Article

Authority without Authenticity: The *Zhuangzi*'s Genuine Pretending as Socio-Political Strategy

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Abstract: In this paper, we present a socio-political reading of the *Zhuangzi* based in part on a brief review of contemporary Chinese scholarship on the text. We will argue that the approach to dealing with authority in the *Zhuangzi* can be summarized by the phrase "externally transforming without transforming internally". When applied to situations where the individual engages with political or social authority, this idea commends the art of retaining a non-conforming and non-committed internal state while, to an extent, conforming to external circumstances and committing to certain actions. In this way the *Zhuangzi* not only aims at ensuring safety in potentially dangerous encounters with authority, but also the avoidance of "authenticating" authority. Following the language and logic of the *Zhuangzi*, the emphasis is on "forgetting (*wang* 忘)", "losing (*sang* 喪)", and "negating (*wu* 無)" one's social self, rather than constructing or discovering an "authentic self" that might ultimately only reify authority. We will refer to the *Zhuangzi*'s strategy in terms of what we call "genuine pretending".

Keywords: *Zhuangzi*; Daoism; authenticity; authority; genuine pretending

1. Introduction

Interpretations of the political and social perspectives found in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (*Book of Master Zhuang*) can be separated into those who find the text overtly political and social, and those who argue that it has little to say about politics and society. The latter camp can be traced back to the early Chinese philosopher Xunzi 荀子 (d. 238) who famously stated: "Zhuangzi was blinded by concern with the natural realm and thereby did not know the human" (*Xunzi* 21.5)[1]. Many later thinkers have followed suit. For example, in his *The World of Thought in the Zhuangzi* Yang Guorong 楊國榮 ends each chapter discussing shortcomings of the *Zhuangzi* based on its overemphasis on "existence" (*zai* 在) and nature or the natural (*ziran* 自然 and *ziranjie* 自然界) (Yang 2006). Guo Xiang 郭象 (d. 312), the complier and editor of the received *Zhuangzi*, is representative of an entirely different understanding of the Daoist classic. Guo finds many political arguments in the text, often concerning the structure of society and forms of rulership (Guo 1990, p. 161). Recently Wang Bo 王博 has reinvigorated this reading, demonstrating that lessons on human interaction and political affairs can be found frequently in the so-called "inner chapters" (Wang 2004).

A common thread throughout these opposing takes on the *Zhuangzi* is the recognition that it is categorically distinct from the Mohist, Confucian, and Legalist texts in that it does not seek to

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[1] When referring to passages from the Chinese classics we cite the chapter and section number as they appear in the online version of the text at the Chinese Text Project website (www.ctext.org), unless otherwise referenced the translations are our own.

present normative political claims. In this way the *Zhuangzi* is somewhat unique among the pre-Qin philosophical classics. Even other major Daoist texts, such as the *Daodejing* 道德經 (*The Way and its Power*) or *Laozi* 老子 (*Book of Master Lao*), provide theories for regulating rulership and delineating what is considered legitimate power. The *Zhuangzi* alone is relatively silent on the issue of who should rule, or what qualifications should be met. In its comments on themes related to society and politics, political and social authority are often taken to be external forces that remain outside of one's influence. It is best, the *Zhuangzi* tends to suggest, to keep one's distance, if possible, and to approach authority with the utmost caution. Above all, the *Zhuangzi* stresses that individuals should not allow themselves to be internally committed or harmed by external acquiesce to power—what the *Zhuangzi* (22.11) refers to as "externally transforming without transforming internally".

We will demonstrate that when applied to situations where the individual engages with political or social authority, this idea relates to the art of retaining a relatively unafflicted internal state while simultaneously adapting to external conditions. This is useful for keeping one's own person safe in potentially dangerous situations. Following the language and logic of the *Zhuangzi*, the emphasis is on "protecting (*bao* 保)" and "preserving (*cun* 存)" one's empty self. It speaks of "forgetting (*wang* 忘)", "losing (*sang* 桑)", and "negating (*wu* 無)" one's social self, rather than constructing an "authentic self" to oppose authority. In other words, in its advice for dealing with, and sometimes subverting, authority the *Zhuangzi* does not rely on developing or cultivating a "purer" or more "real" self—it suggests quite the opposite, remaining a self-less self. We will refer to this strategy for dealing with authority in the *Zhuangzi* as a way of "genuine pretending".

2. Externally Transforming without Transforming Internally

In recent years, several Chinese scholars have focused on the critical notion of "externally transforming without transforming internally" in their respective analyses of the *Zhuangzi*. These readings often highlight the *Zhuangzi*'s perspective on political legitimacy, or authority, and the methods for dealing with it.

Chen Guying 陳鼓應 is arguably the most famous living scholar of Daoism in China today. Although he regularly points to similarities between Daoism and Confucianism, he also describes key differences. Basing his discussion of political authority in Daoism on the famous expression from the *Zhuangzi* (33.1), "inner sage outer king (*neisheng waiwang* 內聖外王)", Chen explains its varied meanings for the two schools of thought. He writes:

> "Inner sage" indicates a type of personal cultivation of someone's inner heart-mind; "outer king" points to affairs that deal with organizing society and communities of people . . . Confucianism thinks that studying to be an "inner sage" can initiate the way of "outer king". Daoism thinks that "inner sage" and "outer king" are fundamentally opposed and conflicting. Studying to be an "inner sage" [does not necessarily enable one to] initiate the way of "outer king". As cultivation of the individual person "inner sage" can only help one become a [sagely] person. One person's character can only influence a small circle of people, there is no way it can be extended outward to the larger society or other communities . . . A power structure needs to have checks and balances, and for this relying on emotional transformation [as the Confucian system does] is useless, there need to be checks and balances on power. And an individual person's cultivation cannot come up with checks and balances on power. ([Chen 2008](#), p. 259)

In other words, Chen argues that Daoists do not think that cultivation of the person will necessarily translate into political (or even moral) authority.[2] For Confucians moral integrity and the cultivation

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[2] There are variances here, between the Laozi and the Zhuangzi, and within these texts. In this paper we will highlight those sections in these texts where suspicion about cultivation being reflected in political arenas.

of a good character can, and must, be extended to wider and wider social spheres. Thus, an "inner sage" can become an "outer king" by virtue of his own individual cultivation. Daoists disagree. Chen continues, "'inner sage' as the way of humaneness and 'outer king' as study of ritual . . . are [for a Daoist] completely unrelated" (Chen 2008, p. 259). Not only politically, but also in a more general existential sense, there is no necessary congruity between inner cultivation and social influence.[3] The *Zhuangzi* not only dismisses the Confucians claim of a supposed correspondence between inner and outer, it actually points to the realization of inner-outer incongruence as a useful strategy for dealing with political authority.[4]

In *The Philosophy of the Zhuangzi*, Wang Bo reorganizes the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi* according to his own understanding of their philosophical value.[5] He places the fourth chapter, entitled "The Human World" (*ren jianshi* 人間世), first to highlight the importance of the socio-political lessons found in the text. In his introduction to the chapter Wang states,

> It is not that Zhuangzi was not concerned with [social] order, but rather that he thinks this problem is not something he can consider, or that only after one's life is [relatively] safe and peaceful that [political and social] order can be considered. So he chooses to give up [the discussion of order], or we could say to temporarily give it up. This attitude of "giving up" allows him to take a relaxed approach in the world, which means that he can keep an appropriate distance from it. (Wang 2004, p. 23)

Wang explains this in terms of stories about Zhuangzi's actual life. Wang argues that despite his low-level government position Zhuangzi was, a hermit—albeit a social one. This can be evidenced by the various accounts of him having been offered high positions, but refusing them, and preferring, in one (likely fictionalized) instance to "drag his tail in the mud" by fishing instead (*Zhuangzi* 17.11). The basic socio-political attitude represented by Zhuangzi displays a difference between one's "heart-mind (*xin* 心)" and "outer appearance (*xing* 形)". Especially when dealing with authority, it is important, Wang says, to follow Zhuangzi's "two paths (*liang xing* 行)" of being "free and easy (*xiaoyao* 小遙) in one's "heart-mind (*xin* 心)" while the "outer appearance (*xing* 形)" remains in alignment with others (Wang 2004, pp. 205–7). Borrowing from Dong Fangshuo 東方朔 (d. 93 BCE), who describes Zhuangzi as "sunken into worldly customs", (*lu chen yu su* 陸沉於俗)[6] Wang sees Zhuangzi as paradoxically avoiding worldliness by being completely in the world (Wang 2004, p. 181).

Like Wang Bo, Wang Deyou 王德有 deems Zhuangzi a "social hermit". Being such a hermit, Wang Deyou explains, does not entail purposively hiding away from society:

> So-called hermits in ancient times were not those who purposively hid their own bodies from other people, nor did they purposively keep their own mouths shut and said nothing; and they did not purposively stop their own thoughts and think of nothing. They did not meet people, speak, or think about [political issues] because it was not the right time to do so. (Wang 2012, p. 311)

Being a social hermit means living in society while keeping one's heart-mind relatively free from attachment, expectations, and intentions.[7] People who get caught up in worldly customs and norms

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[3]　In general Chen sees Daoism as being a philosophy for the individual, whereas Confucianism provides concrete advice for social and political areas. The Zhuangzi in particular, Chen argues, provides "spiritual" relief or therapy, it does not represent much in the way of a proactive social or political approach.

[4]　Confucians, that is the Lunyu and the responses to that text in the Zhuangzi, expect that one's inner feelings are represented in their external actions. We have described our use of "correspondence" in detail elsewhere, see D'Ambrosio et al. (2018). In other words, we are talking about a "correspondence" of the person's inner feelings/thoughts and their external behavior—the term "correspondence" would not necessarily work well with other nei (inner) and wai 外 (outer) distinctions made in Chinese thought.

[5]　See Wang (2004).

[6]　This phrase makes use of the expression *lu chen* 陸沉 ("land-sunken") see *Zhuangzi* 25.5.

[7]　Certain themes in the *Lunyu* reflect a similar attitude (the following quotes use the translation by James Legge accessed on www.ctext.org on November 25). For example, "The Master said of Nan Rong that if the country were well governed he

are limited by the way their thoughts and emotions correspond directly to their expectations about their environment. To borrow from the *Zhuangzi* (22.11), they are people who "transform internally without transforming [i.e., adapting] externally". They are easily excited or disappointed. Stress and anxiety are constantly bothering them so that they cannot be "free and easy". A "social hermit", instead is able to go along with things while "externally transforming without transforming internally". Wang Deyou explains that social hermits are "one with the great *dao* (*rong yu da dao* 融於大道)" or "experiencing *dao* (*ti hui dao* 體會道 / *ti wu dao* 體悟大道)" (Wang 2012, p. 146). These notions in the *Zhuangzi* can be understood as indicating that one's heart-mind is able to go along with the circumstances of one's own life without getting caught up or overly attached to them.

Fu Peirong 傅佩榮 takes the same idea of "externally transforming without transforming internally" to heart and applies it to his own life. He explains: "sometimes I wear a suit, because a suit is the best costume [everyone who wears one looks similar, and no one can tell who I am or what my role is]" (Fu 2016a). The key for achieving this attitude is, for Fu, becoming "empty" or "without emotions". However, being empty does not imply literally being devoid of all thoughts or feelings, but rather to experience them without clinging to them (Fu 2012, p. 138). Referring to a story in the *Zhuangzi*, where Confucius advises his favorite student Yan Hui on how to deal with a ruler who abuses his power, Fu advocates "being empty so as to rely on things (*xu er dai wu* 虛而待物)" (*Zhuangzi* 4.2). In other words, he suggests not achieving a notion of self that gets in the way of going along with the course of things (Fu 2012, p. 85). The goal is to forget the self. Fu bluntly asks: "Why do people grasp so tightly to a notion of self?" Isn't it better, he asks, "to simply let your 'self' go?" (Fu 2016a) The specific target is the sense of self wrapped up with a concern for social standing:

> In terms of the *Zhuangzi*, [we learn that] we don't want to have any type of particular one-sidedness. In society people will always have some type of social influence. But if we focus on this too much then other people will acknowledge us [only as] this type of person. Our life will be tied up with our social position, role, or job. There is no reason for this, everyone is simply a life. Understanding this, the *Zhuangzi* says that [it is ideal to remain] unaffected by the praise or blame of others.[8] This is extremely difficult, and maybe no one can do it [but the *Zhuangzi* advises us to try]. (Fu 2016a)

Fu further emphasizes the distinction between the self-less self in the *Zhuangzi* and contemporary existentialist notions of authenticity. He says that the latter focuses on subjective ownership while the *Zhuangzi* wants to dismiss precisely this (Fu 2016a). Being empty, "going along with things", and letting one's self go is the best advice, according to such readings of the *Zhuangzi*, for dealing with any type of authority—and with one's own inner tendencies to submit to it. It means to undermine

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would not be out of office, and if it were ill governed, he would escape punishment and disgrace. He gave him the daughter of his own elder brother to wife" (*Lunyu* 5.2). In Chapter 5 we also find, "The Master said, 'When good order prevailed in his country, Ning Wu acted the part of a wise man. When his country was in disorder, he acted the part of a stupid man. Others may equal his wisdom, but they cannot equal his stupidity'" (*Lunyu* 5.21). But Confucianism is best known, and Kongzi is often thought of, as advocating a more proactive approach: "The Master said, 'When good government prevails in a state, language may be lofty and bold, and actions the same. When bad government prevails, the actions may be lofty and bold, but the language may be with some reserve'" (*Lunyu* 14.3). We also find the desire to hold fast to one's principles, no matter what type of government prevails: "The Master said, 'Truly straightforward was the historiographer Yu. When good government prevailed in his state, he was like an arrow. When bad government prevailed, he was like an arrow. A superior man indeed is Qu Bo Yu! When good government prevails in his state, he is to be found in office. When bad government prevails, he can roll his principles up, and keep them in his breast'" (*Lunyu* 15.7). These stories, and particularly the last, indicate a certain flexibility in the *Lunyu* or Confucianism. Other prominent examples include Bo Yu as described in *Lunyu* 18.8, and perhaps most famously the Master saying, "there is nothing that I must do and nothing that I cannot do" (*Lunyu* 2.8). In other words, he can adapt to situations and drastically changed his behavior accordingly. The *Lunyu* also reminds that one should not get overly carried away with expressions, for example, "The Master said, 'The Guan Ju expresses his happiness without being licentious, and grief without being overly saddened'" (*Lunyu* 3.20). However, from the perspective of the Zhuangzi Confucius does not go far enough, and remains relatively fixed or has a "already formed heart-mind" (*cheng xin* 成心) (*Zhuangzi* 2.4). For more on the comparison between holding fast to one's intentions and principles in the *Lunyu* and the comparatively more flexible position of the *Zhuangzi* see D'Ambrosio (2017).

8   Here Fu Peirong is referencing the *Zhuangzi* 2.3.

the reification of authority by refusing a total commitment to it while, at the same time, living as productively with it as may be possible.

3. Emptiness and Genuine Pretending

Chapter 4 of the *Zhuangzi* contains some of the politically most relevant stories in the entire text. In each story, strategies for dealing with political authority are central. One major theme, highlighted explicitly throughout, is the preservation of one's life, which often comes through some form of negative cultivation such as "forgetting oneself (*wang qi shen* 忘其身)", (*Zhuangzi* 4.3) being "empty (*xu* 虛)", (*Zhuangzi* 4.1; 4.2) or "fasting of the heart-mind (*xin zhai* 心齋)" (*Zhuangzi* 4.2). Coupled with this is the idea of going along with changes in the environment, which can include provisionally adopting social designations, including reputation or censure, imposed by others.

The story of a huge tree in this section exemplifies this point. As a carpenter and his apprentice walk by the tree, the young man asks his master why they do not chop it down. The carpenter replies that anything made from its wood would be useless. That night the tree appears to the master in a dream. It explains that being considered useless by society has been extremely useful for it, allowing it to live extremely long. When the carpenter tells his apprentice about the dream, the young man questions why the tree has become a shrine—the focus of much social attention. The carpenter quickly admonishes his apprentice saying that if it was not used as a shrine, it would likely be cut down. Moreover, the tree did not choose to become a shrine, it was simply designated as one, and then went along with this designation to ensure its safety. In other words, as we argued elsewhere,

> [the] tree reacted to the social inclusion it could not avoid by playing its role without identifying with it. It did not personally commit to its socially ascribed usefulness. It did not affirm the value that society eventually foisted on it, and it withstood the pressure to acknowledge and recognize this value. At the same time, of course, it performed the role associated with the value. And here lies the difficulty of ["externally transforming without transforming internally"]: one has to manage (as the . . . tree did) to maintain "a difference from the people" (*yu zhong yi* 與眾異) while in their midst and, unlike them, refuse to pretend that such a thing as a shrine has any intrinsic usefulness. It thereby resisted the temptation to adopt its socially ascribed usefulness as its own identity and to conceive of itself as especially valuable. (Moeller and D'Ambrosio 2017, pp. 140–41)

The tree accomplished its difficult task, which it says nearly killed it, by not internalizing the values of the social world around it. Remaining empty, it could avoid becoming a mere tool for human production as, it claims, fruit bearing trees have become. Quite clearly the tree is not talking about developing or realizing an "authentic" self.

As Chinese philosophers sought to globally legitimatize Chinese philosophy through the adoption of Western concepts, and Western scholars attempted to understand Chinese philosophy in terms familiar to them, the *Zhuangzi* has been associated with the notion of authenticity.[9] Authenticity, as Charles Taylor defines it, "involves creation and construction as well as discovery" of one's self (Taylor 2007, p. 66). The *Zhuangzi*, however, hardly speaks of creating or discovering a self. The language it uses points to quite the opposite. Usually, when the notion of "authenticity" is applied to the *Zhuangzi*, what is meant is some type of "personal integrity", or something personal preserved despite social and/or political demands, i.e., some non-transforming internal aspects that remain unadulterated by external adaptations. Truly, the *Zhuangzi* speaks of not transforming internally, but that which is preserved is an emptiness. It is an emptiness that allows one to be continually filled

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[9]   Fu Peirong also details the difference between Western notions of authenticity and Chinese "*zhencheng* 真誠" which he says is often misunderstood as Western "authenticity," see Fu (2016a). In his article on authenticity and the *Zhuangzi* Paul D'Ambrosio references dozens of scholars who have read authenticity into the *Zhuangzi*, and details the distinction between Western notions of authenticity and the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi*, see D'Ambrosio (2015).

in "relying on things (*xu er dai wu* 虛而待物)" (*Zhuangzi* 4.2). Like the image of the vessel employed in Chapter 11 of the *Laozi*—which is useful because its emptiness can be filled, but only to be emptied out again—the *Zhuangzi* advises that an empty person can take on whatever the environment may bring, but should always return to emptiness.[10] While emptiness, and the methods for retaining it, such as "forgetting oneself" or "fasting of the heart-mind", have often been interpreted as suggesting some mysterious "oneness with *dao*" or spiritual state, the *Zhuangzi* actually thereby often provides quite practical advice for engaging in everyday activities (*Zhuangzi* 4.3).

Fu Peirong notes that one of the defining characteristics of Western studies on the *Zhuangzi* is a resort to "mysticism (*shenmi* 神秘 or *miqi* 密契)". This approach is typically also relied upon, Fu says, when discussing the ability to transform externally without transforming internally (Fu 2016b) According to him, however, a closer reading of the *Zhuangzi* shows that what it actually offers are in fact "hints" (*mi jue* 秘) for dealing with mundane external changes and political authority (Fu 2016b).

Such hints are given in the opening story in Chapter 4 that has Yan Hui seeking advice from Confucius. Ironically, the latter here plays the role of a Daoist spokesperson, as it is often the case in the *Zhuangzi*. The story begins with Yan Hui asking to take leave. Confucius responds, "Where will you go?" to which Yan Hui says that he will proceed to the state of Wei where he intends to correct the ways of an evil ruler. Citing the master's own advice, Yan Hui explains that he should "[l]eave a well-ordered state and go to one in chaos". Contradicting "mainstream" Confucian expectations, Confucius, however, does not commend Yan Hui's seemingly good intentions here, but says that such a proselytizing attitude will surely get Yan Hui executed. Questioning Yan Hui's moral mission, he asks: "What leisure do you have to worry about some tyrant?" Exposing Yan Hui's hidden hypocrisy, he stipulates that true virtuosity is "undermined by *getting a name for it*". In addition, further disapproving of Yan Hui's "virtue signaling", Confucius says, "your high-handed display of regulating words about Humanity [*ren* 仁] and Responsibility [*yi* 義] in the face of such a tyrant would just be a way of showing off your beauty at the expense of his ugliness". "This is", Confucius continues "called plaguing others—and he who plagues others will surely be plagued in return".

After the admonishment goes on a bit longer Yan Hui suggests that he might become "unified and focused" then—a gesture Confucius quickly dismisses for being merely accommodating. Confucius instead recommends;

> With this [emptiness through fasting of the mind] you can play in his cage without impinging on his concern for a good name. When he is receptive, do your crowing, but when he's not, let it rest. Do not let him get to you, but do not harm him either. Seeking all possible dwelling places as one, let yourself be lodged in whichever cannot be avoided . . . It is easy to wipe away your footprints, but difficult to walk without touching the ground. (Ziporyn 2009, p. 27)

Left with this description the story ends in an abrupt manner. We do not know if Yan Hui has properly understood his lesson, nor are we told what he decides to do in the end. What we know is that the *Zhuangzi* advises to become empty so as to be able to lodge in any dwelling place, without preference or lasting internal commitment.

We have argued that the story of Yan Hui's proposed visit to Wei expounds the benefits of what we call "genuine pretending" when dealing with political authority:

> The dialogue about the visit to Wei illustrates the benefits of cultivating genuine pretending rather than moral sincerity when facing violent, destructive, and dangerous social powers—or, in moral terms not so often applied in the *Zhuangzi*, when facing evil. Genuine pretending helps to build immunity against these powers, which are, in various degrees, found everywhere. This immunity is twofold. On the one hand, one becomes less vulnerable

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10 See also *Laozi* 4, p. 11.

by avoiding direct confrontations with these powers—one has a better chance of eschewing execution. On the other—and perhaps more importantly—one does not reinforce the evildoer's mode of commitment and one's own selfish desire for and commitment to the pursuit of a good name ... The genuine pretender deflates the self-centered attitude that produces tyranny and thereby helps, as an empty role model, establish social immunity against taking names, possessions, rank, and success too seriously. As Confucius said, one has to first establish emptiness in oneself before one can establish it in others. (Moeller and D'Ambrosio 2017, pp. 146–47)[11]

It is important to note that transforming externally, i.e., the "pretending" aspects of genuine pretending, does not equate to trickery or falsity for personal gain. The genuine pretender pursues no selfish goal—he has no hidden agenda, no mission to complete, no ideology to impose. In the passage outlined above Confucius makes this abundantly clear. When Yan Hui suggests that he might change the ruler by being "internally upright but externally adaptable", following the "ways of Heaven" internally while externally following "the ways of man", Confucius criticizes him harshly:

No, no! How could that ever work? You're like a ruler with a great multitude of policies and methods but without any foreign intelligence. Although this might well allow you to get by without being faulted, that's about all you'll accomplish ... You are still taking your mind as your instructor ... You must fast! ... the vital energy is an emptiness, a waiting for the presence of beings (*xu er dai wu* 虛而待物). The Course (*dao* 道) alone is what gather in this emptiness. And it is this emptiness that is the fasting of the mind. (Ziporyn 2009, pp. 26–27)

Genuine pretending does involve adapting to external transformations, but it is not backed by particular goals, intentions, or ideas. The genuine pretender is internally empty—and does not cultivate a full consciousness of being "upright" or of having an authentic self. Pretending here can be understood in the way that children play, that is, without attachment to whatever is temporarily adopted, recognizing both the contingency and transience of transformations. The "genuineness" of genuine pretending is reflected in child play as well. Children taken on their roles and actually "become" them, but again only while affirming the contingency and transience of their roles. They do not essentially identify themselves as *really being* a doctor, cop, or robber. Unlike actual doctors, cops, and robbers, who sometimes get carried away with their roles, a child only identifies as such in a particular situation and for a fixed amount of time. Genuine pretending suggests that this attitude might help alleviate some of the stress and anxiety associated with overzealous over-commitment to social roles. Perhaps more importantly, it also provides resistance against the "bad faith" of falsely over-identifying with one's social roles. *Genuine* pretending thus also means, paradoxically, the absence of falsely assumed authenticity and builds up a certain immunity against socially induced vanity.

Genuine pretending neither internalizes social authority nor seeks to abolish it. In fact, if we reflect on the advice Confucius gives for dealing with a tyrant, we see that it is not actually concerned with "regime change". The *Zhuangzi* does not intend to replace one model of autocratic political authority with another. Instead, it subverts the social and psychological mechanism that underlies the construction of absolute authority in the first place. It tries to cultivate an internal strategy, a mind-set, if you will, that subverts the formation of a firm belief in authority which fosters total submission to it.

4. The Two Great Constraints

The empty self recommended in the *Zhuangzi* is not absolutely empty. The text is not advocating to never take any position on anything. Like "non-action (*wuwei* 無為)", which does not mean doing nothing not all, but rather refers to a paradoxical method of effortless achievement, the empty self is a paradoxical notion that allows a self to function as sanely as possible. Different perspectives must

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[11] This refers to remarks made by Confucius, being used as a mouthpiece for the *Zhuangzi* (*Zhuangzi* 4.1).

be constantly taken on, but none are clung to, or prioritized as really "right". The term "genuine pretending" is used to describe what the *Zhuangzi* refers to as "lodging in temporary dwelling places" (Ziporyn 2009, p. 27). In the face of dubious, and often threatening or "insane" moral, political, or social authorities *Zhuangzi*an genuine pretending denotes the ability to shift into and out of various moral and political perspectives or social identities to cope with them without falling prey to their respective falsities and obsessions.

In the language of early Chinese philosophy lodging in temporary dwellings refers directly to only provisionally appropriating various *shi-fei* 是非 (is-is not, right-wrong, ought-ought not) positions. The second chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, "Equalizing Things and Arguments", eloquently displays how futile it is to argue for the universal dominance of any single perspective by repeatedly showing how fixation on anything quickly tumbles over and inverts itself. For example:

> Without *that* there would be no me, to be sure, but then again without *me* there would be nothing selected out from it all. (Ziporyn 2009, p. 10)
> If we follow whatever has so far taken shape, fully formed, in our minds, making that our teacher, who could ever be without a teacher? The mind comes to be what it is by taking possession of whatever it selects out of the process of alternation—but does that mean it has to truly understand that process? (Ziporyn 2009, p. 11)
> "This" is also a "that". "That" is also a "things". "THAT" posits a "this" and a "that"—a right and a wrong—of its own. But "THIS" also posits a "this" and a "that"—a right and a wrong—of its own. So is there really an "that" versus "this", any right versus wrong? Or is there really no "that" versus "this"? (Ziporyn 2009, p. 12)

We are not left here simply tumbling through a mess of rhetorical questions that suggest a "turtles all the way down" argument. The *Zhuangzi* concludes these sections: "Hence, when the understanding consciousness comes to rest in what it does not know, it has reached its utmost" (Ziporyn 2009, p. 17). When applied to political and social issues the gist of this argument is not so much skeptical as it is humble. The point is to not give in to any fundamentalism. Any political position becomes dangerous at the very moment when it becomes indubitable and unchallengeable, i.e., a true and "authentic" authority. Once one begins to know for sure that one is right, or that someone is an authority, problems arise. Therefore, the cultivation of an almost Socratic ignorance, and the mode of a playful pretending are crucial to the Daoist quest of remaining sane—both individually and socially.

The *Zhuangzi* is responding to the fixations or "universally effective methods" of other thinkers and texts, which culminated in what would later be called "schools" (*jia* 家). In particular, the *Zhuangzi* was written as a rejoinder to widespread obsessions with virtues extolled in texts such as the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*). A mindless worshipping of *ren* 仁 ("humanness") and *yi* 義 ("responsibility") is constantly questioned. The *Zhuangzi* notes, for instance, that robbers, too, may exhibit their own versions of these virtues: "Robbers also have their own way (*dao yi you dao* 盜亦有道)" (*Zhuangzi* 10.1). In such satirical form, the actual contingency, rather than the suggested necessity, of the validity of such virtues is exposed. They have become rhetorical, political, and psychological tools used to embellish, ornament, or justify often less than holy practices. Rather than actually proving true authority, they in fact have become linguistic indicators of potential hypocrisy and falseness.

Instead of celebrating such values as guaranteeing legitimacy, indicating authority, and providing firm guidance, the *Zhuangzi* cultivates a certain suspicion of them—a suspicion that in turn allows one to deal with their contingency in a way that reduces their harm to oneself and others. A sometimes-neglected passage of the *Zhuangzi* appeals to two major "virtues", which are central to the *Lunyu* as well. However, in the typical ironic fashion of the *Zhuangzi*, these virtues turn out to be rather ambiguous—they are not depicted as glorious embellishments of human nature, but tricky "constraints" (*jie* 戒) that one must be aware of so that one can navigate them cautiously. We already glimpsed at the background story that frames them. The tale that immediately follows Yan Hui's proposed venture to Wei has Zigao being designated the envoy to Qi. Worrying that his anxieties about the mission will screw it up, Zigao turns to Confucius for advice, and is consoled by him as follows:

> There are two great constraints in this world. One is fate (*ming* 命), one's mandated limitations, and the other is responsibility (*yi* 義), doing what fits one's position. A child's love for his parents is fate—it cannot be removed from his heart. An underling's service to a boss is responsibility, the response called for by his position; wherever he goes, he is in service to his boss. It cannot be avoided anywhere in this world. Thus I call these the great constraints. To be reconciled to wherever you may have to go to serve your parents is perfect filial piety, and to be reconciled to whatever may be involved in serving your boss is complete loyalty. And in the service one must render one's own heart, thus seeing that you likewise cannot change the joy and sorrow it sets before you, thus reconciling yourself to these too as part of your fate, knowing them to be something else you can do nothing about—that is the utmost Virtuosity. Being a son or a subordinate, there will inevitably be things you cannot avoid having to do. Absorb yourself in the realities of the task at hand to the point of forgetting your own existence. Then you will have no leisure to delight in life or abhor death. That would make this mission of yours quite doable! (Ziporyn 2009, p. 28)

Before discussing the philosophical content of this passage, we can investigate some of the key terms. *Jie* 戒 is translated by Brook Ziporyn here as "constraints"; James Legge uses "cautionary considerations",[12] and according to A.C. Graham they are "commandments" (Graham 1981, p. 70). The *shu* (疏) annotator Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (d. 660) notes that *jie* should be understood as *fa* 法, which here means standards or regularities, but is often also translated as "methods". Cheng Xuanying further explains that "of these two [fate and responsibility] responsibility is the more important".[13] (Guo 1990, p. 161) Guo Xiang comments that fate and responsibility are "naturally embedded, and cannot be removed" (Guo 1990, p. 161). Further explicating Guo Xiang, Cheng Xuanying says that "filial piety is exhausted in the emotions of love and respect, which are the fate of human nature (*xing* 性), they come naturally (*tian ran* 天然) ... and cannot be removed from the heart-mind" (Guo 1990, p. 161). We can thus read *jie* as harboring any or all these meanings. The *Zhuangzi* sees fate (filial piety) and responsibility as inevitable conditions of the human experience. We are naturally born to our parents, and normally become emotionally and socially attached to them. The same is in turn true regarding our children (if we have any). Likewise, social ties evolve in public life where we find ourselves in shifting hierarchies, professionally and politically. Like the English word "bond", the term *jie* 戒 connotes both a sort of belonging as well as a restriction.

"Fate" may not only refer to the kinship group we are "thrown" into by chance of birth, but also to the geographical location where we grow up and the way of life we thereby acquire. It may be referring to our biological sex as much as to our ethnicity, or bodily features that we can neither choose nor alter. Socially, our "responsibilities" are determined, for instance, by our gender roles, or by our line of profession and social status which, in early China, was inherited rather than freely chosen. The strategy to deal with these contingencies that the *Zhuangzi* advises is to accept them as temporary "lodgings"—and to make ourselves at home with them as much as possible, while, at the same time understanding their contingent nature. Reconcilement goes along with an insight into the non-substantiality of these roles. Other than standard Confucian ethics, which prescribes a sincere commitment and internalization of "fate" and "responsibility", the Daoist philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* allows for the cultivation of a more complex understanding of personal and social identity. As exemplified famously with the image of the butterfly—that Zhuang Zhou changes into during his dream—social roles and biological identities are not essential, but subject to the general "transformation of things".

An understanding of identity as contingent and temporary provides the foundation for an "inauthentic" approach to socially ascribed authority, be it one's own or someone else's authority.

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12 See ctext.org; *Zhuangzi* 4.3.
13 This is a loose translation depicting the philosophical meaning of the original "二事義旨".

The authority that comes with social roles can neither be denied as merely illusory nor should it be regarded as essentially given. To be a functioning father figure, for instance, it is important to adopt and enact some fatherly attitudes and ways of behavior, but it is equally important, to be able to not over-identify with this role so that one can avoid becoming too "patriarchal" or too authoritarian. Likewise, in dealing with the authority of one's father, it can be dysfunctional and pathological to not develop feelings of affection and respect towards him, but it can be equally dysfunctional and pathological to define oneself entirely through the subordination and emotional reverence one may think one may owe him. Something similar can be said, from the perspective of the *Zhuangzi*, regarding political authority. We should not treat it too lightly, but we should be able to maintain an inner distance from it, and this especially so when fate has allotted such authority to oneself. To over-identify either with submission to power, or with the power one has, can easily become problematic.

5. Concluding Remarks

In this short essay, we have offered some reflections on the somewhat paradoxical attitude towards social and political authority in the *Zhuangzi*. We have introduced our analysis with a look at contemporary Chinese interpreters of this Daoist text who highlight its mundane and inner-worldly relevance rather than its mystical or metaphysical features. Based on such readings, we find that the *Zhuangzi*'s stance towards authority both affirms and denies it. Authority attached to social status, and thus acquired by the contingencies of "fate" and one's position within prevailing social structures, presents compelling restraints that cannot be ignored.

Rather than directly challenging authority or trying to either abolish it altogether or to find the "right" and "authentic" kind of authority, the *Zhuangzi* looks at it as a problem that must be dealt with. A Daoist strategy of dealing with authority is aimed at enacting and living with it as sanely as possible by not blindly worshipping, idolizing, or craving it. Social status, and the authority that comes with it can be dangerous; it can lead to tyrannical regimes, both in the family and the state. What is more, if one internalizes one's authority, one can become conceited, or worse, turn into a tyrant. To avoid such extremes, the *Zhuangzi* advises a practice of "genuine pretending" that engages with authority playfully and always remains cautious of internalizing and "authenticating" it. It thereby affirms the socially contingent and temporal nature of authority.

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