also therefore one with political clout) to sell his possessions, give it to the poor, and follow him. So demanding was this requirement that some of his closest disciples wondered whether they themselves could ‘pass through the eye of a needle,’²⁰ as required of such a wealthy person.²¹ Notably in response, Rabbi Yeshuah confirmed that it was ‘hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God,’²² but assured his disciples that because they have left their own normal ways of life, and suffered because of persecution at times, they would also be promised ‘eternal life’.²³ Here there is not only a political repercussion related to discipleship, but also a key distinction between ‘mundane life’ (generally referred to by the Greek term *bios* βίος) and a meaningful life associated also with eternal communion with God (generally referred to by the Greek term *zoē* ζωή), notably paralleling the difference between personal life and the Dào-centered life promoted in the *Zhuāngzǐ*. This

overall situation, therefore, could be expressed in what became another of the famous paradoxes recorded in the Gospels and repeated more than once: ‘Many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.’ Here again, ‘the first’ within this context often would refer to those in power and authority, serving as rulers.

As has been already seen above, there are many references to ‘the kingdom of God’ within the instruction interactions in the Four Gospels that refers to a spiritual reality that ‘comes to life’ through repenting of one’s sins before God, as well as with the casting out of demons (Matthew 12:28), and so offers a new ‘ruling’ that is predicated on this transformative experience of ‘being put right’ with the Deity. Here the continual reference to a return to the Way in *Zhuāngzǐ*-like tropes, pursued by getting rid of hindering states of active engagement, and taking up an ‘emptying’ of oneself, is echoed in the *rhēmata* or poignant sayings of Rabbi Yeshuah. ‘Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.’²⁴ There is here the same kind of either/or-ness that is found in the instruction dialogues and plura-logues of the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuāngzǐ*: one cannot go half-way toward cultivating a *Dào*-centered life. One either accepts the transformative view of life that this new wisdom revealed through the ‘word of God’ and realized in the kingdom of God presents, or one is caught up in a form of intellectual and spiritual misguidedness that endangers one precisely because they are ‘being found useful’ in the more mundane forms of intellectual and spiritual life.

Here then, and quite naturally, questions about concerns generated by one’s living conditions and the fear of death arises. Paradoxically, once again, Rabbi Yeshuah ‘blesses’ those who are “persecuted because of righteousness”, because ‘theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew 5:10-12), that is to say, they have attained the goal of cultivation in holiness that the new wisdom reveals, and so belong to the kingdom of heaven where the living God receives, reaffirms, renews and

regenerates

such

persons.²⁵

Prompted once again by parallels found within the sections of the *Zhuāngzǐ* that have previously addressed, there is a question of whether or not Rabbi Yeshuah is found in the midst of the instruction dialogues and plur-logues of the Four Gospels to reject or deflect the desires of persons who expressed a willingness to follow him and his teachings. Here there are found a number of similarities, including first of all those who initially express willingness to follow him, but then leave disappointed because they are not willing to submit to the conditions of discipleship that they are required of them,²⁶ and secondly, a former demoniac who is healed through exorcism, and then is told not to follow Rabbi Yeshuah, but instead to return to his homeland to proclaim what miraculously had occurred to him (Luke 8:38-39). An even more poignant set of instruction dialogues occur where three different persons are apparently ‘put off’ by Rabbi Yeshuah because they will not immediately and unreservedly follow him.²⁷ All of those rejections involve setting aside what may be seen as conditions involving mundane wisdom in choosing to become a disciple. The first involves a matter of personal comfort and a safe place in which to dwell, but Rabbi Yeshuah responds by underscoring that even though other living things have places of residence, ‘the Son of Man has no place to lay his head’.²⁸ To one who preferred to say some final words to his family members before taking off, Rabbi Yeshuah requires immediate decisiveness and allows for no delay (Luke 9:61-62). To another who requests to have the opportunity to care for his father until his death, Rabbi Yeshuah rejects what would be seen in mundane wisdom as a principled act of filial submission, responding with a call to follow him and ‘let the dead bury the dead’.²⁹ In another instruction plura-logue that includes an embedded parable, those who make excuses for following and are rejected include a person who has just married, another who has just purchased a plot of land, and a third who has obtained a new team of oxen to work his land.³⁰ All of these

justifications suggest some sort of practical wisdom that was generally understood, but become vacuous or even hypocritical in the context of fulfilling obligations made to allow the kingdom of God and divine righteousness to have a preeminent status within one's earthly life (Matthew 6:33).

Two other pericopes that reflect a biblical parallel for arguing ironically for 'the usefulness of the useless' can also be located in certain instruction interactions under conditions that reflect the rejection of mundane wisdom in preference for an alternative vision of the kingdom of God and its implications in the midst of the 'practical world'. The first occurs in a context where many persons are gathered along with Rabbi Yeshuah in a home of two sisters, Martha and Mary. Concerned about showing appropriate hospitality to so many guests, Martha complains to Rabbi Yeshuah about the fact that her sister, Mary, is not helping in those ritual acts involving the reception of guests in their home. Nevertheless, Rabbi Yeshuah responds by indicating that Mary, having sat down along with others to hear his teachings, 'has chosen what is better' (Luke 10:42). In other words, what would be considered normal obligations in terms of proper etiquette for hospitality is less important than the 'uselessness' discovered in attending to 'the word of God'. In a far more conflictual and intense interaction between the Roman colonial ruler, Pilate, and the bleeding Rabbi Yeshuah who has endured physical punishment by Roman soldiers, yet one that still could be considered an instruction dialogue because of the nature of the questions being asked by Pilate, the Jewish itinerant evangelist confirms that he is also a 'king,' but then qualifies this claim by clarifying that 'my kingdom is not of this world' (John 18:36). While this claim would seem utterly 'useless' in the fact of the authority to permit Rabbi Yeshuah's execution, that judgment is put aside by the Jewish teacher by adding that the very authority Pilate has is not his own, but given by the God whose kingdom is represented by Rabbi Yeshuah himself.

All these examples from both Daoist and Christian canonical sources provide the textual materials that now can be further analyzed for their general accounts of the counter-cultural forms of wisdom that requires both a rejection of mundane wisdom and a new style of whole person cultivation.

II. CHARACTERIZING TRANSFORMATIVE WISDOM AND THE NATURE OF WHOLE PERSON CULTIVATION

The alternative forms of wisdom that are promoted in these two very different canonical sources from ancient Chinese and ancient Greek texts can now be succinctly characterized. Within the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuāngzǐ* there is a Dào-centered and sometimes blatantly anarchistic wisdom that is contrasted to a rationalized mundane form of Ruist wisdom and virtue-centered elitism. This opposition was not only made explicit in the sarcastic instruction interactions within the Inner Chapters where well-known Ruist figures are made into Daoist advocates, but was also recognized by later Sòng Ruists as a challenge to their own preferred rationalistic accounts of cultured wisdom and virtuous cultivation.³¹ The parallel account of a counter-cultural wisdom advocated by Rabbi Yeshuah in the Four Gospels is a radically God-centered and sometimes obviously paradoxical wisdom that is set in opposition to the traditional and ritually-centered practical wisdom of some major Jewish teachings of his day. The Daoist vision argues that ‘life’ is not limited to one’s own humanly earth-bound existence, but is linked to a greater vision of ‘life’ that promotes longevity and embracing of basic vital forces that can release one from human concerns even about death, and propel one into supra-rational experiences that only consummate / perfect persons are able to embody. The Christian vision promoted by Rabbi Yeshuah offers a qualitatively different kind of life (*zoē*) in relationship with the living God that comes through preeminent submission to the kingdom of God, and releases one through forgiveness of sins into

a heavenly-oriented lifestyle in the presence of God and in relationship with others in the earthly plane. Both canonical texts are explicit in linking miraculous and preternatural experiences with the powers of these counter-cultural expressions of wisdom. They require a decisive choice for this alternative, arguing against the assumed positive value of the forms of mundane wisdom that they oppose, and that this decision becomes a transformative choice that leads willing seekers into new styles of whole person cultivation.

Undeniably, the roles of master/student and teacher/disciple relationships in initiating the patterns of whole person cultivation by means of imitating the methods promoted by the master or teacher are initially paramount. It is by means of these relationships that the new wisdom is identified and confirmed, and new ways of cultivation become living options for the potential student or disciple. That there are distinct forms of whole person cultivation associated with these two Daoist and Christian scriptures must be confirmed, and so will be described in more detail below. Nevertheless, though in both traditions these relationships serve as the fulcrum point, moving a seeker into becoming an adherent of that specific tradition, there is also a dialectical transformative movement that leads the adherent to become directly engaged with the *Dào* or the kingdom of God. Only by this means can the new lifestyle build upon a newly oriented form of whole person cultivation possible to be nurtured and sustained.

What has been seen within the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuāngzǐ* are forms of whole person cultivation that emphasizes the cultivation of the ‘whole’ of life so that the personal dimension becomes less significant. A *Dào*-centered living presence may be reclusive because it must involve an ‘emptying of the heart-mind,’ but it can also be ‘in the mundane world but not of it’. More significantly, this internally meditative transformation of the whole person releases them from bodily limitations and as well as from a unique corporeal identity, allowing that sentient presence

to thrive on transcending normal life by means of Dào[ist]-informed reveling in the fullness of living transformations, their vital interconnectivity, and their transcendent expression in unabashedly preternatural expressions of human-embodied extraordinariness.³²

From the many instruction interactions found in the Four Gospels Rabbi Yeshuah advocates a God-centered life in worship and relational intimacy that is also expressed in unselfish responsiveness to around one. This God-centeredness nurtures a communally enriched whole person cultivation, responsive both to heavenly *rhemata* and the preeminence of heavenly values especially (but not necessarily exclusively) embodied within human relationships framed by either the spiritual duties of discipleship or the sensitive responsiveness of God-centered neighborliness. Here the ‘denying of self’ is not a selfless forgetfulness, but in unselfish acts of virtuous care that includes compassion, love, justice, and seeking a flourishing inter-relational peace. Rabbi Yeshuah promotes a practice of whole person cultivation expressed in various modes of thankful worship, intercessory concern, meditative focus, and engaged compassion; the heavenly and earthly are intertwined in mutual honor and agapeic responsiveness.³³ Its daily embodiment on earth anticipates a promised transformed completion of all these relationships in an eternal peace where God and all sentient beings relate together in dynamic love and mutually fulfilling joy.³⁴ The contrast of such a heavenly scene with its expressions in the midst of the conflicts and cruelties of some earthly contexts where God-centeredness is not only unappreciated but even despised is neither hidden or left unaddressed. Eternal life is not only a gift but also a justifying fulfillment of those who suffer for righteousness in earthly realms. It relies on a ‘mature wisdom,’ a heavenly-oriented responsive to divine *rhemata*, that the Apostle Paul later argues is ‘not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age’ (1 Corinthians 2:6). Dislodging mundane wisdom, a flourishing

life that is God-centered is also wisely loving, virtuously unselfish in community, and righteously sacrificial in times where larger social and political conflicts are unavoidable.

ENDNOTES

¹ The fact that Master Kǒng [or Kǒngzǐ 孔子] is addressed by this informal means fills the interaction plura-logue with an atmosphere that is humorously transgressive against Ruist veneration of their master teacher. See clever renderings of these sarcastic modes in Mair, 1998 and Ziporyn, 2009.

² Here I am borrowing Mair's clever rendering for 'The Old Master' or Laozi. Found in Chs. 3 [Yǎngshēng Zhǔ 養生主] and 7[Yīng Dì Wáng 應帝王] of the *Zhuāngzǐ*.

³ All these figures occur only once in the Inner Chapters, with only the first having his name linked to a known written text within Daoist traditions.

⁴ Others not to be mentioned in detail here are found in Ch. 2 *Qíwù Lùn* [齊物論], a dialogue between (in Mair's renderings) 'Sir Motley Southurb' and 'Sir Wanderer of Countenance Complete' and in Ch. 3 *Yǎngshēng Zhǔ*, in a plura-logue on the meaning of death.

⁵ One occurring in Ch. 4 *Rénjiān shì*, and the other two in Ch. 6, *Dàzōng Shī*.

⁶ As found in Chs. 3 and 6, where two appear in the latter chapter.

⁷ This female Daoist figure is unique within this portion of the *Zhuāngzǐ*, not only in her gender (since most Daoist adepts are almost always male), but also in the level of attainment in a Dào-centered life that she portrays to the seeker.

⁸ From the angle of the epistemological sources for understanding 'life' within the *Zhuāngzǐ*, there is no privilege given to normal waking consciousness. A dream-state is just as much of a 'human experience' as is a self-conscious rational state of awareness.

⁹ Found in Ch. 4, *Rénjiān shì*.

¹⁰ A broad definition of the technical term ‘parable’ leads to identifying as many as fifty relevant passages as parables.

¹¹ As with the Chinese term *dào* [道], the Greek term *logos* λόγος can refer to spoken, thought and written words, sayings or concepts. Though it is a regular trope in Protestant worship to refer to ‘The Word of God’ (*ho logos tou theou* Ὁ λόγος του θεου) as a term of reference for the Bible, in fact, that phrase may refer to the spoken message or the creative power of the Deity at the beginning of created times-and-spaces. (For a general discussion of this trope in Greek, see Smillie, 2004.) For example, in the text of Hebrews 4: 12, we have the statement where this phrase occurs from the New International Version: ‘For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.’ Here we have a medical metaphor of the ‘double-edged sword’ that indicates the rhetorical impact of the divine expression within the life of a person (as addressed in Smillie, 2004:347-350). Nevertheless, there is another Greek term that explicitly is employed to indicate ‘speech,’ this being the term *rhēma* ῥημα. Generally stated, it is employed in ancient Greek literature to refer to ‘speech,’ a ‘saying’ or a ‘statement’ (as elaborated in Silva, ed., 2014, article on ‘ῥημα G4839 (*rhēma*),’:207). However, this same term can also be stretched to refer to an event that one remembers or a “thing” that has happened. Its general use in the Gospels is dealing with the ‘expressions’ or ‘sayings’ of people who are being cited in various passages. In some cases it can be more specifically taken to refer to ‘a choice word’ or ‘an immediate Spirit-inspired ‘word’ peculiarly adapted to a crisis or struggle’ (quoting here from Smillie, 2004:346). As it ends up, about half of all the appearances of *rhēma* occur in the Gospels of Luke and John.

As might be expected, then, many of those occurrences refer to the ‘words’ of Rabbi Yeshuah as well as to the ‘word of God’ that inspired him (as underscored in Silva, 2014:209-210).

¹² Quoting and glossing the Septuagint Greek version of Isaiah 6: 9-10.

¹³ Particularly in contrast to ‘the rulers of the Gentiles’. See Matthew 20: 25 and Mark 10: 42.

¹⁴ Illustrated especially in the context of washing their dirty feet, as seen in John 13: 2-17.

¹⁵ Consult Matthew 12: 25-28. Here he uses this saying as a commonplace proverbial insight into governance.

¹⁶ Citing phrases from Matthew 23: 23-24. To these charges Rabbi Yeshuah added that these Jewish leaders embodied ‘greed and self-indulgence,’ and were hypocritical and wicked. For these and other criticisms, consult Matthew 23: 25-35.

¹⁷ ‘Suffering for righteousness’ sake’ was the last of the beatitudes (Matthew 5: 10-12), but was underscored in other sayings of Rabbi Yeshuah in the midst of instruction interactions as well. ‘Taking up the cross’ and following him was a condition for discipleship. See Matthew 10: 38 and 16: 24; Mark 8: 34, and Luke 9:23 (here adding ‘taking up the cross daily’).

¹⁸ Quoted from Greek version of Isaiah 61: 1-2 in Luke 4: 18-19. The ‘year of Yahweh [LORD]’ was a technical phrase referring to the return to previously established economic standards upheld in the Pentateuch.

¹⁹ As found, for example, in Luke 11: 41, and 22: 23.

²⁰ Referring to a Jewish proverbial saying that it is ‘easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God’ (Matthew 19: 24).

²¹ Here and below, citing passages found in all the Synoptic Gospels in Matthew 19: 16-24, Mark 10: 17-30, and Luke 18: 18-30.

²² Citing Matthew 19: 23, Mark 10: 23, Luke 18: 24.

²³ Found in Matthew 19: 29-30, Mark 10: 29-30, and Luke 18: 29-30.

²⁴ Mark 8: 35, but see also Matthew 16: 25 and Luke 9: 24.

²⁵ Matthew 5: 10. This transformative interpretation is elaborated in Fei Leren [Lauren F. Pfister], 2009.

²⁶ As in the case of the so-called ‘rich young ruler’ (King James version) or ‘rich young man’ (New International Version), as seen in Matthew 19: 16ff, Mark 10: 17ff and Luke 18: 18ff.

²⁷ See these instruction dialogues in Matthew 8: 18-22 and Luke 9: 57-62.

²⁸ ‘Foxes have holds and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head’ (quoted from Matthew 8: 20 and Luke 9: 58).

²⁹ Here the implication is that those who stay to await the death of others instead of taking up the call to ‘proclaim the kingdom of God’ are themselves already spiritually dead, because they have not understood the preeminence of the life (*zoē*) that is bound up in the rule of God within their own lives.

³⁰ See Luke 14: 15-24, an instruction plura-logue including a parable where excuses were made by persons who had originally accepted an invitation to attend a wedding banquet.

³¹ Here I am referring to the chapter of the *Jīnsìlù* 近思錄, authored by Zhū Xī 朱熹 and others, where both Daoist and Buddhist claims regarding wisdom and cultivation practices are soundly rejected.

³² Intriguing to me is the paradoxical question that arises particularly in the *Zhuāngzǐ* context: would a consummate person [*zhìrén* 至人], numinous person [*shénrén* 神人] or complete person [*zhēnrén* 真人] retain enough human capacity and interest to write some portion of the *Zhuāngzǐ*? Or does the dialectical move into Dào-centered living through forgetting, emptying, and sloughing off terrestrial attachments make the task of such creative writing / revealing testimony otiose?

³³ This could be summed up in the ‘new commandment’ Rabbi Yeshuah gave to his disciples near the end of his life, ‘As I have loved you [all as disciples], so you must love one another’ (John 13: 34). Would a Zhuāngzǐ-ian perspective see this as an all-too-earthly entanglement rather than a dialectical mutuality that transcends mundane self-centeredness?

³⁴ Expressed by reference to the ‘oneness’ between God and aligned humans transformed by agapeic mutuality in John 17: 20-23.

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