Zhuangzi on Perspectives and Therapy

Phil 210, Fall 2023
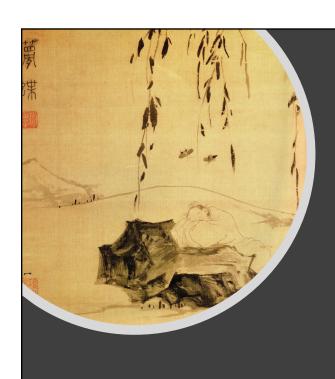
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Overview of Today

- Background to Daoism
- Peng Bird: Perspectives vs. Transcendence
- Formation of Courses
- Rigidity vs. Flexibility
- Illumination of the Obvious: a Therapeutic Meta-Perspective?
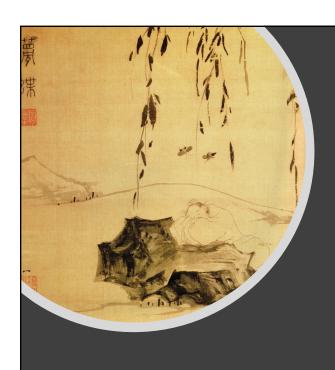
For polls:
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What is "Daoism"?

- Classical
  - during the Warring States
  - as enduring source of therapy
  - through impact on Chinese Buddhism
- Institutional ("Religious")
- Key figures and texts
  - "Laozi" (or "Lao-Tzu" or Lao Dan)
  - *Daode Jing*
  - *Zhuangzi* ("Inner Chapters," etc.)

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What is "Daoism"?

- Reading *Zhuangzi*…
- Your comments on Perusall:
- "This paragraph gave me a headache…"
- "The entirety of this second chapter has given me an existential crisis… and maybe that's the point?"

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Peng and Cicada

- Kun transforms to Peng…

- Cicada and dove laugh…

- Small consciousness vs. vast consciousness…

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Is the Peng Bird superior to the Cicada?

Yes: Peng represents an ultimate achievement

Yes: Peng is better though not the ultimate

No: Peng is no better or worse

No: Peng's audacity makes it worse

Start the presentation to see live content. For screen share software, share the entire screen. Get help at **pollev.com/app**
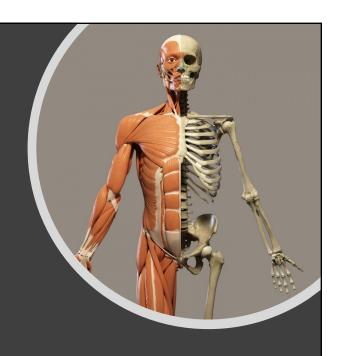
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Perspectives or Transcendence

- Mustard seed as a boat ... and Peng's need for 90,000 miles of air.
- Different "uses" (even "uselessness")
- [5]: person good enough for one post < Song Rongzi < Liezi < Utmost Person
  - Wandering
  - No definite identity
  - No name

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Arbitrary "Formation" (*Cheng* 成)

- [12-13]: "The hundred bones, the nine openings, the six internal organs are all present here as my body. Which one is most dear to me?..."
- Can we rely on the "mind" (= *xin* 心, heartmind)?
- Can we make independent judgments about what to rely on?

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Courses (*Daos*) and Affirmation/Denial

- [15]: "Courses are formed by walking them…"
- "Allowing" (*ke* 可)
- "Affirming" (*shi* 是) and "denying" (*fei* 非)
- (Unfixed) Referring ([13]: "Human speech is not just a blowing of air. Speech has something *of which* it speaks…")

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What category/name do you affirm for this?

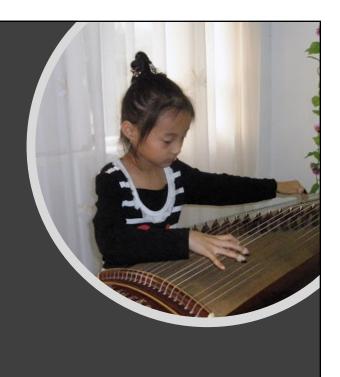[15]: "Each thing necessarily has someplace from which it can be affirmed as thus and so…"
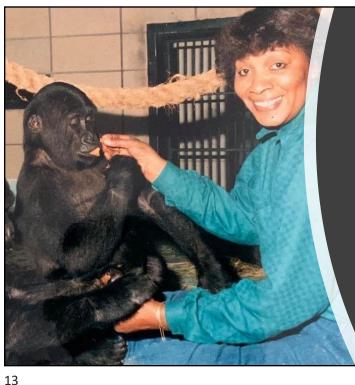
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What is that?

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Two Ways to Affirm

- [16]: Zhao Wen the zither player, whose son "ended his days still grappling with his father's zither strings"
  - "*wei shi* 为是": affirm by defining
  - To be committed
- [15]: Going by the rightness of the present 'this'
  - "*yin shi* 因是": affirming by circumstance

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The Wise Monkey Keeper

- Changes from 3 to 4 chestnuts in the morning
- [16]: "This change brought them no loss either in name or in fact, but in one case it brought anger and in another delight. … relying on the rightness of the present 'this.'"
- What might a "bad" monkey keeper do, and why?

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Illumination of the Obvious: A Meta-Perspective?

- [16]: "The Sage uses various rights and wrongs to harmonize with others, and yet remains at rest in the middle of Heaven the Potter's Wheel. This is called Walking Two Roads."
- "The Radiance of Drift and Doubt is the sage's only map. He deploys no single definition of what is right, but instead entrusts it to the everyday function of each thing. This is what was meant by 'using the Illumination of the Obvious.'"
- [14-15]: "A state where 'this' and 'not-this'— right and wrong—are no longer coupled as opposites, is called Course as axis, the axis of all courses."

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A Paradox of Perspectivalism?

- Recommending transcendence versus recommending perspectivalism: from where?
- Can *Zhuangzi* offer therapy in a way that Zhuangzi cannot?

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