Virtuosos of the Ordinary

Comparative Interpretations of Daoist and Stoic Thought

by

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Abstract

“Virtuosity in the ordinary” is an idea, attributed by this work to the ancient Stoicism and Zhuangzi’s Daoism, that it is possible to achieve an extraordinary excellence in the realm of ordinary, mundane activities. This possibility is based on the view that there is a perfect fit between one’s psychological and cognitive faculties and the structure of reality. By achieving such a perfection, one not only achieves personal fulfillment but also fulfills one’s role in the overarching scheme of things. Within this interpretive framework, the work reconstructs two different versions of this idea in two different cultural contexts. By so doing, it pursues two goals. First, it seeks to use the comparative perspective to engage with existing interpretations of Stoicism and Zhuangzi’s Daoism. In particular, it challenges the view that Stoics were rigid moralists utterly indifferent towards the ordinary world and values, and the tendency to understand Zhuangzi as an anti-rationalist. Second, it tries to interpret the differences between Stoic and Daoist versions of the virtuosity in the ordinary in light of larger divergences between the two intellectual traditions. It suggests that the overarching conceptual dichotomy in the ancient Greek and Roman tradition was that of rational and non-rational, while in the Chinese tradition it was that of artificial and natural.
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Introduction

And if from the moment they get up in the morning they adhere to their ideals, eating and bathing like a person of integrity, putting their principles into practice in every situation they face – the way a runner does when he applies the principles of running, or a singer those of musicianship – that is where you will see true progress embodied, and find someone who has not wasted their time making the journey here from home. (Epictetus, Diss. 1.4.20)

‘Excellent’, said Lord Wenhui. ‘Listening to the words of the butcher, I have learned from them how to nurture life.’ (Zh. 3.1)

And none of the virtuous men makes a mistake about the road or his house or his target. (Stob. Ecl. 2.11m=IG 102)

The genuine person of ancient times slept without dreaming and awoke without worries; he simply ate what was put before him, and his breathing was deep and profound. (Zh. 6.1)

1. The Rationale of the Comparison

In his opus magnum Sources of the Self, Charles Taylor coined a term “affirmation of ordinary life” as one of the major defining features of modernity. The “ordinary life” encompasses various activities associated with “production and reproduction, that is labour, the making of the things needed for life, and our life as sexual human beings, including marriage and the family” (Taylor 1989: 241). Historically, Taylor locates the tendency towards the affirmation of the ordinary life to early modern times and links it closely with the Reformation and the rise of Protestantism. The shift that he reconstructs consists in a relocation of the idea of the good life from the realm of high, noble activities such as major
philosophical, political or military pursuits, to the realm of mundane, everyday concerns with economical and biological prosperity. The contrast that he draws, crudely put, is that of antiquity, which premised the human flourishing on extraordinary achievements, and modernity, which programmatically turned towards the here and now of the ordinary life. Perhaps the most exemplary representation of the ancient paradigm of the good life, according to Taylor, was the Greek and Roman Stoicism:

These authors still gave ordinary life a lesser status in the order of ends [than Plato and Aristotle – D.M.]. For the Stoics, the sage should be detached from the fulfillment of his vital and sexual needs. These might indeed be “preferred” (proēgmena), in the sense that when other things are equal they should be selected, but fundamentally their status was that of adiaphora, things ultimately indifferent. One must be detached from them in a way that one was not from wisdom and the whole order of things which the wise love. One gladly gives them up because one is following this order. (Taylor 1989: 212)

This account of the Stoic outlook tends to reiterate some of the stereotypes about Stoicism that are often found in most of the non-specialist portrayals of Stoic thought, and also in many scholarly accounts: indifference to worldly pursuits, moral rigidity, and the absence of emotions in the mind of the wise man are the most emphasized features. This conventional outlook on Stoicism surely serves well Taylor’s objective to provide a largely homogenous picture of the ancient intellectual tradition, in which all major thinkers placed the good into the realm of the unworldly or extraordinary. But it provides us with a rather one-sided understanding of the Stoic philosophical project.

Stoics indeed framed their project with a figure of the wise man who is strikingly extraordinary: he never makes a mistake, he never does what he does not want to do, and he always gets what he wants. However, the distinctness of the Stoic vision of the good life lies also in the assertion that these extraordinary qualities are to be engaged in the realm of ordinary, mundane pursuits.¹ Production and reproduction are things that the wise man typically does, and does them well: only the wise man is a good moneymaker and household manager, and he will typically marry and have children (Stob. Ecl. 2.11=IG

¹ The “ordinariness” of the Stoic wise man has recently been started to be appreciated by the scholarship on Stoicism: Annas 2008; Brouwer 2014; and in particular Liu 2009, who coined the notion of “ordinariness” as a characteristic attribute of the Stoic sage.
102). He is accommodating, adaptable and “fits in as well as possible with the majority of people”. These all are things “in accordance with nature” (kata physin), and the wise man will “do everything in one’s power to obtain them”. It is thus not an exaggeration to argue that what distinguishes Stoics from other ancient philosophers is not so much their detachment from the world, but a strong and programmatic tendency to assert the value of ordinary pursuits within this world. In opening the door towards acknowledgment of the value of these pursuits, Stoics diverged from the Platonist-Aristotelian tradition, which envisaged the fully accomplished human life either as a life of rational contemplation or the life of a successful political or military career.

The rationale of this comparative project is based on a claim that Stoics were not the sole ancient thinkers who closely tied the wise man’s actions with ordinary concerns. The early Chinese text Zhuangzi, too, envisaged the wise man as a person who finds his happiness in handling mundane tasks. The Chinese tradition portrays Zhuangzi as a person who declined the offer of a high official position in the name of his love of fishing, and, unlike Confucian thinkers, he did not understand the process of self-cultivation as a process of crafting and refining one’s self by means of assimilating certain moral and political doctrines. The assertion of the value of the ordinary in Zhuangzi’s Daoism is most forcefully expressed in passages in which persons skilled in ordinary crafts or skills, such as swimming, butchering, or helmsmanship, serve as exemplifications of what it means to live well. The “ordinariness” (yong) is also explicitly mentioned in the second chapter of the Zhuangzi as the chief commitment of the wise man that helps him to make good use of things (Zh.

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2 According to the current scholarship, the Zhuangzi is a compilation written by different authors presumably between the fourth and the second century B.C. The author of the oldest strata of this compilation is supposed to be certain Zhuang Zhou, or Zhuangzi, a person traditionally dated into the fourth century B.C. For a useful summary of the history of the text see Shen 2009.

3 In the Chinese tradition, Zhuangzi is considered, along with Laozi, as two major works of Classical Daoism. I will be adhering to the view, more common among contemporary interpretations of early Chinese thought, that the Zhuangzi in many important ways diverges from the Laozi, and that these texts represent two rather different versions of Daoism.
2.6). Similarly to the Stoics, however, the manner in which the wise man manages these tasks is far from ordinary. Zhuangzi’s butcher and other virtuoso craftsmen never make even the slightest mistake, and they never exert more energy than is necessary.\(^5\)

The attribution of the “affirmation of ordinary life” to two ancient theories challenges the claim that affirmation of ordinary life is an exclusively and distinctly modern feature, and indicates that the ancient traditions are more heterogenous than Taylor’s account suggests. At the same time, it is the aim of this work to support Taylor’s elementary intuition that it does make sense to distinguish between elements of ancient and modern philosophical outlook, broadly construed. To endorse this intuition, I will argue that the nod to the value

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\(^4\) The sentence is difficult, and translations differ widely. Graham’s version is most hospitable to my understanding of the passage: “the ‘That’s it’ which deems he does not use, but finds for them lodging places in the usual. The ‘usual’ is the usable, the ‘usable’ is the interchangeable, to see as ‘interchangeable’ is to grasp.” (Graham 2001: 53-54)

\(^5\) This comparative picture, however, might raise some worries about how much the Stoic and the Daoist ordinariness have in common. Whereas the ordinariness of the Stoic sage seems to lie in his conformity with the conventional societal and political rules, Zhuangzi is traditionally perceived as a non-conformist figure who revolts against conventional order by making a decision to decline a high official post and live as a recluse in the womb of nature. This ideal seems to differ substantially, even run counter, to the Stoic life exemplified of Seneca or Marcus Aurelius, philosophers who also had substantial political power. This contrast, however, does not undermine the claim that both Zhuangzi and the Stoics affirmed value of ordinariness, since there is a distinction to be made between conformity to conventions and ordinariness; the latter notion is broader than the former, and conformity to conventions is just one possible manifestation of ordinariness. When Zhuang Zhou received the offer to become a Prime Minister, he was just fishing, i.e. engaging in an ordinary activity par excellence; and yet he was choosing, in the name of ordinary joys of fishing and simple life, against the conventional view of what is valuable. But there are passages in the Zhuangzi where the conventional values seem to be well integrated with his idea of individual fulfillment. A similar ambivalence as to whether there is or is not a tension between the ordinariness in the sense of simple life in accordance with nature and the ordinariness in the sense of conformity with the existing social order is not completely absent from the Stoic thought (Desmond 2008): on the one hand, the founder of the Stoic school, Zeno, was allegedly a disciple of Crates, a major proponent of the Cynic school that valued simple life unconstrained by social conventions; on the other hand, Stoics went far in their effort to legitimize many of the values sanctioned by the existing social and political order by integrating them into their naturalistic framework. Thus the contrast between life in human society and life in reclusion cannot be neatly mapped on the contrast between Stoic and Daoist world-view, respectively. It marks two different aspects of the ordinariness, and in both Stoicism and the Zhuangzi there was some sort of negotiation between these two aspects.
of the ordinary that one finds in Daoist and Stoic thought has some peculiar characteristics that distinguish it from the affirmation of the ordinary life that Taylor identifies in modern thought. Within this framework, then, it will also be possible to observe how, i.e. with which emphasis, what motivation, and on which assumptions value of ordinariness was affirmed in two different intellectual traditions.

According to Taylor, the modern affirmation of the ordinary life was accompanied by the negation or “vigorous criticism” of the transcendent values and activities associated with its pursuit. The turn towards ordinary life is fueled by a mistrust in the validity of higher-order values that are now no longer believed to provide a reliable foundation for making ourselves at home in this world. Such motivation behind the yearning for the ordinary, however, is a source of unease: Taylor describes the modern predicament as a conflict between anti-heroism informed by a skepsis towards extraordinary achievements, and a deep, irrepressible desire for heroes that would infuse the ordinary life with a sense of striving for an ideal that would provide our life with a definite framework of values to make life worth living.

The Stoic and Daoist affirmation of ordinariness is free from such conflict because the value of the ordinary is not asserted at the expense of the extraordinary dimension of human life. Stoic and Daoist sages are anti-heroes in the sense that all they do are ordinary things aimed at satisfying their natural needs and inclinations. But they are also heroes in the sense of being extraordinarily perfect and rare individuals, endowed with a sort of excellence that is well beyond what most of us would envisage as an ideal that we could realistically attain in the course of our lives. We should not misconstrue this position to mean that the wise man pursues ordinary things out of necessity dictated by our biological predicament, and in his spare time engages in more lofty pursuits that are the real source of his happiness. Rather, he exercises his extraordinariness amidst ordinary pursuits. The idea of extraordinariness within the ordinary is suggestively exemplified by Zhuangzi’s story about a virtuoso butcher. The butcher does an ordinary and extremely dirty job of dismembering a cow, but does it in an extraordinarily clean manner: the knife finds its way through the cavities in the skeleton, so that no tendon is hit and no blood is spilled. When he is done, his knife is as sharp as it was when he began.

But how is it possible that the dust of the ordinary world does not taint the extraordinary purity of the wise man? To answer this question, we have to turn towards the broader cosmological outlook that underlies this picture. The distinctive feature of this outlook is
that the world is a whole in which all things are interconnected, and, in fact, ultimately identical, in the sense that they are all instantiations of a single “breath” (pneuma in the Greek, qi 氣 in the Chinese context). Therefore, no duality between an ontologically superior and an ontologically inferior realm had place in this outlook; from the ontological perspective, everything that exists is equally ordinary, or perhaps we should say, equally extraordinary. For the breath that constitutes and pervades all that exists has attributes of a highly sublime and divine power. Stoics identified this breath with Zeus or God (theos), but they did not mean by this a God as transcendent entity but a force fully immersed and operative in things of this world, which can therefore also be called, as Anthony Long suggested, “the way things are” (Long 1996: 191-192). The equivalent of the Stoic God on the Zhuangzian side is Dao 道, or the Way; not a particular way of how this or that thing works but the way things work or the way things are in general.⁶ The notions of God and Dao are coextensive with phusis and tian 天 (“Heaven”) that are most often translated as “nature”. The immanence of Dao and God in nature is implied by spontaneity as the characteristic modus operandi of nature: Stoics maintained that nature is “self-moving tenor” (DL 7.149=LS 43A), and Zhuangzi believed that Heaven works as it works “by itself” (ziran 自然). Similarly to God, Dao is everywhere, even in such ordinary and lowly things like excrements (Zh. 22.6). Therefore, if the Stoic wise man is following the natural order of things, he cannot do so, as Taylor argues, by renouncing or giving up ordinary things. In light of this radical immanence of the organizing power in the world, it is not surprising that even the body of the cow is endowed with an orderly “structure” or “pattern” (li 理), and that is why the butcher can, if he has insight into this structure, proceed neatly and without exertion. That the structure of the cow exemplifies reality in general is suggested by Zhuangzi’s claims that “the way things are is a structure” (dao, li ye 道，理也; Zh. 16.1) and that the “wise man seeks out the beauties of Heaven and earth and gains insight into patterns of all things” (Zh. 22.2).⁷ Stoics, too, believed that the universe is “ordered” (Marcus, Med. 4.27) and “beautiful” (Aëtius 1.6.2=IG 31), so that “for someone with feeling and a deeper insight into the workings of the universe, there is almost nothing that will fail to present itself with pleasure” (Marcus, Med. 3.2). It is this beauty and perfection

⁶ “le fonctionnement des choses” (Billeter 2007)

⁷ 聖人者，原天地之美而逹萬物之理. The idea that the wise man has cognitive an access to li 理 of things appears throughout the Zhuangzi (e.g. Zh. 14.3; 15.2; 17.7; 29.2).
in the arrangement and order of things, which makes it possible for the wise man to act in a supremely beautiful and perfect manner.

To achieve such perfection, however, the craftsmanship of the butcher must be equal in its virtuosity to the craftsmanship of the force that created the cow, or “that which creates things” (zaowuzhe 造物者). And indeed it is: The second most distinctive idea of Stoic and Daoist thought besides the extraordinariness of the ordinary world is that human agents have a privileged access to divine, creative power, i.e. that their mind is wired to assimilate this power as its principal moving force. This is the meaning of statements such as that “the wise man is divine” (Zh. 2.11), or that he “has a fragment of God in himself” (Epictetus, Dis. 2.8). The mind of the sage is therefore characterized by the utmost psychological wholeness and integrity, and the agency which is animated by this mind is marked by supreme harmony and infallibility, as it proceeds in accordance with the order of things. An important implication of this cosmological and anthropological outlook is that the idea of virtuosity within the ordinary is not a wishful fancy or purely counterfactual ideal, but a normative vision of the fulfilled life for which we are naturally designed and have all the potential to achieve. The rarity of sages should not serve as an indication of the essential unattainability of this ideal but of the depravity of the world in which we presently live.

This does not mean, of course, that the Stoic and Daoist philosophical project would be without tensions. Quite to the contrary, we will see that these thinkers were engaged in an intense and often uneasy negotiation between the extraordinariness of the wise man and the demands of ordinary life. An example of such negotiation is debates about the emotional life of the wise man, the subject of the fifth chapter of this work. On the one hand, the extraordinariness of the wise man is asserted by the idea that he is without emotions: unlike ordinary human beings, he is unmoved by worldly gains and losses; on the other hand, both Stoics and Zhuangzi argued that the wise man does have some sort of emotional experience that approximates him, in some sense, to the ordinary people. Within this common framework, Stoics and Zhuangzi used different arguments and strategies to justify the view that the wise man does have emotions but in a manner that is different from and superior to the emotional life of ordinary people.

To navigate successfully between these antagonistic pulls required a considerable degree of philosophical ingenuity, and one of the goals of this work is to make this ingenuity palatable to a philosophically minded audience. Each chapter focuses on a particular philosophical problem or theme important to the thinkers being compared and does so in an
accessible and relatable manner. These themes and problems are presented in the outline of individual chapters at the end of this introduction.

2. The Goals and Agenda

The philosophical originality and acuity with which the thinkers engaged these questions will be presented by means of an interpretive project that seeks to determine, in the first place, what their positions were. The comparative element of this work is largely used as an interpretive tool; hence the notion of “comparative interpretation” in the title of this work. The major goal of my study is to use the comparative perspective to engage critically with some of the widely held misconceptions of what these ancient thinkers were up to, and so contribute to the existing interpretations of Stoicism and Zhuangzi as two influential philosophical schools in the ancient world. The perspective for such reinterpretation of these ancient texts is the idea of achieving virtuosity in doing ordinary things. Along with the vision of reality as a structured and ordered whole, and the human mind as a vessel for divine powers, another important claim implied in this idea is that wise man’s excellence is a craft or skill, and that this excellence is in many respects analogical to ordinary manual crafts and skills. Many other thinkers in both ancient traditions also made use of this analogy but in Zhuangzi and Stoicism the idea of craft of living becomes a pervasive notion that implicitly or explicitly backs up many of their arguments. The rationale for the parallel between virtue/excellence and crafts collect itself around three points: ease and infallibility of virtuoso performance; idea of excellence as proper and skilful use of materials/things; and emphasis on cognitive acuity, rather than on properly educated emotions, as the major prerequisite of such an excellence.

On the Stoic side, the idea of virtuosity in doing ordinary things will help to challenge a cluster of ideas that can be subsumed under the label of ‘inner citadel’ interpretation. This phrase was coined in interpretations of later Stoicism by Pierre Hadot, and there are some elements in Hadot’s interpretation that fall under the ‘inner citadel’ interpretation. But a number of other scholars, too, have sometimes leaned toward this interpretive outlook on Stoicism, and applied it to different themes in Stoic thought. Taylor’s presentation of Stoicism quoted above would be an example of an interpretation strongly marked by this tendency. Its most characteristic feature is a belief that the Stoics premised the possibility of flourishing for human beings on their ability to detach themselves from the world, and to
remain absolutely indifferent towards anything else other than their own virtue, or as Hadot puts it, to become “an island of freedom in the midst of a great sea of necessity” (Hadot 1998: 112). From the perspective of virtuosity in the ordinary, we shall be able to appreciate that rather than encouraging disconnectedness of humans from nature, they embraced the ideal of a skillful, and engaged, human interaction with things.

Several interpreters of Stoicism have in fact emphasized the ordinariness of the wise man, but did so in a manner that reinforced, paradoxically, the inner citadel view. On this interpretation, the wise man does outwardly everything exactly in the same way as the non-wise, so that we often cannot tell the wise from the non-wise on the basis of what they do; the difference is solely in firmness and infallibility of his internal disposition. I will argue that the wise man does in fact, in most cases, things better than the non-wise because he does them in the best possible manner, fully exercising his virtuosity in the realm of ordinary things. As the opening quotation from Epictetus indicates, he eats and baths like a person of integrity, not like an ordinary person.

This efficient, outwardly manifested aspect of virtue is explicitly affirmed in the Zhuangzi. But here the reliance on the imagery of crafts has sometimes been interpreted as a mark of Zhuangzi’s alleged anti-rationalism (Graham 1989, Ivanhoe 2000). Contrary to this view, I shall argue that the idea of virtuosity in the ordinary helps to appreciate Zhuangzi’s commitment to some sort of rationality. By ‘rationality’, I mean the view that reality consists of regular, orderly patterns, which can be discerned by the human intelligence; and the view that humans, in turn, have all they need to understand and follow these patterns. There certainly were differences between the Stoic notion of rationality and Zhuangzi’s “rationality” but they both believed that the human flourishing depends fully on a development of one’s understanding of how things work rather than on crafting one’s self by inculcating habits and repressing one’s desires. This picture of Zhuangzi’s thought will further justify its dissociation from the Laozi as the other major Daoist text, for many of those elements that we will emphasize in the Zhuangzi do not find their equivalent in the Laozi.

In interpreting excellence of Zhuangzi’s wise man as virtuosity in doing ordinary things, I have been inspired by several existing interpretations of the Zhuangzi. The notion of “ordinariness” has been pointed out, for instance, by Wu Kuang-ming, who pointed out that the wise man “becomes free in the hustle and bustle of worldly activities” (Wu 1982: 63). To this insight I wish to add that Zhuangzi also believed that one should develop a skill so
that one can be not simply carried along passively by the flow, but impeccably respond to different situations and so achieve one’s individual goals. The centrality of skills in Zhuangzi’s project has been appreciated, among others, by David Nivison and Lee Yearley.  

But the role of crafts for one’s excellence is not limited, I shall argue, to specialized, narrowly focused activities such as butchering or helmsmanship. For we can reconstruct a higher-order craft of living in the Zhuangzi, or an excellence in handling different situation in one’s life. Something close to this idea has been recently proposed by Chris Fraser (2011, 2014), but I will go further than Fraser did in anchoring this ideal in Zhuangzi’s cosmological vision, arguing that rationality of human action owes to rationality of the way things are.

But why should an interpretation of these texts from a comparative perspective be more accurate and sensitive than a non-comparative interpretation? First of all, it should be noted that any comparative interpretation cannot serve as an alternative to the historically sensitive, contextualizing approach that reads philosophical theories in context of their own tradition and its development; throughout this work, too, I will be paying attention, as far as possible, to how Zhuangzi’s and Stoic ideas drew on the ideas their predecessors and reacted to their contemporaries. The added value of comparative perspective is twofold: first, by engaging two different articulations of the similar philosophical ideal, the back-and-forth movement between these two theories can bring before our eyes a broader array of interpretive options; many of them might eventually turn out to be inadequate for interpretation of one or the other theory, but some of them could open up promising and so far neglected interpretive avenues.

Second, to engage two philosophical theories from two different ancient philosophical traditions makes one more sensitive to some predicaments that are characteristic for ancient thought across different traditions. This is an advantage because it enhances our caution against unwarranted importation of some of the modern agenda into the ancient texts. Existing interpretations of Zhuangzi in terms of skepticism or anti-rationalism, or the ‘inner citadel’ interpretations of Stoicism, can be ultimately understood in terms of a failure to appreciate the ancient emphasis on embeddedness of the human agents in the world that is meaningfully ordered and accessible to the human mind.

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8 The real adept … can concentrate with complete singleness of mind on the execution of the skill that is his in his role, without being in the least “worn” by so doing.” (Nivison 1991:180)
The emphasis on substantial similarities between Stoicism and Zhuangzi, as well as on some large-scale similarities between ancient Greek and early Chinese thought, does not amount to a denial that Stoicism and Zhuangzi developed the ideal of virtuosity within the ordinary along different lines, with different assumptions, and with different emphases, or to a denial that there are substantial divergences between both philosophical traditions. Throughout this work, I will try to register important divergences between Stoic and Daoist approach to particular philosophical problems, and will occasionally try to account for this difference by referring to larger patterns of differences between the two traditions. It is not, however, my goal to propose a large-scale comparative theory about essential characteristics of the typically Greek or Chinese worldview, whether there indeed exist such characteristics or not. In this respect, this work takes a rather reserved approach to essentializing cross-cultural comparisons, argues that there is much more commonality between the ancient thoughts from different cultures that has been generally thought, and challenges the influential view that Eastern and Western thought is centered on two essentially different and incommensurable worldviews.

To explain why comparison between Stoicism and Zhuangzi can be particularly helpful in undermining the essentializing view, I will now offer a survey of the state of art in the field of Chinese-Western comparative philosophy and explain how this project situates itself within this field.

3. The Comparative Method: Reason Versus Nature?

Today, the cross-cultural Chinese-Western comparative philosophy is a well-established, quickly evolving discipline. The major recent development within this discipline is to narrow the scope of comparison down temporally to ancient cultures or individual ancient thinkers, as well as thematically to specific branches of philosophical inquiry, particularly ethics. While I have some misgivings about the latter tendency, the growing awareness
of the significance of diachronic development is certainly salutary for reinforcing the potential of comparative philosophy to become a productive method of interpretation, and this project seeks to contribute to this development.

The interest in what is intrinsic to each culture, Western and Chinese, and whether and how these differences can be reconciled, has a long history, starting from the arrival of Jesuit missionaries into China, and has particularly flourished after since the sixties of the last century. Most scholars that engaged in intercultural comparisons construed China and West as two cultures committed to and defined by different sets of assumptions and values. What exactly was understood by this difference and what judgments of value about each of the compared cultures colored the way these differences were brought out, varied with individual interpreters and with time.

While a hundred years ago Max Weber in his comparison of Confucian and Protestant morality articulated the difference in terms of a deficiency and incapacity on the Confucian side in having embraced some core beliefs that characterized Protestantism, the comparative discourse of the last three decades or so was dominated by the view that the two sets of assumptions are different but we cannot say which culture or tradition is better or more developed, either because they are essentially incommensurable (MacIntyre), or because they are in many respects opposite and mutually complementary (Ames, Cheng, Hall, Jullien, Rošker).

It is particularly the view that Chinese and Western cultures are committed to a set of opposite yet complementary assumptions that has shaped decisively intercultural comparisons of recent decades, and many both Western and Chinese scholars working on Chinese thought have been sympathetic, with greater or smaller qualifications, with this model. We find an affirmative statement of this position in a recent study by Jana Rošker:

> Essential differences most definitely exist between traditional Chinese philosophical discourses and Western ones, especially with respect to certain fundamental aspects.

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9 E.g. Raphals 1992; Shankman and Durrant 2002; Reding 2004; Yu 2007; Sim 2007; King 2012; Zhang 2012. And of course the extensive oeuvre of Geoffrey Lloyd.

10 Yu 2007; King 2012.

11 This approach is somewhat problematic because the ancients did not separate different strands of philosophical inquiry into specialized disciplines. Their ethics was so closely intertwined with their epistemology, logic and physics, that it seems to be overly reductive to compare ancient thinkers in the narrow framework of one of these disciplines, particularly on the Chinese side.
The most important of these differences is to be found in the principle of immanence which, in terms of its basic characteristics, differs completely from the concept of transcendental metaphysics. (Rošker 2012: 11)

The contrast between immanent and transcendent worldviews is just one of the many pairs of binary oppositions that different scholars referred to in order to articulate different facets of the contrast and complementarity between the two cultures. These pairs are mostly not entirely commensurable but there is often an implicit affinity between them that points towards a broad convergence in the way that most comparative scholars understood the contrast between Chinese and Western culture. The pair of immanence and transcendence has been often tied up with another popular dichotomy, that of holism and dualism:

In the West, Nature and society, objects and subjects, subjectivity and objectivity, substance and phenomena were seen as dualisms, which manifested themselves in the philosophical tradition of dual contradictions. While the Chinese tended towards a unification of oppositions, and a dialectical integration which was rooted in proposition of harmonic coordination, prevailing Western thought tended towards divisions of unity into dualities, i.e. towards dialectic of contradiction that arose from paradoxical propositions. (Hua Pingxiao 2009:4)

It has been argued that one particular instance where the contrast between holistically and dualistically oriented outlooks comes to light is an absence of the typically Western notion of mind-body dualism in the Chinese thought. For instance, François Jullien argues that the absence of the notion of the soul as we know it from ancient Greek thought is a mark of an essentially non-dualistic conception of living organisms, including humans, in ancient China:

At this point, the soul is born as a crucial anthropological representation that philosophy henceforth takes to be “self-evident”. Simmias, debating with Socrates [in Phaedo], does not think of questioning its existence … The Chinese tradition, by contrast, thought first of feeding “life” rather than elaboration on the “soul” because it did not establish as sharp as separation between a principle of life and organic being. (Jullien 2007:56)

One mark of the allegedly holistic orientation of the Chinese thought is that it took the idea of complementarity and interdependence of binary opposites such as dark/light or cold/warm, which is paradigmatically manifested in nature, as the universal explanatory
pattern for all processes in the world, including those that happen in the human mind.\textsuperscript{12} This idea is closely linked with a cluster of other pairs of opposites, most systematically developed by David Hall and Roger Ames, such as privileging substance versus privileging process, prominence of causal versus correlative thought, and preference of rest versus preference of motion (Hall and Ames 1995: 124-139).

A further support for this contrast is often taken from a relative underdevelopment of formal theories of correct reasoning, or a relative disinterestedness of Chinese thinkers in matters of logic as we know it from ancient Greek thought. This has been repeatedly linked with the high value that the Greeks attributed to theoretical inquiry, which contrasts with a predominantly practical orientation of Chinese thought. This difference, again, is often explained by a distance between ancient Chinese and ancient Greek languages. For instance, the Chinese preference for processual, rather than substantial, interpretation of reality has been linked with the absence of the copula (‘to be’) as we know it from Indo-European languages.\textsuperscript{13}

Although this comparative model was proposed mainly by authors whose objectives were primarily philosophical, it has also informed some more historically oriented works such as Jacques Gernet’s study of the Jesuit mission to implement Christianity into Chinese culture:

Believing that the universe possesses within itself its own organisational principles and its own creative energy, the Chinese maintained something that was quite scandalous from the point of view of scholastic reason, namely that “matter” itself is intelligent – not, clearly enough, with a conscious and reflective intelligence as we conceive it, but with a spontaneous intelligence which makes it possible for the \textit{yin} and the \textit{yang} to come together and guides the infinite combinations of these two opposite sources of energies. (Gernet 1985: 210)

This analysis further reveals some of the weaknesses of the essentializing comparative model. Gernet’s diagnosis is compelling and perfectly acceptable when considered as an interpretation of a particular historical phenomenon, i.e. of a reaction of seventeenth century China to the importation of some Western ideas. It is also reasonable to assume that this encounter can point to some broader divergences between the traditions that go beyond this particular historical event, but one should be very careful to take this analysis simply as

\textsuperscript{12} e.g. Rošker 2012: 11; Cheng 1997: 29.

\textsuperscript{13} Reding (2004) is probably the first comparative study that questions this interpretation.
an argument in favour of some large scale essential divergences between the two cultures in the way that Hall and Ames, and often even Gernet himself, do it.

For if a Stoic philosopher were in the position of Jesuit missionaries he might have been much less surprised by the Chinese ideas that Gernet identifies. Unlike Plato and Aristotle, Stoics did believe that “matter” is intelligent, and their reason for believing so was exactly that “the universe possesses within itself its own organisational principles”, or, in other words, that the organizing principle of the world is fully immanent in each part of this world. Expressed in their own vocabulary, they argued that the universe is made of a material energy called *pneuma*, and that this energy is coextensive with Reason or Zeus. Moreover, Stoics understood the energetical continuum of reality in terms of interdependent connection of two opposite and complementary principles, active and passive, which are exactly the qualities that Chinese cosmology attributed to *yang* and *yin*. Therefore, from this perspective at least, it seems problematic to extend Gernet’s observation to essentializing characterization of the two traditions.\(^\text{14}\)

The comparative outlook of this work thus provides further support to recent findings of an increasing number scholars working on the history of Chinese thought\(^\text{15}\) who tried to

\(^{14}\) A possible strategy to respond to this objection would be to marginalize Stoic thought in the Western tradition by saying that it does not represent the prevailing tendency of the Western thought. It is true that several core Stoic theses were considered as quite unique in the ancient Greek and Roman tradition but it cannot be denied that Stoicism was deeply embedded in that tradition and many Stoic views were based on a consequential development of ideas of their predecessors. For instance, their immanent, naturalistic worldview owes to the often neglected Presocratic thought.

\(^{15}\) Slingerland 2013; Goldin 2007; Puett 2002a.
undermine, from different angles, the holistic paradigm of ancient Chinese thought. The major charge these scholars were raising against this comparative perspective is that it is ahistorical, and largely driven by present philosophical concerns of the time, rather than by a desire to understand the ancient texts on their own terms. The danger of ahistoricity, we can add, is not limited only to excessive homogenizing and essentializing the Chinese tradition, but includes neglecting deep differences between the ancient Greek or Roman and later Western thought, and even the significant heterogenity within Greek and Roman philosophical tradition itself. To exacerbate the differences between the ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ view, comparativists have often drawn the picture of Western thought that marginalizes everything besides the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition, which provides material for their construal of the Western tradition as essentially dualistic.

The tendency to interpret ancient thinkers through a lens of categories that are of a later date can also be detected in the recent pioneering comparative study of Daoism and Stoicism by Jiyuan Yu. The common ground between these two schools, in Yu’s interpretation, is the idea of “following nature”. There is a substantial difference between the two schools in what exactly they understood by this idea. To capture this contrast, Yu relies on dichotomy of rationality and spontaneity: “For Stoicism, living with nature is a matter of developing and nurturing one’s rationality; yet for Daoism, it is a matter of restoring our original spontaneous aptitude.” (Yu 2008: 5) This contrast should be manifested chiefly in their different views about the value of language, logic and reasoning: “Since judging and ranking are the typical forms of analytical reasoning, Daoism appears to be on the opposite side of Stoicism’s goal of developing one’s rationality”. (Yu 2008: 6)

The general tendency in the recent criticism of the essentializing comparative models that were predominantly focusing on the differences was to point to the importance of similarities. For instance Michael Puett: “If the focus is on discovering common tensions, rather than contrasting different assumptions, then once one has isolated the political and cultural tensions at hand, studying the ways in which particular individuals in particular contexts tried to deal with the perceived problems is possible.” (Puett 2002b: 71). A similar point has been made by Haun Saussy, who emphasized that comparison can be pertinent only when a common relation is established: “The information theory of classical structuralism holds that language “consists of differences” – it is not simply a collection of a variety of things, but composed of elements that signify by excluding each other specifically. An opposition is “pertinent” when its two members are formally correlated and functionally distinct. … Pertinence is both a difference and a relation, that is, a difference within a relation.” (Saussy 2002: 49)
The dichotomy of spontaneity and rationality sounds familiar to scholars working on Zhuangzi. The view that Zhuangzi was an anti-rationalist who embraced the value of spontaneity was proposed by leading Zhuangzian scholar Angus Graham, and resonates also in more recent scholarship on the Zhuangzi.17 This interpretation reflects Zhuangzi’s mistrust of the power of language and abstract categories to provide us with a reliable grasp of reality and a guidance. On this point, there surely is a marked contrast with the Stoic optimism about the powers of reasoning and discursive analysis for one’s moral development. The danger inherent in categories such as spontaneity and rationality is that they covertly convey distinctions and oppositions that were not operative in the ancient texts, and consequently make us susceptible to overdrawing some differences and downplaying some others.

To start with, we can note that what Zhuangzi criticizes is not language as such, or the very capacities of human beings to use language to form descriptive or prescriptive propositions, but the human irrationality that misuses these powers so that they become instruments of their passions. This would agree with the Stoic idea that only humans can act irrationally, i.e. against their own nature and the nature of the whole, because only they are rational, i.e. have the capacity to act either rationally (use reason) or irrationally (misuse reason). The fact that Zhuangzi attributes to the humans the capacity for defective or irrational action might imply, from this perspective, that by using this capacity correctly, they can act, in some sense, rationally. Conversely, Stoics seem to attribute much to their sage from the Zhuangzian ideal of spontaneity. In particular, if spontaneity means an effortless and smooth process of decision-making without too much working out, then “spontaneity” would, as we shall see, characterize well the deliberation of the Stoic sage.

The tension between rationalism and anti-rationalism (or spontaneity) might be more an obsession of the modern mind torn between prospects of the rationality of the Enlightenment and the seductions of the romantic appeal to nature and everything which is untainted by

17 Graham 1989: 176-183; Ivanhoe 2000: 22–23: “By rationality we mean thought of a general and abstract form, which tends to disregard the individual and subjective aspects of a given situation in favor of universally binding principles, and which employs clear and well-established standards of judgment in a systematic and consistent manner. In contrast to such thought is that which is extremely sensitive to individual contexts, employs imagination, feelings, and intuitions and is not particularly concerned with establishing or maintaining consistent and systematic standards or methods.”
the scheming and pretence of the human mind. The problem of labels like rationalism, naturalism or anti-rationalism is that they make us more vulnerable to read into the ancient texts something that was not there, and to neglect some of their original concerns and conceptual lines.

To exemplify what I mean by the lines that were their own, we can think about the notion of divine energies that mediate between the realm of human beings and the realm of gods or spirits. Stoics define the human happiness as an agreement with one’s inner daimôn (DL 7.88), and Zhuangzi characterizes the ultimate spiritual state as following the “desires of the spirit” (Zh. 3.1). In both cases, this means that the humans should try to align their minds or selves with these energies, and that this alignment is crucial for their harmonious relationship both to themselves and to their environment. In his paper “Reason as Daimôn”, Stephen Clark invokes the notion of daimôn to point to the difference between the ancient and the modern notion of rationality. In particular, unlike what Clark identifies as the modern idea of Reason, daimôn does not denote one particular aspect of one’s personality but rather a force that empowers and unifies the agent as a whole:

‘I define “daimonic” as any natural function in the individual that has the power of taking over the whole person. Sex and erōs, anger and rage and the craving for power are examples.’\(^{18}\) Demons, or the demonic, may be real and powerful elements in human character, and the less we think there is some one thing, the Self, in each of us, the less we can claim that ‘Reason’ or the operations of reason have any different status from lust or anger or the rules of etiquette. (Clark 1990: 193)

One major implication of this perspective on rationality is that it helps us understand the peculiar extraordinariness of the Stoic and Zhuangzi’s sage. The wise man acts, thanks to his perfection, in an unimpeded, entirely consistent, almost automatic fashion, and yet this automatic action can be given as a paradigm of the utmost thoughtfulness and understanding. The intuitions of most modern readers would instead tend to associate the automatism with thoughtless operation of a machine, and instead see painstaking deliberation as a mark of thoughtfulness. In the Stoic and Zhuangzi’s view, however, the perfect persons know what to do with ease and without a need for working it out because they take part in the divine that makes them perfectly whole, unified, and free from

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uncertainties or hesitation. This picture seems to sidestep a disjunctively understood dichotomy between spontaneous and reflective action, or nature and reason in general.

The fact that the ancient Greek notion of rationality substantially differs from the ways in which modernity tends to think about reason has been registered by scholars working on ancient Greek thought. Michael Frede (1999), in particular, has noted that reason for the ancients was not a power, which is antinomical to desires or passions; reason, too, can have its own passions, and the characteristic passions of the reason are those for truth, order, and integrity. In Plato’s Republic, for instance, the rational organization of soul/city is not such which is liberated from all non-rational elements, but such in which different parts are seamlessly unified and integrated in a single whole. A broader notion of rationality in the sense of wholeness and integrity, is largely compatible with Zhuangzi’s valorization of “wholeness” or “integrity” (quan 仝) and “unity” (yi —). In light of this compatibility, the alleged Zhuangzi’s anti-rationalism loses much of its appeal.

Besides carrying unsalutary philosophical baggage, the contrast between rationality and spontaneity is disadvantageous as an interpretive tool of Daoist and Stoic thought. It does not help us to discover neuralgic points and philosophically productive tensions in their theories; instead, it imposes on these texts fixed categories that significantly limit our interpretive options. In other words, his comparison of these texts follows upon the interpretation as the next step rather then being engaged as an interpretive tool.

In contrast, the advantage of the perspective of extraordinariness of the wise man as exercised in the realm of the ordinary is that it helps us present Stoics and Zhuangzi as being engaged in defending a philosophically ambitious project of the possibility of extraordinary excellence in the ordinary world. This makes it difficult to articulate the differences between them in a simple scheme, in which, let us say, Stoics would gravitate toward extraordinariness and Zhuangzi toward ordinariness of the normative agency. What is our task as interpreters is rather to discover how this ideal was negotiated in different thematical settings of their thought, and to account, as far as possible, for how particular philosophical decisions or concessions were informed by the specific cultural and philosophical context of each tradition. It is very unlikely that this interpretive approach will generate a neat and consistent contrastive picture of two intellectual traditions; but it will, I hope, provide a set of interconnected insights into the agenda and concerns that were specific for both traditions.
Instead of reinforcing the paradigm of East-West geographical and cultural divide, the aim of this work is to argue that the temporal perspective, implying the intellectual affinity between two ancient traditions, can be more productive and appropriate for understanding of philosophical texts from these cultures. I will now outline, therefore, what are some of the characteristic marks of the ancient philosophical outlook across different cultures. This outline is, of course, selective, and limits itself to presenting those features that are of particular relevance for the forthcoming interpretation.

4. The Ancient Outlook: Embeddedness and Wholeness

What distinguishes Stoics and Zhuangzi from most other thinkers in their traditions is the peculiar manner in which they combine the assertion of extraordinary perfection of the wise man with the radical affirmation of his ordinariness, and how they underpin this idea with their cosmological or physical theory. Arguably, though, the difference between the way these two ancient schools affirm the value of the ordinary and the affirmation of the ordinary life in the modernity owes to a set of underlying assumptions that are distinctly ancient, and that are not limited to Stoicism and Daoism.19 The most typical aspects of this ancient outlook are embeddedness of the human agents in the larger cosmological framework, and an optimism, justified by this embeddedness, about the possibility of achieving psychological and ethical wholeness which is conducive to happiness. In both traditions, the normative ideal of the human agency is typically embodied by a normative human agent – wise man, prudent man, or well-cultivated gentlemen – who owes his exemplariness to a full development of his virtues, powers or excellences.

Embeddedness means that the realm of human activities and pursuits is located in a world which is meaningfully structured and ordered, and that human agents can aspire to achieve their flourishing by means of their understanding of this work and playing their proper role in its framework. Not all thinkers believed, though, that the world of the ordinary human

19 There has been a growing awareness among historians of Greco-Roman thought about the distinctive character of the ancient thought, particularly in the realm of ethics, which was contrasted with the modern ethical discourse (e.g. Annas 1993, Cooper 2012).
pursuits is identical with the world of divine reason. For instance, Aristotle located human agency in the so-called “sublunary” sphere, which differs from the higher cosmological realms by presence of matter and contingency. Unlike gods, humans live and act in a world where things can happen in an inexplicable, irregular and unpredictable manner.

In his interpretation of Aristotelian ethics, Pierre Aubenque reconstructed how this cosmological outlook informs Aristotle’s notion of practical wisdom (phronēsis), the distinctively human virtue of deliberation and decision-making. The fact that we live in a world which is to a significant extent undetermined\(^\text{20}\) raises the danger that our lives will collapse into disorder and chaos, but, on the other hand, gives us freedom to shape this world and make it a place in which we can lead a reasonably good life: not a life of gods, surely, but a life of what is the best possible for humans. This view, Aubenque notes, sounds remarkably modern, and he explains that we should be careful not to misconstrue Aristotle’s theory in terms of the modern notion of freedom as undetermination:

> The freedom of man is not based on the contingency, but, on the contrary, is opposed to it. In a remarkable passage from the book Λ of the *Metaphysics*, the universe is compared to a household (oikia) in which the free men represent the stars because “it is the least lawful for them to act by chance” (ho ti etuche poiein), and because all their actions, or at least the most of them, are ordered (tetaktai), while “the slaves and the brutes whose actions are rarely ordered with view to what is common (eis to koinon) but are most often left to chance” symbolize the inferior parts of the universe, that is to say the sublunary world. It is thus the slaves that are “free” in the modern sense of the word because they do not understand what they are doing, while the freedom of the Greek man and its perfection are measured by a greater or lesser determination of its actions. (Aubenque 1963: 91, my translation)

Whereas some modern thinkers measured authenticity and freedom of the human way of living by the degree of one’s undetermination, which opened up the possibility to construe one’s own identity and meaning of life, the ancient thinkers though that such undetermination is a mark of our misalignment with the universal order, either actual or potential, which is eventually detrimental to our own happiness. To be determined, on the

\(^{20}\) A detailed account of the relationship between Aristotle’s ontology and his views about ethics and moral responsibility was provided by Richard Sorabji (1980).
contrary, is a good thing, since the force which determines us is itself more structured and intelligent than we are.

This faith derived from the assumption that the force or structure which should ideally determine our actions is the force which holds the world together, and will therefore also hold our life together. The world we find ourselves in has some sort of intelligible structure, whether in all or only in some of its parts, and our alignment with this structure, whether purely intellectual or also physical, is hospitable for achieving a well-integrated and fulfilled life. For most early Chinese thinkers, such a force was the “Heaven”, for the Confucian thinkers the source of moral norm and values that we should develop and eventually embody. In Plato, the intelligible structures were the ideal Forms, particularly the form of the Good. Nowhere in the ancient texts do we find either the angst of ontological and axiological ungroundedness, or the heroic appeal to human self-construction independently of any natural order. What the ancient thinkers feared was rather that we fail to develop the predispositions to our own flourishing, and end up, as Marcus Aurelius puts it, as a “separate tumor or growth upon the universe” (Med. 2.16).

Another fear that the ancients did not have is that it is unalterable ordeal of the human predicament to be torn between two different sets of values, one connected with the embodied and biologically determined character of the human existence, and the other connected with one’s intellectual or spiritual aspirations. We do find in the ancient texts an awareness of such tension, but not the view that it is the requirement of the human condition to be forever caught in it. In the second book of Xenophon’s Memorabilia, we find Socrates engaged in a conversation with Aristippus on the issue of training youths so that they are fit to become future rulers. The agreement is reached that the virtue of self-control is the essential desideratum of such training. However, when Socrates asks Aristippus whether he would preferably put himself into the category of those who rule, Aristippus responds decisively that he would rather be one of those who are ruled by others because he belongs to “those who wish for a life of the greatest ease and pleasure that can be had”. To rule entails too much responsibility and too many duties, and too little pleasure. Socrates disagrees; the dilemma of the choice between duties and pleasures, so his argumentative strategy goes, is unfounded. To support his view, he invokes a received story of Hercules’s encounter with two women figures, voluptuous “Happiness” and neatly and modestly looking “Virtue”. The former offers him “the pleasantest and easiest road” and promises to secure unlimited enjoyment without any toil. The latter, in contrast, promises not to “deceive him by a pleasant prelude”, for “the gods give nothing to man without toil
and effort”. But she does not renounce pleasure and enjoyment in the manner that her opponent renounces toil. Her argument is more subtle, namely that pleasure is not opposed to toil but rather presupposes it. Turning, to “Happiness”, she argues:

Wretch! What good thing do you have? Or what pleasant thing do you know, not wanting to do anything for the sake of these things? You do not even await the desire for pleasures but rather fill yourself up with everything before desiring it, eating before you are hungry, drinking before you are thirsty. ... Among my friends the enjoyment of food and drink is pleasant and trouble free, for they refrain from these until they desire them. More pleasant sleep is available to them than to those who do not toil. (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.30,32)

Pleasure cannot be the disjunctive alternative to pain because the intensity of pleasure is often commensurable with the intensity of the toil or pain that precedes it, and, so to speak, invites it. But there is more to Virtue’s argument than the mutual complementarity and interdependence of pleasure and pain as opposites. One should not undergo toil and pain only for the sake of preparing ground for the subsequent pleasure. The toil we should undergo is that of striving for self-perfection, when we seek to turn ourselves into “a right good doer of high and noble deeds” that leads a well-ordered, self-controlled life. Only those that are fit to rule over themselves, not those, as Aristippus believes, that are ruled by others, can enjoy genuine pleasures. In another important text of the Socratic tradition, Plato’s *Philebus*, this point is made more explicit: pleasures, if left to themselves, will defeat themselves by their progression to unlimited excess; the limit imposed upon them by knowledge is their “salvation” (26b-c). It is thus the path of virtue, not that of pleasure, that leads to real happiness.

The vision of life presented by Virtue could be characterized by the notion of “wholeness”. In one sense, such a life is whole because it is unified: free from being torn between pursuing pleasures and fulfilling duties, it does not have to balance out appeals of different, sometimes incompatible, frameworks of value. Such unity of values, of course, presupposes a well-developed character with integrity that values virtue above anything else. In a slightly different sense, such a life is whole because it is fulfilled and satisfied, i.e. it does not experience any substantial lack. Either one lives the life of virtue, and in that case one also has everything that is worth having, or else one lives the life of vice, and in that case the best one can hope for are moments of temporary gratification. Both aspects of
wholeness, unity and fulfillment, are, of course, complementary: one can be satisfied only when one is free from internal conflict, and vice versa.

These two aspects of wholeness, and their mutual interconnection, is nicely brought out in an argument we find in writings of the third century B.C.E. Confucian thinker Xunzi. In a chapter titled “Exhortation to Learning”, Xunzi explains why the virtuous character will never be unduly influenced by contingencies of external circumstances:

The gentleman, knowing well that learning that is incomplete and impure does not deserve to be called fine, recites and enumerates his studies that he will be familiar with them… and eliminates what is harmful within him that he will hold on to them and be nourished by them. Thereby he causes that his eye is unwilling to see what is contrary to it, his ear unwilling to hear what is contrary to it, his mouth unwilling to speak anything contrary to it. When he has reached the limit of such perfection, he finds delight in it (hao zhi 好之). His eye then finds greater enjoyment in the five colors, his ear in the five sounds, his mouth in the five tastes, and his mind benefits from possessing all that it is in the world. (Xunzi, 1.14; Knoblock: 142)

The idea in this passage is that normative condition of the self is the necessary condition of constructive and fulfilling use of anything that one can secure in the external world. Only a fully cultivated and perfectly integrated character can fully enjoy pleasures, including not only sublime, lofty pleasures of contemplation and morality but also simple pleasures of the flesh.

In terms of the vocabulary of wholeness, these passages could be interpreted as follows. Wholeness in the sense of unity and integrity is implied by the natural conformity of one's perception and desires to the moral norms – “his eye is unwilling to see what is contrary to it”; the well-developed virtue is so strong that it extends even to those faculties that are typically considered as indifferent for morality. The virtuous agent is a cohesive, well-integrated whole, so that all his faculties are in conformity with what he considers as right. The wholeness as integrity underlies the wholeness as fulfillment and satisfaction. Only the well-integrated agent will find delight in virtue, and, along with that, in all other kinds of pleasures. Not only can the virtuous agent experience all kinds of pleasures in their proper intensity but he does not have to trade this off for neglecting his duties and obligations. He does not have to be torn between doing what he wants to do and doing what he thinks he should do, exactly because doing the former entails doing the latter.
5. Overall Structure and the Outline of Chapters

The whole work is structured in a top-down manner, moving from abstract to particular, from macroscopic to microscopic. This is the basis for the division into three main parts. The first part, or the “Top” (Chapter 1) fleshes out major commonalities between the two theories, and thus provides a basis for the more focused comparisons in the following chapters. The second part, or the “Middle” (Chapters 2 and 3), focuses on larger questions arising from analogies between craft and virtue. This part is also most explicitly comparative as it connects underlying similarities with differences that supervene on them. The third part, or the “Bottom” (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5) focuses on particular themes in the Zhuangzi and the Stoic sources and interprets them from a vantage point of the other theory, delving deeper into the secondary scholarship.

Each chapter is dedicated to a particular philosophical question or problem emerging in the primary texts. All chapters use the comparative perspective to contribute to the existing scholarship on at least one of the compared corpora of texts, and link the interpretation to underlying differences in philosophical and cultural context. However, given the supremely organic character of the cross-cultural differences, no uniform structure was strictly imposed on individual chapters; there are differences in the overall structure, in whether their interpretive impact is targeted more on the Zhuangzian or on the Stoic side, and in the ratio between philosophical and historical/cultural concerns.

The first chapter, or the “Top”, serves as a transition between the introduction and the more focused and detailed analyses of the subsequent chapters. Its principal goal is to highlight the contrast between the Stoic and Daoist ideal of freedom and modern discourses on freedom, and to outline the similarities in underlying cosmological and anthropological outlooks between the two ancient schools. I will argue that the ideal of freedom we find in these texts can be characterized as “doing necessary things”, and that it should be not misinterpreted in terms of two predominant modern theories of freedom: the positive freedom in the sense of free will, and the negative freedom in the sense of mere unimpeded action.

In the second chapter, belonging to the “Middle” part of the work, I am going to focus on the problem of compatibility of the extraordinary freedom of the wise man, in the sense of his self-containedness and independence from the external world, and his commitment to pursuits of the ordinary values. This problem will be explored in connection with the
analogies between virtue of the wise man, or the craft of living, and the excellence in specialized skills, particularly archery: what is the value of hitting the target in comparison with the value of aiming at the target, and how one needs to distribute one’s commitment between these two goals in order to achieve the optimal result? We will see that Zhuangzi and Stoics were caught in the same dilemma from opposing perspectives, and that they can therefore mutually contribute to understanding and reinforcing each other’s position. Yet there remains an irreducible difference in their understanding of the connection between the successful exercise of one’s virtue and the obtainment of the desired result. At the end of the chapter, I will suggest how is this divergence motivated by broader divergences between the two intellectual traditions.

The third chapter will be dedicated to another intriguing implication of the virtue-craft analogy concerning the content of the wise man’s knowledge. What does the wise man know, and how does his knowledge differ from the knowledge of the non-wise? Numerous analogies between expertise in ordinary, first-order crafts (archery, butchering, tax-collecting) and a higher-order craft of living raise the question how these two orders of excellence are related: does an expertise in a first-order craft help one to become wise, or does one’s wisdom help one to excel in some of the first-order crafts? I will argue that Stoic and Zhuangzi’s position are not as different as they might initially appear, and on the background of their similarity a genuine point of difference will be identified.

With the fourth chapter, the work will move down on the “Bottom” level, and focus on the Stoic theory of perception in light of the Zhuangzi. I will try to reconstruct the rationale for the claim, well attested in both Zhuangzi and Stoicism, that the wise man perceives better than the non-wise. This idea fits with the perspective of the virtuosity of the ordinary: the wise man is superior even in such an ordinary ability such as sense perception. In the scholarship on Stoicism, the perceptual excellence of the wise man has been mostly neglected, or misunderstood. The goal of this chapter is to put together scattered evidence in the Stoic sources that helps us to appreciate and understand why the Stoic wise man “never mis-sees nor mishears”. Several arguments from the Zhuangzi will provide a helpful starting-point for such enterprise.

The final, fifth, chapter will discuss Stoic and Daoist ideas about the emotional life of the wise man. In this chapter, I will try to show how a comparison with Stoicism can advance our understanding of Zhuangzi’s views about emotions. Both Stoics and Zhuangzi maintained that the wise man is without emotions. This view is in line with their emphasis
on the insuperable value of one’s state of mind and with their craft-modeled conception of the human excellence. And yet there are worries that such a radical stance might be incompatible with the ordinariness of the wise man and his engagement with the world. In fact, these thinkers did not deprive the wise man entirely of some sort of affective responses. We will be particularly interested in one kind of these acceptable responses, which are self-emerging reactions that do not depend on the conscious processing in the mind, and analyze a contrast between Zhuangzi and the Stoics in evaluating the meaning and function of these responses.

6. A Note on Texts and Translations

Any interpretation of the Zhuangzi and Stoicism faces the challenge of having to deal with textual sources of a considerable heterogeneity. It is widely acknowledged today that the Zhuangzi is a compendium of essays and narratives written by several authors and put together well after the death of historical Zhuang Zhou, the alleged genius behind the book who presumably lived sometime in the fourth century B.C.E. On the Stoic side, the main trouble is that early Stoic philosophical corpus has been lost, and our reconstructions must rely on reports and testimonies. In addition to the largely second-hand access to most of the early Stoic material, any exposition of the Stoic doctrine is complicated by the fact that the school flourished throughout a considerable span of time, roughly from the third century B.C.E. to second century A.D. Not only these five centuries witnessed dramatic shifts in philosophical discourse as well as in social and political environment, so that later Stoic thinkers preoccupied themselves with somewhat different agenda than the founders of the school, but the continuity of the school had to be preserved across two different cultural and linguistic traditions, Greek and Roman.

This heterogeneity raises methodological worries whether it is possible, after all, to propose a reasonably coherent interpretation of these more or less fragmentary corpora of texts, and whether such strategy does not always imply some amount of artifice and violence. A popular view among interpreters of the Zhuangzi has been that this worry can be tempered by limiting our textual material to the so-called “Inner Chapters”, or the first seven chapters of the Zhuangzi, which have been generally considered as the authentic and earliest core of the book compiled by Zhuangzi himself. In light of some recent works that effectively undermine this hypothesis (Klein 2010, McCraw 2011), there is no significant pay-off in
cutting ourselves from numerous highly original arguments from other parts of the
Zhuangzi which have been often neglected on account of their alleged inauthenticity. There
are, of course, constraints on what a philosophical interpretation of such text can
accomplish. In advancing an interpretation of the Zhuangzi in terms of virtuosity in the
ordinary, I do not want to claim that this interpretation can sort out all inconsistencies and
tensions, whether real or apparent, among different passages of the Zhuangzi. The claim is
more modest, namely that it is a plausible interpretation based on a significant textual
support, and one that helps us to make a better sense of a number of important passages in
the book.

A similarly optimistic outlook can be reasonably adopted towards the Stoic material. Most
scholars agree today that while some important conceptual and terminological shifts took
place in the history of the Stoic school, and that the philosophical agenda has changed,
sometimes, considerably, ideas of later Stoics remain largely in line with early Stoicism.
Instead of labeling later Stoics such as Marcus Aurelius as eclectics, it is more adequate to
read them as innovative Stoics who creatively appropriated the Stoic philosophy to serve
their own philosophical purposes in their social and political contexts (Gill 2003).

In rendering the available ancient material into English, I will be using the existing English
translations. Occasionally, I will modify these translations; any such modification will be
flagged by inserting the Chinese, Greek or Roman original. These modifications will be
more frequent and extensive in the case of the Zhuangzi, which reflects the greater
openness of the text to interpretations and significant divergences among translators. For
the Zhuangzi, unless otherwise indicated, the translation used is by Watson (1968). References to the original text follow the electronic database Chinese Texts Project
(ctext.org). For the early Stoics, I make use of both major anthologies, Long and Sedley
(1986) and Inwood and Gerson (2008). For other Stoic authors, the translations used are
listed in the bibliography.
Part One

The Top

(or the Macroscopic Perspective)
Chapter One

Freedom as Doing Necessary Things

‘Do little,’ he says, ‘if you want contentment of mind.’ Would it not be better to do what is necessary, and whatever the reason … prescribes? For this will bring not only contentment of mind that comes from acting aright, but also that which comes from doing little; for considering that the majority of our words and actions are anything but necessary, if a person dispenses with them he will have greater leisure and a less troubled mind. You should also remember to ask yourself on every occasion, ‘Is this something really necessary?’ And we should dispense not only with actions that are unnecessary, but also with unnecessary ideas; for in that way the needless actions that follow in their train will no longer ensue.

(Marcus Aurelius, Med. 4.24)

The life of the sage is run by Heaven, his death is a transformation of things; when passive, he works together with yin, when active, he moves … together with yang; he does not put wealth first, he does not put calamity last. When he receives a stimulus, only then he reacts, when he is compelled, only then he acts, when he cannot do otherwise, only then he rises.21

(Zh. 15.2)

When one wants to do what is right, one follows what is necessary; to do what is necessary, that is the way of sages.22

(Zh. 23.19)

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21聖人之生也天行，其死也物化；靜而與陰同德，動而與陽同波；不為福先，不為禍始；戚而後應，迫而後動，不得已而後起。
22欲當則緣於不得已，不得已之類，聖人之道.
Stoics and Zhuangzi have been widely credited by their interpreters with inventing and proposing ‘freedom’ as ethical and spiritual ideal of human action. The emphasis on freedom has been seen as one of distinctive features that mark them off from other major thinkers in their intellectual traditions.\(^{23}\) In light of the above quotations, however, this fact might come as a surprise. For these all clearly state that ideal human action should be described not, as one might expect, in terms of freedom from doing necessary things, but as doing only those things which are necessary. This idea is baffling: we are used to associate freedom with a fully developed and unimpeded individual agency; necessity, in contrast, implies force and constraint that limit one’s agency. It is even difficult to understand how can we ever do necessary things: we would rather say that necessary things just happen to us, or that we suffer them, but not that we are agents, in the proper sense of the word, that are engaged in doing these things, let alone that it is exactly when doing these things when we exert our agency to its fullest degree.

The goal of this chapter is to reconstruct assumptions and arguments that make the idea of freedom as doing necessary things quite meaningful and attractive. The idea of virtuosity in the ordinary will provide the framework: The wise man navigates among ordinary constraints and necessities of his embodied life; but he handles these constraints with a virtuosity that makes him extraordinarily free. This freedom, therefore, depends on an excellence in dealing with things and situations that one encounters in one’s life, or in “using” these things in the most efficient and beneficial manner. Such superior ability makes the agent free both in the sense of making him more resourceful in turning constraints into avenues, and in the sense of achieving an inner peace of mind, or, as

\(^{23}\) For instance, the most celebrated modern translator of Zhuangzi into English, Burton Watson, notes that “The central theme of the Zhuangzi may be summed up in a single word: freedom” (Watson 1968: 8). It should be noted, however, that the ancient Chinese does not have a single, canonically accepted equivalent of the English word ‘freedom’, and the meaning of this notion is distributed among several different Chinese terms such as “independence” (wudai 無待), “rambling” (you 遨) or “being-so-of-itself” (ziran 自然). On the Greek and Roman side, the equivalent of “freedom” is typically eleutheria and libertas, both terms originally denoting political freedom or freedom from slavery. Some caution, however, is advisable in projecting the idea of freedom onto the Stoic texts. Until recently, it was a commonplace to credit Stoics with inventing the notion of freedom, understood in the sense of free will, in the Western tradition. This view was effectively challenged by Bobzien (1998), who argued that there is no evidence for linking the Stoic freedom with the free will, and that the idea of freedom does not have a presence in the Stoic thought before Epictetus. Therefore, the Stoic material discussed in this chapter will be limited to three major thinkers of later Stoa (Epictetus, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius).
Marcus puts it, “a greater leisure and a less troubled mind”. Only the wise man, Stoics and Zhuangzi maintain, is free, and he is free in all circumstances. This view hinges on the assumption that there is a deep affinity and compatibility between order of things and the peculiar skill of the wise man; in other words, the reality is of such a sort so as to never frustrate a person who handles it with supreme skill. The wise man is able to align his individual nature with necessary processes in the universe, and it is for this reason that freedom can be defined as *doing* necessary things, rather than just skilful dealing with necessary things.

To unpack these claims, I will start from outlining some elementary ideas about freedom and excellence held by Zhuangzi (part one) and the Stoics (part two), focusing on their similarities. The third part will flesh out the characteristics of this idea of freedom by mapping it onto an influential distinction between negative and positive freedom. The final, fourth part, will be dedicated to a reconstruction of major cosmological and psychological assumptions that undergird this idea of freedom.

### 1. Freedom in the *Zhuangzi*

The passage from the *Zhuangzi* that offers arguably the most compressed and suggestive presentation of Zhuangzi’s ideas about wise man’s excellence and freedom is the celebrated dialogue between a nobleman and his butcher, in which the butcher gives an account of his art of carving up cows. I will first quote the passage in full and then gradually unfold its significance:

Cook Ding was carving an ox for Lord Wenhui. As his hand slapped, shoulder lunged, foot stamped, knee crooked, with a hiss! with a thud! the brandished blade as it sliced never missed the rhythm, now in time with the Mulberry Forest dance, now with an orchestra playing the Ching-shou.

‘Oh, excellent!’ said Lord Wenhui. ‘That skill can attain such heights!’

‘What your servant cares about is the Way [things are] (*dao* 道), I have left skill behind me. When I first began to carve oxen, I saw nothing but oxen wherever I looked. Three years more and I never saw an ox as a whole. Nowadays, I am in touch through the daemonic in me, and do not look with my eye. With the senses I know where to stop, the daemonic I desire to run its course. I rely on Heaven’s
structuring, cleave along the main seams, let myself be guided by the main cavities, go by what is inherently so. A ligament or tendon I never touch, not to mention solid bone. A good cook changes his chopper once a year, because he hacks. A common cook changes it once a month, because he smashes. Now I have had this chopper for nineteen years, and have taken apart several thousands oxen, but the edge is as though it were fresh from the grindstone. 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. That’s why after nineteen years the edge of my chopper is as though it were fresh from the grindstone. However, whenever I come to something intricate, I see where it will be hard to handle and cautiously prepare myself, my gaze settles on it, action slows down for it, you scarcely see the flick of the chopper—and at one stroke the tangle has been unravelled, as a clod crumbles to the ground. I stand chopper in hand, look proudly round at everyone, dawdle to enjoy the triumph until I’m quite satisfied, then clean the chopper and put it away.’ ‘Excellent’, said Lord Wenhui. ‘Listening to the words of Cook Ding, I have learned from them how to nurture life.’ (Zh. 3.1; trans. according to Graham)

A figure of virtuoso craftsman is a recurrent topos in the Zhuangzi. In most cases, it is used to exemplify the “ultimate spiritual state” (Yearley 1996) that characterizes the wise man. These characters typically embody a gnosis which is more authentic than “knowledge” (zhi 知) of those who claim to have objective standards of what is good and evil (shan’e 善惡) or right and wrong (shifei 是非), and who derive their legitimacy to rule others from their possession of this knowledge. Elsewhere, a wheelwright challenges his master who is reading ancient books by suggesting that these books, containing normative knowledge, are nothing but “the chaff and dregs of the men of old” (Zh. 13.12). In the butcher story, too, there is a deliberate irony in the fact that a person of a humble social status is instructing a ruler.24 Zhuangzi’s fondness of ordinary craftsmen needs to be assessed in light of his program to affirm a way of life which is free from constraints that emerge from one’s effort to satisfy various demands and expectations imposed upon one from one’s social and

24 Sterckx (2011:50-53) has a good discussion about the topos of butchers in Warring States texts. Among other things, he draws attention to the fact that cooks and butchers often had the role of sage-advisors, and that “the ability to cut and slice meat in proportionate measures is said to reveal a sense of measure and impartiality that could herald success in an official career”. 
political environment. Zhuangzi justifies his decision to decline an offer to become a high official by referring to a case of a sacred tortoise who had been killed in order to be made into a highly valued ceremonial tool. He does not want to trade off his emotional equanimity, or even life, for dangers and worries inherent in a position of power; instead, he prefers to “drag his tail in the mud” (Zh. 17.11). In a biography of Zhuangzi written by the grand ancient historian Sima Qian (ca 145–85 B.C.E.), Zhuangzi is portrayed as being committed to “doing what he wants” (kuai wu zhi 快吾志), so that no king or duke could have ever used him as a tool (bu neng qi zhi 不能器之).25

While Zhuangzi’s wise man is somebody who cannot be used, he is also particularly adept at using (yong 用) other things. This point, too, is exemplified by the imagery of crafts: butcher, wheelwright, engraver, cicada-catcher and others all exemplify an ability to use materials and tools with supreme ease, and yet to deliver impressive results. In a conversation with his friend Hui Shi (Zh. 1.6), who complains about the uselessness of a big gourd that he received as a present from a king, Zhuangzi jabs at him saying that he is “clumsy in using big things” (zhuo yu yong da 拙於用大), and suggests a more open-minded attitude: to use the gourd as a boat. The idea that it is possible to use things efficiently and effortlessly, without doing harm either to things being used or to oneself, is of paramount importance in the Zhuangzi, and it is characteristic for the sages that they are able to use things in such a way.26

It is one and the same capacity that makes one skilful in using things and free from being used by others. This appears to be the significance of the idea of “usefulness of the useless” (wuyong zhi yong 無用之用). Zhuangzi cannot be used (or “hired”)27 because he does not identify himself with values that the king can offer to pay for his services. Not only he does not attach value to conventional values such as wealth and fame; he does not even think that it is his moral duty to employ his abilities, and that there is any good in doing what the

25 This resonates with his esteem of a “big” things (particularly birds and trees) that cannot fall pray to others.
26 “To use is to get through; to get through is to obtain what one wishes” (用也者，通也；通也者，得也, Zh. 2.6); the bad rulers “will be used by the world, whereas [good rulers] wil use it (Zh. 13.4); see also Zh. 6.1; 7.6; 13.2. Another would be Crippled Shu (Zh. 4.7) who was able to “use” his physical deformity so as to avoid conscription.
27 Note that the word for “use” (yong 用) in ancient Chinese is also the standard word for hiring or employing someone.
state officials are supposed to do: to change people for better by generating laws and enforcing them. More widely, he does not think that there is any good in clinging to abstract and fixed standards and imposing them on the way things are: such activity is bound to require a lot of effort and generate little results, similarly to Hui Shi’s clumsy efforts to use his gourd.

This outlook was supposed to challenge Zhuangzi’s philosophical competitors, particularly Confucians and Mohists, who believed that we could articulate definite values and standards, which, once consequentially implemented in our daily lives and in statecraft, can make our life better. According to Zhuangzi, a frozen commitment to these values makes our own mind “unfitting” to us, similarly to a belt, which is too tight, or shoes that are too small. This discomfort is also described as “harming” (shang 伤) one’s psychophysical well-being, or “life” (sheng 生) by “passion” (qing 情) which emerge when we attribute values to things that in fact do not have it (Zh. 5.5). It is best, therefore, to “forget” (Zh. 6.9; 19.11, wang 忘) the beliefs that nourish these passions, or to “fast our mind” (Zh. 4.1, xinzhai 心齋). It is exactly when we manage to liberate our mind from these erroneous, recalcitrant beliefs when we can become good in using things. A carpenter can “draw figures so that they are true to compases or L-squares” only when he “does not depend on calculations of his mind.” (Zh. 19.12, bu yi xin ji 不以心稽). When an engraver starts to work on a bellstand, he first “fasts to still his mind”, so that he “forgets” all external distractions (“congratulation and reward, honours and salary”). It is only when our mind “fits” (shi 適) us, when it also “fits” the material at hand and handles it effortlessly yet efficiently (Zh. 19.10).

The idea of skillful use applies to handling situations in life in general. When Zhuangzi’s wife died, Hui Shi found Zhuangzi squatting, drumming on a pot and singing (Zh. 20.2). Hui Shi criticizes Zhuangzi from a Confucian standpoint: what he does is inappropriate because it is disrespectful of the memory of his wife; he is supposed to weep, not to sing. Zhuangzi defends himself by explaining what his wife’s death really means: a return home, a decomposition of her body into the material from which it had previously emerged. We can say that Zhuangzi is skillful in handling the death of his wife. Instead of being depressed, he reacts to this event in a manner, which is ultimately pleasing to him, i.e. “fits” his mind. Indeed, in celebrating her death he is truly “doing what he wants”. What is important, however, is that this is not a willful fancy but a result of his ability to evaluate the death realistically. His attitude, therefore, also “fits” the situation at hand. Because he
does not label it immediately as something wrong or evil, something which would better not have happened, he understands it as a part of the way things are, and that is why he can respond to the situation with ease and confidence.

We are now in a better position to appreciate the butcher story. As implied by the concluding words of the prince, butcher’s account provides a metaphorical manual for handling things and situation in life in general, or for a craft of living. In words of P. J. Ivanhoe, “the sage is a craftsman who fashions human life in a way that perfectly accords with its proper place in nature” (Ivanhoe 1993: 647) This means, in the first place, that the butcher would never think of assessing different parts of the cow’s body as good or evil. They are just there, and the good butcher is able to “follow them as they inherently are” (yin qi guran 因其固然). To achieve such mastery requires a good deal of exercise, but once he has developed such insight, he will necessarily proceed quite smoothly, without encountering any obstacle or resistance, so that his knife retains its everlasting sharpness. Analogically, anybody who is able to see with confidence the complexity and significance of situations we encounter in our lives will be able to find their way through these situations without failure and emotional turmoil.

The word Zhuangzi uses to describe the free movement of the knife between bones and joints is you 遊. The standard meaning of this word, both in the Zhuangzi, and in the classical Chinese of his time, is unimpeded movement from one place to another, typically with connotations of successfully navigating among external constraints (e.g. Zh. 1.3; 11.4). In the Zhuangzi, this word also takes on another, typically Zhuangzian meaning of peace of mind resulting from one’s detachment from petty perspective of ordinary humans (“ramble beyond the [earthy] dust” Zh. 2.12; “ramble with mind in the beginnings of things” Zh. 21.4). The text never distinguishes between the physical and the psychological meaning of the word, and there may be a reason for that: the peace of mind is the normative psychological and cognitive state which guarantees that one will find one’s way through external constraints, provided that, as Zhuangzi seems to have assumed, things as they happen have “gaps in-between”, similarly to the skeleton of the cow. Such a person, and only such a person, whose mind is able to ramble “beyond the dust”, is also able to find their way smoothly through the many constraints and necessities of the ordinary life. To find that way, one needs to see things as they are; and to see things as they are, one needs to refrain from imposing on them one’s own evaluations and expectations. The space between
the bones is “thin”, and a “thick” mind that carries excessive emotional baggage is bound to be blocked.

We can now try to flesh out what Zhuangzi’s freedom is and why it consists in doing necessary things. Internally, the proper use of things presupposes that one is free from emotions, or, more broadly, from superfluous thoughts or doubts. In this condition, one is able to recognize and follow what is necessary by finding the best alternative in a given situation. Instead of laboriously deciding among different possibilities, the butcher lets his agency to be fully driven by the “desire of the spirit” (shenyu 神欲) (which must be carefully distinguished from pathological emotions) that immediately finds the right way. Graham made this point well: “Unlike Mohist and Yangist seeking grounds for right choice Zhuangzi’s ideal is to have no choice at all, because reflecting the situation with perfect clarity you can respond only in one way.” (Graham 1989: 190) Externally, one is free from being constrained by circumstances because one is able to read these circumstances as a map. The butcher’s knife stays perfectly sharp because it perceptively responds to and conforms to the necessity as represented by the skeleton. The internal and external dimension of freedom necessarily go together: a thin mind is a free mind, because it has been liberated from the bundle of erroneous beliefs that are to be blamed for emotional turmoil; such freedom from emotions, at the same time, is the prerequisite for accurate assessment of situations that we encounter, so that these situations no longer impede us.

The coextensiveness of internal and external aspects of freedom hinges on the assumption that things as they happen to us are objectively of such a sort that one can find one’s way through them. Just as there is a deep compatibility between butcher’s knife and cow’s bones, there must be a deep compatibility between one’s mind and structure of the reality, or between our cognition and logic of things that happen to us. The cow’s body has its own “natural structures” (tian li 天理), and the reality, too, must be structured in a meaningful way. The mind, for its part, must of course have a sharpness (or “thinness”) that allows it to find the suitable way; but the arrangement of things is of such a sort that the mind can always get smoothly through.
2. Freedom in Stoicism

The idea of a perfect alignment between reason and reality is also the key to the Stoic freedom. Consider this statement from Marcus Aurelius: “When things are held together by nature the power that made them is inside them and remains there. Therefore, you must respect it more and believe that if you are, and continue to act, in line with its will, everything will be in line with your mind.” (Med. 6.39). A similar idea appears in the famous Stoic simile about a dog tied behind a cart, which is the passage from the Stoic corpus, which bears perhaps most directly on the idea of freedom as doing necessary things:

They too [Zeno and Chrysippus] affirmed that everything is fated, with the following model. When a dog is tied to a cart, if it wants to follow it is pulled and follows, making its spontaneous act coincide with necessity, but if it does not want to follow, on the other hand, it will be compelled in any case. So it is with men too; even if they do not want to, they will be compelled in any case to follow what is destined. (Hippolytus, Refutation of all heresies 1.21=LS 62A)

Stoics were committed to the view that “everything is fated”, fate being understood as a “sequence of causes, that is, an inescapable ordering and interconnexion” (Aëtius 1.28.2=LS 55J). So we find here a more articulate notion of “necessity” than in the Zhuangzi: everything that happens is necessary because it is fully causally determined. This exacerbates the question about the human freedom: How can human beings exercise their autonomous agency when they are themselves fully caught in this inescapable ordering? The answer implied by this parable is that it is our attitude towards it: ideally, we willingly conform to this necessity. One possibility to understand this willingness to conform is in terms of a submission to a higher power that pervades and determines everything that happens. The amor fati resonates strongly in all three major figures of the later Stoicism: Epictetus (e.g. Ench. 53; Dis. 4.1.131), Seneca, and perhaps most strongly, Marcus: “[The wise man] is content with two things: to accomplish the present action with justice, and to love the fate which has, here and now, been allotted to him.” (Med. 11.3) The willing acceptance of fate also confers freedom in the sense of freedom from disturbances. Once one knows that all things are fated and one does not see things that happen to him as

28 “We have been born into a monarchy; freedom is to obey God” (On the happy life 15); “What then, is the part of a good man? To offer himself to Fate. It is a great consolation that it is together with the universe we are swept along.” (On Providence 5.8).
frustrating constraints, one is liberated from the many disruptive emotions that arise from our effort to change or escape things as they are. But there is an even stronger justification for willingly accepting things as they happen to us. The world is providentially administered, so that we can think of things as they happen to us as a medicine administered to us by a doctor: “...When we say that these happenings ‘fit’ us, we are talking like builders when they say that squared blocks ‘fit’ in walls and pyramids, because they join up with each other in a particular structured arrangement.” (Marcus, Med. 5.8)

It is tempting to understand the submission to fate as the interpretation of the Stoic definition of happiness as “living in accordance with nature” (homologoumenōs tei physei ᾶn) or “following nature”. Nature is fate, and to follow nature, then, presumably, means to accept willingly whatever is fated. But there is more in the Stoic idea of following nature than the acceptance of what is beyond our power, and Zhuangzi’s butcher simile could make us more receptive to this point. What makes the butcher free vis-à-vis the skeleton of the cow is his skill, and what makes the wise man free vis-à-vis things as they happen to him is his ability to use them with skill, i.e. with wisdom. Similarly, Stoics defined virtue or wisdom as a craft or skill (technē), namely as the “craft of living” (technē peri ton bion)²⁹. Appropriating the Socratic idea that wisdom is what makes the proper use of all other things, Stoics believed that one’s happiness, or following nature, must be understood in terms of proper exercise of one’s wisdom, or skill to use rationally all other things. Even though we are like dogs tied behind a cart, whether we are able to follow the cart or not is not matter of a simple habitual complacency, but depends on exercising our wisdom. In a spirit fairly resonant with the Zhuangzi, Stoics defined wisdom as “fitting expertise” (technē epitēdeia), which means that one’s mind, and one’s action, fits the rational structure of the universe,³⁰ and acknowledged “resourcefulness” as one of the virtues that the wise man will have (Stob. 2.5b2=IG 102).

Like Zhuangzi, Stoics too use imagery of ordinary skills and crafts to make their point: “Similarly to the [art of] flute-playing is able use well all melodies that it is given, the virtue, too, can [make a good use] of all situations“ (Alexander, De anima mant. 20.33-

²⁹ Sextus, Adv. Math. 11.170 = SVF 3.598; Epictetus, Dis. 1.15.2.
³⁰ ps.-Galen, On the History of Philosophy 5, 602.19-3.2; in interpretation of this phrase, I am following Brouwer (2014:49)
34=SVF 3.204-205)\textsuperscript{31} The situations we encounter, Stoics maintained, are by themselves “indifferent” (adiaphora); they are material for one’s virtue-craft that can use them well or badly. Stoics are in agreement with Zhuangzi that it is mistaken to take external things or situations for good and evil, because they do not have such unconditional value. The only thing that counts as inherently valuable or “good” (agathon) is one’s wisdom, or the skill of using indifferent things, and the only thing that counts as evil is its absence. When we instead take for good or evil the material itself, we are not only making a categorial mistake, but we also become unable to use the material well:

You will find that skilled ballplayers do the same thing. It’s not the ball they value, it’s how well they throw and catch it that counts as good or bad. … If we are afraid to throw the ball, or nervous about catching it, then the fun is lost; and how can we preserve our composure when we are uncertain about what next to do? (Epictetus, Dis. 2.5.15-17)

It’s not cows or balls that are good or bad, but butchers and ballplayers. Bad butchers, similarly to bad ballplayers, fail to respond to their materials accurately and with confidence because what they consider as valuable, ultimately, are these things themselves rather than their ability to handle them. Similarly to Zhuangzi, Epictetus urges us to untie our bonds to indifferent things: “Look about on every side and cast these things away from you. Purify your judgments, for fear lest something of what is not your own may be fastened to them, or grown together with them, and may give you pain when it is torn loose.” (Dis. 4.1.111-112)

But the freedom that a good exercise of the craft of living provides is not limited to purely internal freedom from emotions. It also makes one more free in the sense that one can deal more efficiently with whatever challenges one encounters: “What, therefore, is it which makes a man free from hindrance and restraint in writing? The knowledge of how to write. And what in playing on the harp? The knowledge of how to play on the harp. But also in living, it is the knowledge of how to live.” (Dis. 4.1) A good ballplayer is free from excessive worries about possible consequences of a failure to catch the ball; but he is also free from being restrained by ‘bad’ balls because his skill will handle well even the ‘bad’ balls.

\textsuperscript{31} For the idea of virtue as using of indifferent things, see also, e.g., Marcus, Med. 7.61; a recent comprehensive discussion of this theme is provided Bénatouïl 2007.
The skill of using indifferent things, Stoics would also agree with Zhuangzi, is something which cannot be used in order to get something else because it itself has the superior value which cannot be trumped: virtue is the sufficient condition for happiness. It is not surprising, therefore, that we find the idea that the wise man is somebody who cannot be used in the Stoic sources as well. Consider Epictetus’s reverent portrayal of Cynic philosopher Diogenes:

Diogenes was free. How did that come? It was not because he was born of free parents, for he was not, but because he himself was free, because he had cast off all the handles of slavery, and there was no way in which a person could get close and lay hold of him to enslave him. Everything he had was easily loosed, everything was merely tied on. If you had laid hold of his property, he would have let it go rather than followed you for its sake; if you had laid hold of his leg, he would have let his leg go; if of his whole paltry body, his whole paltry body; and so also his kindred, friends, and country. (Dis. 4.1.152-153)

There is a striking similarity between Diogenes who could not have been enslaved and Zhuangzi who could not have been “used”: neither of them traded their autonomy for external things. The autonomy and self-sufficiency of the wise man is most explicit in Epictetus’s definition of freedom: “He is free who lives as he wills (zēn hōs bouletai), who is subject neither to compulsion, nor hindrance, nor force.” (Dis. 4.1.1)

The key to understanding Stoic freedom is to be clear about how the idea of freedom as “living as one wants” can be a part of the same picture together with the idea of freedom as submission to fate. A closer look at the notion of “following nature” can help: “living in agreement with nature comes to be the end, which is in accordance with the nature of oneself and that of the whole” (DL 7.88–LS 63C). So to follow nature means not only to accept whatever happens to one from outside, since one is a part of the whole, but also to follow one’s own natural inclinations. The idea of wisdom as skill of using things helps to connect the conformist with the individualist aspect of freedom. To live in accordance with one’s own nature means to exercise one’s reason, i.e. to deliberate rationally about value and use of things that happen to one. But the skillful use of indifferent things presupposes that one is able to understand things as they are and to accept them as such. The Stoic view could be well illuminated by using Zhuangzi’s imagery: one’s individual nature is like the butcher’s knife, which is free from constraints exactly when it conforms to the structure of
the cow, which stands, in the Stoic picture, for the universal nature, i.e. rational and providential ordering of all things.

The characteristic features of the Stoic and Daoist freedom outlined above will come more clearly to light when discussed in connection with other theories of freedom. In the following, I will focus on one particularly influential theory of freedom: Isaiah Berlin’s distinction between positive and negative freedom.

3. Positive, or Negative Freedom?

Isaiah Berlin drew a distinction between negative and positive freedom (or liberty). The negative freedom means, briefly put, “not being interfered by others; the wider the area of non-interference the wider my freedom.” (Berlin 2002: 170) Typically, according to Berlin’s theory, the negative freedom is limited when societal or political norms constrain the range of possible avenues that a subject may pursue. Berlin notes that this notion of freedom was advanced by several important figures in English moral philosophy. Hobbes argued that a “free man is he that is not hindered to do what he has a will to do” (Hobbes 2001: 146). Hume maintained that the negative liberty (what he called “liberty of spontaneity”), which means “that which is opposed to violence” is the only meaning of freedom worthy of preservation and must not be confounded with “the liberty of indifference”, the erroneous idea that we can decide without any determination by external causes. (Hume 2005: 312). That allegedly erroneous idea Hume attributed chiefly to the scholastic tradition, and its later development to Kant with his emphasis on inalienable autonomy of one’s will. Much of the history of this idea is reflected in Berlin’s characterization of the positive freedom:

The ‘positive’ sense of the word ‘liberty’ derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master. I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind. … I wish to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes, which are my own, not by causes which affect me, as it were, from outside. (Berlin 2002: 133)

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32 He himself uses the terms ‘liberty’ and ‘freedom’ mostly indiscriminately.
While negative freedom is determined by external factors, i.e. typically by social and political situation, positive freedom results from a self-assertion of the subject by means of his own intellectual and volitional resources, and often quite independently from external circumstances.

Both these notions of freedom, it should be noted, presuppose an incompatibility between freedom and necessity. To be free in the positive sense means to have established one’s own sphere of autonomy which is independent from external constraints and pressures; to be free in the negative sense means to eliminate all external constraints that narrow down one’s range of options. Since neither Stoics nor Zhuangzi were committed to such incompatibility, it won’t surprise us that their idea of freedom does not coincide neatly with either negative and positive freedom and cuts across this dichotomy. Instead, their freedom combines elements of both positive and negative freedom in a manner which brings to light the significance of freedom as skillful use of indifferent things.

Berlin himself valorizes negative freedom and deplores positive freedom. Only the former is the freedom that promotes, in his view, authentic individual human agency, while the latter has either been used to legitimize autocratic regimes, or to remain indifferent towards oppression of individuals by a tyrant. This second aspect of positive freedom informs Berlin’s interpretation of the Stoic ethics. According to Berlin, Stoics sought to establish their autonomy and self-mastery by means of turning themselves away from the world, and fortifying themselves in their “inner citadel”, remaining indifferent to everything besides the unimpeded activity of their own mind. Stoic ethics is thus a sort of escapist strategy of achieving one’s inner peace and security by trading it off for one’s real agency in the world. Marcus’s injunction “Do little!” would be read, on this interpretation, in terms of encouraging passivity and promoting complacency.

A recent discussion of Berlin’s interpretation of Stoicism is provided by Sorabji (2012); Sellars (2012) also has a useful summary of Berlin’s take on Stoicism in his survey of reception of Marcus Aurelius in modern Western thought.

“I eliminate the obstacles in my path by abandoning the path; I retreat into my own sect, my own planned economy, my own deliberately insulated territory, where no voices from outside need be listened to, and no external forces can have effect.”(Berlin 2002: 182-183.)
This outlook on Stoicism had been popular even before Berlin, and has had a strong presence in philosophical interpretations of Stoicism until now. In recent interpretations, it has been operative in the idea that Stoic freedom is a direct precursor of the idea of free will, or undetermined choice, and the idea that the subject has absolute power to interpret the reality as it wishes, and can thus opportunely “rationalize” whatever happens to him as something that he should welcome. Similarly to Berlin, these interpretations are committed to the idea of the self that asserts its autonomy independently from outside world, and to a radically internalistic account of freedom. Situations we find ourselves in are often not up to us, but the way we perceive and interpret these situations is entirely in our power. The power to “redescribe“ any situation that we encounter owes to the specifically human capacity to interpret reality by means of language, and that could indicate, according to Long, that “the Stoics may have room for a stronger sense of free will than is normally admitted” (Long 1991: 120). The dog and cart parable has been interpreted so as to bolster this interpretation: what will happen will happen, and that is beyond our power; but whether we accept willingly in our minds what must happen or not, that is up to us. Our possibility to choose among alternatives is premised on an indetermination of our decisions, which is a privilege of human beings in the otherwise completely determined universe: unlike all other entities we have the free will, i.e. “can do otherwise”. Rationality is invoked here, similarly to Berlin, to mark a divide between freedom of human reason and necessity of nature.

The Stoics, however, believed that nature is inherently rational, and that laws of nature are ultimately continuous with laws of reason itself. They had therefore little grounds for predicking human freedom on an ability to disconnect from necessity of nature. Stoics maintained that only the wise man is free, not just anybody who can decide whether to follow the cart or not. The act of willful, informed following itself requires a skill, and it is this skill that is the source of freedom. This freedom lies in having aligned one’s own intentions and acts with the Right Reason (orthos logos). Such alignment puts one in a position to make the right decisions quickly without having to sort out different possibilities. As was argued by Susanne Bobzien, “there is no mention of the wise having more choices or possibilities in their action; they differ from common people rather in that

35 Sellars traces the inspiration behind Berlin’s interpretation back to Hegel; an example of later interpretation of the Stoic theory along these lines would be Paul Ricoeur or Bernard Williams.
36 Recent versions of this reading have been advanced by Zimmerman (2000) and Long (1991).
they always follow up the right choices and are not tempted by the wrong alternatives.” (Bobzien 1998: 341). So the wise man will be both free from internal doubts and insecurities and free from external impediments resulting from a failure to respond to situations adequately with a full respect to their logic.

But such freedom sounds much more like Berlin’s negative freedom. It is true that freedom of the wise man amounts to, as Berlin says, to being one’s own master. This self-mastery, it should be noted, includes also freedom from forces that emerge in one’s mind: we are free because we cannot be pushed around, whether by a sovereign or by our own emotions. This freedom, however, liberates one also from all external constraints because they no longer constrain us. The wise man won’t be less free when he is put to prison because he won’t assess that situation as something evil but as something that needs to be properly handled. Autonomy and self-mastery, as elements of positive freedom, always go together with freedom from constraints in the sense of negative freedom.

Marcus’s imperative “Do little!”, too, makes a better sense from the perspective of negative freedom. The wise man has “greater leisure and a less troubled mind” because he is free both from exhausting himself too much in pursuit of superfluous things, and from excessive emotional responses. This imperative is well illustrated by Zhuangzi’s butcher simile. The butcher, too, “does little” in twofold sense: he is free from excessive effort because he knows how to wield his knife, and he is also free from psychological insecurity in responding to the complex structure of the skeleton.

This freedom, however, is not exactly like Berlin’s negative freedom, for it is determined by the agent, not by an actual constellation in the outside world. What makes one free from impediments is not an absence of external constraints but one’s virtuosity in navigating among these constraints. Freedom springs from within the agent, and is not in the slightest determined by the world outside. That is possible because, unlike Berlin, and similarly to Stoics, Zhuangzi does not see freedom and necessity as two mutually exclusive notions; in fact, the indication here is that he does not even understand them as merely compatible, but as mutually interdependent. The bones and flesh of the cow surely impose constraints on the butcher in the sense that they limit the number of possible options he can meaningfully take to cut up the animal. But the constraints do not necessarily entail impediments: the master butcher is able to move freely regardless of the constraints. In fact, not only are constraints not impediments, they provide the master butcher with guidance; serve as the most reliable orientation marks on the way he wants to follow.
Much of recent scholarship about the *Zhuangzi* has emphasized the idea that the butcher follows, rather than interferes with the inherent structure of the skeleton, and linked it with *Zhuangzi*’s appeal to following nature and acceptance of fate. This appeal is as strong in the *Zhuangzi* as it is in Stoicism, and it has been pointed out that the much-celebrated *Zhuangzi*’s freedom from psychological and societal constraints is not a fanciful liberty to do whatever one wants but rather to do what one must do. An extreme version of reading *Zhuangzi* along the lines of submission to fate has recently been proposed by Erica Brindley; in her view, *Zhuangzi* “promotes the ideal of ultimate freedom from the confines of personal perspective and individual agency” urges us to “negate and transcend our selves” and become “utterly dependent on the powers of the cosmos” (Brindley 2010: 56–59).

This interpretation is symmetrically opposite to Berlin’s interpretation of Stoicism. There, the emphasis was put on atomization of the self and its impregnation from influences of the outside world; here, the emphasis is put on dissolving, or “losing” of one’s self into the universe. Both these extreme interpretations are equally misguided, for they undermine the foundation of freedom, i.e. the idea of virtue as excellence in using things: the former because the agent is indifferent towards the world; the latter because there is no personalized agent that would have his own intentions and goals.

One should be careful, however, not to overemphasize the appeal to conformity and dissolving one’s individual agency at the expense of personal fulfillment and satisfaction. The limitations of the radically conformist interpretation come to light when we appreciate how this interpretation clashes with the more traditional view on freedom in the *Zhuangzi*. According to this view, individual agency is strongly asserted by means of an ostentatious withdrawal from the public life, liberation from conventions of the human society, and programmatic pursuit of personal gratification (“pleasing one’s own fancy”). This

37 Acceptance of fate: “To serve your mind … understanding that there are things that you can do nothing about and accepting it contentedly as fate—this is the utmost excellence.” (Zh. 4.1). Following nature: *Zhuangzi* has a rich vocabulary of conformity and following; in the butcher passage, it is represented, for instance, by the phrase *yin qi guran* (因其固然), or “follow what is inherently so”.

38 Edward Slingerland argued that “it is not accurate to say that the Daoist sage is free to do whatsoever he wants; rather, he is free to do what he must…” (Slingerland 2001: 208); Chris Fraser pointed out that *Zhuangzi*’s freedom is “not doing anything we please” (Fraser 2014: 552), and Jean-François Billeter that “there is no liberty outside of the recognition of necessity” (Billeter 1993: 558).
sensitivity about Zhuangzi has been retained and modified in much of the modern and contemporary scholarship on the *Zhuangzi*, particularly among the Chinese scholars, and many interpretive suggestions are fairly in line with the idea of positive freedom: Zhuangzi has been read as an advocate of one’s autonomous power to determine one’s course of action, or as a precursor of the Western notion of free will (Zhao 2012: 141).

The normative agent certainly does only what he must but he also does, by the very doing of necessary things, only what he wants. It is not only the case that the butcher must wield his knife in a certain way, but also that that is exactly what he wants to do, because that is both the easiest and the most efficient way of achieving his goal. In the butcher simile, this is reflected by an intense satisfaction (*manzhi* 滿志) that the smooth exercise of the skill brings, and we will see, in the last chapter, that Zhuangzi attributes to the wise man a constant joy. The compatibility of “must” and “want” is explicitly formulated in the *Zhuangzi*:

> For when all your actions are ‘what you cannot help doing, outside of your control’, we call it virtuosity. Conversely, when all your actions ‘come from yourself alone,’ we call it ‘being completely in control.’ These two descriptions are directly opposed, but the facts they describe actually agree.”

(Zh. 23.17; transl. according to Ziporyn)

We are most in control exactly when we feel that we cannot act in any other way, and we most fully exercise our individual agency when we cannot help doing what we do.

4. Underlying Assumptions: Authentic Self and the Structured Unity of All Things

There are two broader claims that undergird this notion of freedom. One is that all existing things are essentially one, because they are all different instances of a single breath, and that this unity is meaningfully ordered. The other is that human beings have an authentic self, which is aligned with this universal ordering. Both these claims have already been

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39 劉以不得已之調德，動無非我之調治，名相反而實相順也
outlined in the Introduction, so the following lines can be read as follow-up additions and further elaborations.

In modern thought since Descartes, necessity and determination have often been associated with realm of nature understood in terms of mechanical, impersonal and thoughtless operation of natural laws, and has been contrasted with the intelligible realm of human rationality that is endowed with the capacity for self-determination and free-will. The outlook that we find in Stoicism and the *Zhuangzi* differs from this picture in two major respects.

First, they did not think that humans are “an island of freedom in the sea of necessity”, as Pierre Hadot dubs the Stoic view, or that humans can assert their autonomy outside of the realm of nature. This is impossible because reality is entirely pervaded by a law that sustains everything that exists and arranges everything that happens: “the way things are” (*dao*), and “Reason”, “Nature” or “Zeus”. This omnipresent principle is not simply one of many individual existing things: “What makes things to be things is itself not a thing” (*Zh*. 23.10); at the same time, we learn that “there is no boundary between things and what makes things be things but there are boundaries between individual things” (*Zh*. 23.6).

An account of Stoic theology from Diogenes reports that Stoics understood God as a creative power which is immanent in all things: “He is the creator of the whole and, as it were, the father of all, both generally and, in particular, that part of him which pervades all things, which is called by many descriptions according to his powers.”(DL 7.147=LS 54A).

A remarkable consequence of this cosmological outlook is the idea of universal sympathy (*sumpatheia*) among different entities in the universe:

> Reflect again and again on how all things in the universe are bound up together and interrelated. For all things, in a sense, are mutually intertwined, and by virtue of that all are dear to one another; for one thing follows duly upon another because of the


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40 A good critique of this view was proposed by Brennan (2005:200), who argued that the “inner citadel” interpretation of freedom is incompatible not only with the fundamental Stoic tenet that *everything* in the world is fated, i.e. even one’s internal states and decisions, but would also lead to the consequence that the isolation of the indetermined human mind from the deterministic causal nexus would make impossible for any human action to make impact on anything in the “external” world.

41 物物者非物
tensile movement and the common breath that pervades throughout and the unity of all substance. (Marcus, Med. 6.38)

Zhuangzi could have well referred to this passage from Marcus to win his point in a debate with his skeptic-minded friend Hui Shi, who tried to refute Zhuangzi’s claim that he can appreciate the happiness of fish that he is seeing from a bridge swimming down in the river (Zh. 17.12). Even though Zhuangzi’s final argument in this debate is somewhat enigmatic, the gist of it seems to be that epistemological certainty about the possibility of intersubjective empathy and cognition stems from an interpenetration and unity of all things in the universe.

Second, this all-pervading power is not a blind, thoughtless force. Besides being present equally in all things, it arranges and organizes everything with view to flourishing of all parts of reality. Stoics argued explicitly that God is good because it is essentially something that benefits: “God is agreed to be good; therefore god benefits. But the good in so far as it is good does nothing but benefit; therefore god benefits everything.” (Clement, The teacher 1.8.63=LS 60I). Determination of everything is not a blind necessity, but a vehicle employed by the god to achieve the effective and beneficial ordering of the world. Therefore, the Stoics connected the causal determination of all events with providentiality: everything must be as it is but this necessity always serves the well-being and preservation of the whole. Zhuangzi did not argue explicitly for beneficent and providential nature of reality. But we can say that his notion of Heaven, which is the force that makes all things be the way they are, is a power that systematically generates and nourishes all things. An important indication of the substantially beneficent notion of Heaven is the idea that the agency in agreement with Heaven guarantees or promotes one’s self-preservation and invulnerability, which is a recurrent theme in the Zhuangzi (e.g. Zh. 1.5; 3.1; 7.6).

The intelligence inherent in the way things are is perhaps most forcefully asserted when conceptualized in terms of craftsmanslike force. This tendency is particularly pervasive in the Stoic sources, where technical expertise serves as the paradigm for rationality. Given the intrinsically rational quality of nature, it is not surprising that reference to crafts plays a central role in the Stoic definition of nature: “[Zeno] says that [nature] is a craftsmanslike fire which proceeds methodically to the task of creation.” (Cicero, On the nature of the gods 2.57=IG 30.57) The equivalent of this paradigm on Zhuangzi’s side would be the notion of “that which/who creates things” (zaowuzhe 造物者) or “that which/who creates transformations” (zaohuazhe 造化者; Zh. 6.5; 6.6; 6.8; 7.3). In both cases, of course, the
idea of creative force is different from the Christian idea of God as the Creator in the sense that this power is wholly immanent in things.

The normative human agency is premised on an alignment of the human mind with the way things are. Such an alignment is understood in terms of the empowerment of one’s authentic self. In the earliest Chinese texts, “spirit” or “daemon” (shen 神) referred to divine powers that occupy an intermediary position between Heaven and humans, and that the humans tried to influence, by means of ritual sacrifices, to work in their favour (Puett 2002). In later philosophical texts, this original meaning never quite fell out of picture but the significance and scope of the term shifted according to specific arguments advanced by individual thinkers. In the Zhuangzi, the predominant meaning of “spirit” is the authentic self of the normative agent, or “the core-level of the heart-mind” (Roth 2003: 18). Because the spirit extends in all directions and “is one with Heaven” (Zh. 15.1), it empowers the individual who has developed their spiritual powers to the degree comparable with that of Heaven.42 The process of this development is typically conceptualized in terms of stripping away those layers of one’s self that are derivative or inauthentic,43 which includes, broadly understood, all that arises from and is sustained by attachment to external things.44 All actions that are motivated by these inauthentic layers oppress and harm one’s spiritual core which is inherently subtle and sublime; “fasting” and “forgetting” are the most typical methods of purification,45 which help to keep one’s spirit whole and unharmed (Zh. 24.2).

Stoics, too, had a functionally equivalent notion of authentic, divine self, called daimōn. This notion is invoked in the Stoic sources even in such important philosophical contexts as formal definitions of the goal of human life: “And when the principle of every action is

42 As Puett (2002) shows, Zhuangzi’s position is different from other claims to self-divinization in his time in that its goal was not to gain control over Heaven. On the contrary, the assimilation of divine powers is typically associated to submission to Heaven as insuperable force.

43 “When he had put the world outside himself, I kept at him for seven days more, and after that he was able to put things outside himself. When he had put things outside himself, I kept at him for nine days more, and after that he was able to put life outside himself. After he had put life outside himself, he was able to achieve the brightness of dawn, and when he had achieved the brightness of dawn, he could see his own uniqueness (jian du 見獨). After he had managed to see his own uniqueness, he could do away with past and present, and after he had done away with past and present, he was able to enter where there is no life and no death.” (Zh. 6.4)

44 Zh. 22.6 gives the most comprehensive list of attachments in the Zhuangzi, including rank, wealth, prominence, fame, sexual beauty, dislikes, desires, joy, anger, et al.

45 Zh. 4.1, 5.5, 6.6, 6.9, 19.4.
concordance between each person’s daimōn and the will of the director of the universe, precisely this is the virtue of the happy human being and his good flow of life.” (DL VII.87-8=LS 63C) Among later Stoics, the idea of internal deity had a strong presence especially in Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. According to Epictetus, God “has provided each of us with an individual daimōn, which stays by our side and is in charge of looking after us – a guardian who never sleeps and is impossible to distract.” (Dis. 4.27). The daimōn is each person’s individual share in the divine, and, at the same time, “every person’s normative, rational self” (Long 2002: 166). Similarly to Zhuangzi, Stoics emphasized that it is quintessential to keep the spirit free from harm (Epictetus, Dis. 2.8; Marcus, Med. 2.13; 3.16; 13.2). To avoid actions that would do harm to one’s daimōn or spirit, we need to abstain from actions that are motivated by desires and fears arising from mislocating value or disvalue into indifferent things. Similarly to Zhuangzi, one of the strategies conducive to this transformation is to clearly circumscribe one’s authentic self by means of casting away the inauthentic layers of the self, i.e. the recalcitrant, erroneous judgments about what is good and evil (Epictetus, Dis. 4.1; Marcus, Med. 9.13).

Now it might be objected that what the authentic self does is quite different in each case: in Epictetus, it is rational deliberation, whereas for Zhuangzi, it is “precognition and intuition” (Roth 2003: 16, 23). No matter how strong this contrast eventually turns out to be, it should not overshadow the fact that in both cases the unimpeded agency of one’s authentic self makes one free by bestowing autonomy, invulnerability, and ease. According to the Stoics, the wise man is invulnerable because no external adversity or misfortune can deprive him of his integrity and make him unhappy (e.g. Seneca, On Firmness 10.4). The wise man is also autonomous because nothing can constraint or force the way he makes his decisions, except from this decision-making capacity itself.46 In the Zhuangzi, too, the activity of one’s authentic, divine self, i.e. the activity of traveling or rambling (you 遊), is autonomous, because the wise man “does not depend on anything” (wudai 無待; Zh. 1.4). He is also invulnerable, and some passages in the Zhuangzi47 extend this invulnerability.

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46 That is, not even Zeus.

47 “The utmost man is daemonic. When the wide woodlands blaze they cannot sear him, when the Yellow river and the Han freeze they cannot chill him, when swift thunderbolts smash the mountains and whirlwinds shake the seas they cannot startle him. A man like that yokes the clouds to his chariot, rides the sun and moon and roams beyond the fours seas; death and life alter nothing in himself, still less the principles of benefit and harm!” (Zh 2.6)
even to the wise man’s body, making the sage’s body entirely immune from any kind of physical injury or deterioration.48

While ease as the characteristic feature of the normative agency has been widely appreciated in case of the Zhuangzi, it has been neglected by most interpreters of Stoicism. And yet this idea was not altogether alien to Stoic thinkers. For instance, Marcus Aurelius remarks that a liar “struggles against the nature of the orderly universe” (Med. 9.1): lying is hard work, similarly to the work of the butcher who cuts across the bones. What lying has in common with rationalization is that they are unnecessary. This is most clearly manifested in the fact that they require a good deal of exertion. Some degree of exertion also characterizes the deliberation of non-sages. Having to decide among multiplicity of available alternatives, being unable to recognize straight away which one is the right one, is as tiresome as to brainwash oneself into accepting a consolatory account of reality in which one in fact does not believe. The ability of the Stoic sage to come quickly and effortlessly to the most rational conclusion is akin to the ability of the butcher to rely on the “desire of the spirit” and find the most efficient way of getting the knife along the bones. The wise man does not have to go over all possibilities but sees right away what is the right thing to do.49

There is perhaps a difference, however, between Zhuangzi and Stoics in the implications and scope of their valorization of ease. Whereas the Stoic ease seems to characterize exclusively the process of internal deliberation, in Zhuangzi’s case, ease is also predicated about the efficacy and effortlessness with which he is able to attain his goals. Zhuangzi would agree with Epictetus that the free man does what he wants, but he would add that doing encompasses not only thinking and deciding in a rationally consistent manner but bringing his worldly projects to completion, similarly to practitioners of crafts. Where Zhuangzi’s normative agent seems to differ from the Stoic image of the sage is that his perfection has more material manifestations: he is invulnerable also in his body, and his skill typically guarantees tangible results. This contrast will be the discussed in the following chapter.

48 It should be noted, though, that there is also a bunch of evidence, particularly in the fifth chapter of the Zhuangzi, indicating that the invulnerability has little to do with the body, and that one’s bodily condition is entirely irrelevant to one’s happiness.

49 I therefore tend to disagree with the view that the wise man “has to make hundreds and thousands of microdecisions, decisions he is not, or hardly any more, aware of” (Wenzel 2003: 122).
Part Two

The Middle
Chapter Two

Ethics of Efficacy

When a man shoots an arrow to win a tile he is skilful. But if he is trying to win a silver buckle he starts getting nervous. And if he’s competing for gold he almost loses his mind. His native skill is the same in each case, but because he has something to lose, he overvalues the external. Whenever the external is prized, the internal gets clumsy.

(Zh. 19.4)

For just as, if it is someone’s purpose to direct a spear or arrow at something, we say that his highest goal is to do everything he can in order to direct it at [the target], in the same sense that we say that our highest goal is the good. The archer in this comparison is to do all that he can to direct [his arrow at the target]; and yet doing all that he can to attain his purpose would be like the highest goal of the sort that we say is the highest good in life; actually striking [the target], though, is as it were to be [only] selected and not to be chosen.

(Cicero, De fin. 3.22= IG 103)

In the previous chapter, we have seen that philosophical insights that justify the idea of freedom as doing necessary things are widely exemplified by analogies between excellence of the wise man and excellence in skills or crafts. The goal of this chapter is to take a closer look at one particular implication of the idea that excellence of the wise man is a sort of skill. Like virtuoso craftsmen, wise men are adept at attaining their goals with efficacious ease and precision; this ability they owe to their infallible insight into the way things are. But what exactly are the goals of the wise man’s craft of living? In light of the ordinariness of the wise man, we would expect that they will be the sort of mundane goals that ordinary humans typically pursue, such as preserving one’s life and health, taking care of one’s family, establishing fulfilling friendships, and so forth. The craft of living, in this sense,
would amount to faring exceptionally well in procuring and maintaining all these ordinary
goods. There is some evidence that Zhuangzi and Stoics did think that this is indeed what
the wise man is good at. The Stoic sources state explicitly that only the wise man is good
housekeeper, good moneymaker, and good friend. Zhuangzi emphasizes that the normative
agent will avoid all sorts of dangers and manages to preserve his own life and health.

At the same time, a success in ordinary pursuits cannot be the only goal of the wise man’s
action. For both Zhuangzi and Stoics acknowledge that one can be a sage even if one is
deprived of some or even all of these conventionally valued things. Zhuangzi is keen on
presenting persons with physical disabilities as exemplars of sagehood (e.g. Zh. 5.1; 5.3),
and Stoics famously held that the wise man will remain happy even when tortured on the
rack. As we know from the previous chapter, the autonomy of perfect person cannot depend
on the capriciousness of external circumstances. In other words, there must be a “wholly
internal” dimension of craft of living which is “not contingent on anything external” (Fraser
2011: 108). This is exactly what the Stoics, too, maintained: “For if a man is confident of
the goods he has [in himself], what does he lack for living happily?” (Cicero, Tusc. 5.40=LS 63L). From this perspective, the craft of living seems to differ substantially from
ordinary crafts because its goal cannot be located in the external realm of material things; in
fact, it seems that the only “wholly internal” project is the activity of mind itself.

The question that frames the agenda of this chapter, then, is how the Stoics and Zhuangzi
thought these two aspects of craft of living can and should hang together: on the one hand,
the wise man is engaged in pursuit of ordinary things in the outside world; on the other
hand, unlike ordinary people, he is detached from them and finds fulfillment only in the
exercise of his own excellence. The extent to which we manage to find a model that would
integrate these two dimensions of normative agency will make the Stoics and Zhuangzi
immune to two unattractive interpretations. On the one hand, it is a kind of opportunism of
someone who is extremely skilful at achieving his goals but unscrupulous about what these
goals are; this view has sometimes been attributed to Zhuangzi, perhaps most radically by
Robert Eno’s claim that “the dao of butchering people might provide much the same
spiritual spontaneity as the dao of butchering oxen”. (Eno 1996: 142). On the other hand, it
is a self-enclosed posture of indifference towards the mundane, along with a rigid obsession
about doing the morally right thing regardless of the external circumstances; this view, in
turn, invokes the “inner citadel” interpretation of Stoic ethics.
We will see that that Stoic and Zhuangzi have arguments that, when translated into the other cultural context, can increase each other’s resistance against these radical interpretations. At the same time, I will suggest that there is something in both theories that makes them prone to be misinterpreted by tying them to the opposite horns of the dilemma, and that this propensity is grounded in deeper patterns of what is characteristic for each philosophical tradition. The difference between the two traditions is most strikingly manifested in the Stoic view that the wise man might sometimes fail to actually achieve his goals in the world outside, contrasting with the implicit affirmation on Zhuangzi’s side that the sage always succeeds in his pursuits.

The textual framework of this chapter will be two passages about archery quoted above. Analogies between different crafts or skills and wise man’s excellence were widely adopted by all major thinkers in both traditions. In this chapter, the focus on archer images should make the comparison more accessible and palatable. In both passages, shooting skills stand for the extraordinary excellence (or virtue) of the wise man, whereas targets stand for ordinary things in the world that the wise man pursues. We will start by unpacking the meaning of these analogies in the context of debates in their respective philosophical traditions, and then move back and forth between Stoicism and Zhuangzi to see how this exchange can contribute to our understanding of both theories. In the final part, I will turn to what I think remain as irreducible dissimilarities and indicate what implications could be drawn from this for a larger cross-cultural comparison.

1. Zhuangzi’s Archer Simile in Context of Early Chinese Ideal of “Non-action” (wuwei 無為)

The archer simile from the Zhuangzi quoted above is the culmination of a longer argument that deploys imagery of two other skills, swimming and helmsmanship. It is worth quoting the whole passage in full:

Yan Hui said to Confucius, “When I was crossing the gulf of Shangshen, I came across a ferryman who sailed his boat with the grace of spirit. I asked him if such

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50 Raphals (2005) offers an extensive survey of craft analogies in both traditions. The most common crafts invoked in both traditions are archery, medicine, and weaving.
helmmsmanship could be learned. He said, ‘Yes. It is a good swimmer who can usually do it. If he can swim underwater, he can operate a boat even if he has never seen one before.’ I asked him to explain this, but he refused. What did he mean?’

Confucius said, “A good swimmer can usually do it because he has forgotten the existence of the water. One who can swim underwater can operate a boat even if he’s never seen one before because to him the deep pool is no different from a gentle hill, and a capsizing boat just like an overturning cart. Even if his vessel is tossed and flipped in all directions, it doesn’t get to him, so he is relaxed and leisurely wherever he sails. When a man shoots an arrow to win a tile he is skilful. But if he is trying to win a silver buckle he starts getting nervous. And if he’s competing for gold he almost loses his mind. His native skill is the same in each case, but because he has something to lose, he overvalues the external. Whenever the external is prized, the internal gets clumsy. (Zh. 19.4)

The archer analogy is invoked here to provide a support for a seemingly absurd view that good swimming skills are the prerequisite of one’s excellence in helmmsmanship. It is typically assumed that the goal of a technical performance is to obtain the desired result. But excessive fear of failure or desire to succeed can be detrimental to the quality of one’s performance. If one of the major prerequisites for one’s ability to navigate a boat is to stay free from panic even in the middle of a storm, then surely a person who can swim well will have better chances to remain calm, and thus to fare better in saving the boat. The reference to archery reinforces this argument by turning it into a more general point about the relationship between one’s “internal” state of mind, and “external” failure or success, along with losses and rewards following from them. The priority of the internal over the external is affirmed several times in the Zhuangzi, as well as the danger of overvaluing the external and neglecting the internal: “What is Heavenly is inside, what is [merely] human is outside; excellence lies in the Heavenly” (Zh. 17.7); “the [wise] men of old changed on the outside, but did not change on the inside” (Zh. 22.11).

The typical shortcoming of ordinary agents is that their mind loses its “wholeness” (quan 全) and “unity” (yi 一) and splits its attention between the internal, i.e. the proper exercise of skill, and the external, i.e. the achievement at stake. The more our attention moves away from the exercise of skill towards the external achievement, the more likely it is that we fail to hit the target. Paradoxically, our chances to obtain something increase with our indifference towards what we want to obtain: if you want something, the best thing you can
do to get it is not to want it, not to attach any value to it, or, in Zhuangzi’s words, to “forget” it. Elsewhere, Zhuangzi supports this idea by referring to the well-known fact that the influence of alcohol can, in some cases, save one from injury and preserve one’s bodily “wholeness” because one’s physical coordination is improved since the alcohol has inhibited fear (Zh. 19.2): one is more likely to survive a fall from a moving carriage when one “forgets” all about death and survival.

Zhuangzi’s ideas about the relationship between efficacy and indifference need to be situated in a broader framework of *wuwei* 無為 territory. Recently, Edward Slingerland has demonstrated the overarching character of this idea, translated variously as “non-action”, “non-interference”, “non-purposive action”, or “effortless action”, as the spiritual ideal embraced across the major philosophical traditions of early China. *Wuwei* has mostly been associated with Daoist thinkers, particularly Laozi, but Confucian authors, too, have attributed the ability to act in the *wuwei* fashion to their normative agents, and Legalist thinkers have embraced *wuwei* as the tool of political control.51

The complexity of *wuwei* comes to light in contemporary scholarly debates about what exactly this ideal encompasses and how it can be achieved. Slingerland argued that the primary dimension of the *wuwei* in early Chinese thought was psychological: “it is important to realize that wu-wei properly refers not to what is actually happening (or not happening) in the realm of observable action but rather to the state of mind of the actor” (Slingerland 2001:7). But it has been pointed out that this interpretation is too reductive, for *wuwei* very often refers exactly to what is happening in the realm of observable action. Zhuangzi himself characterizes *wuwei* by reference to “Heaven”, or processes in nature: “To act without exertion and be revered, this is the way of Heaven; to act with exertion and be exhausted, that is the way of man.”52 Heaven is the force that manages to perform the multiplicity of processes that take place in the world, invariably succeeds in getting things done, and yet never shows the slightest sign of exhaustion. Ivanhoe’s critique of Slingerland is therefore most accurate: “Nature is the ultimate paradigm for *wuwei* behaviour… All of this shows that *wuwei* is not so much a quality of persons but of actions” (Ivanhoe 2007: 284).

51 It should be noted, though, that this ideal was most likely not embraced by the influential school of Mohists, which indicates a somewhat less monolithic picture of the early Chinese tradition.

52 *Zh.* 11.6 (無為而尊者，天道也；有為而累者，人道也).
To maintain a continuity with the dichotomy between internal and external from Zhuangzi’s archer simile, I prefer to structure the discourse on wuwei slightly differently, not according to the distinction between dispositions and actions, but that between internal, or psychological, and external, or physical, dimension of wuwei. The psychological dimension, again, has several aspects that are differently emphasized by different thinkers, and that are more or less tightly connected with each other. Depending on how far they go in eliminating one’s sense of self, the most radical dimension of the psychological wuwei, which necessarily encompasses all its other dimensions, is unselfconsciousness; in a weaker sense, the psychological wuwei refers to absence of conscious intentions in the mind of the agent (wuxin 無心, wuyi 無意), freedom from worries, or freedom from excessive or tiresome deliberation about what and how should be done.

The physical, or external, dimension, of wuwei is characterized by effortless efficacy, exactly of the sort that characterizes processes in nature. The effortlessness can mean simply “doing nothing”, i.e. an outright passivity, or it can mean action which is free from excessive exertion, force, or violence, because it proceeds in accordance with the natural logic and propensities of things. In both cases, such effortlessness goes with efficacy and smooth attainment of goals. This dimension of wuwei was particularly influential in theories of statecraft. Wuwei was typically used to characterize the ideal kingship: “Do nothing (practice wuwei) and there will be nothing which is not in order” (wei wuwei, er wu bu zhi 為無為而無不治; Laozi 3). In Confucius’s Analects, wuwei characterizes the rule of the legendary king Shun: “The Master said, ‘May not Shun be instanced as having governed efficiently without exertion? What did he do? He did nothing but gravely and reverently occupy his royal seat.’” (Analects 15.5). The best way to rule over people is to let them be. Here, effortlessness amounts to absence of interference with the natural desires and inclinations of people; such effortless action is efficacious because it brings the desired result of a well-ordered kingdom.

Perhaps the most substantial of the Zhuangzi’s contributions to discourse on wuwei is his reflection on inseparability and interdependence of the internal and external dimension of wuwei. This interpretation is corroborated by our conclusions in the previous chapter about the interdependence of freedom from psychological disturbances and freedom from external constraints. One of the most explicit statements of this interdependence can be found in the carpenter passage, mentioned already in the previous chapter. The psychological wuwei is described here as a sort of ease, or fittingness, exemplified by a belt.
which is neither too loose nor too tight. Zhuangzi links this feeling of comfort with the notion of “forgetting”, or freedom from concerns or disturbances:

When carpenter Chui drew a figure it was true to compasses or L-square; his finger shared in the [natural] transformations of things (zhì yú wù huà 指與物化)\(^53\) and did not depend on calculations of the mind (bù yì xīn jí 不以心稽). Consequently his Numinous Tower was a unity (língtài yī 靈臺一) and he could go up and down it unobstructed. Shoes most fit (shì 適) us when we forget the feet, a belt when we forget the waist, the mind when we forget “That’s it, that’s not” (shìfēi 是非), an engagement with circumstance when we neither vary inwardly nor yield to external pressures. To fit from the start and never fail to fit is forgetfulness of what it is that fits. (Zh. 19.12; trans. according to Graham)

This portrayal of the carpenter’s excellence strongly indicates that the psychological dimension always goes together with its efficacy, i.e. the manner in which we steer our way among things so that we succeed to realize our goals with ease, without inflicting harm either on things or on ourselves. We do not do violence to things emerges because we do not do violence to our minds, and let our minds configure themselves along with the natural propensities of things. The archer simile should be read along the same lines. The psychological dimension of the archer’s wùwèi lies in his indifference towards potential gains and losses. Such equanimity is the necessary prerequisite for shooting well, i.e. for the external dimension of wùwèi: the internal effortlessness translates into efficacious action.

Zhuangzi provides here a rewarding perspective on an alleged paradox or tension inherent in the early Chinese notion of wùwèi. With regard to Lǎozǐ, it has been argued that wùwèi has two very different, and, indeed, incompatible meanings: there is a “contemplative” wùwèi, i.e. an attitude of genuine detachment from the world, and a “purposive” wùwèi, i.e. a consciously adopted strategy to achieve worldly goals, particularly political control (Creel 1970). If one operates in the contemplative mode, then one does not harbour any goals, and, the other way round, if one operates in the purposive mode, then one ceases contemplation. The lesson of Zhuangzi’s archer simile is that, in some sense, these two modi operandi are

\(^{53}\)“Transformations of things” is very close in its meaning here to the “way things are”.

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perfectly compatible: it is one’s detachment from external goals that facilitates its attainment.

The paradox of *wuwei*, if paradox is the right way to label it, should therefore be located not in tension between the internal and external dimension, but solely only in the internal, or motivational, dimension. If indeed one’s effortlessness can bring about the most efficacious course of action, i.e. we get the best results when we do not excessively try to get them, is this effortlessness not jeopardized when we seek it as a means to efficacious action? This difficulty has been dubbed as the “paradox of trying not to try” (Slingerland 2001). How can we adopt “non-trying” as a strategy for obtaining certain things, if the very employment of this strategy means that we do try to get them? Is this not self-defeating? Having the unperturbed mind is a part of the strategy to hit the target. But how can the mind remain unperturbed, i.e. indifferent about whether we hit or miss, if the posture of such indifference is adopted *in order to* hit the target?

Before we try to answer this question, let me turn to the Stoic archer simile. We will find that the Stoics, too, were confronted with a tension between one’s indifference towards external gains and losses, and one’s desire to perform well in securing them. In the Stoic context, this tension emerges in a different conceptual constellation and has somewhat different implications. The familiarity with the Stoic case will help us to discover resources in Zhuangzi’s own thought that can reinforce his own position.

2. *Telos* and *Skopos*: The Stoic Archer Simile in the Context of the Greek Thought

There had been a long tradition of drawing analogies between virtue and masterful exercise of a craft long before the Stoic school was founded. The Stoic archer simile must be therefore understood against the background of shared assumptions that appear in the Platonic corpus about what makes these analogies substantive. Two assumptions are particularly important: all crafts have their own specific *telos* or *ergon*, i.e. their determinate goal or function, and human life, too, has its *telos* or *ergon*; second, crafts are excellences in knowledge and rational deliberation, and human life too, if it is to be happy, must be lived with reason and knowledge. Just as a the virtuoso craftsman is somebody who knows exactly what he is doing, when he is performing his craft, and why that is the
best thing to do at a given time, so the wise man knows how should he live, and what he
should do in different situations he encounters.

The earliest Stoic definitions of the goal (telos) attributed to the founder of the school Zeno
are “living in agreement” (homologoumenōs zēn; Stob. 2.75.11,76=LS 63B) and “a good
flow of life” (eurhoia biou; DL 7.88=LS 63C). These accounts outline, in general terms,
what is broadly characteristic of the good life, i.e. harmony of one’s actions and their easy
flow. These texts also cash out more specifically what the “life in agreement” means: it is
the life in agreement with nature, or, which is the same thing, the life in agreement with
virtue. This can be taken to follow analytically from the short definition, for nature is,
essentially, harmonious and in agreement with itself, and hence to live in agreement is the
same thing as to live in agreement with nature.

But what, concretely, is the content of life in agreement with nature? Later Stoic scholarhs
specified the content of the normative human action in terms of pursuit of the so-called
things “in accordance with nature” (kata physin), or “preferred things” (proēgmena):
Diogenes defined the telos as “reasoning well in the selection and disselection of things in
accordance with nature” (Stob. 2.76.9-15=LS 58K); Antipater’s definition is “to do
everything in one’s power continuously and undeviatingly with a view to obtaining the
predominating things which accord with nature” (ibid). So the “life in agreement” is
defined as agency that pursues, in an exemplary way, the things “in accordance with
nature”. The things in accordance with nature, according to the Stoics, were things that it is
reasonable and natural for human beings to select given their natural constitution; typical
examples are health or wealth. Antipater was the Stoic thinker who is credited with the
Stoic archer analogy. The target stands for the preferred things, while the skill and effort of
the archer to hit the target stands for “doing everything in one’s power” to obtain them.

If doing everything in one’s power to obtain things in accordance in nature is the telos of
the human life, then all one needs to attain it is to develop an excellence (aretē) to obtain
them. This excellence, in the Stoic view, is purely rational, or deliberative, and therefore it
has a structure identical with crafts, which are defined as “systems of cognitions”.
(Olympiodorus, On Plato’s Gorgias 12.1=LS 42A) The value of having such excellence,
the Stoics maintain, is incommensurably higher than the value of things in accordance with
nature that this excellence seeks to obtain. In maintaining this seemingly paradoxical view,
Stoics were drawing on the Platonic precedent of construing virtue as a higher order craft
which alone is good in the strict sense of the word because it alone can use all other things
in a beneficial manner. This argument is advanced in the *Republic*, where the virtue-craft corresponds to the wisdom of the guardians in the city which by making sure that all elements in the city mind their own business.

But it is in Plato’s *Euthydemus* (281a-d) where the argument most closely anticipates the Stoic assimilation of this idea. Here, conventionally valued things are likened to raw material, and wisdom to the art of carpentry. It is wisdom which determines how these ordinary goods will be used, whether well or badly, similarly to the manner in which the art of carpentry determines what shape a piece of wood will be carved into, and whether it will be utilized well or badly. The list of conventional goods mentioned here is similar to the items that Stoics sources mostly give as preferred things: wealth, health, beauty and honor. By themselves, these things have no value at all; it depends on how they are used. If they are used badly, having these things can even do more harm than being deprived of them:

> It seems likely that with respect to all the things we called good in the beginning, the correct account is not that in themselves they are good by nature, but rather as follows: if ignorance controls them, they are greater evil than their opposites…; but if good sense and wisdom are in control, they are greater goods. (Plato, *Euth.* 281d)

It follows from this account that one’s rational excellence in using these things can be the only thing truly worth having, whereas all other things are ultimately indifferent. This is indeed at the core of the Stoic theory, which maintained that only virtue, and what participates in it, is truly good (Cicero, *De fin.* 3.27) because only virtue invariably benefits (Sextus, *Adv. Math.* 11.22-6=LS 60G). It might not be immediately apparent, though, how is this compatible with the definition of the *telos* of human life as doing everything in one’s power to obtain conventionally valued things. For the implication of this definition is that these conventional goods do, after all, have some value. But this, too, is the view upheld by mainstream Stoicism. What we call here the conventional goods are, for the Stoic, both indifferent and preferred. It is indifferent to the extent that all things besides virtue are indifferent: they are neither good or evil but can serve us well or badly depending on how we use them. But within the multiplicity of indifferent things, there are some to which we have natural affinity, and it is therefore reasonable for us to pursue these things (e.g. *Stob.* 2.96-97=LS 59M) and do our best to obtain them.

To articulate and justify the relationship between pursuit of naturally valuable things and the supreme value of virtue, the Stoics proposed an account of human development from a
pre-rational stage of one’s life to a stage of fully developed rationality. Perhaps the philosophically richest account of this theory is provided by Cicero:

At this point, [i.e. when one is consistent is one’s selection of things in accordance with nature] for the first time, that which can be truly called good begins to be present in a man and understood. For a man’s first affiliation is towards those things which are in accordance with nature. But as soon as he has acquired understanding, or rather, the conception which the Stoics call ennoia, and has seen the regularity and, so to speak, the harmony of conduct, he comes to value this far higher than all those objects of his initial affection; and he draws the rational conclusion that this constitutes the highest human good which is worthy of praise and desirable for its own sake. (Cicero, De Fin. 3.17.20-2=LS 59D)

This account can be viewed as a specific version of Aristotle’s function argument (NE 1.7). According to this argument, human flourishing lies in the perfected exercise of the distinctly human capacities; for the Stoics, the distinctive capacity of human nature is its rationality. The transition from pre-rational to fully rational life hinges on our realization that it is not our proper function as human beings to preserve our life, feed ourselves, and have children, but to do everything in our power to obtain these things to the degree which is appropriate for us as rational animals, i.e. to exercise fully our capacity for making rational decisions about what we should strive for and what we should avoid in different situation of our lives.

The consequence of this conception is that there are two different goals that the fully developed rational agent pursues: on the one hand, he wants to obtain ordinary things in accordance with nature such as health or wealth; on the other hand, he wants to think and decide in a manner that is both most conducive to obtainment of these things and most “in agreement with the constitution of man” (Clement, Misc. 2.21.129.4-5). The former goal is to obtain certain conditional goods, the latter goal to exercise one’s rational excellence. According to the Stoics, rationality is the only genuinely good and choice worthy thing, and that is the latter goal, not the former.
To make the rationale for this differentiation of goals more palatable, Antipater coined a distinction between “goal” (telos) and “target” (skopos) of human agency, and deployed an image of archer aiming at a target to illustrate the point.

For just as, if it is someone’s purpose to direct a spear or arrow at something, we say that his highest goal is to do everything he can in order to direct it at [the target], in the same sense that we say that our highest goal is the good. The archer in this comparison is to do all that he can to direct [his arrow at the target]; and yet doing all that he can to attain his purpose would be like the highest goal of the sort that we say is the highest good in life; actually striking [the target], though, is as it were to be selected and not to be chosen. (Cicero, De fin. 3.22=IG 103)

Whether or not the archer succeeds in hitting the target is not entirely in his power, for external circumstance can divert the arrow after it is released. Analogically, whether or not the wise man manages, in the given circumstances, to obtain the natural things that he selects depends on many factors that he cannot control; for instance, he can do everything to take care of his health but he can be hit by a drunk driver. But the archer’s function (ergon) is to do everything he can to hit the target, i.e. to shoot well; this is what makes him a good archer, and this is the goal (telos) of his activity. Analogically, the goal of human action is to deliberate consistently and infallibly about how to obtain the natural things. That is entirely in our power and that is what is our function as rational animals.

Human agency can thus be described from two interconnected, yet sharply different perspectives. From the perspective of the “target” (skopos), human agency resembles ordinary, stochastic crafts like navigation or medicine. These crafts pursue their goals, and they can either succeed or fail to deliver the intended result. But from the perspective of its goal (telos), the “craft of living” can never fail because the goal is intrinsic to the exercise of the activity, and so is its intended product, i.e. happiness. Aiming at the goal always involves aiming at a target; but missing the target does not entail missing the goal, and neither does hitting the target entail achieving the goal, for even an untrained archer can, with luck, hit the target, without thereby proving that he has mastered the skill.

The analogy between virtue and crafts helps to reinforce the rationale for the somewhat counterintuitive Stoic idea that the goal of human life is to do everything in order to obtain

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54 Or he rather reshaped the meaning of the distinction, cf. Alpers-Götz 1976; Inwood 1986
55 This interpretation follows, in broad lines, those of Inwood (1986) and Striker (1996).
things in accordance with nature, but the fact whether one eventually succeeds or fails in obtaining these things is indifferent for one’s flourishing. For human beings can exercise their rationality well regardless of their material achievements, just as an archer can exercise his skill of archery well regardless of whether he hits or misses. And if one maintains, as the Stoics did, that the human flourishing depends solely on the exercise of one’s proper function, then it follows that all one needs to live as one wants is to act rationally.

Some ancient critics of Stoicism argued (Plutarch, *On common conceptions* 1070F-1071E=LS 64C; Alexander, *On soul* 2. 164, 3-9) that the flaw of this double conception of value shows exactly in its misalignment with how we typically think about crafts. For we do not say that the goal of the doctor is to practice medicine well, but to heal and save patients, and we do not say that the goal of the archers is to aim well, but to hit targets. What ultimately matters in crafts is not the activity which is conducive to a goal, but the attainment of the goal itself. According to this criticism, in their effort to underpin the claim of the unique value of virtue, which is incommensurable with value of all other things, Stoics ended up with a schizophrenic conception of agency that pursues two different goals at the same time, which undermined, in fact, the claim of the exclusive value of virtue.\footnote{Striker (1996) has convincingly argued for the defeasibility of the Stoic archer analogy in the debates with their opponents.}

The problem Stoics were grappling with is, I think, similar to the paradox of “trying not to try” that was identified in the *Zhuangzi*. In both cases, the difficulty is to show how the indifference towards the outside world is compatible with one’s successful engagement in this world. The problem raised by Zhuangzi’s theory is how one can be engaged in obtaining the preferred things, and yet remain indifferent enough not to mar one’s chances to get them. The Stoic emphasis on self-sufficiency of virtue implies an opposite problem: How can one be indifferent towards external things, and yet be engaged enough to do everything in one’s power to obtain them?
3. Zhuangzi Revisited: Indifference Towards the External as the Pleasure from the Internal

The potential of the Stoic outlook for enhancing our understanding of the *Zhuangzi* lies in the idea that exercise of one’s excellence is insuperable in value and provides a lasting and deep satisfaction. If this view could be identified in the *Zhuangzi*, we could recast the excellence of Zhuangzi’s virtuoso archer/wise man in positive terms: the sort of unperturbed aiming at the target is not just the mindset which disregards the external achievement of its goal, but also that which is primarily concerned about and satisfied by the correct performance of archery itself, similarly to the Stoic wise man who sees the highest good in doing everything he can to hit the target. So the archer “does not try” to hit the target in the sense that he is more interested in what he is doing than in what will come out of it; but he tries, of course, to hit the target inasmuch that outcome is implicated in the correct performance of his skill.

One could even argue that one’s indifference towards the external is only a side effect of immersion in one’s own performance. In contrast, ordinary people overprize the external because they fail to find satisfaction in their own performance. And they fail, of course, because their performance is deficient so as not to generate the sort of satisfaction that is provided by a virtuoso performance. The better we are at a skill, the more successful we are in attaining the goals, but also, the less we are gratified with the attainment of these goals in comparison with the satisfaction procured by the exercise of skill itself. In turn, the tendency to overprize the external is commensurable with the deficiency of our skill, i.e. with our clumsiness in acquiring the external things that we want.

There are several indications in the *Zhuangzi* that the value of internal state of mind cannot be trumped by the value of external results that follow from it, and the justification for this view is to a considerable extent similar to what we find in Stoic sources. To “travel” or “ramble” (*you* 遊) without constraints and impediments, this is the goal of the craft of living. Rambling as optimal, unimpeded flow of one’s vital and spiritual forces, sometimes explicitly specified as the lasting condition of one’s mind (*youxin* 遊心), reminds us of the Stoic “good flow of life”. Similarly to the Stoics, the supreme value of this self-contained activity is grounded in the fact that it is animated by the noblest and loftiest forces in our self: by what is “spiritual” (*shen* 神) or “quintessential” (*jing* 精) (*Zh.* 3.1; 12.3; 12.11). Unlike the Stoics, Zhuangzi would not describe these capacities as distinctly human, but
rather as such that help us to transcend the ordinary, fallen humanity. But an implicit version of the function argument is there: if we want to fully realize our potential, or be what we truly are, we have to engage the best elements in our personalities, i.e. to “nourish our spirit” (yang shen 養神; Zh. 15.2) and make sure that nothing impedes their workings.

This line of interpretation also has some potential to block the charges of immorality. Zhuangzi’s fascination with the externally manifested aesthetic and efficient dimension of normative action, along with his seeming indifference about what is its goal, has led some interpreters to interpret him in anti-moralist terms: what matters is that things are done efficiently and graciously rather than what these things are. This assessment of Zhuangzi would put him into a stark opposition to the Stoics, who sometimes specify at great length the content of the appropriate action. Contrary to the anti-moralist perspective on Zhuangzi, it has been argued, that “Zhuangzi is asserting that the cultivated human spirit will act in certain ways rather than others” based on “a strong commitment to a certain definition of the proper place of humanity in the universe” (Puett 2003: 259).

While I agree with the first part of this claim, I think that the justification for it lies elsewhere than in a clearly defined idea of what it is appropriate from the perspective of humanity. On this point, Zhuangzi differs from the Stoics, and this difference will be discussed in the next chapter. Where his position appears to be closer to the Stoics is that he thinks that doing certain things is contrary both to the way things are, and therefore also to one’s individual nature. This is, after all, also the appropriate perspective to understand the Stoic “moralism”. The reason Stoics believed that some sort of actions are immoral, or inappropriate, is not that they conflict with some conventional notion of morality, but because they are contrary to nature, and therefore that they are not good for us. If we realize that Stoics believed that what constitutes the genuine self are our “daemonic”, or rational, powers, then we find a very similar line of reasoning against doing immoral things in the Zhuangzi. There are certain things that are contrary to inclinations of our spirit, and therefore harmful for our overall psychophysical integrity. This argument is exemplified by the case of a debauched ruler who suffers on account of excessive pursuit of sensual desires. As his interlocutor notes, such self-indulgence is incompatible with desires of one’s spirit: “The spirit does not approve of such a way of life. The spirit loves harmony and hates licentiousness. Licentiousness is a kind of sickness, and that is why I have come to offer my comfort.” (Zh. 24.2)
A broader notion of “immoral action”, or action which is contrary to nature, is associated with what Zhuangzi calls “machine mind” (jixin 機心). This idea appears in a dialogue between an old gardener who labours manually on watering his field and Confucius’s disciple Zigong who accidentally passes by. Zigong suggests that he uses a mechanism that will save him a great deal of energy. The gardener promptly dismisses the suggestion:

Where there are machines, there are bound to be machine worries; where there are machine worries, there are bound to be machine minds. With a machine mind in your breast, you’ve spoiled what was pure and simple; and without the pure and simple, the life of the spirit knows no rest. Where the life of the spirit knows no rest, the Way will cease to buoy you up. It's not that I don't know about your machine - I would be ashamed to use it! (Zh. 12.11)

While the efficacious activity of Zhuangzi’s virtuoso craftsmen is animated by spiritual powers, here, in contrast, the spirit is harmed by one’s obsession with efficacy. Zhuangzi often warns against the tendency to instrumentalize things and dominate nature by means of technique (e.g. Zh. 4.10; 20.1). The above passage indicates, however, that the real danger of this tendency is not so much in instrumentalizing things but in instrumentalizing our own activities: in reducing all that we do into procedures that help us to achieve our goals, we turn ourselves into machines with “machine worries” (worries that we fail to deliver) and “machine minds” (minds that are concerned only with results), constantly calculating and scheming in the narrow framework of the utilitarian means-end deliberation. If the spirit is that element in our selves that makes the life worth living for its own sake, then it stands to reason that it will be the first to be harmed by such instrumentalization (Zh. 2.2).

The anti-utilitarian strand in the Zhuangzi, though, should not be over-emphasized. Many interpreters have pointed out that aimlessness and playfulness are the characteristic features of the normative agency, or “rambling” (you 遊). To “ramble” means to drift “without fixed direction” (Fraser 2014), to have “a laid-back attitude towards life” (Mair 1994: 385), and “play like a child” (Wu 1982). It should be noted, though, that the fact that the “rambling” as the telos of the craft of living is the goal in itself does not have to entail that it is itself aimless, or that it consists merely of unconnected episodes of drifting. As exemplified by the butcher’s knife, which “rambles” through the empty spaces of the cow’s body, the self-containedness of normative agency is not in conflict with its capacity to systematically pursue and attain ordinary goals at which such agency is intrinsically targeted. The Stoic archer simile makes it clear that in order to be able to aim at a target, i.e. to exercise our
excellence, we first need to have a target that we want to hit. Similarly, even though the virtuoso butcher values the Way things are as he experiences it in his own performance, rather than the external result of this performance, he does try to carve up the cow. Being without fixed direction could be one way to describe phenomenologically the supreme concentration and dedication to the exercise of skill, instead of apprehensive anticipation of the results; but each skill, when exercised, moves always towards completion of some goal, whether we care about it or not, similarly to Heaven, which is constantly working towards transforming one thing or one state into another. Typically, Zhuangzi’s ideas about wisdom are explored in connection with ordinary, mundane activities that have their own specific goal: advising a ruler, swimming in a river, or collecting taxes. One should differentiate, therefore, between absence of self-consciousness or absence of exertion, and absence of goals, because the former does not necessarily have to entail the latter.

The interpretive model outlined here helps to immunize Zhuangzi against ruthless utilitarianism on the one hand and slack aimlessness on the other hand: the exclusive concern about the unimpeded exercise of his spiritual powers against the former, and the fact that this exercise is always carried towards a goal against the latter. I will now turn back to the Stoics to see how Zhuangzi’s archer simile can help us with the Stoic problem of how the wise man, in spite of his self-containedness, pursues ordinary, mundane goals.

4. Stoics Revisited: The Aesthetic and Efficacious Dimension of the Wise Man’s Action

Does not the Stoic idea that only virtue is truly valuable undermine one’s motivation to do everything in one’s power to obtain things in accordance with nature? Ancient critics of Stoicism pointed out that the craft of living is fundamentally at odds with the intentional structure of ordinary crafts: it is not the goal of medicine to practice medicine well, but to heal patients. From Zhuangzi’s point of view, the Stoic archer simile would not seem to distort the ordinary notion of crafts. One does not have to attach value to external achievements in order to be successful in their pursuit; on the contrary, as Zhuangzi’s archer analogy implies, one fares better when one does not do that. In other words, one does everything in one’s power to obtain the things in accordance with nature when one is not excessively concerned with whether one succeeds or not. So the self-containedness of
virtue is not only compatible with pursuit of natural things, it even appears to be conducive to obtaining them.

This comparison opens up a space for setting out a more general interpretive perspective on Stoicism. There has been a tendency in the Stoic scholarship to interpret the rationality of the wise man in moral terms. This went with emphasis on the internal dimension of the wise man’s action, i.e. on whether or not he does what he does from the right reasons. It surely was the Stoic view that whether one’s action is normatively rational depends largely on one’s genuine motivation, and not on external appearances. This is exemplified, for instance, by the following passage from Seneca:

A friend keeps watch beside a sick man; we approve. But he is doing it to obtain legacy; he is a vulture, waiting for the corpse. The same action can be either disgraceful or honourable; it matters why and how they are performed. Now every action will be honourable if we have committed ourselves to the honourable and judged it and what comes from it to be the only good in the human affairs; the rest are only good for the time being. (Seneca, Ep. 95.43)

It is our commitment to virtue that makes our action virtuous. From a slightly different perspective, the derivativeness of the external dimension is affirmed in a report from Cicero: “…Those things which take their start from virtue are to be judged right from their first undertaking and not by their accomplishment.” (Cicero, De fin. 3.32=LS 59L). What matters is why we undertake certain actions and how we deliberate, and not so much how these actions materialize themselves in the world. Both these passages implicitly refer to the Stoic distinction between “appropriate” (kathēkonta) and “perfect actions” (katorthōmata). Both sage and non-sage do appropriate actions, (take care of their bodies, serve their country, honor their parents etc.) but only in the agency of the wise man are these appropriate actions also “perfect” because they are done from the infallible rational disposition which is characterized by a “specific stability” (idia pēxis; Stob. Florileg. 103.22=SVF 3.510).

Several scholars (Long 1996: 168-69; Sellars 2006: 121; Jedan 2009:132-134) have interpreted the distinction between appropriate and perfect action by distinguishing two different components of actions: what we do, i.e. what is the externally observable content of our actions, on the one hand, and how we do it and why we do it, i.e. what motivates us internally to such action and how we deliberate about it on the other hand. Both a sage and a non-sage can both honor their parents in an appropriate way, so that no external observer
could tell the sage from the non-sage on the basis of their actions, but in fact there will be fundamental differences in their motivation and deliberation: while the action of the wise will be virtuous, the action of the non-wise will be vicious. On this interpretation, the ordinariness of the wise man would lie in the fact that he does “exactly” (Sellars) the same things as ordinary people but for different (better) reasons.

I want to suggest that to acknowledge the primacy of one’s internal deliberation, and to set the perfection of the wise man clearly off from the imperfect rationality of other human beings, it is unnecessary, and in fact, misconceived, to dwell on the point that the what aspect will be exactly the same in virtuous and in non-virtuous agent, or that appropriate actions done by a non-sage will be exactly as appropriate as those done by the non-sage. For this is a ramification of the ‘inner citadel’ view: Just as in case of freedom, here, too, our true agency is located deeply inside of our mind, and is independent and separated from the world outside.

As was pointed out in a classic article by G.B. Kerferd (1978), appropriate actions, unlike perfect actions, can be done better or worse, or can be more or less appropriate. In fact, it is when we appreciate the point that the what aspect admits of better and worse, and that therefore the wise man will typically do things more appropriately than other people, that we best observe the sharp Stoic distinction between both levels of description: the either-or perspective of wisdom and perfect action, and the more-or-less perspective of appropriate actions. These two levels can be mapped on the distinction between telos and skopos. On the one hand, the agent is pursuing his telos, i.e. the proper exercise of his skill; on the other hand, he is also at the same time acting in the world and hits or misses his skopos. The former perspective describes his action in terms of the aiming, i.e. his infallible deliberation, i.e. as a series of perfect actions. The latter perspective describes it from the perspective of the shooting, i.e. as an externally observable performance. The fact that the wise man infallibly exercises his craft will naturally translate itself into the results that he achieves in the world outside.

Typically, the wise man will do kathēkonta in the best possible manner, so that his virtue will uplift the content of his actions. This is similar to a virtuoso piano player who plays a composition so brilliantly that he transforms, in his own unique way, the content of the composition (the notes he is playing), so that the way he is playing cannot be considered separately from what he is playing, and vice versa. A virtuoso player may even occasionally take the liberty not to play exactly what is in the score, and yet we would not
say that he is playing it wrong; in fact, this is what we expect from a virtuoso player. Similarly, the wise man may occasionally take the liberty to do a dispreferred thing, such as eating human flesh (DL 7.121), if it is appropriate in the given circumstances. The sharp distinction between the content of one’s action and the manner one performs it makes only sense on the level of inferior performance. Here, just to deliver the content which is in the score will be the goal for everyone; and we will be able to distinguish the content from the way it is played, either exactly according to the score, or poorly, so that the composition is not delivered properly.

The idea that the psychological excellence of the wise man manifests itself externally would reinforce the rationale for the Stoic analogy with crafts. For one characteristic of crafts is that the external product typically manifests the quality of the internal disposition of the craftsman. In the Zhuangzi, this relationship is clearly brought out. The butcher simile, for instance, makes it clear that what distinguishes the normative agent from other people is not only their internal disposition or the state of mind, but the way they perform in managing their tasks and deliver expected results. In other words, their virtue is always externally manifested and one can immediately tell the sage from the non-sage by their actions, and even by their bodily appearance. If we think of Zhuangzi’s bell-stand maker and his products which are endowed with a spiritual quality, we can see that Zhuangzi thought that the quality of the product cannot be considered separately from the state of mind of the craftsman, and that this state of mind manifests itself in the product. But we can tell an expert from a non-expert also from the externally beautiful and pleasing performance of their skill.

There are indications that the combination of externally observable efficacy and beauty, characteristic for the virtuoso performance of any craft or skill, was not altogether absent from the Stoic image of the wise man. Recently, Nancy Sherman proposed, using Seneca as her main case, that Stoics were committed to an “aesthetic of character” (Sherman 2005), and appreciated the role of proper demeanor and appearance in virtuous action. To reinforce her interpretation, Sherman could have also pointed out the topos of ‘walking’ in the Stoic texts. The idea that the wise man does everything in the right manner entails that ‘prudent walking’ is one of those right things that the wise man typically does (Stob. 2.5c=IG 102). It is natural, and suggested by the following passage from Seneca, to think about prudent walking as being manifested externally in one’s body: “The sage does not need to walk timidly or one step at a time; for his confidence in himself is so great that he does not hesitate to go against Fortune herself nor will he ever give way to her” (Seneca,
In one of his letters, Seneca makes a point with which Zhuangzi would earnestly agree: “the soul is not disfigured by the ugliness of the body, but … the body is beautified by the comeliness of the soul.” (Ep. 66.4)

If there is something like an aesthetic dimension of wisdom, then it presumably goes, as suggested by the analogy with crafts, hand in hand with its efficacy. To reconstruct this link, we can start from recalling the early Stoic definition of telos as “good flow of life” (eurhoia biou). Similarly to expert exercise of a skill, the good craft of living does not get stuck on a particular problem or misfortune, but is able to maintain an even flow, so that one action seamlessly flows into another without force or strain. The image of even flow is implied in the Epictetus’s analogy between the craft of living and skilful ballthrowing and ballcatching. “It is not the ball they value, it’s how well they throw and catch it that counts as good or bad. That is where the grace and skill lie, the speed and expertise.” (Dis. 2.5)

The graciousness and ease characterize the externally observable aspect of virtuoso performance.

Epictetus construes this analogy to address the question of how is one’s steadfastness, implying indifference towards the externals, compatible with one’s carefulness about the manner in which one handles these externals. “It is, indeed, difficult to combine and unite these two things – the carefulness of the man who is devoted to material things and the steadfastness of the man who disregards them, but it is not impossible; otherwise happiness would be impossible”. (Dis. 2.5.9–10) At one point, Epictetus suggests one avenue to construe this polarity as less antagonistic but more symbiotic:

You will find that skilled ballplayers do the same thing. It’s not the ball they value, it’s how well they throw and catch it that counts as good or bad. … If we are afraid to throw the ball, or nervous about catching it, then the fun is lost; and how can we preserve our composure when we are uncertain about what next to do? (Dis. 2.5.15–17)

This sounds exactly like the point of Zhuangzi’s archer analogy: one’s indifference to whether one succeeds or fails in handling the ball enhances one’s capacity to handle it well. When we attach value to the outcome of our activity, we are likely to lose our composure and perform poorly. Similarly to Zhuangzi, too, the consequence of the impeccable exercise of one’s skill will bear externally manifested results.

Therefore, the Stoic emphasis on self-containedness and self-sufficiency of virtue should not overshadow the fact that the wise man is supremely adept, in contrast to the non-sage,
at procuring “preferred indifferentss” and faring better in ordinary pursuits. If the world is not a totally disorderly and unpredictable place – and the world in the Stoic view certainly is not such a place – then it stands to reason that wise men should generally have a much higher success rate in obtaining the preferred things (‘hitting the target’) than non-wise, just as a skilful archer will be more likely to hit the target than a learner of archery. To support this view, we can turn to those sources that clearly indicate that only the wise man fares well in ordinary pursuits. Consider the following report by Stobaeus:

They say that only the virtuous man is a household economist and a good household economist, and again a moneymaker. For household economy is a condition which contemplates and practices what is advantageous to a household; and economy is an arranging of expenditures and tasks and a care for possessions and for the work that is done on the farm. …And some think that moneymaking is an intermediate [activity], others that it is virtuous. And no base man is a good guardian of a household, nor can he arrange it that a house is well run. And only the virtuous man is a moneymaker since he knows the sources from which one is to get money and when and how and up to what point. (Stob. 2.1d=IG 102)

It has been argued (Vogt 2008) that the claim “only the wise man is X”, where X stands for a range of different roles and excellences, should, in the first place, invite us to revise the conventional notion of what X is, and give it instead its proper, normative meaning. So when the Stoics say that “only the wise man is king”, they do not mean by this, of course, that all actual kings are sages, but that only the wise man can be the ideal ruler, or the king-sage. However, this revisionist interpretation does not seem to be as helpful in case of moneymaking, for here the excellence in moneymaking is characterized in a fairly conventional way. Rather than to change our notion of what moneymaking is, this passage perhaps wants to contribute, more straightforwardly, to our notion of who the Stoic wise man is and what is he good at: his excellence is virtuosity in handling ordinary tasks.

5. The Big Picture Difference in Light of Cross-cultural Comparison

After having qualified the alleged contrast between the Stoic moralism and Zhuangzi’s anti-moralism, we can now attend to what seems to be an irreducible difference. Stoics
emphasized that the superiority of virtue is independent of the way it manages to materialize itself in the world; Zhuangzi, in contrast, did not have any concern for the possibility of failure, and emphasized instead that impeccable craft guarantees material results. In the Zhuangzi, also, we do not find any comparable interest in stochastic crafts. Most of exemplary craftsmen are involved in typically non-stochastic skills such as engraving, in which a failure to hit the target entails the failure to aim well. And when the text does mention stochastic crafts, it is quite indifferent to those features that were exploited by the Stoics. In the last part of this chapter, I will try to account for this divergence by turning to some larger characteristic features of each philosophical tradition that go beyond the specific context of Stoic and Daoist thought.

It is the distinct advantage of stochastic crafts that they accommodate the point that a failure to obtain the intended result does not necessarily imply a deficiency in one’s skill. Most other crafts do not allow for a gap between one’s performance and one’s results. If a flute player or a shoemaker, for instance, fails to achieve the expected results, it means that they have performed poorly. What matters in crafts as productive activities is primarily quality of the artefact that can be appreciated from outside, rather than a state of mind that was conducive to that result. In most crafts, therefore, we feel confident enough to tell a good from an inferior craftsman solely by comparing their products. This is not necessarily the case in the stochastic crafts, and that is why Stoics resorted to them.

This divergence might reflect broader divergences between both traditions. Thinkers in both traditions were using the imagery of stochastic (e.g. archery, sailing, medicine) and non-stochastic (e.g. building, carving, shoemaking) crafts to make points about the normative human agency. In the Greek tradition, however, the imagery of stochastic crafts had a stronger presence than in the Chinese: sailing and medicine, in particular, were widely invoked. Moreover, some thinkers in the Greek tradition explicitly took account of some peculiar features of the stochastic crafts, particularly the idea that the fact of whether the projected goal was attained or not can be dissociated from the evaluation of whether the craft was performed well or badly. So Aristotle, for instance, notes that “it is not the function of medicine to restore a patient to health, but only to promote this end as far as possible; for even those whose recovery is impossible may be properly treated.” (Rhet. 1355b) It is one thing to perform well one’s function as a doctor, and another thing to succeed in healing this or that particular patient. For there are many factors that can influence the final outcome that are beyond our control. Stoics adopted this idea and exploited it to reinforce the idea of self-containedness of rational excellence: similarly to
the good doctor, the wise man will do everything in his power to obtain things in accordance with nature, and even if he fails in obtaining them, he will always attain his goal in the sense of the impeccable performance of his craft.

In contrast, Chinese thinkers appear to have been relatively disinterested in the distinction between proper performance of one’s function and the actual outcome of this performance. Even though the stochastic crafts are recruited, their peculiar characteristics are not exploited: no idea is entertained that an archer might miss the target and yet be a good archer. The most pervasive kind of crafts imagery in early China was not that of aiming, but that of carving, or transforming the raw material into a certain form. This activity was used as an explanatory paradigm both for working on one’s own self, and for engaging oneself in the external world.

There is, of course, a plethora of possible reasons to account for the fact that stochastic crafts did not play as important role in the Chinese context as they played in the Greek and Roman thought. I will limit myself to entertaining one course of explanation which concerns predominantly held views about the material. The view that non-rational matter or material is an essentially limiting factor for the intelligent operation of reason was deeply entrenched in the Greek tradition in association with the duality of form/reason and matter in Plato and Aristotle, but we do not find it as strongly pronounced in the Chinese tradition.

For Plato and Aristotle, the material is “matter” (hulē): the ontologically inferior aspect of reality, which is put into contrast with the inherently rational forms (or Forms). Matter is often disvalued as necessary evil, as a cumbersome, opaque source of impediments. In its essential indetermination or underdetermination, matter represents the non-rational aspect of reality that should be under the governance of reason. But even if reason does a good job in structuring and controlling the material, the material always imposes limits on the power of reason. In Plato’s Timaeus, even the demiurge, who creates things by forming the formless matter, is constrained by the inherent opacity and non-yieldingness of the material. Aristotle notes that the virtuous person, similarly to a skillful shoemaker, who manages to make the best shoes possible from the leather he is given, will make the best possible life out of the given circumstances (NE I.9).

We do not find an analogous concern in the Chinese tradition. The material is never considered as an essentially limiting factor for the operation of reason. Even Mozi, who understands the normative human agency in terms of a creative construction, focuses on the problem of adequacy of models and norms that we are imposing on the material rather than
on the nature of material itself. Confucius’s dichotomy between “raw substance” (zhi 質) and “cultural patterns” (wen 文) does not carry implications of the contrast between perfect forms and imperfect matter. He promotes a balance between these two aspects but does not privilege one over the other: too much refinement is as detrimental as too little of it (Analects, 4.18). Some later thinkers such as Laozi went even further than Confucius in asserting the value of the rawness of the material. Rejecting Confucius’s ideal of the balance between nature and artifice, Laozi embraced the value of the “unhewn” (pu 樸) as that which is primordial and untainted by the human artifice (Laozi 15, 19, 28).

The concern that we do find in the Chinese tradition is with the origin and legitimacy of patterns and norms that serve as models for production. The cause of the human misfortune is never sought in the inherent deficiency of the material but in the failure of human agents to choose models that are appropriate to the given material, or in the process of their implementation. There was an agreement that the legitimacy of these patterns must be ultimately derived from Heaven but it was disputed whether it is compatible with the human capacity for artificial creation, or with what kind of human artifice, exactly. Confucius and Mozi were in an implicit agreement that Heaven gives humans norms and patterns so that they implement them into reality and make it better; but they disagreed about the nature and scope of the artificial action. Whereas Confucius thought that these patterns should be taken from the past and presently implemented in order to carve out the virtuous character as one’s second nature, Mozi argued that these norms can be taken from a quasi-scientific procedure and implemented in order to create a new and better social and political order. But not all early Chinese thinkers believed that patterns provided by Heaven call for the human artifice. A counterstatement to this view, formulated in the Laozi, was well described by Michael Puett: “Whereas the classical view held that the sage imitated Heaven by working on and domesticating the landscape, the Laozi argues that the sage imitates undifferentiated nature through stillness and lack of conscious action.” (Puett 2001: 63)

The different views about the quality and nature of the material are indicative of some big-picture divergences between thematical axes delineating the philosophical agenda in each tradition. Perhaps the most influential and overarching axis on the Greek and Roman side is defined by the dichotomy of the rational and non-rational. We can find several different instantiations of this dichotomy in Plato and Aristotle, such as reason and desire, actuality and potentiality, one and many etc. There was an agreement that the rational is the norm,
and that the non-rational should conform to the rational. This does not mean, however, that the rational was always privileged at the expense of the non-rational; rather, the idea was that only the rule of reason can establish and maintain the order that benefits everything that is subordinated to it, while the rule of the non-rational would lead to disorder and destruction of everything, including the non-rational itself.

Valorization of the rational in most Greek philosophical texts was partly motivated by an effort to provide an alternative to the tragic outlook on the human condition, and to overcome the distance that separated human beings from the gods. The appeal of rationality was to make the possibility of human happiness less dependent on the mercy of gods, less vulnerable to the vicissitudes of unpredictable fortune, and more based on the capacity of the humans to rule over themselves by exercise of intelligence. Stoic philosophy can be considered as a culmination of this project. They made the decisive step of abandoning the duality of rational and non-rational, and thus erased non-rationality from the world. Human agency can be animated exclusively by human rationality, and human rationality, at its best, is equal, indeed identical with divine rationality.

In the Chinese tradition, the source of normativity and order was Heaven. Unlike reason in the Greek and Roman tradition, Heaven was the source not only of norms and patterns, but also of the material. Since Heaven encompassed both some aspects of what Greeks attributed to the rational (normativity and order) as well as what they attributed to the non-rational (naturalness, absence of deliberation), the contrast between the rational and the non-rational as we know it from ancient Greece was not operative in the Chinese texts. Heaven provides the patterns that humans can use to pattern themselves and their society and bring it to order; but it sometimes does things that are puzzling, such as condemnation of a virtuous ruler (Mengzi). The inexplicability or apparent chanciness of operations of Heaven, however, is never evaluated as a mark of defect or disorder but rather as a mark of the limitations of human mind to understand the complexity of Heavenly workings. What was at the center of discussions was the role of (human) artifice in recognizing and implementing the norms of Heaven in the realm of human life and society.

Instead of the dichotomy of the rational and non-rational, early Chinese philosophical discourse was therefore organized along the dichotomy of nature and artifice, or Heaven and man. It is important to note that the dichotomy of rational and non-rational cannot be mapped on the dichotomy of artifice and nature, even though there are, of course, some suggestive points of similarity between artifice and rationality on one hand, and nature and
non-rationality on the other hand. They are two independent conceptual frameworks but they are not, for that reason, essentially inaccessible to each other or incommensurable with each other.
Chapter Three

Ordinary Crafts and Extraordinary Wisdom

Only the sage is a good seer, poet, orator, dialectician and critic. (Stob. 2.67.13-16=SVF 3.654)

‘Excellent’, said Lord Wenhui. ‘Listening to the words of butcher Ding, I have learned from them how to nurture life.’ (Zh 3.1)

Besides the question about the goal of wisdom, the second major question that arises from analogies between wisdom and crafts is about its scope: if the wise man is an expert, what is he expert at? In light of the analogies, we can recast this question as a question about connexion between having an expertise in first-order crafts, such as archery, butchery, or medicine, and having an expertise in wisdom as the higher-order craft of living. If wisdom is a skill of using things in general, then the first order skills will belong to those things that wisdom uses. So the wise man, besides being an expert in the extraordinary craft of wisdom, will also be, presumably, an expert in some of the ordinary first order crafts.

The question is how these two levels of excellence are related. One possibility is that their relationship is entirely arbitrary: it is irrelevant for wisdom whether one is expert in a first-order craft, or what sort of craft one is expert at. The wise man may be a good doctor, or a good shoemaker, but he may well not be expert in any of these crafts. Another possibility is that the connexion is tighter. Perhaps wisdom can put one in a better position to master some first-order crafts, or perhaps virtuosity in some first-order crafts can help us to become wise. Perhaps, even, one’s wisdom and one’s excellence in a first-order craft is one and the same disposition, so that one cannot have one without having the other.
The manner in which the analogies between wisdom and crafts are drawn in the sources suggests that Stoics and Zhuangzi will give starkly different answers to this question. In the Stoic sources, the function of analogies seems to be purely illustrative or explanatory. They explain that an archer or a flute-player is, in some particular respect, like the wise man, not that he is, by virtue of his excellence in archery or flute-playing, also a wise man. The wise man may be, incidentally, also a skilful archer or flute-player, but this does not add or subtract anything from his wisdom. Hence the connexion between first-order crafts and wisdom seems to be quite arbitrary. This picture seems to be bolstered elsewhere. To master the craft of living, one needs to undergo a training in basic areas of the Stoic philosophical curriculum, i.e. logic, physics, and ethics, and thoroughly assimilate this knowledge (e.g. Epictetus, *Dis*. 3.21). The first-order crafts are sharply distinguished from the craft of living: they have their own body of theorems and their own curriculum of apprenticeship. They are also distinguished by physical properties: unlike the excellence in the craft of living, which does not admit of more or less, so that one either is a perfect sage or is not sage at all, one can be a better or worse rhetorician or doctor (*Stob*. 2.58.5=SVF 3.95; Simplicius, *Arist. Cat*. 284.32-285.1).

In the preceding chapter, we mentioned that in maintaining that virtue is a craft, the Stoics were drawing on the Socratic legacy, and particularly on the idea that wisdom is a sort of higher-order, universal “human and political excellence” (*anthropinē kai politikē aretē*; Plato, *Ap*. 22d) or the excellence in the good use of first-order goods in the *Euthydemus*. And yet, by clearly dissociating the higher order craft of living from first-order crafts, the Stoics seem to take a step away from a tendency to valorize the expertise in first-order crafts in the Platonic corpus. In the *Apology*, Socrates notes that unlike the politicians and the poets, those who have mastered “manual crafts” (*cheirotechnai*) know many fine (*kala*) things. Their knowledge, eventually, also turns out to be insufficient, but the reason is not that it would be limited in its scope, but that it is “overshadowed” (*apokrupteî*) by their failure to acknowledge this limitedness (*Ap*. 22d). Stoics do not seem to credit craftsmen with such a knowledge, and keep their expertise sharply apart from knowledge of the wise man.

Many passages in the *Zhuangzi* imply, in contrast, that the craft of living is not an expertise *sui generis* with its own clearly defined body of knowledge and educational curriculum. On the contrary, if one is wise, in some sense, then it is thanks to one’s expertise in a first-order craft. All figures of virtuoso craftsmen present their wisdom as an extension of their expertise in an ordinary skill (*Zh.*. 3.1; 13.8; 19.3; 19.4; 19.11). The way one becomes a
sage is intimately connected with the way one becomes a master carpenter, tax collector or cicada-catcher. This position is no doubt informed by Zhuangzi’s opposition to Confucians who premised wisdom on a mastery of a well-defined body of normative knowledge contained in the classical texts. The tendency to tie wisdom to excellence in first-order crafts could even suggest that Zhuangzi programmaticaly undermined the idea of higher-order craft of living. This position seems to be reinforced by the view, very influential in recent scholarship, that the sort of excellence Zhuangzi promotes is a “knack” – a habitual disposition with a very low cognitive profile. This would disqualify it to play a role of wisdom that can be universally applied to different situations in life. What we can achieve, on this interpretation, is not happiness as a lasting achievement, but only flashes of inspired joy that are tied to virtuoso exercise of a first-order skill.

This contrast would seem to provide a compelling case for a big-picture difference between the two traditions regarding their views on knowledge. It has been argued (e.g. Raphals 1992:5, Hall and Ames 1987) that Chinese thinkers had a thoroughly practical conception of knowledge, and unlike Western thinkers, were disinterested in abstraction and pursuit of purely theoretical gnosis. Here, the indications that Zhuangzi tied his notion of wisdom to the exercise of practical skills, whereas Stoics dissociated first-order crafts from a higher-order knowledge, could be assessed so as to corroborate this view.

As in the previous chapter, my goal is to qualify this contrast. I will argue that Zhuangzi, like Stoics, allow us to differentiate between first order skills and wisdom; and that Stoics, like Zhuangzi, acknowledged that there is a non-arbitrary connexion between wisdom and excellence in first-order crafts. On the basis of these similarities, we will be able to identify some genuine differences in their understanding of the link between the two levels of expertise.

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57 The idea that the master skill is a knack was proposed, for instance, by Berkson 1996: 117; Graham 1981:7; Jochim 1998: 59. A very popular tendency of the recent interpretations has been to characterize Zhuangzi’s ideal gnosis, in reference to Gilbert Ryle’s distinction between ‘knowing how’ and ‘knowing that’, as pragmatic, non-propositional ‘knowing how’ (Berkson 1996:117; Yearley 1996:170; Ivanhoe 1993: 648). Burton Watson used another distinction, characterizing Zhuangzi’s gnosis an ‘knowing how’ rather than ‘knowing why’ (Watson 1968: 4), accentuating even more the habitual and downplaying the cognitive dimension.
1. The Craft of Living in the *Zhuangzi*: Yes, or No?

While Zhuangzi is keen about describing the gradual process of learning in case of specialized crafts and skills, he does not seem to acknowledge that there would be such an independent process of mastering a universal expertise in the craft of living. There is no specific curriculum for learning how to live well. Other philosophical schools in ancient China did have such a curriculum, and Zhuangzi challenged this idea. In a dialogue between a wheelwright and a nobleman, the wheelwright criticizes the Confucian idea that there is a canonical body of knowledge and practice that one should assimilate in the process of one’s moral cultivation. Such knowledge is essentially second-hand, and therefore less authentic than the first-hand knowledge embodied by the wheelwright:

Duke Huan was reading a book at the top of the hall, wheelwright Bian was chipping a wheel at the bottom of the hall. He put aside his mallet and chisel and went up to ask Duke Huan. ‘May I ask what my lord is reading?’ – ‘The words of a sage.’ – ‘Is the sage alive?’ – ‘He is dead.’ – ‘In that case what my lord is reading is the dregs of the men of old, isn’t it?’ – ‘What business is it of a wheelwright to criticise what I read? If you can explain yourself, well and good; if not, you die.’ – ‘Speaking for myself, I see it in terms of my work. If I chip at a wheel too slowly, the chisel slides and does not grip; if too fast, it jams and catches in the wood. Not too slow, not too fast; I feel it in the hand and respond from the mind, the mouth cannot put it into words, there is a knack in it somewhere which I cannot convey to my son and which my son cannot learn from me. This is how through my seventy years I have grown old chipping at wheels. The men of old and their untransmittable messages are dead. Then what my lord is reading is the dregs of the men of old, isn’t it?’ (*Zh*. 13.8)

One might argue that the untransmittability of authentic knowledge does not, by itself, undermine the notion of the craft of living. It is conceivable that one can learn how to “nourish one’s life” only through one’s own, long-term experience with the world. This is the reason why we value the judgment of elderly persons, and why we think that one does not become wise by reading many books but by going through a variety of life experience.

But this and several other craft passages give us a more weighty reason for why the craft of living cannot be an independent, higher-order expertise. If one has an ambition to become
expert at something, one must dedicate oneself to a single, narrowly focused activity for a long period of time or even over the entire course of life. Because the span of the human life is limited, but the knowledge one could potentially acquire is unlimited (Zh. 3.1), one should not try to become an omniscient, universal expert but rather choose one single craft or skill and use one’s lifetime to perfect it.

This point is supported by Zhuangzi’s emphasis on habitual dimension of skill, or the “knack”, that makes the normative agency easy and efficient. As it takes a long-term effort to build such habitual sensitivity in a narrowly focused skill, it is difficult to imagine how a human being could possibly acquire an equivalent knack for dealing with an almost unlimited variety of situations one can encounter in life. Some of Zhuangzi’s master craftsmen have to pay a price of a physical deformity, resulting from the impact of a long-term exercise of a single, one-sided activity on their bodies; at the same time, this deformity helps them in their skill. The question is what price one would have to pay for becoming expert in life in general.

The “limitedness of life” is not restricted to limitedness of body but also to the limitedness of mind. The following story about a cicada-catcher emphasizes how important it is to narrow and concentrate one’s mental focus:

When Confucius was traveling through the forests of Chu, he came upon a hunchback who was catching cicadas with a glue-tipped stick as if plucking them with his hand. Confucius said, “How skillful you are! Or do you have a way?” The old man said, “I have a way. For five or six months, I practiced piling one pellet on top of another. When I could make a stack of two without it toppling over, already I would lose only very few cicadas. When I could make a stack of three, I could catch nine of ten. By the time I was able to balance a stack of five, I could catch the cicadas as if plucking them with my hand. I settle my body like a twisted old stump, holding my arm still like the branch of a withered tree. Although heaven and earth are vast and the ten thousand things numerous, I am aware of nothing but cicada wings. Motionless, neither turning nor leaning, I would not trade away a single cicada wing for all of creation. How could I fail to catch them, no matter what I do?” – Confucius turned to his disciples and said, “Using his will undividedly, the spiritual in him converges and solidifies (用志不分，乃凝於神) – such would perhaps be a description of this hunchbacked gentlemen here!” (Zh. 19.2, trans. according to Ziporyn)
The focus and concentration of the catcher helps him not only to fully attend to cicadas, but also to perfect the way he “uses his mind” (yong xin 用心). Because the mind is fully concentrated on one thing, it becomes a unity, and the unified mind becomes an attractive “dwelling place” for the spirit (Zh. 4.2; 15.2). The virtuosity owes to the spiritual condition of the mind, and this spiritual condition is achieved through a long-term concentration on a tiny segment of reality. One would hardly attain such concentration and unity if one would let oneself be distracted by engagement in a multiplicity of different intellectual pursuits.

And yet there are clues that Zhuangzi was in fact committed to the idea of a higher-order craft of living. Some evidence for this view has already been set out in the first chapter of this work in the interpretation of Zhuangzi’s freedom as a skilful use of things. Let me now consider some additional evidence. Chapter Six of the Zhuangzi starts with a definition of the subject matter of wisdom: “He who knows what it is that Heaven does, and knows what it is that man does, has reached the peak.” (Zh. 6.1) This general statement is followed by a comprehensive description of the wise man and his competences, freely blending intellectual, moral, and physical excellences. This and other passages that portray the wise man as a non-craftsman reinforce the view that there is a higher-order skill of “understanding life” (dasheng 達生) and “nourishing life” (yangsheng 養生) that can be applied to different situations in life. From this perspective, the figures of virtuoso craftsmen can be read metaphorically, as explaining what the wise man is like.

Metaphorical readings of the skill passages were quite popular among traditional Chinese commentators. In line with the Chinese tradition, numerous passages in the Zhuangzi identify the sage with somebody who is fit to rule others; and the passages featuring virtuosity in ordinary crafts have therefore been interpreted as analogies for mastery in statecraft. An example is the following reading of the butcher story proposed by a Buddhist monk Deqing 德清 (1546–1632): “The cook is a metaphor for the sage, the ox is a metaphor for worldly affairs, both large affairs like ruling and small affairs like everyday business and what we see before the eyes. The skill of butchering oxen is an intelligent method of ordering the world and the state, and for dealing with the world in general.” (trans. according to Ziporyn 2009: 168)

Given the ostensibly anti-political tenor of many other parts of the Zhuangzi, this interpretation is contentious. But this does not present any substantial obstacle to the idea that there is a craft of living that human agents should seek to master, whether or not this makes them fit to rule others. What are principles and rules of this craft? On this point,
interpreters diverged widely. A Confucian philosopher Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692) argued that Zhuangzi’s craft of living is a sort of pragmatic, even immoral, art of survival. Buddhistically or Daoistically inclined scholars, such as Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (fl. 631 A.D.), were inclined to read Zhuangzi in mystical or spiritual terms as a teaching leading to spiritual transformation and enlightenment. For instance, Cheng Xuanying interprets the empty spaces in the skeleton of the cow as representing the true, “empty” (xu 虛) nature of reality, and the butcher’s knife as mind that has been liberated from attachments to the “world of dust”.

The roots of this interpretive divergence can be tracked down to complexity of the notion of “life” (sheng 生), which is what we should understand and nourish. On the one hand, Zhuangzi understands by “life” our biological life. From this perspective, the craft of nourishing life is a prudential strategy aimed at avoiding premature death or any sort of fatal misfortune. The goals of this craft of living are outlined in a prologue to the butcher passage:

The flow of my life is bound by its limits; the mind bent on knowledge, however, never is. If forced to follow something limited by no bounds, the bounded [current of life] is put to danger. And to meet this danger by enhancing knowledge even further – that merely exacerbates the danger. What it does may be “good”, but not to the point of bringing reputation. What it does may be “evil”, but not to the point of bringing punishment. It tends toward the current of the middle as its normal course. And this is what enables us to maintain our bodies (bao shen 保身), to keep the life in them whole (quan sheng 全生), to nourish those near and dear to us, and to fully live out our years. (Zh. 3.1)

This sounds like an exhortation to a down-to-earth, low profile and careful way of living. We should try not to do or to know too much because that makes us vulnerable and prone to going to extremes; instead, we should mind our own business and maintain the middle course. Only then can we minimize the risk of depleting our vital energy, both due to

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58 Such a critical view of Zhuangzi dominates Wang Fuzhi’s “Preface” to his Synthetical commentary on Zhuangzi (Zhuangzi tong 莊子通), in which he addresses the worry that his withdrawal from the public service might be compared with Zhuangzi’s.

59 吾生也有涯，而知也无涯。以有涯随无涯，殆已
struggling with external misfortunes, and due to inner exhaustion resulting from emotional entanglements. The key characteristics of this way of living is well illustrated by the skill stories: emotional sobriety and capacity for adjustment facilitate a smooth, unimpeded activity. Wang Fuzhi makes some of these parallels explicit in his commentary to the above passage:

Wherever great fame is at stake, wherever great punishment threatens, wherever great good and great evil are battling, there is great danger and great obstruction there. These are the “big bones”. But the dangers and obstructions are not really unavoidable: there is always some hollow within them. The problem is just that we inflate our feelings, talents, and knowledge into a “thickness” (hou 厚) and then try to force our way in with them.” (transl. according to Ziporyn 2009:168)

According to Wang, Zhuangzi would do anything to avoid obstacles and save his own life. This critique echoes a much earlier polemic of Confucian Mengzi against Yang Zhu 楊朱, an influential philosophical figure living in the fifth century B.C.E., famous for his claim that “if plucking out a single hair from his body would benefit the whole empire, he would not do it” (Mengzi 7A.26). It is today generally assumed that Yangist emphasis on the value of one’s body and its preservation had a significant impact on Zhuangzi, or that some parts of the Zhuangzi were written by followers of Yang Zhu.60

It has also been widely acknowledged (e.g. Lewis 2006; Mølgaard 2007) that there is a view of the human body in the Zhuangzi that is markedly different from that of Yang Zhu, and that implies that there is more to Zhuangzi’s craft of living than the pragmatic and egocentric care for one’s own life. In an introductory essay to the chapter “Understanding Life” (Da sheng 達生), Zhuangzi dissociates the notion of body from the notion of life: “How sad it is that the people of the world think that nourishing of the body is enough to preserve the life in them! In the final analysis, a nourished body is not sufficient for the preservation of this life” (Zh. 19.1) The same point is made by several other passages in the text where physically deformed persons are presented as exemplifications of sagehood: the “life” that we should nourish cannot be reduced to one’s physical integrity and well-being. One passage goes as far as to say that the wise man views losing his own limb as indifferently as a loss of a clod of earth. (Zh. 5.1) There is also a marked tendency to set up

60 Some interpreters, A.C. Graham among them, have even tried to identify the “Yangist” chapters in the Zhuangzi.
an uneasy opposition between attachment to body and preservation of one’s life: “Many gentlemen of the present age will throw away their life for the sake of their bodies (wei shen qi sheng 為身棄生), in chasing after material objects – is that not sad?” (Zh. 28.6)

Due to its dependence and attachment to external things, body is understood as something external, not belonging to our innermost self.

In light of the contrast between body and life, it has been suggested that Zhuangzi has two different notions of life: besides the biological, material life, there is a “transcendental life”, non-material life, and it is with this idea in mind when Zhuangzi talks about “nourishing life” (Mølgaard 2005). But there is little textual support for the notion of transcendental life. Rather then being some sort of eternal life, “life” is typically seen in the Zhuangzi in contrast and complementarity with “death”, and understood as a temporary composition of material elements.61 That does not mean, of course, that the regimen of nourishing one’s “life” (understood in the biological, material sense) is devoid of any spiritual or transcendental dimension. It follows from the holistic view that it is exactly by taking care of the mundane, proximate things where we should hope to work towards our spiritual transformation. In turn, such a transformation puts us in a better position to effectively take care of those mundane things around us: the principal presupposition of nourishing one’s life is that one must not cling to one’s body and life. The Zhuangzi persistently points out that one of the greatest obstacles for living up one’s natural lifespan is that one is unduly attached to external things, including one’s own body and all one considers as necessary to keep the body alive. In order to keep one’s life and body intact, one must cease to value anything except from “traveling freely in the inescapable tendencies of things” (Zh. 6.2), i.e. in a self-contained, unimpeded activity of one’s spirit.

There is thus not necessarily a tension between the pragmatic and the spiritual dimension of the craft of living: one pragmatically takes care of one’s life and body, because one believes that attending to these things is what is appropriate and natural for one to do, and helps one to live in agreement with the way things are, or with agreement with one’s spirit; at the same time, the spiritual perspective that one acquires by taking care of these things, ideally,

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61 e.g. Zh. 2.5, 5.1, 5.3, 6.1, 7.5.
reinforces the efficiency of these mundane pursuits by eliminating emotional disturbances emerging from overvaluing of one’s body and life.62

2. Zhuangzi: Virtuoso Craftsmen as Embodiments of Sagehood

The unity of pragmatic and spiritual aspect of the craft of living opens up an avenue to establish a connexion between this higher-order skill and first-order skills. For if one’s spiritual powers flourish in one’s engagement with the realm of ordinary, mundane activities, then it does not surprise that Zhuangzi uses figures of virtuosos in first-order crafts to illuminate a higher-order cognitive and spiritual breakthrough. These virtuosos achieve wisdom qua craftsmen, by virtue of their excellence in a first-order craft, and they themselves are sages, not only metaphorical illustrations of sagehood. This does not mean, however, that their wisdom cannot be applied outside the scope of their skill. Their wisdom is achieved by training in a craft, but once developed, it can be applied to various situations in one’s life.

One of Zhuangzi’s reasons for wide employment of craft imagery is to provide an account of how one becomes wise. The butcher, the engraver, the cicada-catcher all offer a narrative of their gradual advancement towards virtuosity. The training in a manual craft or skill encompasses, along with appropriating a sort of manual knack, a training of mind, or, more precisely, a training in how to “use one’s mind” (yong xin; Zh. 4.1; 7.6; 13.5; 22.5) and how to “respond to things” (ying wu 應物; Zh. 14.4; 22.5). The goal is to develop such a psychophysical hygiene that one becomes a dwelling place for the spirit (Zh. 4.2; 22.3) This realizes the potential of the mind to become at one with all existing things (Zh. 6.6; 6.7), which eliminates one’s personal biases and puts one in a position to use one’s mind “as a mirror” (ruo jing 若鏡; Zh. 7.6), “without effort” (bulao 不勞; Zh. 22.5), and respond to things “without constraints” (wuqiong 無窮; Zh. 14.4). Elsewhere, Zhuangzi describes this process as “fasting of the mind” (xinzhai 心齋), where one “listens” to other things by

62 This interpretive model, of course, is not without difficulties. Why should taking care of one’s body make one become less attached to it? Why should the fact that we do not see the genuine value in something mean that we will be able to take better care of it?
“vital energy” that runs through all of them (Zh. 4.1). The pay-off of this training in this case is that one will be able to approach and gradually reform a debauched ruler of a foreign state: “You may move freely (you 遊) in his bird cage but never be moved by fame. If he listens, then sing; if not, keep still. Have no gate, no opening, but make oneness your house and live with what cannot be avoided. Then you will be close to success” (Zh. 4.1).

Learning a craft or skill is, presumably, not the only way to build such receptivity of mind, but Zhuangzi no doubt presents it as an exemplary way. It serves well his intention to affirm a way to wisdom that would serve as an alternative to the Confucian model of self-cultivation as an assimilation of noble and normative ideas from the ancient classics. Rather than expanding our “knowledge” (zhi 知), we should purify our mind and to “forget” (wang 忘; Zh. 2.12; 5.2; 12.9.). Learning a skill or craft, in particular a manual one, can serve as a regimen of spiritual transformation in which the sustained repetition of certain movements and concentration on a limited set of tasks helps one to liberate one’s mind from the “thickness” of all emotional baggage that gets into the way of one’s interaction with things.

The extraordinary dimension of ordinary humans who excel in a craft or skill is brought out, for instance, by the phrase “the spirit solidifies” (shen ning 神凝). This phrase is used to describe the excellence of the cicada catcher: “Using his will undividedly, the spiritual in him converges and solidifies” (͜қʔʱ d ɗኑ StdString). In the first chapter of the Zhuangzi, the same phrase is used to characterize an almost otherworldly, supernatural figure of the wise man: “He said that there is a Holy Man living on faraway Gushe Mountain, with skin like ice or snow, and gentle and shy like a young girl. … By solidifying his spirit (qi shen ning 其神凝), he can protect creatures from sickness and plague and make the harvest plentiful.” (Zh. 1.4)

The idea that one can achieve wisdom by learning craft also sits remarkably well with Zhuangzi’s cosmological commitments. Dao is equally present in everything. And because Dao is the functionality of all things, the way things are, rather than a repository of information or a list of precepts, we can assume that the way to embody the way things are in general is to assimilate one of its many aspects. If one wants to taste the blood of the reality, than one can reach it by puncturing any vein. What one needs is a sharp mind, not necessarily a mind which has a comprehensive knowledge. By means of a long-term engagement with a tiny part of the world, one develops a skill that can be broadly applied.
This interpretation is in tension with the idea that the sort of knowledge Zhuangzi proposes is a knack. The major rationale for this view derives largely from the fact that expertise of virtuoso craftsmen is not purely intellectual but also involves bodily responses. The wheelwright, for instance, has a knack in his hand that he cannot transmit to anybody, not even to his son. It does not follow from this, however, that the psychological element of such expertise must be a knack, too. The knack of the wheelwright in chipping wheels, of course, cannot be transmitted to anybody as easily as a piece of information or an idea, nor does it help him in any other activity except in chipping wheels. But the psychological excellence which is exemplified by other virtuoso craftsmen does not have to be constrained in this way. This view surely presupposes at least a weak version of mind-body dualism, but a tendency to such view has been plausibly identified in the Zhuangzi (Goldin 2002; Slingerland 2013).

When considered as an excellence of mind, there appears to be no compelling reason why wisdom should be a knack, just as it is far from clear that it is knowing how rather than knowing that. It is true, certainly, that Zhuangzi’s wisdom is ultimately pragmatic in the sense that it is the knowledge of how to use things, and how to nourish one’s life. But this knowledge is based on excellence of mind that is able to understand the way things are. Think of Zhuangzi’s claim that he knows that the fish are happy (Zh. 17.13), or that he understood that death of a person of is a decomposition into original elements (Zh. 6.5; 20.2). This empathy in the first case and intellectual acuity in the second case find their equivalent in the ability of virtuoso craftsmen who are able to feel with their materials (the engraver) and rigorously scan and assess their structure (the butcher). Zhuangzi’s fondness of crafts can thus be explained not only negatively by reference to his aversion to theoretical, propositional knowledge, but also by his admiration of intelligent, receptive and rigorous responsiveness to things. This disposition is very different, indeed opposite, to a mere knack: a knack is marked by fixity, incapacity to respond in any other way than in the one which one is used to; the mirror-like mind, in contrast, is able to creatively adapt itself to specific circumstances thanks to its capacity to have an objective, undistorted understanding of things it encounters.

The emphasis on radical empirical pragmatism, exemplified by an emphasis on knack, went closely in hand with the view that the epistemological contribution of this text lies primarily in propounding a specific version of “relativism” or “skepticism”. (e.g. Kjellberg 1996; Raphals 1996; Hansen 1983) While there certainly are passages in the Zhuangzi that argue against the idea of a positive and universally valid cognition, we should appreciate that this
text also advances a positive epistemological project. A remarkable counterstatement to the emphasis on Zhuangzi’s pragmatism and skepticism has recently been offered by Huang Yong (2010) in his effort to reconstruct a distinctively Zhuangzian ethical project. Far from being an immoralist, as Zhuangzi has been all too often portrayed, Zhuangzi has, according to Yong, a peculiar moral sensitivity based on respecting distinctive preferences of other living beings. An important implication of Yong’s interpretation is that this project must be undergirded by an epistemology that is non-pragmatic (because we treat others non-instrumentally) and non-skeptical (because we can positively understand and appreciate their own perspective).

The ethical dimension of Zhuangzi’s thought reinforces, rather than blurs, his distinctive role in context of early Chinese thought. The seemingly strange strategy to use the imagery of pragmatic, instrumental activities to exemplify the disposition of mind that can treat materials, animals or persons with respect to their uniqueness, and thus display a peculiar sort of moral sensitivity, is a part of Zhuangzi’s project of rational empathy that might gesture towards a reconciliation of the sharp opposition between morality and pragmatism that informed much of the philosophical agenda of his time. What makes this empathy “rational” is the paramount role of cognition. Whereas the Confucian tradition understood human agents, in the first place, in terms of their feelings and desires, and their cultivation in terms of developing or shaping these feelings and desires, Zhuangzi shifted the focus to the importance of beliefs, convictions and insights that different people hold or lack. He saw the cause of the human folly in unreflected attachments to one-sided beliefs and doctrines that trigger inappropriate emotional responses and wear down one’s body and spirit. The remedy of this condition must then lie in liberation from these attachments facilitated by some sort of cognitive breakthrough (e.g. Zh. 17.1; 2.1) of the sort exemplified by learning crafts. We need to exercise ourselves in understanding the way different things are, rather than in crafting our own self so that it conforms to ideals of humanity. This is exactly what matters in crafts: not primarily one’s emotional dispositions but one’s grasp of principles of one’s craft and understanding of one’s material.
3. Stoics: Wisdom as the perfection of first-order crafts

Unlike the Zhuangzi, Stoics were quite explicit that there is a craft of living which is independent from individual crafts. This craft of living is wisdom (phronēsis), defined as [scientific] knowledge (epistēmē). Interpreters have recognized two different, yet interrelated, aspects that define knowledge – cognitional and dispositional (Brouwer 2014: 32-33). Both these aspects differentiate sharply wisdom from first-order crafts. The cognitional aspect of wisdom has to do with content and consistency of the beliefs that the wise man holds, whereas the dispositional aspect refers to the physical characteristic of his mind.

From the cognitive aspect, wisdom is defined as an unshakable and consistent system of cognitions (Stob. 2.73.19-4.3=SVF 3.112). This system of cognitions is specified in terms of its scope and subject matter. Similarly to Zhuangzi, they defined wisdom as knowledge of “the divine and human”, and as a triad of excellences in physics, ethics, and logic: “Physics is practised whenever we investigate the world and its contents, ethics is our engagement with human life, and logic our engagement with discourse, which they also call dialectic.” (Aëtius 1, Preface 2=LS 26A) These excellences are closely interrelated, and this interrelatedness is reflected in the Stoic idea of unity of philosophy, where logic is likened to “bones and sinews, ethics to fleshier parts, and physics to soul” (DL 7.39-40=LS 26B). No matter how exactly this interrelatedness should be construed, philosophical knowledge is characterized by a considerable degree of abstraction and comprehensiveness which seems to distinguish it sharply from first-order specialized crafts.

It has been discussed in the scholarship whether the comprehensiveness of wise man’s knowledge implies his omniscience. Most interpreters agree today that such an interpretation is untenable for several reasons. To block such interpretation, some scholars have prioritized the dispositional aspect of knowledge, and considered the cognitive aspect as derivative (Vogt 2008, Liu 2009). Several Stoic sources define wisdom as firm and

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63 DL reports three other Stoic metaphors to articulate this relationship: “They make a further comparison to an egg: logic is the outside, ethics what comes next, and physics the innermost parts; or to a fertile field: the surrounding wall corresponds to logic, its fruit to ethics, and its land or trees to physics; or to a city which is well fortified and governed according to reason.” (DL 7.40=LS 26B)
unshakeable disposition. According to Plutarch, “it itself is reason, consistent, stable, and unshakeable” (Plutarch, De virt. mor. 441 C=SVF 1.202). A definition in Stobaeus defines this disposition in physical terms: “It is also a tenor [hexis] that in the reception of impressions cannot be shaken by reason, which they say consists in tension and power” (Stob. 2.73.19-4.3). “Tenor” is a word for any stable disposition, and in this broad sense, all crafts are hexeis. But Stoics singled out, within this category, a specific sort of tenor which is sharply different from all others, namely “character” (diathesis).64 Character is more stable than tenor, and does not allow for more or less (Simplicius, On Aristotle’s Categories 237=LS 47S). This distinction sets the craft of living sharply apart from first-order crafts, or “middle techniques” (mesai technai): one can be a better of worse doctor, but one cannot be more or less wise.

And yet the Stoics tied the first-order crafts and the craft of living together in a manner which is compatible with the distinction between hexis and diathesis. While hexis is not diathesis, so that a virtuoso craftsman cannot be, just by virtue of his virtuosity, the wise man, diathesis is a sort of hexis, so that the wise man, besides being a sort of craftsman in the sense of having the craft of living, can also integrate to his stable system of cognitions, i.e. diathesis, a number of hexeis, or first-order crafts: “In tenor” are not only the virtues but also the other expertises in the virtuous man which are modified by his virtue and become unchangeable, since they become like virtues.” (Stob. 2.58,5-15=LS 60K)65. The relationship between hexis and diathesis corresponds to that between the ability to do kathēkonta and to do katorthōmata that we discussed in the previous chapter: hexis is a disposition to do appropriate acts, which can be done better or worse both but the sage and non-sage, whereas diathesis is a disposition to do perfect actions that are reserved for the sage.

In light of this parallel, it is not surprising that just as diathesis can improve one’s appropriate actions, as I argued in the previous chapter, so can the wisdom confer upon the first-order crafts an additional excellence and strength once they have been integrated into the supremely coherent structure of cognitions. Thus the Stoics argued that “the virtuous is the only soothsayer” (Stob. 2.114,16), that “only the wise are holders of public offices, judges and orators, whereas no inferior man is” (DL 7.122), or that “only the sage is a good

64 It is generally agreed (e.g. Inwood 1986; Jedan 2006; Brouwer 2014) that the Stoics used hexis in a broader sense that encompasses diathesis and in a narrower sense that is contrasted with diathesis.

65 As LS (372) point out, ‘in tenor’ is here used in the sense of ‘in character’.
seer, poet, orator, dialectician and critic; but not all these things together, because it is necessary to acquire for these things some principles. (Stob. 2.67, 13)"

The structure common to all these claim, namely that only the wise man is X, assumes a normativity of X, so that a part of this definition is a redefinition of what a good oratory or political service means (Vogt 2008). This would be similar to Zhuangzi’s figures of virtuoso craftsman who redefine our conventional notion of what a good butchery or engraving is. Zhuangzi would presumably agree with the statement that only the wise man is a good X, because only a person that has learnt how to use his mind efficiently and without effort can fare exceptionally well in ordinary pursuits. But it is not clear that Zhuangzi and Stoics would agree on what can possibly be substituted for X. While Zhuangzi’s position seems to be that X stands for any sort of skill, all the way down to highly specialized and purely instrumental skills, the Stoic position appears to be more ambiguous, and I will now discuss two possible interpretations of what X possibly stands for.

The first is that Stoic position is essentially identical with Zhuangzi’s. By mentioning specific skills like oratory or poetry, they are giving just some of typical activities in which the wise man is bound to excel, not a definite list. On this reading, they would agree with Zhuangzi that only the wise man can be a good butcher or cicada-catcher. There are two major considerations that support this reading. One is the claim that “the wise man does everything [emphasis mine] well” (Stob. 2.66=LS 61G). This does not have to mean, of course, that he is a universal expert, but only that he is bound to become a virtuoso in whatever skill for which he decides to acquire appropriate theōrēmata. The other reason is that only the wise man does everything well. Stoics do not say explicitly that only the wise man is a good doctor or carpenter but it seems to follow from the fact that all crafts are hexeis, and that all hexeis are perfected when integrated into the wise man’s mind.

On the radically dispositionalist reading presented by Liu (2009), the Stoic position could resemble even more closely that of Zhuangzi by suggesting that one could theoretically build a supremely consistent set of cognitions by mastering any craft or skill. If it is irrelevant what the wise man knows, and only matters how he knows, then he can presumably become wise by learning anything, provided that he will become insuperable in that respect. But there is nothing in the Stoic sources that would support this idea. On the contrary, Stoics proposed a relatively clearly defined educational curriculum specifically designed for one’s progression towards wisdom, which was focused on acquiring the
relevant expertise in the philosophy, i.e. physics, logic and ethics. This indicates that only knowledge of certain things can make one’s knowledge firm and infallible, and can confer these attributes on one’s expertise in other things.

If this expertise does not amount to a universal omniscience, as is agreed today by interpreters, but is somehow limited in scope, then it is possible that the limitedness of this knowledge also justifies some limitations in the list of those skills that are perfected by wisdom. So perhaps the Stoics did not want to say that only the wise man can be expert in any skill, but only in those skills that they expressly mention, such as oratory, soothsaying, and few others. What these skills have in common, presumably, and what distinguishes them from other skills such as carpentry or navigation, is that their mastery is contingent upon the mastery of physics, logic, and ethics.

One possible argument in favour of this reading is that “without such knowledge, the techniques can serve good as well as bad ends” (Jedan 2006: 67). So perhaps there is a number of skills in which one cannot be truly an expert unless one uses these skills for good ends. Medicine would be an obvious example, even though it is not on the list of crafts that are typically perfected by wisdom. What distinguishes medicine from the art of butchering would presumably be these moral considerations. Only the wise man can be a good doctor, because this skill has a moral dimension, but anybody can be a good butcher since this skill is morally indifferent.

This explanation is not without difficulties. By shifting the constraints towards the crafts that are perfected by one’s expertise in ethics, it cannot so readily cater for those crafts on the Stoic list where the moral dimension is not so obvious, such as soothsaying. Soothsaying as an excellence in understanding divine signs does not pursue any goals that could be good or evil; it is rather an art of interpretation. So perhaps we should expand, as Katja Vogt (2008: 127-129) suggested, the stock of philosophical knowledge that perfects some first-order crafts also to physics and logic: only the wise man can be a good priest or a good soothsayer because he is good at knowledge of divine matters, and only the wise man is a good dialectician because he is good at logic.

If this is the Stoic position, then it appears to be a slippery slope. Zhuangzi might well argue that even the butcher and the engraver need to be experts both in divine matters, because they can recognize the divine nature of their materials, and in human matters, because they need to have the correct view about value of indifferent things, and be able to use their mind appropriately. If wisdom is construed more broadly than a sort of moral
excellence, then it is possible that the Stoics would ultimately be willing to agree with Zhuangzi that X can stand for all sorts of skills and crafts, as long as these qualify as *technai*. We do not find any evidence in the Stoic sources between two classes of first-order skills, those that are perfected by wisdom, and those that aren’t.\(^{66}\) Maybe the specific set of skills in which only the wise man can excel is determined, after all, simply by social status of typical students of philosophy: they were more likely to become judges or orators than doctors or butchers. This might well be the reason that Stoics were not overtly concerned about relationship between wisdom and crafts such as carpentry or butchering. Zhuangzi, in contrast, expressly picked these crafts because it served well his intention to challenge the authority of political establishment of his time.

Where the Stoic view obviously differs from Zhuangzi’s is that the expertise of the wise man’s qua orator or soothsayer depends on his wisdom, not the other way round. There is a certain body of knowledge that, when mastered, puts one in a position to excel in different first-order crafts. The plausibility of this position will hinge on a justification of why firmness and irrefutability of wise man’s cognitions will be premised on appropriating that particular body of knowledge, i.e. the philosophical curriculum, rather than some other.

There is a more complex story to be told to flesh out that justification, and I will here limit myself to pointing out what could be the starting-point of that justification. This is a claim that our excellence qua doctors or orators can be only secondary to our excellence as fully developed human beings. If there is a specific rationality of medicine and rhetoric, then it derives from the rationality that defines humans as distinctive and privileged species in the universe, i.e. rational animals. This is our primary function, on which all other functions, starting from that of a son, a citizen, and so forth, are to be founded (Epictetus, *Dis.* 2.10). This view is perhaps most impressively formulated in Panaetius’ theory of four different roles (*personae*), where the first and primary role for the human beings to play derives

\(^{66}\) It should be acknowledged at this point that the Stoics did have a special category of the so-called “pursuits” or “practices” (*epitēdeumata*) encompassing a number of activities in which the wise man will typically engage, such as love of music, love of literature, or prophecy. How exactly “pursuits” play into the present discussion into hinges on a clarification of their relationship to the notion of *techné*. According to Stobaeus, a pursuit is “a method which by means of expertise or a part of expertise is conducive to the domain of virtue” (Stob. 2.67.5-12=LS 26H), which implies that some *technai* are the prerequisite for some pursuits. But this does not imply that wise man’s skills would have to be limited to a set of skills that would coincide with the corresponding pursuits.
“from the fact that we all share in reason and that status which raises us above the beasts” (Cicero, On duties 1.107=LS 66E).

Therefore, it stands to reason that there is also a body of knowledge that is naturally there for human beings to master, just as there is a body of knowledge that an orator or doctor should master. This includes knowing physics, for we need to be clear about our place and role in the universe, knowing logic, for we need to know how to use properly our distinctively human capacity for linguistic expression, and knowing ethics, for we need to know what truly counts as good and evil. It has been suggested (Brouwer 2014) that all these run together in the traditional precept “know thyself”, which the Stoics modify and appropriate for their own purposes. For to truly know ourselves as rational beings, including an understanding of our roles and functions in the universe and in the society, presumably presupposes some degree of expertise in the philosophical curriculum.

4. The Upshot: Top-down vs. Bottom-up Approach

The Stoics and Zhuangzi would agree that only the wise man can be a true expert in first-order crafts. No doctor and no butcher will achieve virtuosity in their craft unless they have also become wise. The rationale for this view is that only the wise man has acquired the disposition of mind that is the prerequisite for excellence in any pursuit. Unlike the Stoics, however, Zhuangzi argued that one can become wise also, and perhaps even only, by developing one’s expertise in a specific craft or skill. We could call this a bottom-up approach: from learning a first-order skill, we eventually build those muscles in our mind that are crucial in the craft of living. This view hinges on a purely dispositional notion of wisdom. How wise one is does not depend on what one knows, or how much one knows, but only on how firmly one knows. In contrast, the Stoics believed that the way to virtue is in learning philosophy, i.e. in a thorough assimilation of relevant knowledge of physics, logic and ethics. We can label this as a top-down approach: expertise in philosophy opens the door to a true mastery of first-order crafts. This view goes with a definition of wisdom which combines dispositional and cognitivist aspects, so that how one knows is not entirely independent from what one knows.
This contrast can be explained, at least partly, by different roles that conceptions of human nature play in Zhuangzi and in Stoicism. The rationale for a well-defined philosophical curriculum on the Stoic side derives from an explicit notion of human beings as rational animals. Stoics spelled out what sharply distinguishes human beings from all other entities in the universe, and this explicitness goes with some anthropocentrism, for Stoics argued that everything in the world was created for the sake of humans which are, together with gods, at the top of the hierarchically organized *scala naturae* (e.g. Cicero, *De deor. nat.* 2.133=LS 54N; Gellius 7.1.1-13=LS 54Q).

This clearly contrasts with Zhuangzi's agenda of de-privileging humanity as the form of existence that should have the authority to rule and instrumentalize other forms of existence. So unlike some other thinkers of his time, who based their philosophy on a robust notion of humanity, in contrast to other forms of existence, Zhuangzi has a much more implicit, and thinner, conception of the human nature. The idea that Zhuangzi urges us to “transcend one’s humanness” (Brindley 2010: 60) goes perhaps too far, and several scholars convincingly argued that Zhuangzi does think of human agents as distinct, and privileged, in some sense (Puett 2002; Mølgaard 2007). But it is unclear, at any rate, that Zhuangzi’s craft of living is, in the first place, the human craft of living. Zhuangzi is not primarily interested in what agents do or should do *qua* human beings; instead, he is interested in what one naturally does *qua* a butcher, a ruler, or a huge bird. There are, of course, passages that address explicitly the human predicament: take, for instance, the story about Zhuangzi grieving for his wife. But Zhuangzi never suggests that the role of being a human should be more fundamental than any other from the multiplicity of roles that we may play in our lives. This goes with his rejection of the view that the human mind should be the ruling element in one’s body (*Zh*. 2.3), which reflects his view that there is no hierarchy of different forms of life. It is, therefore, not surprising that one can work one’s way to wisdom by a thorough mastery of any of these roles.

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67 “Horses and oxen have four feet – this is what I mean by the Heavenly. Putting a halter on the horse’s head, piercing the ox’s nose – this is what I mean by the human. So I say: do not let what is human wipe out what is Heavenly; do not let what is purposeful wipe out what is fated; do not let [the desire for] gain lead you after fame.” (*Zh*. 17.7)

68 Perhaps the most complex, and surely the most recent, discussion of Zhuangzi’s view about humanity has been offered by Perkins (2014), who gravitates towards the more radical view.
I would like to conclude by considering whether the contrast between Zhuangzi and Stoicism in their understanding of the relationship between ordinary crafts and extraordinary wisdom feeds into the view that the Chinese thought is more pragmatist and particularist, whereas the Greek thought is relatively more theoretical-minded and abstract. The above interpretation suggests that we should be careful, in the first place, about yoking the contrast between pragmatic and theoretic with the contrast between particular and abstract. It seems that the Stoics ethics was more abstract than Zhuangzi’s in the sense that it subordinated particular roles that humans can play to a general category of humanity. On the other hand, Zhuangzi’s reservedness towards abstraction does not make him any more pragmatic-minded than the Stoics, or Stoics any more theoretic-minded than Zhuangzi. The Stoic philosophical project, as is well known, is ultimately practical; and Zhuangzi’s epistemology, as I have been trying to suggest, has place for a non-pragmatic dimension.
Part Three

The Bottom

(or the Microscopic Perspective)
Chapter Four

Ethics of Perception

He who accords with this is strong in body, unobstructed in thinking, keen of hearing and seeing.

(Zh. 22.5)

But they believe that the wise man neither mis-sees nor mishears nor, generally, makes a mistake when using any of his sense organs; for they believe that each of these depends on false assent. (Stob. Eclogae, II.5.11m = IG 102).

The idea of extraordinary virtuosity in the realm of ordinary human pursuits raises a question about what abilities, exactly, the wise man has, and what psychological faculties he employs when he exercises his virtuosity. In this chapter, I want to focus on whether this virtuosity also encompasses excellence in sense-perception. In most contexts, we would associate “wisdom” with more intellectual, abstract or higher-order cognitive capacities than sense-perception. And yet we find in the Zhuangzi two passages that attribute to the wise man a supreme quality of hearing and vision (Zh. 22.5; 26.9); and the Stoic sources give “prudent sense-perception” as an “attribute of all wise men on every occasion” (Stob. 2.5c=IG 102). So it does seem that these thinkers understood the wise man’s virtuosity not only as an excellence in higher-order deliberation, but extended it all the way down to his sense-perception. The idea that the way one perceives plays a role in one’s ability to respond to different situations with ease and precision makes good sense in
connection with virtuosity in the realm of the ordinary: given that perception is our most elementary mode of interaction with the ordinary world around is, it is not difficult to understand why the role of perception is more significant than if the true objects of wisdom were located in a more transcendent or extraordinary ontological realm.

The perceptual excellence of the wise man is made more explicit in the *Zhuangzi* than in the extant Stoic material. A possible reason for this difference is that this idea was more common in the Chinese tradition than it was in the Greek. Even though Zhuangzi shapes the idea according to his specific philosophical agenda, several other Chinese texts that originate most likely from the same time attribute to the wise man sharp perceptual responses, and this view became quite wide-spread in many later texts. On the Greek side, in contrast, this idea was absent from major philosophical texts. This contrast appears to be corroborated by some generalizing claims made in the scholarship about different approaches to sense-perception in Chinese and Western philosophical traditions. It has been argued that Chinese thinkers, unlike Greek, were more epistemologically naïve, but also less inclined to separate sense-perception from rationality and ethics.

I will argue that the Stoic material, at least, undermines general validity of this contrast, since the Stoics, too, believed, that the excellence of the wise man goes with some sort of perceptual acuity, and that this acuity is owed to his rational excellence. This fact, however, has been mostly neglected by scholars working on Stoicism, and so the major part of this chapter is going to be

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69 E.g. “Neiye” 內業 chapter from the *Guanzi*, or the *Wuxing* 五行 manuscript excavated in Guodian.


71 “In these Warring States texts, the distinction between things “as they seem to us” and things “as they are in themselves” is not a philosophical problem (Geaney 2002: 33)

72 Sterckx 2003: 72; Lewis 2006: 39: “Unlike Western philosophy, which treats the senses as suspect because unreliable in their perceptions, early Chinese texts usually treat them as dangerous in their reckless desire for sensual stimulation.”
dedicated to a detailed interpretation and reinterpretation of those Stoic sources that indicate that the wise man has better sense-perception than the non-wise. The role of the *Zhuangzi* in this undertaking is that this text puts us in a better position to appreciate, and to better understand, the Stoic position.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. I will start with a brief reconstruction of Zhuangzi’s views about sense-perception. Although the text does not provide a prima facie clear and neat account of the role of the senses in the human psychology, the secondary scholarship on the *Zhuangzi* does not have an on-going debate about sense-perception that would be comparable to sustained and focused debates about his views about knowledge or emotions. So my goal in the first part is to put on the table a preliminary, working account of perception in the *Zhuangzi*, with special regard to those ideas that will come into effect in the interpretation of the Stoic material in the remaining four parts of this chapter. In this interpretation, I will challenge the predominant view that the Stoic rationalism goes with a passive and instrumental outlook on perception. My strategy will be to establish explicit connections between different parts of the Stoic theory – such as the notions of “expert presentation” or “training of presentations” – that indicate a greater degree of integration between perceptual and deliberative excellences than is normally attributed to the Stoics.

1. Sense-perception in the *Zhuangzi*

The claim that the wise man has sharp senses, which was becoming increasingly popular in the fourth century B.C.E., is complicated in the Zhuangzi by a strong anti-sensory rhetoric suggesting that sense perception should be abandoned in favour of a non-sensory or supra-sensory spiritual intuition.\(^{73}\) For Zhuangzi, senses are epistemologically inferior because

\(^{73}\) Zh. 3.1; 5.5; 6.6; 19.14.
their cognition does not have a strong foothold in the way things are, and cannot therefore inform a truly effortless and unconstrained action. Zhuangzi asserts that the reality cannot be grasped by means of sense-perception: “As for the way things are (dao 道), it is something with identity, something to trust in, but does nothing, has no shape. It can be handed down but not taken as one’s own, can be grasped but not seen.” (Zh. 6.5; trans. according to Graham) Even worse, the underlying reason of all ethical depravations is the mistaken belief that the senses are sufficient to grasp reality, and therefore that the desires associated with them are worth pursuing: “The visible to sight is shape and colour, the audible to hearing is name and sound; how sad it is then that worldly people think shape and colour, name and sound, sufficient means to grasp the true nature (qing 情) of that!”

Like his contemporary, the Confucian Mengzi, Zhuangzi understood sense-perception as cognitively inferior due to its proclivity to be “misled by things” (6A.15). But unlike Mengzi, Zhuangzi did not think that the alternative is to be found in the thinking mind that asserts its authority as the natural leading faculty of the human agency. The mind, too, can be misled by things and in this respect it is on par with the senses:

There are five conditions under which the inborn nature is lost. One: when the five colors confuse the eye and cause the eyesight to be unclear. Two: when the five notes confuse the ear and cause the hearing to be unclear. Three: when the five odors stimulate the nose and produce weariness and congestion in the forehead. Four: when the five flavors dull the mouth, causing the sense of taste to be impaired and lifeless. Five: when likes and dislikes unsettle the mind and cause the inborn nature to become volatile and flighty. These five are all a danger to life. (Zh. 12.15)

But this passage also makes a point that seems to depart substantially from Zhuangzi’s depreciating view about the senses. The implication is that the good function of the senses is in fact integral to one’s nature, and losing it amounts to losing one’s nature and endangering one’s life. This idea is also in agreement with the above cited assertion that the sage has sharp eyes and ears. It is therefore misguided to say that Zhuangzi simply “rejects the eyes and ears and thereby rejects the knowledge they represent“ (Geaney 2002: 59). The theory of sense-perception that we find in the Zhuangzi seems to be more complex, and we need to look for an argument that would reconcile this tension.

One such argument is implied in a remarkable passage from the “Miscellaneous Chapters” of the Zhuangzi. Here, the senses are still listed alongside the mind but a superiority of the
mind is affirmed by maintaining that a poor functioning of the senses is a consequence of an impeded activity of the mind:

The eye that is penetrating (che 微) sees clearly, the ear that is penetrating hears clearly, the nose that is penetrating distinguishes odors, the mouth that is penetrating distinguishes flavors, the mind that is penetrating has understanding, and the understanding that is penetrating has virtue. In all things, the Dao does not want to be obstructed, for if there is obstruction, there is choking; if the choking does not cease, there is disorder; and disorder harms the life of all creatures. All sentient beings depend upon breath. But if they do not get their fill of breath, it is not the fault of Heaven. Heaven opens up the passages and supplies them day and night without stop. But man on the contrary blocks up the holes. The cavity of the body is a many-storied vault; the mind has its Heavenly wanderings (tianyou 天遊). But if the chambers are not large and roomy, then wife and mother-in-law will fall to quarreling. If the mind does not have its Heavenly wanderings, then the six apertures of perception will defeat each other. The great forests, the hills and mountains excel man in the fact that their daemonic power is not repressed. [In man] virtue spills over into a concern for fame, and a concern for fame spills over into a love of show. Schemes are laid in time of crisis; wisdom is born from contention; obstinacy comes from sticking to a position; government affairs are arranged for the convenience of the mob. (Zh. 26.9)

In contrast to the effortless and spontaneous order of the nature, human beings typically make themselves unable to profit from the essentially beneficient arrangement of things, since their excessive desires block the flow of their energy. But if the mind is in the state of the “Heavenly wandering”, i.e. when it is free from constraining attachments and emotions, the sense organs are unobstructed and penetrate to the way things are. This normative, supra-sensory activity of mind should not be associated with an abstract or higher-order cognition. It is not the same kind of cognition as “thinking” (si 思) that Mengzi attributed to the mind, and that might be the reason why Zhuangzi does not think that the mind should be the ruling element. The fact that the functioning of the senses depends on the mind does not entail that the mind would exert a controlling or verificatory power over the senses. The normative mind is the unobstructed channel for daemonic power, and it is by virtue of this power that the senses will not “defeat each other” and the agent will work as a well-integrated whole. The mind is a vehicle for this daemonic power rather than a power that
issues and enforces orders of its own. This is also implied by the fact that the mind is listed as one of the “six apertures of perception” – it is not a faculty of thinking or imagination but a faculty which should be open and receptive to the world as it is and instrumental to the smooth, unobstructed interchange between the agent and the reality.

Hence the normative functioning of the senses supervenes on the normative condition of the mind. This argument would explain how a non-sensory cognition can be superior to the senses, and yet the sharpness of the senses can still be a characteristic feature of the normative agent. The idea that sharp perception is achieved as a result of a transformation of the way one “uses one’s mind” is also strongly implied by some of the craft stories. The engraver “observes” (guan 觀) the nature of the wood and then he “sees” (cheng jian 成見).

Besides sight, in other craft passages Zhuangzi is particularly fond of touch or, in general, immediate physical contact with the material: the butcher does not look at the ox but “meets” (yu 遇) it with the spirit; the wheelwright “feels it in the hand”, etc. This perceptual acuity comes with a mastery in a complex psychophysical practice of inner purification and self-discipline. The engraver, for instance, describes this as the practice of fasting which should help to eliminate all unnecessary thoughts and aspirations that would interfere with his concentration and responsiveness.

The idea that that normative condition of mind necessarily improves the functioning of one’s senses implies that mind and the senses are, at least, very closely connected, if not parts of the same cognitive and acting unit. The close integration of mind with the senses seems to be implied by Zhuangzi’s description of the wise man, in whom what is perceived by the senses is comprehended internally, and the mind and awareness, in turn, are directed towards what is outside (耳目內通而外於心知; Zh. 4.2). The Stoics were quite explicit that senses are parts of the human soul, and are functionally subordinated to the ruling element of the soul, or the “mind”. It should not surprise us, therefore, if we find out that the Stoics, too, believed that an excellence in higher-order cognitive operations, attributed to the ruling part, enhances one’s perceptions. I will now turn more closely to the Stoic material to show that this was indeed their view.

74 A very similar idea is formulated at Zh. 14.5.
2. Stoics: Perception as Passivity?

Stoics have typically been known as rationalists. They argued that there is one single motivational force behind everything that human beings do: reason and its judgments. In maintaining this view, they departed from Plato and Aristotle, who believed that there are multiple sources of motivation in the human soul: non-rational desires, emotions or perceptions are powerful forces that can either cooperate with reason, or pull against it. A consequence of such rationalistic psychology is that some of those psychological powers that were conceived as relatively autonomous and active now turn derivative, instrumental or passive. Consider the case of perception. The passivity of perception is strongly implied in the Stoic “presentation” (phantasia), a central term of their psychology, which “embraces perception, abstract thought, imagination, memory, and latent concepts” (Long 1996: 104). Presentation is defined as something that the soul suffers (pathos), an “imprint” (tupōsis) in the soul caused by an external entity (DL 7.45=SVF 2.55=IG 7.45). But the passivity is not limited to the mechanics of acquiring presentations; in perceiving things, we are not exercising our agency in any sense because whether the reality imprints itself into our minds in this or that presentation is entirely undetermined by quality of our individual minds. How things appear to us is not in our power, but only our decisions whether we endorse what is presented to us or not: “For having presentations is unwilled, and it does not lie in the power of the person affected. … but assenting to this movement does lie in the power of the person receiving the presentation.” (Sextus, Adv. Math. 2.397=SVF 2.91).

Sense-perception (aisthēsis) as the activity that provides us with many presentations turns into a subordinate instrument of reason: “The soul as a whole despatches the senses like branches from the trunk-like commanding faculty, while itself like a monarch passes judgments on their reports” (Calcidius 220, SVF 2.879=LS 53G).

Most scholarship have presented the Stoic theory of perception along these lines, so that one can easily get the impression that this was the Stoic theory of perception. An anthology published this year by Springer (Silva and Yrjönsuuri 2014) titled Active Perception in the History of Philosophy has chapters on all major thinkers in the history of philosophy before Kant except the Stoics. The tendency to present the Stoic theory of perception in terms of

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75 Stoics distinguished between perceptual presentations and those that “are obtained through thought” (DL 7.50=LS 39A).
passivity has also prevailed among specialists on Stoicism.\textsuperscript{76} This outlook can be blamed for the neglect and marginalization of those elements in the Stoic thought that imply a more active notion of perception. Perhaps the most significant of these elements is the notion of “expert presentation” (phantasia technikē) or, more broadly, expert perception, which presupposes that different individuals will see things differently: “Some presentations are expert, some non-expert. For an image is viewed differently by an expert and by a non-expert.” (DL 7.51=IG 7) This idea, too, has a foothold in Stoic philosophical commitments, particularly in those that remind us that Stoic rationalism went closely in hand with a psychological holism: Stoics argued that all faculties in the leading part of the human soul are as unified as sweetness and fragrance of an apple (Iamblichus, \textit{On the soul}=SVF 2.2826=LS 53K). A corollary of this view is that presentations themselves are “thoughts” (noēseis) with propositional content (DL 7.51=SVF 2.61). The holistic outlook is also present in a report by Aëtius (4.12.1=SVF 2.836=LS 53H) that perceptions (aisthēseis) are products of the ruling part itself. This is an alternative to the account from Calcidius that presents senses as instrumental collectors of data and locates them outside the ruling part of the soul.

In the following interpretation, I will focus on the Stoic notion of expert perception. This notion provides a compelling parallel with the \textit{Zhuangzi}, where the sage-craftsman possesses a sort of perceptual excellence. Given the distinctly Stoic view that virtue is an expertise (technē), it is surprising, however, that this notion has received such a short shrift in the scholarship about Stoicism.\textsuperscript{77} Those who did discuss it have confined its relevance to epistemological context. Most of the available evidence about expert perception, indeed, can be found in this context, but I will try to show that this notion resonates with other parts of the Stoic theory, and can enhance our understanding of some aspects of their moral psychology and ethics. This interpretation will also be conducive to my broader goal. This is to suggest, first, that a less one-sided assessment of the Stoic theory of perception is in order, and, second, that active and passive aspects of perception are largely compatible. This compatibility can also be understood as a larger case for the compatibility of rationalistic and holistic commitments of the Stoic theory.

\textsuperscript{76} One recent example is an interpretation by Irene Liu (2009: 264-266), who argued that it does not matter what the wise man perceives but how he responds to it.

\textsuperscript{77} Two relatively recent studies that do discuss expert perception, albeit briefly, are Annas (1992) and Barnouw (2002).
3. Eggs and Twins: “Expert Presentation” and “Grasping Presentation”

The account of expert presentation provided by Diogenes Laërtios is regrettably terse. It says little about in what sense, exactly, the expert perceives “differently” (allōs) from a non-expert, and how far this difference goes. I will try to fill this out by bringing in other available evidence about expert perception. Most of this evidence originates from the Stoic effort to vindicate their notion of the “grasping presentation” (phantasia katalēptikē) – the cornerstone of the Stoic epistemology – against the sceptical attack. We can learn more, therefore, about characteristic features of expert presentation by clarifying its relationship with the grasping presentation.

On the one hand, it seems from several passages that expert presentation is a special kind of grasping presentation. In Stoic epistemology, grasping presentation served as the criterion of truthfulness of our cognitions. It is characteristic of the grasping presentation that it represents its object in a way that clearly and comprehensively captures all distinguishing features of that particular object in a manner that they could not arise from any other object (Sextus, Adv. Math. 7.252). To challenge the veridicality of grasping presentation, Skeptics objected that we often fail to tell apart two very similar objects, such as two eggs, because our presentations of these eggs will be entirely identical (Sextus, Adv. Math. 7.410=LS 40H). Hence our presentations will in fact fail to clearly pick all the distinguishing features of an object. In response to this argument, Stoics argued that one’s perceptions can be trained so that their discriminatory capacity is enhanced as needed:

> Just as a mother discriminated her twins as her eyes become accustomed to them, so you, too, will discriminate them, if you practise. You see how the similarity of eggs is proverbial? Nevertheless, we have heard that there were quite a few people on Delos...who used to rear a great number of hens for their living; well, when these men had inspected an egg, they could usually tell which hen had laid it. (Cicero, Ac. 2.57)

Clearly, expert presentation is introduced here as a special sort of grasping presentation, namely such that is able to preserve even the minutest differences between two almost identical objects. Both grasping presentation and expert presentation are cognitively
superior to other presentations. So in one sense the difference in perception of an expert and that of a non-expert is qualitative: the expert will see better.\(^{78}\) The superiority of expert perception is clearly affirmed in another passage from Cicero’s *Academics* which celebrates the discriminatory power of the senses:

> In my judgment, there is a great deal of truth in the senses, providing they are healthy and properly functioning and all obstacles and impediments are removed. That’s why we often want the light changed or the position of the things we’re looking at, and we reduce or increase their distance from us and alter many conditions until our vision itself provides the warrant for its own judgment. The same goes for sounds, smells, flavors. So none of us would demand keener judgment in any of the various senses. But if you add the practice and skill that allow one’s eyes to dwell on paintings or one’s ears on songs, can anyone fail to see the power of the senses? There’s so much detail painters see in shadow and relief that we don’t see! And so much detail in music escapes us that practitioners in this field pick up on: at the first notes of the flute, before we even have an inkling of it, they say that it’s *Antiopa* or *Andromacha!* (Cicero, *Ac.* 2.19-20)

In this passage, the superiority of expert perception seems to be attributed primarily to the richness of its content: experts perceive more than non-experts. But this richness is very closely linked with the clarity of experts’ perceptions: they also perceive more clearly. This clarity is implied in swiftness and confidence with which experts are able to identify and discriminate different objects (melodies, colors, eggs). In being at once rich in terms of its content and clear in terms of how this content is manifested, expert presentation is akin to grasping presentation. Grasping presentation is “clear and distinct” but this clarity cannot be separated from the fact that it provides us with a rich and comprehensive image of the thing perceived.\(^{79}\) We can think of the difference between having and lacking a grasping or expert presentation as a difference between putting on and taking off one’s glasses. When one puts the glasses on, one is able to see much more clearly and sharply, but one might

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\(^{78}\) As Annas (1992: 81) pointed out, expert perception will be superior because it will be receptive to richness of reality that a laymen misses.

\(^{79}\) “All the impressors’ peculiarities are stamped on it in a craftsmanlike way” (Sextus, *Adv. Math.* 7.251=LS 40E)
well describe this change as being able to see more richly as one now notices things that escaped one’s notice before.\textsuperscript{80}

On the other hand, there are some characteristic features of expert presentation that make it sharply different from grasping presentation. These features do not derive from the cognitive force of presentations as such, but from a yoke between a particular sort of perceptions and a particular sort of individual agents who may or may not have them. With regard to grasping presentations, the mainstream Stoic position is that (1) even defective minds (i.e. the minds of non-sages) may have normative (i.e. grasping) presentations,\textsuperscript{81} and that (2) normative minds (i.e. the minds of sages) may have defective (i.e. non-grasping) presentations. There is thus an arbitrary connection between the two sorts of minds and the two kinds of presentations.

In contrast to the grasping presentation, expert presentation clearly does not allow for (1). Somebody who has not been trained in recognition of two similar eggs will never have the sort of rich and clear perceptual input that an egg expert will have. (2) is more delicate. Thinking about the case with eggs, one would be inclined to say that just as a non-expert will not be able to tell them apart, so an expert will not be able to fail to tell them apart, and hence the expert will never have, in his field of specialization, any other presentations than expert ones. But what if his perception is impeded by external conditions? Supposing the light is so dim that even an expert cannot confidently discriminate the eggs: will his perception, for that reason, lose its expert quality? The definition of expert presentation does not say that expert will see a work of art differently \textit{if the circumstances permit}, but simply that he will see it differently, without any qualification. This reading would also accord with our intuitions about what having an “expert eye” means. Suboptimal conditions might certainly diminish, to some extent, clarity of expert’s vision, but they won’t take

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\item \textsuperscript{80} It is problematic, therefore, to maintain, as Frede (1996) did, that Stoics sharply separated the content of presentations from its form of manifestation. The distinctness of one vision, ‘how’ one perceives, is connected with its richness, i.e. ‘what’ one perceives.
\item \textsuperscript{81} But as a report from Sextus indicates, Stoics were ready to impose, to some extent, constraints on sorts of minds that are allowed to have grasping presentations. Here, non-grasping presentation is defined with regard to dispositions of individual mind that will have it: “... Non-katalepatic are those that obtain those that are not in their normal condition (\textit{kata pathos}). For there are multitudes of those who are mad or melancholic who receive a presentation which is true but not katalepatic that comes to them from outside and haphazardly (\textit{exōhen kai ek tuchēs}), and that is why they are often not firm towards such presentation and do not assent to it.” (Sextus, \textit{Adv. Math.} 7.241).
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away from the expert his receptivity, so that, as long as he can still perceive at least something, his perceptions will always be superior, to some degree at least, to those of a non-expert. So expert presentation does not have to be rich and clear absolutely, but of such a sort that it turns perfectly rich and clear in optimal conditions. What is both the necessary and sufficient criterion of expert presentation is that mind of a person who has it has a firm cognitive disposition that is characteristic of expertise. Once one becomes an expert, one cannot help from seeing things in an expert manner. While having grasping presentation can be likened to having one’s glasses on accidentally, having expert presentation would amount to having one’s glasses on permanently, without the possibility of taking them off.

This reading makes it impossible for expert presentation to be a sub-kind of grasping presentation. Many grasping presentations will be non-expert, but also many expert presentations will be non-grasping. For in all cases of suboptimal external conditions, an expert will have expert presentations which will, nevertheless, be non-grasping because they will lack the appropriate richness and clarity. So while expert presentation might have been largely instrumental to vindicating grasping presentation, it should also be acknowledged as a notion *sui generis*. To advance our understanding of this notion, let me now turn to the view that expert presentations are a result of training. If expert presentations can be acquired, unlike grasping presentations, by means of a training, what exactly is being trained in this process?

4. Expertise as a Unity of Mind and Eye

The training conducive to having expert presentations surely cannot be understood in a narrow sense of improving one’s perception in a manner that can be achieved by putting on one’s glasses. With the glasses on, one can see everything more sharply, but experts can see more sharply only things within their field of expertise. More importantly, discriminatory capacity of expert perception cannot be attributed solely to a perfect condition of one’s sense organs. One cannot expect that an eye surgery would build a capacity to perceive as richly as an expert painter. Painters and musicians clearly owe their expert eyes and ears to a complex training that builds a “systematic collection of cognitions unified by practice” (Olympiodorus, *On Plato’s Gorgias* 12.1=LS 42A), which defines what expertise is. This training does not transform one’s external senses, but one’s internal cognitive disposition. It is interesting that such transformation should also underlie very simple skills such as
discriminating between eggs and twins. But these skills, presumably, also require a corresponding psychological transformation of a limited scope.

For these reasons, it has been suggested that the training is purely intellectual: it does not improve one’s sense perceptions, but only one’s ability to evaluate and analyze these perceptions. Julia Annas argued that experts and non-experts will have identical sense perceptions, but experts will be able to extract more information from these perceptions than non-experts (Annas 1992: 83). This interpretation would appear to be bolstered by those Stoic sources that seem to distinguish sharply between “perceptions” (aisthēseis) as raw perceptual data received and transmitted by sense organs, and “presentations” (phantasiai) as propositional thoughts that we eventually glean from these perceptions. According to one such report, “perceptions are true, but some presentations are true and some are false” (Aëtius, Plac. 4.9.4=SVF 2.78). This report might be interpreted so as to back up the view that we all have true and comprehensive sense perceptions, but only experts fully understand them and manage to transform these perceptions to expert presentations. The problem of this interpretation, as pointed out by Cooper (1994), is that it establishes a superfluous duality between two different activities, that of having perceptions and that of having presentations, which sits uneasily with Stoic holistic psychology.

I suggest that a third option is available that would avoid shortcomings of the purely externalist and the purely internalist interpretation. For it is possible to argue that the cognitive transformation is closely accompanied with enhancing perceptual capacities of our sense organs. The claim that experts do perceive better than non-experts does not have to amount to a crude idea that they have a 20-20 vision. They can see better simply because they know what to look for. Owing to their skill, they will have different (and better) perceptions than non-experts. Not only their presentations, but their perceptions, too, will be superior. On this interpretation, the Stoic position would be very close to Zhuangzi’s idea that excellence of mind always brings perceptual clarity.

The statement that “perceptions are true” is compatible with this interpretation. For this does not have to be read in the sense that all perceptions are true but rather as a claim about normativity of perception (aisthēsis) in general, in contrast to presentations (phantasiai) which are not normative in this sense. Our sense organs are naturally designed so as to

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82 This is what makes the Stoic theory of perception different from the Epicurean one that did hold that “all perceptions are true”.

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provide us with rich and clear perceptions. But most people in most situations will fail to fully exploit the potential inherent in their senses, and will go by perceptions that are, in some sense, impoverished: not exactly false, perhaps, but less true (less rich and less clear) than perceptions in their normative state. Experts are those who have fully developed, in a particular field of expertise, all the potential inherent in the human perception.

It is thus both the perceptual and the intellectual capacity that is enhanced by this training. But these are just two aspects of the same process, and the process could be well described in terms of an increasing integration or alignment between thought and perception. The process of learning a skill illuminates this point well. An apprentice’s mind and eye may impede each other. The mind may hold many mistaken beliefs that interfere with the eye’s capacity to see things as they objectively present themselves, and an untrained eye will see many things that are irrelevant and hinder the ability of mind to think clearly. When he masters his skill, eventually, his eyes will be receptive to all and only those things that are relevant for the efficient exercise of his skill, and his mind will entertain all and only such thoughts that promote optimal functioning of the senses.

The idea of a close integration and efficient alignment of mind and the senses makes a good fit with the holistic commitments of the Stoic psychology. They did not compartmentalize perception into one part of the soul, and thinking to another. Sextus reports that for the Stoics “the same thing is thought (dianoia) and perception (aisthēsis), but not in the same respect; rather, in one respect it is thought while in another respect it is perception” (Sextus, Adv. Math. 7.307=SVF 2.849). Another perspective on the unity of thought and perception is provided by a definition of perception, according to which perception is (besides having also other meanings) “the breath (pneuma) that extends from the commanding-faculty to the senses” (DL 7.52=LS 40Q). In other words, perception is something which mediates between senses and the mind, and hence, to perceive better means, among other things, to achieve a better transmission and coordination between mind and the senses. From the perspective of Stoic physics, experts will have pneuma with a higher tension, and hence the alignment between their senses and their mind will be more efficient.

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83 We could say, alternatively, that a person with impoverished perceptions will perceive less, i.e. he will have less of perception. The status of a presentation qua presentation, in contrast, is not diminished by its falsity. Presentation which in not true, or grasping, is as much a presentation as a grasping one.
This interpretation puts us in a position to appreciate that the Stoics’ reference to examples with skills is more than an ad hoc maneuver to escape the skeptical attack. The point that experts will have better perceptions than non-experts now appears to have a non-arbitrary foothold in their psychology. Our perception can be improved as much as our thought, and to deny this possibility means to deny, in effect, that it is possible to master any craft or skill that involves perception. Now that we have a sufficient working understanding of expert perception in the context of Stoic psychology, I would like to consider how this idea resonates with other parts of their theory besides epistemology, particularly with moral psychology and ethics. Is there a parallel between perception of experts in specialized skills, and perception that characterizes the Stoic wise man?

5. “The Wise Man Neither Mis-sees Nor Mishears”

There are three indications that such a parallel is not, at least, altogether absurd. First, as we know from the previous chapters, Stoics defined wisdom as the “craft of living” (technē peri ton bion)\(^84\), and drew analogies between virtue and expertise in ordinary crafts and skills. This implies that the wise man, too, is an expert, and therefore has expert perceptions. Second, we have two testimonies that attribute to the wise man a freedom from misperception. One of them is a report by Stobaeus: “They believe that the wise man neither mis-sees nor mishears nor, generally, makes a mistake when using any of his sense organs” (Stob. 2.11=IG 102). We find a very similar statement in the corrupted text from Papyrus Herculaneum (SVF 2.131, frgmt. IIn), which adds that the eyes of those who misperceive, (i.e. of the non-wise) “acquire false presentations” (kata tēn opsin lambanonta phantasiai pseudē). Third, the notion of “training of presentations”, which appears particularly in Epictetus, implies that the wise man is somebody who has his presentations trained and perceives things in a superior manner. In the following, I will try to assess the meaning and relevance of the second and third piece of evidence in light of expert perception. Before that, however, let me clear the way for drawing such a parallel by

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\(^{84}\) Sextus, Adv. Math. 11.170 = SVF 3.598; Epictetus, Dis. 1.15.2.
spelling out some constraints on what the craft of living can possibly mean, and by
anticipating some objections.\textsuperscript{85}

To attribute to the wise man expertise in the craft of living does not amount to attributing to
him an expertise in all individual crafts and skills that might be useful in one’s life. It is true
that the wise man “does everything well” (\textit{pant’eu poiein}) but this is qualified:

…that is to say, everything that he does: for as we say that the flute-player or the
lyre player does everything well, with the implications ‘everything to do with flute-
playing’ and ‘everything to do with lyre-playing’, so the wise man does everything
well, so far as concerns what he does, and not of course also what he does not do.
(\textit{Stob.} 2.66=LS 61G)

This could mean (Vogt 2008: 126) that whatever the wise man decides to do, he will do it
well as judged from perspective of that particular skill. The wise man does not have to be
an accomplished flute player; but if he does decide to play flute, or to do anything else
whatsoever, he will perform it impeccably. But it could also mean, and we will be better off
following this reading,\textsuperscript{86} that the wise man excels only in his specialty, in the craft of
living, just as a flute player excels in flute-playing. All that he does qua wise man has to do
with applying his “expertise concerned with the whole of life”, or the “knowledge of what
is good, evil and neither” (Sextus, \textit{Adv. Math.} 11.170=SVF 3.598). Qua an expert in the
craft of living, he “does not do” things in which he does not apply this expertise, or, more
precisely, he does not do them in the capacity of being the wise man. Even though he may
play the flute more clumsily than an accomplished flute player (if he is incidentally not,
besides being a sage, an accomplished flute player), he will still play it masterfully if we
assess this performance with respect to how it employs, in playing the flute, his “knowledge
of what is good, evil, and neither”. In contrast, a virtuoso flute player may perform poorly
from the perspective of the craft of living even though his performance is technically
impeccable.

\textsuperscript{85} A recent comprehensive discussion of the Stoic “craft of living” is Sellars (2009). In the following, I will
limit myself on those implications of this idea that are immediately pertinent to the issue of perceptual excel-
ence of the sage.

\textsuperscript{86} The problematic consequence of the latter interpretation is that it would render all accomplished practitio-
ners of skills that are not sages inferior. A flute player, for instance, would never be a virtuoso unless he
would also be a wise man.
But what is the criterion of a good performance considered from the perspective of the craft of living? Another report using the imagery of flute playing helps to fill this out: “similarly to how the [art of] flute-playing is able to use well all melodies that it is given, the virtue, too, can [make a good use] of all situations” (Alexander, De anima mant. 20.33-34=SVF 3.204-205). These “situations” are what Stoics called “indifferent things” (adiaphora): they can be more or less welcome, or preferred, but they are ultimately indifferent for our happiness, because that happiness depends exclusively on how we use them. Wisdom is the capacity to use indifferent things, which are therefore the “material of virtue”, in the manner, as one report suggests, that “produces” one’s eudaimonia.

At the same time, while eudaimonia can be understood as a product of wisdom, the Stoic maintained that happiness lies exactly in being wise and doing wise things. This brings us to one important characteristic of the craft of living in which it differs from specialized skills. Unlike ordinary skills, which measure their success by attaining an external goal (medicine: to save a life) or by delivering a product (shoemaking: to make a shoe), wisdom is a self-contained activity that achieves its goal in itself. This peculiar feature of wisdom has been linked with another difference between wisdom and ordinary crafts pertaining to a type of cognitive disposition that characterizes them: while virtue is a diathesis, a firm disposition that does not allow for different degrees, ordinary crafts are hexeis, which allow for more or less: one can be a better or worse doctor, but one cannot be more or less wise; either one is wise, or not (Stob. 2.5=SVF 3.95).

These peculiar features of wisdom do not necessarily undermine similarities between wisdom and ordinary skills. Wisdom is a diathesis, and is self-contained, in addition to the fact that it is also a hexis which has its pursuits in the world outside, and has its own product, which is happiness. Similarly to all other crafts, it is a “systematic collection of cognitions unified by practice for some goal advantageous in life ”, with it own field of

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87 For the idea of virtue as using of indifferent things, see also, e.g., Marcus, Med. 7.61; a recent comprehensive discussion of this theme is provided Bénatouil 2007.

88 Alexander Aph., De anima 162.23=SVF 3.66

89 For this reason, Stoics maintained that is analogical to “performative” (Sellars) rather than “productive” skills: “And we do not think that wisdom is like navigation or medicine, but rather like the craft of acting or dancing… thus its goal, i.e. the [proper] execution of the craft depends on itself and is not sought outside itself.” (Cicero, De fin. 3.24=IG 103)

90 I rely here on Inwood (1986:548), who follows an older interpretation by Rieth (1933).
expertise and its own methods. Not everything that is said about wisdom can also be said about ordinary skills, but all that we can say about ordinary skills also applies to wisdom. It is reasonable to expect, therefore, that expert perception that characterizes ordinary skills will also be characteristic for the craft of living.

A weightier objection against the parallel between perception of experts in ordinary crafts and perceptual excellence of the wise man is that expert presentations seem to be limited to perceptual presentations, such as seeing twins or eggs, but the craft of living deals also, and perhaps predominantly, with non-perceptual presentations, such as abstract thoughts or feelings that are generated by the mind itself. Hence the scope of expert perception within the field of the craft of living is fairly limited. This objection touches upon a number of complexities in the Stoic theory, which makes it impossible for us to deal with it conclusively here. Let me therefore limit the response to this objection to three brief points. First, it is not entirely evident that expert presentations are limited to perceptual presentations, just as it is not clear, and is discussed in the scholarship, whether grasping presentations are limited to perceptual presentations. Second, given the propositional character of presentations, perceptual presentations can have a considerable complexity that exceeds simple perceptions of twins and eggs. Third, even if we acknowledged that the sage will also have non-perceptual, and therefore non-expert presentations, this does not undermine the fact that he will still have, also, perceptual, expert presentation, and with regard to these, he will perceive as an expert.

Having addressed some potential limitations of this parallel, we can now consider more closely what could the wise man’s freedom from misperception be. According to Stobaeus, Stoics maintained that “the wise man neither mis-sees nor mishears (oude paroran oude parakouein ton sophon)...for they believed that each of these depends on false assent (toutōn hekoston echesthai nomizousi tōnde pseudōn sunkatatheseōn)“. Apart from being in an agreement that wise man’s freedom from misperception does not mean that he has a 20-20 vision or X-ray eyes (Annas 1980: 93, Gourinat 1996: 49), scholars have had little to say about these lines. As in the case of expert perception in ordinary skills, we will be able to stay clear of the purely intellectual and purely externalist interpretation.

Our assessment of the sage’s freedom from misperception hinges on a clarification of how assent determines the quality of perception, and what false assent is. As to the first question, the close link between perception (aisthēsis) and assent (sunkatathesis) is well attested elsewhere: “The Stoics did not make perception consist in presentation alone but
made its substance depend on assent; for perception is an assent to a perceptual presentation, the assent being voluntary.” (Porphyry apud Stob.1.49.25=IG 8)91 This implies that quality of assent determines quality of perception, since assent is, in some sense, a crucial constitutive element of perception.

As to what “false assent” means, I suggest that we can understand it in a broader sense of deficient assent. Deficiency of assent is typically described in sources in terms of both its “falsity” and “weakness”, with some tendency in the sources to tie these two attributes closely with each other.92 In most contexts, however, falsity and weakness each seem to pick a different aspect of assent in which it can be deficient. I will now consider these aspects separately, since they will help us to identify two different aspects of perceptual inerrancy of the wise man.

In one sense, falsity of assent derives from falsity of presentation: an assent is false when it is given to a false, non-grasping presentation. In this sense, excellence in perception is defined negatively by saying what the wise man does not do, and misperception positively by saying what the base man does. The wise man is “non-precipitant” (aproptōtēs), knowing when to suspend his assent, and “uncareless” (amataiotēs), since his reason has the power not to give in to non-veridical appearances (DL 7.46=LS 31B).93 In contrast, the base man misperceives because he gives his assent to non-grasping presentations: “we [base] are led by our weakness to assent to such presentations” (Plutarch, Stoic rep. 1057B). We could say that while the wise man is careful, and always sees only what is there to see, the base man is precipitant and routinely sees things that are in fact there not to see.

In another sense, assent is false because it is deficient in terms of its firmness and strength. This deficiency does not owe primarily to deficiency of a presentation the assent is given to

91 “Perception itself is assent” (Cicero, Acad. 2.108) and “all perception is assent and grasp” (Aëtius, Plac. 4.8.12) seem to be versions of the same view.
92 Doxan einai … τῶν ασθενῆ καὶ πευδὲς εῖναι συνκαταθεσία (Sextus, Adv. Math. 7.151=SVF 1.67); opinio… quae esset imbecilla et cum falso incognitoque communis (Cicero, Acad. 1.41); “… pseudēs sunkathēsis kai propetēs kai asthenēs (Galen, De animi pecc. 1.5.58=SVF 3.172) The same thing is implied by a definition of “opinion” in Stobaeus: “For there are two kinds of opinions: one is assent to something which is not gras-pable; the other is weak belief.” (Stob. 2.5)
93 The non-precipitant person “has the power to resist amidst of presentations” (ischein en tais phantasiais), Papyrus Herculaneum, Papyrus 1020, Col. IVn=SVF 2.131.
but to a cognitive disposition of the mind itself. While the wise man’s assent will always be “firm” and “stable” (Cicero, Acad. 1.42=SVF 2.53), the base man’s assent will always be “weak” (asthenē), no matter whether it is given to grasping or non-grasping presentations. All sages are “ignorant”, and ignorance (agnoia) is a “changeable and weak assent” (Stob. 2.11=IG 102). The inherent weakness of non-sage’s assents is the cause of their “distrustfulness” (apistia): “the base man neither knows nor trusts in anything” (mēte epistasthai mēte pisteuein). In contrast, the wise man, and only the wise man, has trust (pistis). In comparison with non-precipitancy and carefulness, trust as the distinctive feature of the wise man’s psychology has received little attention. One of the possible reasons for this neglect might be that some of the claims surrounding this notion sit uneasily with the prevailing view that Stoics were committed to the passive theory of perception:

Nor does anything escape his notice (lanthanein), for to fail to notice is to have a belief which asserts a false thing (lēthē gar einai psedous hupolēpsin apophantikēn pragmatos). Following on these traits, he is not distrustful, for distrust is a belief in a falsehood (apistian einai pseudous hupolēpsin); and trust is a virtuous thing, for it is a strong grasp which secures what is believed. (Stob. 2.11=IG 102)

We could account for the wise man’s exclusive capacity for trust even on the passive understanding of perception: the “strong grasp” would be owed to a careful scrutiny of a presentation that comes arbitrarily from outside, giving rise to a firm assent in case this presentation is deemed to provide a reliable grasp. But here the claim seems to be that the wise man’s trust depends on a positive perceptual input (“nothing escapes his notice”) that base men lack. It is one thing to be able to dismiss deficient presentations, and another one to have such perceptions that one can trust. A skillful egg picker won’t assent to his presentations unless they are clear and distinct; but besides this ability, he will also need to have discriminating perceptions of the sort that a non-expert lacks, namely those that will put him in a position to tell the eggs apart in optimal external conditions. His confidence in doing so, similarly to trust of the wise man, will depend on his ability to see all that there is to see.

94 Besides meaning the deficient assent simpliciter, “weak assent” also has a more specific meaning of tentative or provisional assent (Galen, De an. Pecc. 1.5.58=SVF 3.172). This specific kind of assent, even though reserved for those who make progress, will belong to the broad category of weak, deficient assent that characterizes assents of all non-sages. Cf. Görler 1977.
The non-arbitrary link between strength of one’s assents and richness of one’s presentations is corroborated by a seemingly odd statement that “distrust is a belief in falsehood”. Why should a disability to trust in something amount to a commitment to a falsehood? This claim will make better sense if we acknowledge that strength or weakness of one’s mind (i.e. one’s capacity to give strong or only weak assents) can be a factor that has impact on what presentations one will be able to have. Only sages are (always) trustful, and all other people are (always) distrustful. Distrust is therefore the hallmark of weak minds. This implication seems to be in agreement with the idea from the Papyrus Herculaneum that eyes of the base men will typically acquire false presentations.

We have thus identified two different aspects of wise man’s excellence in perception, depending on two aspects of falsity of assent: in one sense, the wise man never misperceives because he never assents to a non-grasping presentation; in another sense, he never misperceives because he never misses anything which is relevant. Similarly to falsity and weakness of deficient assent, these two aspects of misperception seem to be two aspects of one and the same ability, for only sages are free from either of these aspects of misperception and they are necessarily free from both of them. This interconnectedness of two aspects of excellence in perception will help us with an interpretation of the notion of “training of presentations”, yet another indication of active perception, to which I shall now turn.

6. “Training of Presentations”

The phrase “training of presentations” appears at least three times in the Stoic sources: once in Diogenes (DL 7.48), and twice in Epictetus’s Discourses. In all these cases, the straightforward reading of this phrase is that it is presentations themselves that are trained and transformed. There are other passages that corroborate this reading. Encouraging us to resist non-grasping presentations, Epictetus suggests that we “introduce and set over against it some fair and noble presentation, and throw out this filthy one.” (Dis. 2.18.25); Marcus Aurelius urges us to “get rid of unnecessary presentations” (Med. 4.24). And yet some translators preferred to render this phrase in the sense that it is not presentations, but how

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95 Epictetus, Dis. 4.4; 3.12.
The obvious advantage of this rendering is that it makes the phrase easily compatible with the idea, amply attested in the sources, that it is of paramount importance how we use our presentations (e.g. *Dis.* 1.1), and whether we have the power to overcome and fight the suggestiveness of non-grasping presentations (e.g. *Dis.* 2.18.20-25)

We can retain the straightforward rendering of the “training of presentations”, in the sense of “having one’s presentations trained” and yet understand it as fully compatible with the idea that we are fighting against presentations. For they correspond to the negative and positive aspect of perceptual excellence as we have just identified it: in the negative sense, the wise man is well trained against presentations, i.e. he can resist, and ultimately dismiss, all non-grasping presentations; in the positive sense, he has presentations that an untrained person lacks.

But how should we understand the idea of having one’s presentations trained in the sense of the positive aspect of one’s excellence in perception? Several interpretations of this idea in the scholarship collect around the view that the goal of training of presentation is to empower the subject vis-à-vis external reality. Long argued that this empowerment lies in maximazing one’s potential for exercising our free will. Referring to the following passage, he suggests that this freedom has a “transcendental” (Long 1996:285) foundation in the sense that it is up to us to choose how we perceive the external reality:

> You say, ‘I don’t like leisure, it is solitude.’; ‘I don’t like a crowd, it is confusion.’ Instead of talking like this, if circumstances bring you to a state of spending time alone or with just a few, call it peace and use the situation in the right way. Talk to yourself, train your presentations, work at your preconceptions. But if you fall in with a crowd, call it games, a festival, a holiday, try to celebrate with people. (Epictetus, *Dis.* 4.4.26)

A version of transcendentalizing interpretation was also proposed by Voelke (1973: 40), who, referring to a statement from Marcus Aurelius that “the wise man makes it so that

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96 IG: “…those who are not well exercised in handling presentations turn to unruliness and aimlessness.” (IG 7.48). or Görler (1977:12): “phantasiai nich fest in der Hand haben”. LS, in contrast, prefer the straighforward version: “so people who do not have their impressions trained…” (LS 31B)
everything appears to him as he wishes” (Med. 4.8), emphasized the role of perceiving “subject” that has the power to determine the sort of presentations one will have.97

But there is some evidence that seems to clash with this interpretation of training of presentations. Consider the imperative that we should “add” nothing to our perceptions reality, i.e. that we should eliminate the tendency of the perceiving subject to distort our objective perception of things by an unwarranted importation of our subjective evaluations: “Do not to yourself add to the reports of your immediate sense impressions. You are told that so and so speaks ill of you. That is the report, but the report is not that you have been injured.” (Marcus, Med. 8.49)98 Instead of valorizing transcendentalism, there are passages that promote a radical realism, urging us to perceive things in an entirely disengaged, quasi-scientific manner:

How useful, when roasted meats and other things are before you, to see them in your mind as here the dead body of a fish, there the dead body of a bird or a pig. Or think... of sexual intercourse as internal rubbing accompanied by a spasmodic ejection of mucus. What useful perceptual images these are! They go to the heart of things and pierce right through them, so that you see things for what they are. (Med. 6.13)

So is the transcendentalizing interpretation ultimately misguided? And if it is, what to do with the evidence that seems to support it? To answer these questions, we can think about training of presentations in light of training in ordinary crafts and skills. Think about a master carpenter’s perception of his material. His perception is transcendentalist in the sense that it is filtered by the specific agenda of his craft: he will always see a piece of wood in terms of its suitability to be made into this or that product, and it will be impossible for him to detach himself from that perspective. The power of the subject to “make the reality appear to him as he wishes” will be present also in a different sense which is characteristic for the virtuosity of an expert. It is a mark of true virtuosos that they can see right away a number of facts about their materials that an apprentice would laboriously have to work out. Their assessment is so swift and yet infallible because they have an exceptionally good alignment between thinking and perception: they think already

97 A different interpretation of empowering the subject by means of training of presentations was proposed by Bartsch, who argued that it is a training “in the art of non-responsiveness” (2007:95).
98 See also Epictetus, Dis. 3.17.8; Seneca, Ep. 78.13; Marcus, Med. 5.26. 7.64.
on the level of their perceptions. It is worth noting that having one’s presentations trained in this sense does not amount to being free to choose among different possibilities. Rather, the perceptual excellence of an expert depends on being condemned, so to speak, to having only the accurate and comprehensive perceptions of materials at hand. He is free from choice, rather than being free to choose.

And yet these transcendentalist elements of carpenter’s perception do not make his perception less objective or realistic. Everything that he perceives are existing attributes of things, which are, nevertheless, inaccessible to those who do not have their perceptions trained. After all, if his perceptions would be merely imaginary, he would not have the ability to manufacture a real product. The objectivity of carpenter’s vision is very different, of course, from the objectivity of camera that records indiscriminately everything that is put in front of it. The expert will be sensitive to some aspects of things, and insensitive to others.

The wise man’s perception has a similar combination of transcendentalist and realist elements. Just as the carpenter will see his material in its carpentry-related relevance, so the wise man will see situations in life in their craft-of-living-related relevance, i.e. as indifferent things that are material for wisdom. To return to the passage from Epictetus, he will see being in a crowd as a welcomed opportunity for celebration, and solitude as a welcomed opportunity for introspection. Moreover, unlike an apprentice in wisdom, he will immediately have the right perceptions, i.e. he won’t have to decide which perception of the situation at hand is more accurate, and to force himself to see it that way. Freedom of wise man is similar to freedom of craftsman to the extent that it is not freedom of an indeterminate choice among possibilities, but rather freedom to see and choose right away the right option.\(^9\) This acuity can be linked with “quick-wittedness”, as one of the many

\(^9\) This interpretation of the Stoic freedom has been in circulation in the scholarship. “What can the sage’s freedom be? It cannot be an indeterminacy in his response to stimuli from the environment, such as one may be able to find in the deliberation which is so important to Alexander and to Aristotle. One may at best pause to evaluate the stimulus to action by comparing it to the standard of Right Reason before giving or refusing assent. If a man knows what Right Reason prescribes in a particular situation, he will not be in doubt about what to do.” (Inwood 1985: 111). “The wise man will not be tempted by wrong alternatives” (Bobzien 1998:335)
virtues of the Stoic wise man, which is defined “a condition which instantly finds out what
the appropriate action is“ (DL 7.93=IG 101).100

As in carpentry, the existence of some constraints on how the reality appears to the wise
man does not make his perception less realistic. It is objectively the case that to find oneself
in a crowd of people is not an evil; it is an indifferent thing which can be used wisely or
not, and to interpret this situation in a manner which is conducive to one’s happiness means
to interpret it more accurately and realistically. If there is a difference between the wise
man and specialists in ordinary crafts, it is perhaps that the compatibility between seeing
things as they are and seeing them as one wants them to see has an even more powerful
justification. While the wise man considers different situations in his life as a material for
his rational deliberation, all that happens to him is more than just a raw material: “...When
we say that these happenings ‘fit’ us, we are talking like builders when they say that
squared blocks ‘fit’ in walls and pyramids, because they join up with each other in a
particular structured arrangement.“ (Marcus, Med. 5.8) In other words, things happen to us
in structured “squares”, not in haphazard and irregular shapes. According to the Stoics, the
world itself is providentially arranged, so that everything that happens is particularly
amenable to being used in a constructive way. This providential arrangement goes in hand
with the idea that reality is structured in a craftsmanlike way, i.e. that it is a “work of art”.
This term brings us back to the definition of expert perception: similarly to specialized
craftsmen, who have their specific “works of art” that they see differently from non-
experts, the wise man will have expert perception of a work of art that is pertinent to his
craft of living: things as they happen to him in his life.

The idea that things as they happen to us, as well all other things and events, are woven into
an intelligent work of art reminds us of Zhuangzi’s butcher story: we are like butchers, and
the world around us is a perfect cow with its “Heavenly patterns”. In this chapter, I have
been trying to show how this idea undergirds ideas about perceptual excellence of the wise
man in Stoicism and Zhuangzi’s Daoism, and to read the Stoic material from the
perspective of some ideas from the Zhuangzi. It has been shown that expert perception is
not an isolated and marginal epistemological notion but that it makes a good fit with some
others, and mostly neglected, ideas in other parts of the Stoic theory, such as training of
presentations, trust, or perceptual excellence of the wise man, and can therefore also

100 see also DL 7.48; Stob. Ecl. 2.5, 2.11.
positively contribute to our understanding of these ideas. Considered together, these ideas form a pattern indicating that the Stoics did not one-sidedly conceive perception in terms of impassivity. The view that intellectual excellence of the wise man will extend itself to the level of his perceptions suits well their holistic psychology. I have also suggested that this pattern is largely compatible with rationalist commitments, particularly with the centrality of assent. The fact that the wise man will have superior presentations does not mean, as has been suggested (Barnouw 2002:197), that the assent “is absorbed” into presentation. For even the wise man will still routinely have presentations that he will not assent to.
Chapter Five

Emotions that Do Not Move

None of those things which rouse the mind fortuitously should be called emotions; the mind suffers them, so to speak, rather than causes them. … For if anyone thinks that pallor, floods of tears, sexual arousal, heavy breathing or a sudden brightening of the eyes and the like, are evidence of passions, he is mistaken and fails to realize that these are bodily drives.” (Seneca, *On Anger* 2.3.1-2.4=LS 65X)

When sadness and joy come, I cannot prevent their approach; when they go, I cannot retain them. (Zh. 22.11)

One of the upshots of the preceding chapter was that perception is closely integrated with more complex cognitive and evaluative faculties; the way we perceive or misperceive things reflects not only the condition of our sense organs, but also tells something about how we think and what we value. The evaluative component of perception links perception also with our feelings, for the way we respond affectively to things around us, according to Zhuangzi and the Stoics, also reflects what we value and disvalue. Hence one reason why the wise man will be free from some sorts of desires and passions is that he simply will not even have those perceptions of things that elicit these passions, or will perceive them in a manner that does not elicit them.

We would thus expect that if the wise man has excellence in perception, he will also have some sort of excellence in feeling. Similarly to the excellence in perception, the excellence in feeling will be an ability to respond to things adequately and truthfully, but the difference from perception is that we attribute a strong value judgment to what we respond to: it is something which is good or bad, something worth pursuing or worth avoiding. This chapter will try to elucidate what such an excellence in feeling could possibly amount to given the
notoriously critical outlook on emotions in both Stoicism and the Zhuangzi, and their idea that the wise man is without emotions.

One suggestion for how to save the wise man from the total absence of feelings was proposed by the famous Chinese scholar Qian Zhongshu 錢鐘書 (1910–1998). In his paper “The Sage Does Not Experience Emotions”, he attributes to Daoists a peculiar view that the wise man does feel emotions but is never moved by them. To reinforce this interpretation, he draws a parallel with Stoicism:

To have grief and joy but not to allow the emotions to become excessive, this is the Confucian teaching. To have grief and joy but not to be really moved by them, this is the Daoist doctrine. … To respond to things and accord with events so that grief and joy do not enter in, to suffer convulsions to the body but have no injury to the mind, these are the ideas that ancient Western philosophers also earnestly propounded. As the Stoic master [Epictetus] said, “I do not mean that you may not groan, but do not groan in spirit.” And again, “If someone loses a son, you may offer your condolences, and you may join in with the family’s cries of wailing, but take heed that you do not also groan in your inner being.” (Qian 1998: 390)

These lines open up a promising perspective on the Stoic and Daoist view about emotions in the larger framework of negotiation between ordinariness and extraordinariness of the wise man. The ordinariness is asserted by the claim that even the wise man will generate, at least on the face of it, emotional responses that one would expect from every human being; so he will, for instance, cry for the deceased when appropriate and to the appropriate degree. The extraordinariness is affirmed by attributing to the sage an invulnerability in regards to these emotions, so that even though he experiences them, they will never shatter the deeply seated equanimity of his mind. Qian’s idea of “emotions that do not move” can be understood as an interpretive suggestion for how to reconcile the tension between ordinariness and extraordinariness of the normative agency with regard to its emotional dimension.

However, in the crude form that Qian formulates this idea, it is also quite puzzling. The very notion of the emotions that do not move is paradoxical: Is having emotion something else than being moved by this emotion? This view, at least, runs counter to the etymological origin of the English word emotion, which is the Latin verb movere, to move. How can one feel emotion and not be moved by it? Can one, in the similar fashion, have sleep and not sleep it, or eat food and not be filled by it? More importantly, this idea seems
to collide with the holistic psychology, to which both Stoics and Zhuangzi subscribed, and particularly with the view that emotions are judgments. Whenever the mind feels emotion, it must be moved by it, because the emotion is a state of the entire mind. There is no independent faculty of thinking that could remain detached from the emotions, and untouched by their impact.

It is for this reason, perhaps, that Qian develops the idea in a slightly different direction, locating the dichotomy between the presence and absence of emotions not in the mind, but between mind and body, or between what is internal and what is external. The tension between presence and absence of emotions, between ordinariness and extraordinariness of the sage is resolved by means of a dichotomy between the internal and the external: outwardly, the sage is quite ordinary, but inwardly, he is extraordinarily still and calm. In this account, Qian is at least right that the distinction between body and mind occasionally served as a device, for both Stoics and Zhuangzi, to defend the ideal of equanimity of the wise man. But the quotations from the Stoics that he provides raise a worry that while the distinction between internal and external accommodates the tension between the presence and absence of emotions, it externalizes emotions to a degree in which it fails to do justice to what we normally understand by emotions. In the first case (‘groan in your body, not in your spirit’), emotions are relegated to mere bodily movements (pleasures and pains); in the second case, it turns them into an artificially induced external posture: we cry together with others, but the grief does not move us because we are not sincerely committed to it.

And yet, in spite of these worries, I will argue that the idea of emotions that do not move could be qualified and developed in a way that does justice to the Zhuangzian and Stoic theory, both in what they have in common and where they differ. This interpretation can be accomplished, moreover, without having to establish a dualism within the mind or between the mind and the body. The essential prerequisite of such an interpretation is to explain what are these peculiar emotions that do not move and why exactly they do not move: is it because they themselves are inherently of such a sort as not to move the mind of the person who experiences them, or is it because the mind itself has a sort of vigilance and resiliance that prevents these emotions to get hold of it? Zhuangzi and Stoics will give different answers to this question, and this difference will be interpreted as a mark of two different conceptualizations of the human agency that reflect broader philosophical agenda of each tradition.
Similarly to the preceding chapter, I will use one theory as a backdrop for interpretation of the other. There is a striking lack of consensus among scholars working on the *Zhuangzi* about what position this text adopts with regard to the emotional life of the wise man. This divergence owes, most likely, to a significant heterogeneity in the available textual evidence. In spite of this heterogeneity, I will try to show that we can arrive at a coherent interpretation of the text if we let our interpretation of the *Zhuangzi* be guided, up to a point, by a Stoic distinction between different types of emotional responses.

1. The Overview of Evidence and Scholarly Debates

On both sides, scholars have been trying to reconstruct how the radical claim that the wise man is without emotions was advanced as the alternative to those influential philosophical theories of the time that considered emotions as important motivating forces of the virtuous agency. In the Chinese context, these theories were represented mainly by the Confucian thinkers, and their program of refining or developing the natural emotional drives. In the Greek and Roman context, there is a strong tradition emerging from Plato and Aristotle of regarding well educated emotional responses as a crucial component of virtue. In both cases, there is a degree of disagreement among scholars about how much the Stoic and Zhuangzian theory really differ from that of the Peripatetic or Confucian, or how far these thinkers went in granting concessions to their opponents, i.e. in gravitating to a more ordinary vision of the emotional life of the sage.

This disagreement seems to be less disconcerting on the Stoic side.¹⁰¹ There has been a tendency in the scholarship on Stoicism towards an increasing appreciation of richness of the emotional life of the wise man.¹⁰² Scholars have done a great deal to qualify the widely held but crude view that the Stoic sage is totally without feelings, for, in fact, he has two

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¹⁰¹ This is the view expressed by Brennan (1998) in a paper in which he outlines a canonical interpretation of the Stoic theory, followed by a discussion of items of controversy in the recent scholarship. Surprisingly, he does not include in this list questions surrounding the Stoic notion of involuntary feelings or *propatheiai*, which seems to open more place for disputes about what the Stoics were up to with equal or potentially greater philosophical impact than the other themes.

sorts of emotional experience. He surely is without passions, i.e. without voluntary judgments that attribute value or disvalue to indifferent things; but besides that, he can also feel, as all other human beings, involuntary emotional reactions that he cannot control, and, unlike ordinary humans, he can feel the so-called “good feelings” (*eupatheia*), particularly joy. There is an agreement that some later Stoics like Seneca sometimes walk a fine line between making innovative contributions to the Stoic theory and falling into heterodoxy by accepting the Platonic/Peripatetic doctrine that emotions should be moderated, rather than eradicated (*metriopatheia*). Most scholars today seem to agree that the core Stoic commitments are preserved even with these authors.\(^{103}\)

Scholarship on the *Zhuangzi* presents a much less tidy picture. I will now try to identify three major positions that can be found in the scholarship, outline the major evidence in the *Zhuangzi* for each of them, and give a brief, anticipatory assessment of their interpretive force.

First, some scholars have argued that Zhuangzi advocates an eradication of emotions. This interpretation has been sometimes underpinned by the contrast between Confucianism and Daoism. For instance, Hans-Georg Möller argued that “the Confucians take enormous efforts to cultivate their emotions … and to translate these emotions into social virtues. The Daoists, on the other hand, try to eliminate emotions from the heart of the sage.” (Möller 2004: 119)\(^{104}\). There is a wealth of evidence in the text that suggests this view. Some of it is quite explicit: “Grief and happiness are perversions of Virtue; joy and anger are transgressions of the Way; love and hate are offenses against Virtue. When the mind is without care or joy, this is the height of Virtue.” (*Zh.* 15.2). Another passage gives reasons for why emotions should be eliminated: “What I call having no emotions (*qing* 情) is not to harm the inside of one’s body by preferences and dispreferences (不以好惡內傷其身), to constantly follow what-is-so-of-itself (常因自然) and not to add anything to life (不益生). (*Zh.* 5.12).\(^{105}\)

Second, it has been argued that Zhuangzi does in fact endorse a sort of emotional engagement, including attachments to external things. Two interpreters, David Wong and

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\(^{103}\) E.g. Reydams-Schils 2005; Gill 2006; Graver 2007.

\(^{104}\) Other advocates of this view would be Maspero 1971 or Fraser 2011: 100-105.

\(^{105}\) Other evidence pointing in the same direction can be found at *Zh.* 3.5; 4.3; 5.6; 21.4; 23.16; 31.4, including the ambiguous statements that the emotions cannot “penetrate inside” that will be discussed below.
Amy Olberding, have recently argued in favour of the positive role of emotions in the life of the wise man by means of contrasting Zhuangzi with the alleged extirpation of emotions in Stoicism.\footnote{Other interpreters who can be associated with this position is P.J. Ivanhoe ("Zhuangzi advocates a middle path in regard to both reason and the emotions"; Ivanhoe and Carr 2000: 58-59) and David Nivison (1991).} Olberding argued that Zhuangzi’s wise man is more ordinary than the Stoic because his ideal is “a refined version of the exchange between sorrow and joy, pleasure and pain, that marks ordinary life” (Olberding 2007: 357), whereas the Stoic wise man will stay clear of all sorts of emotional experience. Both Olberding and Wong refer to the ‘grieving Zhuangzi’ passage as the major support for their reading. Let me quote this passage here in full:

> When Zhuangzi's wife died, Huizi went to condole with him, and, finding him squatted on the ground, drumming on the basin, and singing, said to him, 'When a wife has lived with her husband, and brought up children, and then dies in her old age, not to wail for her is enough. When you go on to drum on this basin and sing, is it not an excessive (and strange) demonstration?' Zhuangzi replied, 'It is not so. When she first died, was it possible for me not to feel sorrow? But I reflected on the commencement of her being. She had not yet been born to life; not only had she no life, but she had no bodily form; not only had she no bodily form, but she had no breath (非徒無生也，而本無形，非徒無形也，而本無氣). During the intermingling of the waste and dark chaos, there ensued a change, and there was breath; another change, and there was the bodily form; another change, and there came birth and life. There is now a change again, and she is dead. The relation between these things is like the procession of the four seasons from spring to autumn, from winter to summer. There now she lies with her face up, sleeping in the Great Chamber; and if I were to fall sobbing and going on to wail for her, I should think that I did not understand what was appointed (for all). I therefore stopped!' (Zh. 20.2)

The major point of Olberding’s interpretation of this passage is that the wise man, represented by Zhuangzi, willingly endorses his grief and in the process of intellectual reflection turns it into an avenue to the subsequent joy: “For Zhuangzi’s endorsement, albeit brief, of death as a disvalue structures his experience in ways that render it
meaningful and opens up a space for profound joy” (Olberding 2007: 34). He intentionally “lets the experience injure”, for this emotional impact makes him more receptive to the link between his individual predicament and the universe, which, eventually, leads to joy. This view is contrasted with Seneca. For Seneca, the initial, involuntary blow of grief can be pardoned but there is nothing inherently valuable in it, and we should try to avoid it altogether.

The problem of this interpretation is an overreliance on this particular passage, as well as a tendency to consider the explicitly anti-emotionalist passages in the Zhuangzi as less authentic or less philosophically interesting. Moreover, it is questionable that the figure of Zhuangzi here is supposed to represent the wise man, or only somebody who aspires to wisdom. In any case, there is a considerable challenge in making this interpretation compatible with the explicitly anti-emotionalist strand in the Zhuangzi.

Finally, third, there have been efforts to pursue a line of interpretation that would provide an alternative to both these readings. On this view, the wise man has some sort of emotional responses that are fully compatible with his unfractured equanimity, and the task is to determine why exactly he has these responses, whereas other people don’t. This strategy reminds us, of course, of Qian Zhongshu’s idea of emotions that do not move. But other scholars came up with similar, and sometimes rather sophisticated suggestions about what is so peculiar about the wise man’s emotional life. I believe that this option is the most promising in terms of helping us to make sense of the puzzling heterogeneity of claims about emotions found in the Zhuangzi. Unfortunately, the available interpretations to date have not developed it into a sufficiently clear and systematic account, and are limited to passing remarks.

Within this framework, two interpretive strands can be differentiated. First, the wise man is undisturbed by his emotions because he has emotions of a special kind that are different

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107 Discussing other models of sagehood in the Zhuangzi that imply total absence of grief, Olberding argues that “their responses appear to deform Zhuangzi’s ideal in important ways” (Olberding 2007: 349). But no other argument is offered to explain why this should be a deformation except from the view that these passages do not make a very good fit with ideas of certain modern philosophers (Nussbaum, Williams) about the human condition.

108 Those who think, in contrast, that it is emotional equanimity what is Zhuangzi’s ideal are in an advantageous position because they can argue that the passages that allow for some degree of emotional upheaval do not represent sages but only persons who progress towards wisdom.
from ordinary emotions of other humans. This has been suggested by Dan Lusthaus, who argued that the wise man has feelings which do not include feelings of gain or loss (Lusthaus 2003: 184), or by Eske Møllgaard, who suggested that the wise man is free from the so-called “subjective emotions”, i.e. from the passions, while he has “objective emotions”, such as perfect joy (Møllgaard 2007: 131). Second, the wise man has emotions that are not different from those of ordinary humans, but he is able to maintain a detached attitude to these emotions so that they do not pose a threat to his equanimity. This position is implicit in Lee Yearley’s model of the two-tier self, where one self experiences ordinary emotions, whereas the other equanimously observes this as a detached spectator (Yearley 1983: 133). A similar position was taken by Brian Lundberg who argued that “emotions per se are not the problem, but attachment to them and the objects they are directed towards are” (Lundberg 1998: 216).

All interpretations subsumed under the third interpretive option tried to respond to two claims in the Zhuangzi: that the wise man does have some emotions, and that these emotions cannot “enter” (ru 人) into his self and control it. The evidence for the first claim consists basically of two passages. One is the following:

Joy, anger, grief, delight, worry, regret, fickleness, inflexibility, modesty, willfulness, candor, insolence – music from empty holes, mushrooms springing up in dampness, day and night replacing each other before us, and no one knows where they sprout from. (Zh. 2.2)

Møllgaard quotes this passage to justify the idea of “self-emergence” of emotions. The self-emergence as the typical characteristic of what is natural, and therefore normative, would open up an avenue to construe emotions as compatible with wisdom. Some caution is in order, though, before we decide that this passage should be acknowledged as a description of wise man’s emotional life, since “fickleness” and “inflexibility” seem to be fairly incompatible with what the sage is like in the Zhuangzi. In its context, the passage might be better read as a part of the account of the misery of ordinary humans. The other passage, which explicitly describes the wise man, is more reliable:

Being thus, their minds were intent, their faces tranquil, their foreheads broad and plain. They were cool like the autumn, warm like the spring; their joy and anger intermingled with the four seasons. They found something fitting in their encounter with each thing, and none could tell exactly what their ultimate end might be. … His kindness and bounty may extend to ten thousand generations, but not because
he harbors any love for humankind. So he may take joy in clearing the way for things, but he is not being a “gentleman” [in the Confucian sense]. He may have a certain intimacy with others, but he is not being Humane [in the Confucian sense]. (Zh. 6.1)

In likening the emotional flow to alternation of spring and autumn, this passage corroborates the idea of self-emergence of emotions.

The second claim is supported by several passages in the text: “If you are content with the time and willing to follow along, then grief and joy have no Way to enter in.” (Zh. 3.5) 109

“To serve your ruler and be content to do anything for him – this is the peak of loyalty. And to serve your own mind so that sadness or joy do not sway or move it; to understand what you can do nothing about and to be content with it as with fate – this is the perfection of virtue.” (Zh. 4.3).

The question that has not been properly discussed in the scholarship is, I think, why, exactly, these emotions cannot enter into the wise man’s self. Bearing on the above differentiation, there are, again two possibilities. One is that this depends on the kind of emotions that the wise man has: they are a sort of non-intrusive, easy coming and easy going emotions. The other is that this depends on the sort of self we have, and on our agency vis-à-vis these emotions. Within this possibility, we can discern two further options: the emotions cannot “enter inside” because the agent actively prevents them from doing so; or because the perfect agent has no “inside”, or no self in which these emotions could take root.

In the following interpretation, I will try to clarify Zhuangzi’s position by locating it on the map provided by these options. Before we turn to the emotions that do not move, we are going to prepare the ground for this move by outlining Zhuangzi’s and Stoics’ views on emotions that do move us – the pathological emotional responses of the non-wise.

109 An almost identical statement can be found at Zh. 6.5.
2. Emotions that Do Move Us: Passions as Excessive Additions

Stoics and Zhuangzi were in agreement that emotions that move us undermine our autonomous agency and turn us into patients who are controlled by their own dependence on things and persons which we deem worthy of pursuit or avoidance. Let us call these pathological emotions ‘passions’. The wise man will never feel passions; in contrast, all other people do often feel passions, and passions even occupy the predominant part of their emotional life. The passions, as all other emotional and non-emotional activities of the mind, are conditions of the whole mind, and can be described both in physiological terms as uneven or fluttery flow of breath (qi or pneuma) and in cognitivist terms as false judgments. From the former perspective, the most characteristic feature of passions is their inherent unlimitedness, or boundlessness. I will start from this feature of the passions, and then link it with their cognitive deficiency.

There is a close association in the Stoic and Daoist sources between what is natural (good, or normative), and what is limited. Limits are indicators of order and structure; when things stay within their limits, they keep their integrity and maintain their optimal functioning. What is without limits is unnatural (bad, or pathological) and should be avoided. Take these two quotes from Seneca:

Natural desires are limited, but desires born of false beliefs have no way of ending; for there is no boundary to what is false. If you travel on the road there is a destination, but wandering from it has no measure. (Ep. 17.8)

For nature’s measure has a limit, but empty desires sprung from lust are beyond bounds. Self-interest measures out what is necessary: but how do you reduce superfluity? (Ep. 39.5-6)

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110 This double perspective is brought out, for instance, by Galen, reporting from the lost Chrysippus book On emotional therapy: “The emotions are called ailments not just in virtue of their judging each of these things [i.e. things that are not really good] to be good, but also with regard to their running towards them in excess of what is natural.” (Galen, PHP 4.5.21=LS 65L)

111 We are talking here about “unlimitedness” in the sense of wuya 無涯, or an absence of natural boundaries, rather than wují 無際, which is often the epitome for Heaven, and hence carries normative connotations.
The word the Stoics are using to capture the unlimitedness of the passions (“desires born of false beliefs”) is “excessiveness” or “exceedingness”. According to the earliest Stoic definition of passion, it is an “excessive impulse” (*hormē pleonazousa*). The passion is excessive because it oversteps that measure in impulses which is natural and is through oneself. What I mean would be more comprehensible through the following. When one walks through impulse, the movements of the legs is not excessive, but is to some extent fitted to the impulse, so that if the person wishes to stop or make a change, he can do so. But when people run through impulse, this is no longer the case: the movement of the legs is excessive and contrary to the impulse, so that they are carried away and [the legs] do not obediently make a change right when one initiates it, as in the previous case. I think that something very similar happens also in impulses [involved in emotion], because of overstepping the measure that is in accordance with reason, so that when one has an impulse [of this kind] one is not being obedient to reason. (Galen, *PHP* 4.2.8-18=LS 65J)

The danger of the impulse that transgresses the natural limit is that it is not entirely under our control, similarly to runner’s legs. Even worse, passions are akin to the legs of a runner who is compelled to run faster and faster without being able to slow down: passion is a slippery slope. This feature of passions is vividly described by Seneca:

> Some things at the start are in our power; thereafter they sweep us on with a force of their own and allow no turning back. Bodies in free fall have no control over themselves. They cannot delay or resist the downward course. Any deliberation and second thought are cut short by the peremptory force of gravity. They cannot help completing a trajectory which they need not have begun. In the same way, the mind, if it throws itself into anger, love and other affections, is not allowed to restrain the impulse. It is bound to be swept along and driven to the bottom by its own weight and by the natural downward tendency of any falling. (*On Anger* I.7)

The propensity of passions is so worrisome because it is the condition of the mind as a whole, and there is no independent faculty in the mind that could control and block the progression of the passion once it starts to unfold. The passion is the sick mind. The mind which turns itself into a passion is like a building with cracks in the walls that rapidly loom large, increasingly affecting the foundations of the whole building that gradually loses its capacity to counterbalance the power of the gravity and resembles, to use a Stoic image, a
bird that loses its muscular tension and falls to the ground.\textsuperscript{112} Passions move us exactly in this sense.

In the \textit{Zhuangzi}, the excessiveness of passions is not demonstrated primarily in their tendency to become uncontrollable but in their tendency to block or disturb the flow of breath, and the detrimental consequences this has on our psychophysical well-being. But the idea of the unlimitedness of passions is also clearly pronounced here:

Our life has limits but “knowledge” has no limits (吾生也有涯，而知也无涯).

With what is limited to pursue after what is unlimited is a perilous thing. (Zh. 3.1)

The contrast between “life” and “knowledge” here should be interpreted in terms of contrast between what is natural and what is artificial; “life” is a normative notion in the \textit{Zhuangzi}, whereas “knowledge” is often used pejoratively in the sense of the petty human tendency to attribute absolute values to things that are in fact relative and indifferent. What \textit{Zhuangzi} means here by “knowledge” comes to light in his most explicit statement about passions, in which he defines them as transgressions of the natural limits of “life”:\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{112} “Imagine a lofty bird which appears to be staying in the same place. Should one describe it as motionless, as though it happened to be suspended from above, or as moving upwards to the same extent as the weight of its body carries it downwards? I think the latter is more correct. If you killed the bird or destroyed its muscular tension, you would see it fall quickly to the ground. That makes it plain that the bird was evenly counter-balancing its innate downward inclination due to the weight of his body by the upward motion resulting from its soul’s tension.” (Galen, \textit{On muscular movement} 4.402,12–403,10=LS 47K)

\textsuperscript{113} This passage is the upshot of a longer conversation on the theme of what are the defining features of being human. \textit{Zhuangzi} interlocutor, Hui Shi, wonders how can we talk about humans as humans if we deprive them of their capacity for having \textit{qing}, i.e. the passions emerging from value-laden judgments about things and persons. Hui Shi represents here the position of the Confucians, who maintained that the defining characteristic of humanity is the ability to feel compassion with other human beings.
What I call passions (qing 情) are positive and negative affirmative evaluations of things (是非吾所謂情也). What I call having no passions is not to harm the inside of one’s body by preferences and dispreferences (不以好惡內傷其身), to constantly follow what-is-so-of-itself (常因自然) and not to add anything to life (不益生). (Zh. 5.12)

Passions emerge from one’s obsession to conceptualize, evaluate, and eventually reform the reality, the obsession that ultimately springs from one’s “knowledge”. To be free from passions, one should instead “follow what-is-so-of-itself”; this phrase is very close to the phrase “follow what is inherently so” from the butcher story. Mind in the grip of passions is akin to the knife that is too thick to find its way through the empty spaces among the bones, and hence it seeks to force its way across the solid structures, failing to conform to the natural constraints, but instead forcing the natural constraints conform to the wishful thinking of the mediocre butcher.

The collisions with the bones, however, have detrimental effect on the sharpness of the knife, and thus the more the knife collides with the bones, the thicker it gets, and the less chance there is for it to regain the original sharpness; analogically, the passions have detrimental effect on the agent, because they make him “collide” with things and events in the world. Zhuangzi characterizes these “collisions” as “ties” (jie 結) or “bonds” (xian 縛). Since these things are not in our power, this fixation obstructs the smooth flow of the energy and undermines one’s psychophysical health. Zhuangzi is explicit about how the strong distress, in particular, cripples one’s body.

The strategy to avoid physical and psychical harm is to refrain from “adding to life”. “Life” stands here for what is natural, and the idea of “adding” refers to evaluative or prescriptive

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114 There are disputes about how to construe and translate this passage. At heart of these debates is the notion qing 情. Some interpreters, most notably A. C. Graham, argued that it does not mean “emotions” here but “essence” or “true nature”. Although this meaning of this word is well-documented in the Zhuangzi, I think that Graham is wrong. Perhaps the most compelling set of arguments against Graham and in favour of the “emotions” version was presented by Bruya (2010). Another disputed point is the grammatical ambivalence of the construction, for the phrase could also be construed as “this is not what I call qing”. Even though grammatically this version is possible, it does not seem to make a good fit with the overall context of the conversation.

115 Fraser 2011: 105-106 gives a very good analysis of Zhuangzian “ontology of emotion” and its psychophysical manifestations.
judgments like “This should (or not) be like this”, or “this is good (or evil)” that are artificially added to things as they are. We find a similar caution against “adding” to things as they are in the Stoic material as well.\textsuperscript{116}

His son is dead. What happened? His son is dead. Nothing else? Not a thing. His ship is lost. What happened? His ship is lost. He was carried off to prison? What happened? He was carried off to prison. But the observation: “He has fared badly,”, is an addition that each man makes on his own responsibility. (Epictetus, \textit{Dis}. 3.8.5)\textsuperscript{117}

Don’t make your misfortunes worse by your own actions and burden yourself with laments; pain is trivial if opinion adds nothing to it. (Seneca, \textit{Ep.} 78.13)

Your directing mind, the ruler of your soul, must remain unaffected by the activity of your flesh, whether painful or pleasurable. … When, however, these affections reach the mind through the other channel of common feeling, since both exist in a body organically one, then we should not resist this perception of them, since it is natural; but the directing mind should not add to this any judgment of its own as to whether these affections are good or bad. (Marcus, \textit{Med.} 5.26)\textsuperscript{118}

The passions, then, transgress the limit not only in the sense that they are violent and out of control (Stoics) or as something which blocks our energy and undermines our health (Zhuangzi) but also in the sense that they are epistemologically or cognitively defective: they claim the existence of something which is in fact not the case. What is real is what is true, and what we add to what is real is necessarily false.

The addition means that we attribute value or disvalue to things that in fact do not have it; we desire or fear things that are not of such a sort as to be desired or feared. One of the most typical cases of such unnecessary addition is excessive grief. After the death of Zhuangzi’s wife, his friend Hui Shi reproaches him his lack of funeral decorum (\textit{Zh.} 20.2). To indulge in grief, Zhuangzi objects, would be superfluous. When we recognize what the death truly is, i.e. a dissolving of the individual breath into the universal breath, there is no

\textsuperscript{116} A similar caution against nourishing emotions by unnecessary additions appears in Epicureanism, particularly in connection with the fear of death.

\textsuperscript{117} A very similar point is also made at \textit{Dis.} 3.17.8

\textsuperscript{118} Cf. also \textit{Med.} 7.64
point in attributing to this event a disvalue that it does not have. In his *Consolation to Marcia*, Seneca makes a point that the tendency to add to reality is a distinctly human vice that arises from the misuse of the distinctly human capacity for forming rational judgments, the point with which Zhuangzi would earnestly agree:

“But,” you say, “Nature bids us grieve for our dear ones.” Who denies it, so long as grief is tempered? For not only the loss of those who are dearest to us, but a mere parting, brings an inevitable pang and wrings even the stoutest heart. But false opinion has added something more to our grief than Nature has prescribed. Observe how passionate and yet how brief is the sorrow of dumb animals. The lowing of cows is heard, for one or two days only, and that wild and frantic running about of mares lasts no longer; wild beasts, after following the tracks of their stolen cubs, after wandering through the forests and returning over and over to their plundered lairs, within a short space of time quench their rage; birds, making a great outcry, rage about their empty nests, yet in a trice become quiet and resume their ordinary flight; nor does any creature sorrow long for its offspring except man – he nurses his grief, and the measure of his affliction is not what he feels, but what he wills to feel. (Seneca, *To Marcia On Consolation*, 6.3)

In order to eliminate the passions, it is thus of paramount importance to be able to take things for what they truly are. Zhuangzi emphasizes that to refrain from adding to reality, it is vital to eliminate “additions” from one’s mind, the recalcitrant beliefs about value of external things, as well as deeply entrenched patterns of responding to things on the basis of these beliefs. This purificatory process is conceptualized as “forgetting” or “fasting of the mind”:

Unify your intentions. Do not listen with your ears but listen with your mind. Do not listen with your mind but listen with your energy. Listening stops at ears, mind stops at what tallies [with its conceptions]. As for the energy, it is empty and waits for things. It is in the emptiness where the Dao gathers. The emptiness is the fasting of the mind. (*Zh*. 4.1)

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119 A similar exhortation to see objectively what death really is appears several times in the Stoics sources. See also Chapter 1.
In the psychological context, emptiness refers to the greatest level of receptivity in the sense of readiness of the mind to accept things as they are without any admixture of personal bias. This somewhat surprising combination of receptivity and detachment is captured in Zhuangzi’s metaphor of the perfect mind as a mirror. This metaphor explains the phrase “waiting for things”: similarly to the mirror, the mind waits for things to come in front of it as they are in order to provide their undistorted reflection.

A similar imagery of thinking or perceiving along or together with the breath of universe can be found in Marcus:

Do not only breathe in unison with the air which surrounds you, but think now in unison with the intelligence which encompasses everything. For the intelligence which spreads everywhere and permeates everything is available to him who wishes to absorb it no less than air is available to him who is able to breathe. (Med. 8.54)

On the whole, though, rather than in terms of emptiness and purification from superfluous sediments, Stoics preferred to describe the ideal mind in terms of developing a consistent and coherent stock of beliefs that determine the way one responds to things. When this stock of beliefs is entirely consistent, then it is in agreement with nature, and whatever the agent assents to on the basis of these beliefs, it will never be an unnecessary addition. To this choice they were surely motivated by their optimistic theory of development of one’s rational capacities from one’s original biological endowment.

At this point, we should have a sufficient working idea about what the emotions that move us are, and can turn to the core question of this chapter: what are the emotions that do not move us? Some of the above passages indicate that there is a sort of emotional response that the “Nature prescribes”, and it is only when we willingly nurture and develop this response that the passion arises. But before one reaches that point, there is a realm of emotional responses that are in accordance with nature, and that should therefore be compatible with wisdom. In the following part, we will try to see in what sense these emotions do not move us, and what is their role in the emotional life of the wise man. I will start with the Stoics, particularly Seneca, and then contrast it with what I think could be Zhuangzi’s view.
3. The Emotions that the Nature Prescribes for Us

In recognizing that there are some psychological responses that are necessitated by nature, rather than emerging from our rational, voluntary decisions, Seneca draws on an earlier Stoic notion of ‘bites’ and ‘contractions’ in the soul. One of the few available pieces of evidence about this theory before Seneca comes from Cicero:

Distress of any kind is far removed from wise person, because it is an empty thing; because it serves no purpose; because it has its origin not in nature, but in judgment and opinion and in a kind of invitation that is issued when we decide that grief is appropriate. Once this entirely voluntary belief is removed, distress will be eliminated – the real, unhappy distress, that is; but the mind will still feel a bite, still be contracted a little from time to time. This last they may indeed call “natural”, provided they do not use the name “distress”. For that is a grim and deadly name, which cannot by any means coexist or, as it were, dwell together with wisdom. (Cicero, Tusc. 3.82-83)

A stark contrast is asserted between the grief arising from a voluntary belief that grieving is appropriate, and grief as involuntary, subrational movements of the mind. The wise man will never experience the former, because that would entail agreement with falsehood; but he might experience the latter, because that does not engage his rational capacity of assent, but just happens in him, not unlike physiological processes that spontaneously happen in the body.

One distinctive feature of Seneca’s development of the notion of involuntary feelings within the Stoic school is to assign them explicitly to the realm of body: “Lest it should seem that what we call virtue strays outside natural order, the wise person will tremble and feel pain and grow pale, for all these things are feelings of the body.” (Ep. 71.29). In a list of involuntary feelings in Seneca’s essay On Anger, their bodily nature is affirmed to emphasize the passivity of mind in regard to these feelings. As long as we are agents by virtue of our minds, not by virtue of our bodily drives, by merely experiencing these feelings we are not exerting agency in the proper sense of the word:

None of those things which rouse the mind fortuitously should be called passions; the mind suffers them, so to speak, rather than causes them. Therefore, passions
consist not in being moved as a result of impressions of things, but in surrendering oneself to them and following up this fortuitous movement. For if anyone thinks that pallor, floods of tears, sexual arousal, heavy breathing or a sudden brightening of the eyes and the like, are evidence of passions and a mark of the mind, he is mistaken and fails to realize that these are bodily drives. (On Anger, 2.3-2.4=LS 65X)

However, as other examples of the involuntary feelings from the same list indicate, Seneca does not seem to be quite categorical in restricting involuntary feelings to the body: rather complex cognitive responses, such as aesthetic responses to music or literature, are included in the list. Scholars have agreed that what is crucial for Seneca here is the involuntariness of these movements, i.e. the fact that they do not involve assent.\textsuperscript{120} The bodily spontaneity is a suitable paradigm for this involuntariness, but the range of involuntary feelings need not to be limited to bodily reactions.

In the Zhuangzi, something fairly similar to involuntary feelings is implied in the idea of self-emerging emotions that come and go like spontaneous processes in nature. What these natural emotions have in common with the Stoic involuntary feelings is that, unlike passions, they do not depend on our value-laden judgments, and, therefore, are not in our power. Besides the statement that “their joy and anger intermingled with the four seasons” (Zh. 6.2), this characteristic feature of natural emotions is implied elsewhere: “When sadness and joy come, I cannot prevent their approach; when they go, I cannot retain them.” (Zh. 22.11) Both these passages suggest that some emotional responses, at least, happen to us, and through us, by nature, and are therefore, in some sense, normative.

According to the Stoics, these feelings are not the exclusive preserve of the wise man: all humans, whether sages or non-sages, will experience involuntary feelings. In other words, these feelings are quite ordinary. Zhuangzi, I think, would agree with this. We do not have an explicit textual support for this claim but it can be reconstructed when we appreciate an implicit distinction in the text between emotions and desires. Both the wise and the non-wise, the text implies, will experience the four basic emotions: happiness, anger, sorrow, and joy (xinu aile 喜怒哀樂). Where they differ is that in the non-wise these emotions will be joined with desire, whereas in the wise they won’t. By ‘desire’, I mean “preferences” and “dispreferences” (haowu 好惡), or, more generally “desires” (yu 欲). Note that

\textsuperscript{120} Sorabji 2000; Inwood 1993; Graver 2007.
nowhere in the text is the wise man said to have preferences or dispreferences, and, unlike ordinary people, he is said to be free from desires (Zh. 6.1; 9.2; 20.2) It is not difficult to see why the wise man should lack preferences and dispreferences: they are inherently of such sort that they “enter inside”, or “harm the inside of one’s body” (Zh. 5.5). The sages “do not welcome or escort” things (Zh. 6.1) and submit to “what is necessary” (Zh. 4.3; 6.1); in contrast, the non-sages flutter in potentialities and nourish their desires by thoughts about what could or should happen.

So all sorts of human agents will feel emotions, but non-sages will “add” desires to their natural emotions, and that is, presumably, why their emotions can penetrate to their self and harm them. If this is right, then it follows that the natural emotions that come and go by themselves are essentially harmless, it is a further addition to these feelings that turn them into harmful passions. On this point, Zhuangzi and Stoics are in agreement. Where they differ is how they assess the value of these natural feelings. Understanding this difference will help us to articulate Zhuangzi’s position with a greater precision.

Seneca’s account of involuntary feelings, and his analysis of anger in particular, gives the impression that the essence of voluntary action consists in one’s ability to nip the propensity of involuntary feelings in the bud. The involuntary feelings are, by themselves, morally neutral; but there is a distinct air of caution, even hostility, against them. The reason for this caution is that involuntary feelings are understood as beginnings of passions. If we do feel them, therefore, we should either let them subside, or to actively suppress them. This stance is brought out by Seneca’s discussion of development of anger in terms of a sequence of three ‘movements’:

If you want to know how the emotions begin, grow or get carried away, the first movement is involuntary, a preparation, as it were, for emotion, a kind of threat. The next is voluntary but not insistent – I may, for example, think it right for me to wreak vengeance because I have been harmed or for him to be punished because he has committed a crime. The third really is out of control; wanting retribution not just ‘if it is right’ but at all cost, it has completely overcome the reason. (On anger, 2.4.1).

The realm of voluntary action is located, strictly considered, in the second movement. The first movement is involuntary as it is the “first blow in the soul that we cannot escape by means of reason”. The third movement is voluntary in the sense that the action springs from our voluntary decision but it is involuntary in the sense that it is “out of control”, similarly
to a pilot who lost control of his plane, or the runner who cannot stop right on the spot. The second movement is truly decisive and entirely in our hands: we might have an impression of having been wronged, which has an intrinsic propensity to develop into a full-fledged desire to take revenge, but it is in our power to block this propensity and not to act on that impression.

In likening the involuntary feelings to enemies that we should stop right at the border (On Anger, 1.8.2), Seneca is in agreement with other Stoic sources. According to a testimony by Aulus Gellius, “even a [Stoic] wise man’s mind must be slightly moved and contracted” but “soon the wise man does not … assent to such impression … but he rejects them and belittles them” (Gellius 19.1.17-18=LS 65Y). Note the disdainful stance towards the involuntary movements: they are to be spurned and rejected. The report continues by noting that what distinguishes the wise man from the non-wise is that he does not “add belief” (proseptodoxazei) to what he involuntarily feels, i.e. he does not sanction this feeling by endorsing the belief that some evil is happening to him. Instead, the wise man maintains a sort of level-headedness in handling these feelings, remembering the opinion “he has always had about impressions of that kind”.

Seneca’s acknowledgment that some degree of grief is a natural requirement of the human condition is as far as the Stoics go towards recognizing any positive value of the involuntary feelings in adult humans. But this seems to be more a compromising concession to a more commonsensical view rather than a gesture towards a substantial revision of the underlying Stoic theory: nowhere do we find any statement that a person who does not feel any amount of grief would be morally deficient.

The major point of contrast with the Zhuangzi is that we do not find any sign of hostility there towards these spontaneously emerging emotional responses. They are valued much higher than necessary evils or primitive responses that can be tolerated. There is also no sign of the tendency to relegate them to mere bodily drives. The rationale for this view can be summed up by the phrase that the “life of the sage is driven by Heaven” (tian xing 天行) and is “like floating” (ruo fu 若浮; Zh. 15.2). The self-emerging emotions are not additions to life, but the life itself; they are the flow that keeps us afloat, the power of nature within us that responds to the things around us and navigates us through the reality, without letting us sink into inertia. The ebb and flow of these emotions connects us with the breath of the world, and by letting them flow we are living in accordance with natural transformations.
Unlike the Stoics, therefore, Zhuangzi does not think that we should actively block these emotions to prevent them to take control of our self. He would agree with the Stoics that we should not indulge in them, and bring them to a point when they paralyse our capacity to act as autonomous agents; but he does not think that we should suppress them or block them, or even moderate them (Zh. 31.4). First, because there is no need to do that: As long as we do not add to these emotions, there is no point in worrying that they would, by their own propensity, grow out of proportion, because they are natural, and therefore within limits. Second, because these responses are, by themselves, valuable: their naturaleness, manifested by their spontaneous emergence, guarantees that they will provide us with infallible guidance, comparable with the infallibility of the instinctual reactions that keep a drunk person free from injury (Zh. 19.2).

If the sage gives his involuntary feelings free rein, it is difficult to see, from the Stoic perspective at least, why he should be, at the same time, free from passions that emerge as unchecked developments of these involuntary drives. And yet it seems that this is exactly what Zhuangzi is up to. A strong indication in favour of this view is provided by the imagery of movement and stillness. In early Chinese philosophical texts, movement (dong 動) typically implies transition from one state into another; on the level of the human mind, movement connotes emotions that move one in one or another direction. Stillness (jing 靜), in contrast, implies leisure and freedom from disturbances. The wise man is moving inasmuch he has these involuntary emotions, like a boat on the open sea; he is still inasmuch he does not interfere with these emotions and respects their self-emerging nature, like a boatman who does not fear the sea and the wind, knowing that they always work, ultimately, in his favour. “So it is said, To be pure, clean, and mixed with nothing; still, unified, and unchanging; limpid and inactive; moving with the workings of Heaven – this is the way to care for the spirit.” (Zh. 15.2)

One can be still and yet moving only when one is “moving with the workings of Heaven”, not attaching oneself to any single particular thing, but neither trying to reject or avoid any of them. But to stay free from attachments to external things means, in some sense, to stay free from attachments to our self-emerging emotions that connect us with these external things. The desires and fears of the ordinary, non-wise persons can be ultimately understood as excessive pursuits or avoidances of positive or negative feelings (pleasures and pains) that initially arise as our natural

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121 純粹而不雜，靜一而不變，恬而無為，動而以天行，此養神之道也。
responses to things around us. In other words, the passions are mishandlings of our involuntary feelings.

This brings us to the major therapeutical lesson of Zhuangzi’s theory of emotions: we can only liberate ourselves from emotions when we let them be as they are. The pathological emotional responses, the passions, arise from our tendency to interfere with the self-emerging emotional flow. This interference can have two forms: either we “add” to the self-emerging emotions, i.e. we nurture the feeling beyond its natural measure, or we cultivate it and trim it. Zhuangzi’s point is that these two attitudes are flip sides of the same coin: in both cases, we fail to accept things as they are, and thereby disturb ourselves by taking unnecessary action. We are moved by self-emerging feelings, but we fail to counterbalance this by the stillness of our attitude in regards to these feelings, and move ourselves even more by the effort to take control.

Here starts to emerge a more definite and coherent picture of Zhuangzi’s account of emotions: The wise man has a rich emotional life in the sense of a wealth of self-emerging feelings. At the same time, he is completely free from passions, i.e. disruptive, pathological emotions that arise from tampering with the primordial, self-emerging and self-regulating emotional flow. Another way to grasp Zhuangzi’s position is with regard to the issue of emotional control. On the one hand, Zhuangzi advocates a sort of emotional restraint. The affective sobriety of the wise man is often described by the word *dan* 淡, meaning tasteless or weakly flavoured food or drinks. On the other hand, he deplores any sort of artificial strategy of forming or refining the natural emotional drives in conformity with social and political norms. The emotions of the wise man are not refined versions of the emotions of the non-wise. They are exactly the same; it is the way these emotions are handled that distinguishes the sage from the non-sage.

From the Stoic point of view, one might worry, however, whether the major role of self-emerging feelings does not undermine any notion of autonomous human agency. If the emotions should just flow through us, and all we should do in regard to them is to do nothing, in what sense can we act as autonomous agents, and how can we experience this agency as ours? More specifically, a Stoic might find unattractive the idea that the emotional life of the wise man should be limited to these self-emerging feelings. This

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122 Zh. 7.3; 10.3; 13.1; 20.5.

123 The antonym is *nong* 浓; a salty/greasy food or a strong tea are *nong*.  

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worry about Zhuangzi is reinforced by the fact that one passage in the Zhuangzi uses the same characterization, i.e. that the emotions cannot enter inside, to describe the emotional life of animals (Zh. 21.4). So is there, after all, no difference between the wise man’s freedom from passions and the animals’ freedom from passions?

Stoics would agree with Zhuangzi on the point that animals do not have passions. But they believed that what will distinguish the wise man from animals are special emotional responses that are voluntary, and yet in conformity with nature, the so-called “good feelings” (eupatheiai). To indicate how Zhuangzi might respond to the Stoic worry, I will start from first outlining what exactly Stoics meant by the good feelings, focusing particularly on “joy” (chara, gaudium) as the most salient of these feelings, and then argue that Zhuangzi does have an equivalent notion of normative joy, which is compatible with his valorization of natural feelings, and that he can therefore maintain that the emotional life of the wise man will have a specific quality that distinguishes it from that of animals.

4. The Joy of the Wise Man

In the Stoic theory, good feelings (eupatheiai) are sharply distinguished from passions (pathē): whereas optimal feelings are “normative affects” (Graver 2007: 51), passions are deficient, pathological affects. According to Stoic psychology, both kinds of affections are impulses that arise as assents to impressions. Similarly to Zhuangzi, impulses are therefore understood as evaluative responses to external stimuli. The difference between passions and good feelings is that in case of passions the evaluations (or “assents”) are false whereas in case of good feelings they are true. The criterion of truth and falsity is whether things are evaluated according to their true value: good and evil can be attributed only virtue and vice, respectively, and all other things are indifferent in a qualified manner. It has been a matter of dispute whether the good feelings have a different phenomenology than the passions, in particular, whether they are less powerful and intense. Most recent interpreters agree that they are not, and that the normative agents have as stimulating and profound affective life

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124 Graver (2007), Cooper (2013), Inwood (1985). Graver’s summary is the most instructive: “They [i.e. the eupatheiai] are corrected versions of human feelings, not diminished versions. We should think of them as being like the easy movements of a powerful athlete, forceful but without strain.” (Graver 2007: 52)
as ordinary humans. Seneca, in particular, was keen on emphasizing the emotional fulfillment of the wise man, and his ability to feel joy.\footnote{125}

We have reached the heights if we know what it is that we find joy in and if we have not placed our happiness in the control of externals. The man who is goaded ahead by hope of anything, though it be within reach, though it be easy of access, and though his ambitions have never played him false, is troubled and unsure of himself. Above all, my dear Lucilius, make this your business: learn how to feel joy.

Do you think that I am now robbing you of many pleasures when I try to do away with the gifts of chance, when I counsel the avoidance of hope, the sweetest thing that gladdens our hearts? Quite the contrary; I do not wish you ever to be deprived of gladness. I would have it born in your house; and it is born there, if only it be inside of you. Other objects of cheer do not fill a man’s bosom; they merely smooth his brow and are inconstant, – unless perhaps you believe that he who laughs has joy. The very soul must be happy and confident, lifted above every circumstance. (Seneca, Ep. 23)

What phenomenologically distinguishes the good joy from the passionate joy is its constancy and a sense of fulfillment. So the fact that the wise man does not feel passions does not mean that he is deprived of emotional fulfillment: on the contrary, only he is emotionally fulfilled in a true sense of the word. According to the Stoic definition, joy is rational elevation arising from a truthful judgment that “some good is present toward which it is appropriate to be elevated”.\footnote{126} So what sort of good Lucilius should rejoice in?

Do you ask me what this real good is, and whence it derives? I will tell you: it comes from a good conscience, from honourable purposes, from right actions, from contempt of the gifts of chance, from an even and calm way of living which treads but one path. (ibid.)

All instances of the good listed here are different aspects of virtuous action. This is in agreement with the Stoic view that only virtue, and what participates in it, is good (DL 7.101). So the most accessible and reliable source of joy should be one’s own mental

\footnote{125}{The Stoic theory recognized two other kinds of eupatheiai besides joy: “wish” (boulēsis) and “caution” (eulabeia). While the object of joy is a present good, the objects of wish and caution are future good or evil, respectively.}

\footnote{126}{Stob. 2.7.10b}
qualities, one’s own rational responses. But the objects eliciting joy do not have to be limited to one’s own virtue; one can feel joy in the rational management of the universe, or joy in the virtuous action of others, for these, too, are goods.  

There are substantial indications that Zhuangzi was committed to a similar notion of the wise man’s joy which should be distinguished from the inconstant joy of self-emerging feelings. An indication of such distinction is a statement that “supreme joy is without joy” (zhile wule 至樂無樂; Zh. 20.1), which I take to mean that supreme joy is different from the natural feeling of joy. In two passages, Zhuangzi talks about “Heavenly joy” (tianle 天樂) and defines it as “the mind of the sage” (天樂者，聖人之心). The person who experiences the Heavenly joy is said to “live a life conducted in accordance with Heaven” (其生也天行) and “not to be entangled with things” (無物累). Both these points make Zhuangzi’s Heavenly joy strikingly similar with the Stoic good joy.

Even though Zhuangzi is less explicit about the source of the “complete joy”, there are some significant hints. For instance, we can read that “in ancient times, those who grasped the way things are (dedao 得道) were happy both when they got what they wanted and

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127 Many questions arise from differentiating different subclasses of joy and their objects: Only wise man can feel joy directed at his own virtue because only he is virtuous. But what about joy from virtue seen in other human beings, or from rational administration of the universe? Does one have to be virtuous in order to be able to appreciate the rational administration of the universe?

128 This view differs from the interpretation of this phrase provided by Hans-Georg Möller, namely that “the perfect Daoist happiness is joy without joy” which is “not tied to any particular emotional sensation and is not felt in a specific way”. (Möller 2004: 65).

129 Zh 13.1; 14.3.

130 In one passage from the Zhuangzi, the distinction between ordinary, inconstant joy that is elicited by external things, and the normative joy of the sage is drawn quite explicitly: “When joy is complete, this is called to “get what one wants” (dezhi 得志). When the men of ancient times spoke of getting what one wants, they did not mean fine carriages and caps. They meant simply that joy was so complete that it could not be made greater. Nowadays, however, when men speak of getting what one wants, they mean fine carriages and caps. But carriages and caps affect the body alone, not the inborn nature and fate. Such things from time to time may happen to come your way. When they come, you cannot keep them from arriving, but when they depart you cannot stop them from going. Therefore carriages and caps are no excuse for becoming puffed up with pride, and hardship and poverty are no excuse for fawning on the vulgar. You should find the same joy in one condition as in the other and thereby be free of care, that is all. But now, when the things that happened along take their leave, you cease to be joyful. From this point of view, though you have joy, it will always be fated for destruction. (Zh. 16.3)
when they encountered obstacles” (Zh. 28.13). Here, attainment of joy is premised on “grasping the way things are”, which, as the context suggests, is an insight into the true nature of reality. Elsewhere, the source of “supreme joy” (zhile 至樂) is specified as “rambling with one’s mind in the beginning of things” (遊心於物之初; Zh. 21.4), i.e. a state of mind which to the reality as it unfolds. A significant indication is also provided by the butcher simile, in which the butcher explains his mastery by his “love of the way things are” (haodao 好道). We can say that both in Seneca and in the Zhuangzi, the distinctive and exclusive object and source of the normative joy are things the way they are, whereas the object of natural feelings are individual, particular things that there are.

So Zhuangzi’s wise man, besides having natural, self-emerging emotional responses, which are inconstant just as the things in the world to which they respond, will also feel a constant joy. This joy, I think, does not have to be construed as a higher-order feeling that would be associated with a higher-order self, or the spectator self, whereas the natural feelings would be attributed to the engaged, first-order self. There are, after all, no two different orders of reality at which these two different selves would be directed. Moreover, the wise man is “simple” (chun 純)\textsuperscript{131}, and hence it is unlikely that he would be engaged in a reflection on his own feelings.

5. Diverging Evaluations of the Involuntary/Self-Emerging/Natural Feelings

Zhuangzi’s idea of non-interfering with one’s natural feelings seems to be quite far from the Stoic notion of reason as “the craftsman of impulse”, implying that we exert our agency inasmuch we make voluntary decisions about involuntary impressions. After all, Zhuangzi does not have an equivalent of the Stoic notion of assent as the decisive voluntary moment mediating between impression and impulse. This raises the question what exactly is at stake in referring to self-emerging feelings as “involuntary” in the Stoic case and as “natural” in Zhuangzi’s case. The distinguishing criterion between voluntariness and involuntariness in the Stoic sources is the degree of activity or passivity of the agent: with regard to having involuntary feelings, we are passive; with regard to handling these feelings, we are active.

\textsuperscript{131} Zh. 12.11; 15.2-3.
But what is emphasized in the *Zhuangzi* is not *our* powerlessness regarding having these feelings but *their* peculiar character, namely that they emerge and subside by themselves. There is little concern in the *Zhuangzi* with the fact that we cannot control these feelings; instead, there is a marked appreciation of their authenticity and genuineness, and a worry about the fact that human agents could be inclined to control or inflate these feelings. Consequently, the agency driven purely by self-emerging impulses is itself more authentic and genuine than agency that artificially adds to these impulses or restrains them.

We can observe now more clearly how Zhuangzi’s broader conceptual framework of the theory of emotions differs from that of the Stoics. Whereas the Stoic theory works with the contrast between involuntary and subrational on the one hand (*propatheiai*), and voluntary and rational on the other (*pathē* and *eupatheiai*), the contrast that underlies Zhuangzi’s theory is that of authentic spontaneity of nature, on the one hand, and the human artifice on the other hand. Zhuangzi seems to show a greater appreciation of the natural drives that spontaneously emerge in the human agents, while he tends to understand the voluntariness in more derogatory terms of unnecessary and potentially dangerous artifice; Stoics, on the other hand, seem to be more optimistic about rationality of the human beings as the capacity that aligns our action with nature, and less appreciative of the role of involuntary feelings.

One may wonder, indeed, what exactly informs the Stoic indifference and hostility toward these feelings, and how it reflects broader divergences between the two traditions. For in light of their strictly teleological account of nature, it is somewhat surprising that the Stoic theory does not seem to have any clear notion of constructive role of involuntary feelings in the agency of the human adults. In the pre-rational stage of the human life, i.e. roughly before the age of fourteen, these feelings surely are useful, on the Stoic view, as instinctive drives that serve one’s biological self-preservation. But when they are overridden by the purely reason-based deliberation, the Stoic theory seems to have no better place for them than that of useless and even potentially dangerous hangovers: they are incipient sprouts of passions but never sprouts of good feelings. Thus the wise man does not need them, and the non-wise is threatened by them. It would seem to be more consequential, from the perspective of the providential teleology, to maintain that the wise man is not susceptible to involuntary feelings at all, and the non-wise is exposed to them only because these feelings can elicit some cognitive processes that help his moral progress. It is possible that such account could be extrapolated from some of the many Stoic texts that have unfortunately been lost. But as it is, we can only ask if there are any deep underlying factors that
informed the Stoic depreciation of self-emerging feelings, and Zhuangzi’s appreciation of them.

In having made the choices they made both Stoics and Zhuangzi are arguably very much embedded in their respective philosophical traditions, and their views are informed by conceptual oppositions demarcating the fields of philosophical debate as we outlined them in the second chapter. In the Stoic theory, the involuntary feelings are natural, and therefore they are, in a very broad sense, also rational. But in the more narrow context of the human agency, they are non-rational because they are not voluntary judgments. The Stoic caution against these non-rational, involuntary feelings, may be an outgrowth of the Greek fear of the non-rational powers, i.e. of that which is chancy, unpredictable and uncontrollable. Taking rationality as the normative notion, there emerges a tendency to consider all which is non-rational as something deficient or less valuable. For Zhuangzi, in contrast, the positive view of the self-emerging feelings stems from their affinity with the notion of spontaneity, or non-action, which Zhuangzi valorizes against the opposite notion of artificial human action.
Conclusion

Let me start this conclusion by a quote from Milan Kundera’s novel *Immortality*. Introducing the main character of his story, Agnes, he ponders about one of her bodily gestures and offers a more general reflection about gestures and human individuals:

But isn’t a person, and, to an even greater extent, a character in a novel, by definition a unique, inimitable being? How then is it possible that a gesture I saw performed by one person, a gesture that was connected to her, that characterized her, and was part of her individual charm, could at the same time be the essence of another person and my dreams of her? That’s’ worth some thought: If our planet has seen some eighty billion people, it is difficult to suppose that every individual has had his or her own repertory of gestures. Arithmetically, it is simply impossible. Without the slightest doubt, there are far fewer gestures in the world than there are individuals. That finding leads us to a shocking conclusion: a gesture is more individual than an individual. We could put it in the form of an aphorism: many people, few gestures. (Kundera 1991: 6)

Maybe philosophical ideas are like gestures: there are far more philosophers than original philosophical ideas. If this is right, then it follows that ideas retain their own distinctive character when adopted by different thinkers in different times, and perhaps even in different cultural contexts. In this work, I have been arguing that one such philosophical idea, virtuosity in doing ordinary things, can be reconstructed in two different intellectual traditions. Both Zhuangzi and the Stoics envisaged the excellence of their perfect agent, or the wise man, as a super-skill which can become absolutely infallible because its material, i.e. things and events in the world around us, has order and structure that our mind can fully understand and follow. This common ground has been reconstructed so as to enable a constructive dialogue between two philosophical theories that never had contact with each other in history, and originate from different cultural contexts. I hope that it has been sufficiently shown that this procedure, which I think necessarily has to be a part of any cross-cultural comparison, does not hinder, but rather promotes, our understanding of the compared theories on their own terms and in their historical and cultural context.

I therefore disagree with a further consequence that Kundera draws from his idea:
I said at the beginning, when I talked about the woman at the pool that “the essence of her charm, independent of time, revealed itself for a second in that gesture and dazzled me.” Yes. That’s how I perceived it at the time, but I was wrong. The gesture revealed nothing of the woman’s essence, one could rather say that the woman revealed to me the charm of a gesture. A gesture cannot be regarded as the expression of an individual, as his creation (because no individual is capable of creating a fully original gesture, belonging to nobody else), nor can it even be regarded as that person’s instrument; on the contrary, it is gestures that use us as their instruments, as their bearers and incarnations. (Kundera 1991: 7)

The fact that the woman revealed the charm of a gesture does not have to mean that the gesture revealed nothing of the woman’s individual character: there may be a limited reservoir of gestures, but each individual will adopt and slightly modify that gesture so that it will manifest something distinctive and special for each individual human being. Similarly, the fact that most philosophers work on philosophical ideas that are already in circulation does not mean that their work is not original, or that the way they work on these ideas does not bring out their specific taste and judgment. Now Zhuangzi and Stoics certainly do bring out the charm of the idea of virtuosity in the ordinary. At the same time, they embody this idea in a manner that represents both distinctive features of Daoism and Stoicism, but also of the two intellectual traditions at large. We will be able to put our finger much more easily on a characteristic feature of two different individuals when we ask them to perform one and the same gesture, rather than when we ask them to perform whatever gesture they want. Similarly, the Greek version of the virtuosity in the ordinary will have its own distinctive feature in which it will differ from the Chinese version of the same theory, and this difference will mirror larger divergences between the two intellectual traditions.

With the exception of tentative conclusions in chapters two and five, however, I am mostly leaving these differences implicit, since the scope of this work does not allow us to confidently propose similar generalizations. I am much more confident about the impact of this comparison on the microscopic level, i.e. its ability to use the comparative perspective to positively change our understanding of the compared texts themselves. This work has demonstrated, as I hope, that comparative philosophy does not have to be a hopelessly ahistorical, abstract and generalizing enterprise, but that it can constructively contribute to specialist discourses of Sinologists and Classicists. I can only welcome if readers, having finished this work, feel that they have a better insight into the Greek or Chinese tradition;
but what is even more important, and what I have been trying to achieve, is that they should feel that it helped them to get a better grip on the *Zhuangzi*, if they work primarily in Chinese thought, or that it helped them to understand better the Stoics, if they work in Greek and Roman philosophy.

Let me conclude by acknowledging some limitations of this work and suggesting a course for a future development. Perhaps the greatest challenge of a comparative work like this is to address and satisfy different kinds of audience. Every time one wants to engage with a more detailed and specialist discussion of the Chinese material, one runs a risk of straining the patience of those who work on ancient Greek philosophy, and vice versa. On the other hand, in trying to maintain the style and content of presentation that makes the predominant part of the work accessible and appealing to readers with different backgrounds, the risk is in being too trivial and superficial, so that the work which could be relevant for everyone is actually seriously read by no one. To respond successfully to this challenge, it is essential to develop an art of fine balancing between the demands of accessibility on the one hand and erudition on the other hand, which means, in effect, to be able to find a balance in satisfying the expectations of Sinologists and Classicists. My sense is that there is still a significant room for improvement in this work in trying to achieve that balance and writing with different audiences in mind.

One could perhaps also wish for a more developed articulation of the differences between *Zhuangzi*’s Daoism and Stoicism, and also between the two intellectual traditions at large. The reason I was focusing somewhat more on the similarities than on the differences is simply that we can talk about the differences only after we have established a solid understanding of the similarities, on which any differences, if they should be pertinent, have to be based. At the same time, the work has articulated a preliminary pattern of differences which can be expanded in a further development.

Finally, I would like to develop those qualities of the work that make it an attractive reading for philosophers across different specializations. Besides a deeper and tighter engagement with different philosophical problems and arguments that emerge in individual chapters (freedom, perception, emotions), this could lie in fleshing out different arguments in support of the view that excellence is a skill, and to consider how these arguments differ in light of varying conceptions of skill in both traditions. This should generate enough interesting material to contribute, in the wake of Annas (2011), to our assessment of the idea of virtue-skill in light of contemporary virtue ethics. Lastly, there is also a room for making
a stronger case for the idea that different cultures of the ancient world might have been, in spite of the cultural and linguistic differences, in a better position to have a meaningful conversation with each other than ancient and modern thinkers within each tradition.
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