Deviations from the Way, Failures of Virtue: Emotions in Early Daoist Thought*

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Abstract

Numerous passages in the early Daoist compilation *Zhuāngzǐ* depict the life of *dé* (virtue, power) as one of emotional equanimity. Acute emotions are regarded as "deviations" from the Way, "burdens" to or "failures" of *dé* that interfere with the freely adaptive, responsive agency central to the well-lived life. This study surveys treatments of emotion in the *Zhuāngzǐ* and other early texts in an attempt to better explain the nature of and grounds for the equanimity sought by the Daoist adept, the psycho-physiological assumptions that inform this view of equanimity, and the techniques by which one attains this state. For these sources, equanimity is not a complete absence of affect but the sustained presence of a calm, peaceful alertness, which facilitates activity that is physically healthy and ethically exemplary. The chief techniques for attaining this state involve attention management and cognitive reframing. The study concludes with a comparison of Daoist and Stoic views on equanimity.

1. Introduction

Numerous passages in the early Daoist compilation *Zhuāngzǐ* depict the life of *dé* 德 (virtue, agentive power) as one of emotional equanimity.[1] From such passages, we can construct a composite, eudaimonistic ideal that runs roughly as follows: Zhuangist adepts or sages "nurture what is within" (*yǎng zhōng* 養中) and keep their "capacities whole" (*cái quán* 才全) by maintaining a constant, harmonious psychological state of "being at ease with the moment and dwelling in the flow" (*ān shí ér chǔ shùn* 安時而處順). They cease to have strong preferences, and intense emotions such as joy, anger, sorrow, delight, shock or fear, and anxiety or worry rarely "penetrate" (*rù* 入) their heart or chest, the psycho-physiological locus of agency. They remain "empty" or "open" (*xū* 虛), calm or still (*jìng* 靜), and are "released" (*jiě* 解) from things. The result is that they maintain a mode of flexible, responsive agency that is self-sufficient or independent of contingent factors. This expression of agency allows the agent to

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"wander" (*yóu* 遊) through the world, following no fixed path but instead flexibly adapting to and "riding along with things" (*chéng wù* 乘物). Against the background of this ethical ideal, acute emotions are regarded as "burdens" (*lěi* 累) to or "deviations" (*xié* 邪) from *dé* that interfere with the freely adaptive, responsive agency that constitutes "wandering." Affective calm and equanimity are hallmarks of *dé*—the most admirable trait or capacity an agent can possess—and thus are central to the well-lived life.

In previous research,[2] I tentatively suggested two main reasons that some Zhuangist writings take this view of emotion, both intertwined with prevailing beliefs about healthy or vigorous psycho-physical functioning. One is that intense emotions were thought to disrupt or even physically injure the agent's healthy functioning, because they were regarded as disturbing the normal balance of *qì* 氣 (vital vapour) in the body. Since *dé* requires a healthy, robust flow of *qì*, emotions damage the agent's *dé*—the inward power or potency that gives us life and the capacity for action, in particular the ability to follow *dào* 道 (the way). The second is that, by disrupting the agent's neutral, "empty" or "open" psycho-physical equilibrium, they interfere with the capacity to perceive and respond to situations appropriately. They thus impede the agent's ability to apply *dé* in smoothly adjusting to circumstances.

The present study surveys prominent discussions of emotion in the *Zhuāngzǐ* and then examines a range of other pre-Hàn and Hàn texts in an attempt to further fill in the background to Zhuangist views and so better understand them. A broad search through pre-Qín to Hàn texts reveals that only a handful present views about affective equanimity closely related to those in the *Zhuāngzǐ*. The *Zhuāngzǐ* seems distinctive among pre-Hàn texts in its emphasis on equanimity as pivotal to *dé* and thus the good life. The texts most relevant to the *Zhuāngzǐ* on emotion, according to my findings, are the *Nèi Yè* 内業 chapter of the *Guǎnzǐ* 管子, several sections of the *Huángdì Nèijīng* 黃帝內經, two short sections from *Lǚ's Annals* 呂氏春秋, and three chapters of the *Huáinánzǐ* 淮南子. Each of these will be discussed below. Some of these sources, such as the Hàn-dynasty *Huángdì Nèijīng* and the *Huáinánzǐ*, are likely to have been composed considerably later than much *Zhuāngzǐ* material.[3] A working premise of the discussion is that despite their later date, these sources articulate long-standing traditions of thought closely related to views expressed in the *Zhuāngzǐ* and thus are instructive as to the broader intellectual context of Zhuangist thought.

In examining these texts, I aim to better explain the nature of and grounds for the equanimity sought by the Daoist adept, the psycho-physical or medical assumptions that

[1] See Fraser (2011). For a detailed account of the view summarized in this paragraph, including the sources of the key terms quoted, see the above article, along with Fraser (2014). Relevant passages are discussed in section 2 below.

[2] Fraser (2011).

[3] The dates of various *Zhuāngzǐ* writings may range from the late fourth century BCE through the middle of the second century BCE. *Zhuāngzǐ* texts such as "The Fisherman" or "Robber Zhí" likely date to around the second century BCE. The *Huáinánzǐ*, *ca* 139 BCE, borrows freely from *Zhuāngzǐ* material without attribution, suggesting that the material had not yet been collected together under the title *Zhuāngzǐ*.

inform this view of equanimity, and the techniques by which one attains this state. These points should help shed light on the relation between equanimity and *dé*. In light of the comparative focus of this collaborative volume, I will then consider how our findings from pre-Hàn and Hàn sources compare and contrast with Stoic perspectives on equanimity.

2. Equanimity in *Zhuāngzǐ*

Let me begin by reviewing a selection of Zhuangist views on equanimity. To present an accurate account of *Zhuāngzǐ* material, it is worth emphasizing that the discussion that follows is deliberately selective. The *Zhuāngzǐ* is a compilation of hundreds of short writings, most likely composed by a variety of hands over more than a century, which express a plurality of interrelated yet diverse views. For the purposes of this essay, I will be considering one or more composite views constructed from a sample of prominent, thematically interrelated Zhuangist writings. These views certainly do not constitute the only stance on emotion that can justifiably be reconstructed from the *Zhuāngzǐ.* Nor do they represent the stance of the *Zhuāngzǐ* as a whole, since, given the anthological nature of the corpus, it is highly unlikely that there is any single such overarching position. The motivation for focusing on the passages chosen here is that they represent a striking, prominent family of views that appear repeatedly across the *Zhuāngzǐ* corpus.

I will focus on views from what I take to be two rough chronological strata of *Zhuāngzǐ* material, one covering relatively early writings from books 4 and 5, the other somewhat later writings from books 13 and 15.[4]

Consider first a story from book 4, "The World Among People," in which a high official named Zǐgāo is assigned a thorny, perilous diplomatic mission and soon finds himself physically and psychologically debilitated from anxiety, to the extent that he falls ill. Consulting with his mentor, Confucius, he receives this advice:

> 自事其心者，哀樂不易施乎前，知其不可奈何而安之若命，德之至也。為人臣子者，固有所不得已，行事之情而忘其身，何暇至於悅生而惡死?…且夫乘物以遊心，託不得已以養中，至矣。
>
> In handling your own heart, for grief and joy not to alternate before you, to recognize what you can't do anything about and be at peace with it as you are with inescapable life circumstances (*mìng* 命)—this is the utmost *dé*. As a political subject or son, one indeed faces things that are inevitable. Proceed on the

[4] Any attempt to date *Zhuāngzǐ* material is at least partly conjectural, but the selections from books 4 and 5 seem to refer to a Warring States social and political setting, use anecdotal or dialogue form, and tend to focus on the concerns of concrete, named characters. These features probably place them in the late fourth to mid-third century BCE. The selections from 13 and 14 seem to represent a later stratum of syncretic, "rulership" Daoism more closely related to the Hàn-dynasty *Huáinánzǐ*. They use essay form and present general statements about abstract figures such as "sages." They seem consistent with writing from the late third through mid-second century BCE. Section 2 of book 15 is especially closely related to the *Huáinánzǐ* and may even be contemporaneous with some *Huáinánzǐ* writings.

> facts of the matter while forgetting yourself; then what time have you for delighting in life or hating death? …To let your heart wander freely by riding along with things, to nurture what is within by entrusting yourself to the inevitable—that's the utmost. (4/42–53)[5]

This story exemplifies a prominent view in the *Zhuāngzǐ* of certain emotions as intense, problematic states that may cripple an agent's normal functioning. The management of such states is treated as an aspect of self-cultivation—of "handling" or "managing" one's own heart—that involves adjusting one's cognitive attitudes and attention in order to attain equanimity, a feature of *dé*. Equanimity contributes to the resilient, imperturbable capacity for responsive agency associated with *dé*.

The passage gives us an initial basis by which to identify the psychological states targeted as problematic and the contrasting, positive state advocated to replace them. Specifying these states can help us avoid imposing a preconceived conception of emotion on the texts or implicitly assuming that our own folk concepts associated with emotion—themselves hardly clear, precise, or systematic—form a universally applicable framework into which the ideas in the texts will fit neatly. Here the states to be avoided are, roughly, grief or sorrow, joy or happiness, delight or pleasure, and hate or dislike; the valorized state is described as peace, ease, or calm (*ān* 安). Insofar as being calm or at peace is itself arguably an affective state, the implication is not that *dé* or ethical cultivation entails eliminating all "emotion," in a broad sense covering all affects or feelings. (Indeed, with one exception—addressed below—this and the other *Zhuāngzǐ* passages I will discuss employ no term for a general concept of "emotions" or "feelings.") It is that *dé* involves a cognitive and attentive orientation by which extreme, polar affects such as grief and joy or delight and hate cease to disrupt the agent's calm, peaceful equilibrium and thus ability to act effectively.

This orientation appears to have two main features. The first is that the person of *dé* recognizes that events may be beyond our control and accordingly treats them as *mìng* 命 ("fate"), in this context probably referring to brute, uncontrollable life circumstances such as our family relations or national origin. The text assumes we routinely accept such circumstances as a normal part of everyday life, and so if we assimilate other events to *mìng* as well, we will find them untroubling. Accordingly, the second feature is that, having ceased to worry about the potentially uncontrollable outcomes of our endeavors, we instead focus attention on the task at hand, adjusting our aims so that we seek "to ride along with things" freely, "nurturing" our inward well-being as we go. *Dé* thus seems to imply a shift in what we value, as we come to focus more on maintaining an adroit, resilient flow of activity than on achieving particular outcomes.

A story in "Signs of Full Virtue," book 5, depicts Confucius—again the text's spokesman—describing the sage Wáng Tái, who suffered judicial amputation of a foot, as possessing traits similar to those endorsed in the Zǐgāo story. Wáng maintains

[5] Citations to *Zhuāngzǐ* give chapter and line numbers in Hung (1956).

affective equanimity and constancy by cognitively framing changing circumstances as inescapable and by nurturing the “source” of life and agency within himself:

死生亦大矣，而不得與之變…審乎無假，而不與物遷，命物之化，而守其宗也。

Death and life are indeed major affairs, yet they bring about no change in him…He discerns the non-contingent and does not move along with things; he treats the transformations of things as inescapable life circumstances (*mìng*) and preserves his source. (5/5–6)

Wáng achieves this psychological constancy by selectively attending to certain features of his situation, specifically respects in which things remain the same—and thus constant and unchanging—rather than respects in which they are different and thus can undergo loss. The result is that he has no preferences for one outcome or another but only maintains the steady psychological harmony associated with *dé.* Both the Zǐgāo story and this passage refer to allowing the heart to “wander”—implying a form of playful, pleasant psychological freedom without any fixed end—while maintaining inward harmony.

自其異者視之，肝膽楚越也；自其同者視之，萬物皆一也。夫若然者，且不知耳目之所宜，而游心於德之和。物視其所一，而不見其所喪。

Looking at them on the basis of their differences, liver and gall are [as different as the countries of] Chǔ and Yuè. Looking at them on the basis of their similarities, the myriad things are all one. Someone like this doesn’t know what suits his eyes and ears, instead letting his heart wander in the harmony of *dé*. He looks at respects in which things are one, not seeing respects in which something has been lost. (5/7–8)

The passage introduces water as a metaphor for psychological stillness or evenness, suggesting that the equanimity of the sage can induce stillness in others as well:

人莫鑑於流水，而鑑於止水，唯止能止眾止。

No one seeks their reflection in flowing water; they seek it in still water. Only the still can bring stillness to everything else. (5/9–10)

Water metaphors are common in writings depicting sagely equanimity. This description of Wáng illustrates one implication of such metaphors, that affective equanimity or stillness allows the agent to reflect or mirror things accurately. Later in “Signs of Full Virtue,” the *dé* of another sagely figure, the grotesquely ugly Āi Tái Tuō, is also compared to water:

> 平者，水停之盛也。其可以為法也。內保之而外不蕩也。德者，成和之修也。
>
> Levelness is the highest degree of water's being unmoved. It can be taken as a standard. Preserve it internally, and external things will not disturb you. *Dé* is the practice of achieving harmony. (5/46–7)

This passage illustrates a second implication of the water metaphor: like still water, the sage's inward stillness provides a standard by which to measure things accurately. The passage also once again associates *dé* with preserving inward harmony or peace.

A third informative selection is a conversation in which the characters Zhuāngzǐ and Huìzǐ discuss the claim, asserted in the preceding paragraph (5/54), that the sage has human physical form (*xíng* 形) but lacks human *qíng* 情 (feelings, factual conditions) (5/55–60). For our purposes here, this conversation is significant because it asserts that the sage lacks "feelings," using a general term (*qíng*) that covers a range of emotions and other states, and it explains that "feelings" are potentially injurious to health because they interfere with the course of natural development. The passage is doubly interesting because of how it explains "feelings." An established use of the word *qíng* in early Chinese texts—found in the Zǐgāo story, for instance—is to refer to facts or actual conditions. By extension, *qíng* came to be used for distinctive or characteristic facts about a kind of thing—the real or genuine features of that sort of thing. Late in the Warring States period, *qíng* came to refer also to affective and conative states.[6] In such contexts, the word may well retain roughly the connotation of "actual conditions," in this case referring to conditions of the person, or the person's "feelings," in a broad sense similar to the colloquial use of the English "feelings" for what one thinks, feels, and wants.

The conversation between Zhuāngzǐ and Huìzǐ appears to play on the ambiguity between the latter two uses of *qíng*. Huìzǐ questions how sages can be human yet lack the *qíng* of humans, a contention that sounds paradoxical if *qíng* is interpreted as referring to characteristic features but might be defensible if *qíng* refers only to typical feelings. (Indeed, the claim that sages have human physical form without human *qíng* could be punning on the idea—which Huìzǐ may hold—that feelings are what is distinctive of humans.) Zhuāngzǐ explains that in this context *qíng* refers specifically to *shì fēi* 是非—attitudes of approval or disapproval or of deeming things right or wrong—while lacking *qíng* refers to not allowing likes and dislikes to "injure oneself within" (5/57–8).[7]

> 惠子謂莊子曰：「人故無情乎？」莊子曰：「然。」惠子曰：「人而無情，何以謂之人？」莊子曰：「道與之貌，天與之形，惡得不謂之人？」惠子曰：

[6] For example, the *Xúnzǐ* states that likes, dislikes, joy, anger, grief, and delight are *qíng*. See Li (1979) 506.

[7] That *qíng* refers to *shì* and *fēi* is supported by the preceding passage, which states that because the sage lacks human *qíng*, "*shì* and *fēi* do not obtain in him" (5/54).

> 「既謂之人，惡得無情？」莊子曰：「是非吾所謂情也。吾所謂無情者，言人之不以好惡內傷其身，常因自然而不益生也。」
>
> Huìzǐ said to Zhuāngzǐ, “Are there indeed humans who lack feelings?” Zhuāngzǐ said, “It’s so.” Huìzǐ said, “If they’re human yet lack feelings, how can we call them human?” Zhuāngzǐ said, “Dào gives them a [human] appearance, nature gives them a [human] physical form—how could we not call them human?” Huìzǐ said, “Since we’ve called them human, how can they lack feelings?” Zhuāngzǐ said, “*Shì* and *fēi* are what I call feelings. What I call lacking feelings refers to their not injuring themselves within with likes and dislikes, always going along with the self-so without augmenting life.” (5/55–8)

The discussion of “feelings” here, then, appears to be concerned with basic pro and con attitudes—approvals and disapprovals, likes and dislikes—rather than more fine-grained emotions.[8] The passage thus alerts us that treatments of “feelings” or of equanimity in early texts may refer to clusters of states or attitudes that overlap but may not correspond precisely with our own familiar folk concepts of emotion.[9]

According to the passage on which Zhuāngzǐ and Huìzǐ are commenting, evaluations and preferences are potentially harmful because they interfere with our capacity for perfecting what is “from heaven” or “natural” in ourselves (5/53–5). Zhuāngzǐ explains that sages maintain health through affective and conative equilibrium and situational adaptability: they avoid fixating on preferences or aversions, instead adjusting to how things are so-in-themselves and thus conforming to the life-process rather than attempting to enhance it to their benefit. By contrast with this sagely mindset, Zhuāngzǐ rebukes Huìzǐ for neglecting his spirit (*shén* 神) and exhausting his vitality (*jīng* 精), two aspects of our psycho-physical make-up crucial to robust health (5/59).[10]

The later passages I want to consider elaborate on the theme of stillness or equanimity as pivotal to *dé* and thus to following *dào*. The passage from book 13, “The Way of Heaven,” introduces a new dimension: sagely equanimity is said to reflect features of the cosmos itself, “the levelness of heaven and earth.” In book 5, the sage Wáng Tái was described as attending to how things form a unity; here sages are said to achieve affective stillness by identifying with the all-encompassing perspective of the cosmos, such that events that befall particular things in the world cease to disturb them, being of minor importance.

[8] These attitudes can easily be linked to emotions such as joy, anger, grief, and delight, as the latter can be explained as responses to states or events that we approve and prefer or disapprove and dislike. However, the text does not draw this connection explicitly.

[9] Here I am taking attitudes to be psychological states that have intentional contents and are thus “about” various things.

[10] Spirit (*shén*) is the locus of agency within the chest; vitality or vital fluid (*jīng*) is the concentrated dynamic vapour (*qì*) that constitutes the spirit. Often the two concepts are combined into the compound *jīngshén*, or “vital spirit,” referring to the material locus of life and agency within us.

> 聖人之靜也，非曰靜也善，故靜也，萬物無足以鐃心者，故靜也。水靜則明燭鬚眉，平中準，大匠取法焉。水靜猶明，而況精神！聖人之心靜乎，天地之鑑也，萬物之鏡也。夫虛靜恬淡，寂漠無為者，天地之平而道德之至…以虛靜推於天地，通於萬物，此之謂天樂。
>
> As to the stillness of sages, it's not that they claim that stillness is good and so are still; it's that none of the myriad things are enough to disturb their heart and so they are still. If water is still, it clearly illuminates one's beard and eyebrows; it is so perfectly level that great artisans take it as a standard. The stillness of water being this clear, how much clearer is [the stillness of] the vital spirit! The stillness of the sages' heart! The mirror of heaven and earth, the looking glass of the myriad things. Empty and still, tranquil and limpid, calm and non-acting—the levelness of heaven and earth and the utmost in *dào* and *dé*…Extending empty stillness to heaven and earth, connecting it to the myriad things, this is called "heavenly happiness." (13/2–12)

Water imagery is again used to imply that a still, level heart functions as a reliable measurement standard and mirrors things accurately. Here water is explicitly compared to the vital spirit (*jīng shén* 精神), an unsurprising analogy given that water and water vapour are the metaphorical basis for the concepts of *jīng* 精 (vital fluid) and *qì* 氣 (vital vapour), which constitute the spirit. The water imagery thus indirectly links these discussions of emotions and equanimity to early medical beliefs, since medical texts appeal to *jīng* and *qì* to explain the physiology of emotion. (We will return to this point in later sections.)

A novel theme in this passage is an alternative, positive conception of an enlightened state that supplants the deprecated conception of emotions as disturbances. Here the attainment of a neutral, empty stillness is designated a distinctive form of "heavenly happiness," using the word *lè* 樂, interpreted as "joy" in the standard lists of emotions discussed so far. The implication seems to be that a steady, calm equilibrium can nevertheless be considered an affective state. As we will see below, the *Huáinánzǐ* develops this theme in detail.

My final *Zhuāngzǐ* selection is a collection of short remarks that form the second section of book 15, "Forced Intentions." Phrasing from this section is borrowed extensively in the *Huáinánzǐ*. In comparison with the material from books 4 and 5, these remarks are notable for emphasizing the correlation between sagely equanimity and features of the cosmos and for associating disruptive psychological states with disease and equanimity with psycho-physical hygiene. Water metaphors are again prominent, connecting equanimity with both the natural cosmos and with health.

> 夫恬惔寂漠虛無無為，此天地之平而道德之質也。…平易恬惔，則憂患不能入，邪氣不能襲，故其德全而神不虧。…虛無恬惔，乃合天德。

> 故曰，悲樂者，德之邪；喜怒者，道之過；好惡者，德之失。故心不憂樂，德之至也。…
>
> 水之性，不雜則清，莫動則平；鬱閉而不流，亦不能清；天德之象也。故曰，純粹而不雜，靜一而不變，惔而無為，動而以天行，此養神之道也。

> Tranquil and limpid, quiet and calm, empty and non-acting—the levelness of heaven and earth and the stuff of *dào* and *dé*.…Level and at ease, tranquil and limpid, worries and troubles cannot penetrate and deviant *qì* cannot attack, and so [the sage's] *dé* is whole and spirit unimpaired….Empty and tranquil, he merges with the *dé* of heaven.
>
> So it's said, sorrow and joy are deviations from *dé*; delight and anger are errors in *dào*; likes and dislikes are failures of *dé*. So the heart not being anxious or joyful is the utmost *dé*.…
>
> The nature of water is that if nothing is mixed in, it is clear; if not moved, it is level; if blocked so that it does not flow, again it cannot be clear—[water] is a symbol of heavenly/natural *dé*. So it's said, pure and unmixed; still and consistent without changing; indifferent and non-acting; when moving, proceeding according to heaven/nature—this is the *dào* by which to nurture the spirit. (15/8–18)

A quiet, neutral, level state of the heart reflects the even, level features of heaven and earth and constitutes the "stuff" or "material" of *dào* (the proper path to follow) and *dé* (the traits or capacities by which we follow this path). Equanimity protects against disruptive psychological states and deviant, diseased *qì* and so secures "wholeness" of *dé* and spirit (*shén*), leading the adept to merge with the *dé* (virtue, agentive power) of nature or heaven (*tiān*) itself. An implication is that equanimity contributes to the neutral, "empty" state the text associates with responsive, *dào*-guided "non-action" (*wú wéi* 無為), probably by eliminating motivation that is at odds with *dào*. Both here and in the selection from book 13, equanimity aligns the adept with the patterns of the cosmos, eliminating self-initiated activity (*wéi* 為, the opposite of *wú wéi*) that runs contrary to *dào*.

The passage again makes clear that the rejected states include some that fall directly under folk concepts of emotion—sorrow, joy, delight, anger—but also the attitudes of like and dislike. These states are regarded as disturbances akin to disease-causing vapours; they contrast with equanimity, which strengthens *dé* and spirit, building resistance to disruption or infection. The clarity of clean, level, flowing water symbolizes both the *dé* of nature or heaven and the cultivation of the spirit. The stuff of the spirit—*jīng* (vital fluid) or *qì* (vital vapour)—is understood to be water-like and so nurtured by keeping it clear, level, and unblocked.

To sum up, across a range of earlier and later *Zhuāngzǐ* passages, affective equanimity is strongly correlated with *dé*. Indeed, for many passages, equanimity is effectively a component of Zhuangist virtue or power of agency. The specific conception of equanimity in play involves an absence of delight or anger, grief or joy,

and like or dislike, along with the presence of a sustained state of harmony (*hé* 和), stillness (*jìng* 靜), levelness (*píng* 平), peace or ease (*ān* 安), and neutral "openness" or "emptiness" (*xū* 虛). In the earlier material, the emotions listed are treated as disturbances to normal, healthy functioning, while a still, calm heart is described as a "standard" by which to respond to things aptly. The later material elaborates on these motifs while asserting that *dé* and equanimity correspond to features of the cosmos and explicitly correlating certain emotions with disease. At least one later passage claims that equanimity constitutes a sagely form of "heavenly happiness."[11]

3. "Inward Training"

The "Inward Training" (*Nèi Yè* 內業) chapter of the *Guǎnzǐ* 管子 presents an account of psycho-physical cultivation that complements Zhuangist views on equanimity and *dé.* This account testifies to contemporaneous metaphysical and physiological assumptions that may have informed views on equanimity found in the *Zhuāngzǐ*.[12]

According to "Inward Training," humans are formed by a combination of *jīng* 精 (vital fluid) from the sky and *xíng* 形 (physical form) from the earth.[13] *Qì* 氣—the vaporous form of *jīng*—can be guided and stabilized within us by applying our *dé* 德 (agentive power, virtue) and *yì* 意 (thought, attention). One can perfect or complete *dé* and become a sage by accumulating and preserving *jīng* in the chest through meditative, yoga-like exercises.[14] *Dé* being complete, wisdom too emerges, such that one grasps all things.[15] "Life" or good health (*shēng* 生) is said to rely on "levelness and uprightness" (*píng zhèng* 平正), or equanimity and balance, paired features that, as in some *Zhuāngzǐ* discussions, are said to reflect features of heaven and earth. Through balance (正) and stillness (*jìng* 靜), the heart can become "settled" or "stable" (*dìng* 定) and thus accumulate *jīng*.[16]

This cultivation process is impeded by desires, greed or self-interest, and the paired polar emotions of worry and joy, delight and anger.

其所以失之，必以憂樂喜怒欲利。能去憂樂喜怒欲利，心乃反濟。

[11] "Heavenly happiness" is mentioned again at 13/12–17. A related notion, "ultimate happiness" (*zhì lè* 至樂) is discussed at 18/1 and 21/30.

[12] Rickett suggests a date of "no later than" 400 BCE for the "Inward Training," which would place it considerably earlier than the *Zhuāngzǐ* writings (1998, 37). Roth proposes that the text is among the earliest writings produced by the Jìxià 稷下 assembly of scholars in Qí, placing it roughly around 325 BCE, although it may have drawn on older, oral traditions (2015, 267). Roth's view would make "Inward Training" roughly contemporaneous with or slightly older than the earliest *Zhuāngzǐ* material. Either way, ideas along the lines of "Inward Training" were probably in circulation during the time much *Zhuāngzǐ* material was produced.

[13] Translations from the "Inward Training" are my own. For comparison, see Rickett (1998) 39–55.

[14] In modern Chinese, such exercises are referred to as *nèi gōng* 內功 ("inward training").

[15] Compare Rickett (1998) 40.

[16] Compare Rickett (1998) 43.

> How one loses it [that is, *jīng*] is surely through anxiety, joy, delight, anger, desire, and self-interest. If one can eliminate anxiety, joy, delight, anger, desire, and self-interest, the heart will return to completion.[17]

The adept who attains stillness in the heart, avoiding disturbances, such that the *qì* within is well patterned, will effortlessly attain inner harmony and *dào* itself may settle in him.[18]

For the "Inward Training," then, affective equanimity is a crucial prerequisite to psycho-physical cultivation, which by building up a stable, robust reservoir of *jīng* strengthens *dé* and brings one into alignment with the cosmic order. *Dé* here is partly analogous to a physical attribute such as strength, fueled by *jīng*.

The treatment of *dé* and equanimity in "Inward Training" is distinct from those we examined from the *Zhuāngzǐ*, which do not emphasize active cultivation of *jīng*. Still, "Inward Training" shares with *Zhuāngzǐ* material a rough conception of *dé* as an inner power that is disrupted or damaged by affects, preferences, and desires and preserved through affective and conative equanimity. Whether literally or metaphorically, both sources also associate *dé* with a normative conception of the heart or chest as a still, limpid reservoir of *qì*, *jīng*, or a water-like *shén* (spirit). Affective states disturb this reservoir, impairing *dé.*

4. *Lǚ's Annals*

Lǚ's Annals (*Lǚ Shì Chūnqiū*) 吕氏春秋 contains two passages directly relevant to Zhuangist views on emotion. One is section 25.3, which duplicates a passage in *Zhuāngzǐ* 23 that lists six affects as encumbrances to *dé* 德, the six here being delight, anger, grief, joy, desire, and dislike. This passage thus informs us only that the idea of emotions as impediments was in circulation among scholars in the state of Qín when the later parts of the *Annals* were composed there sometime after 239 BCE. It adds no further information about the intellectual background of this idea. The other is section 3.2, from the portion of the *Annals* reliably datable to *ca* 239 BCE, which presents ideas reflecting medical beliefs similar to those in the *Nèijīng* (to be discussed below).

According to section 3.2, sages "nurture life" (*yǎng shēng* 養生), or cultivate psycho-physical health, by carefully examining the suitable balance of *yīn-yáng* 陰陽 (passive and active vitality or forces) and beneficial or harmful aspects of things. Consequently, their vital spirit (*jīng shén* 精神) is securely at peace in their physical form and they enjoy longevity. To nurture life, the sage avoids harmful influences such as strong flavors (which injure the physical form), extreme weather (which injures the *jīng* 精, or vital fluid), and intense emotions (which injure the *shén* 神, or spirit), here specified as "great joy, great anger, great anxiety, great fear, or great grief." "In all

[17] Compare Rickett (1998) 40.
[18] Compare Rickett (1998) 41.

nurturing of life," the text states, "nothing is better than knowing the basics; if one knows the basics, diseases have no way to come."[19]

The passage thus shares the theme of emotions as disturbances that harm or disrupt the spirit. Where the *Zhuāngzǐ* passage from "Forced Intentions" implies an analogy between emotions and pathogens, the *Annals* here explicitly presents them as disease-inducing factors. Intriguingly, the impact of emotions is treated as parallel to that of diet and the weather. The implication is that emotions are regarded not as inherent parts of the self or expressions of the agent's heart but as potentially harmful conditions the agent faces, akin to conditions in the environment.

5. *Huángdì Nèijīng*

Numerous passages in the Hàn-era *Huángdì Nèijīng* 黃帝內經 are potentially informative concerning Zhuangist views of emotion. Although the writings in the *Nèijīng* may postdate much *Zhuāngzǐ* material, they reflect traditional medical beliefs that likely were already centuries old and so could have been contemporaneous with and influenced the *Zhuāngzǐ.*

A general assumption in the *Nèijīng*—echoing Zhuangist views—is that psycho-physical equilibrium is the normative state, which is disturbed by intense emotion. Accordingly, to preserve health or life (*shēng* 生), emotions must be moderated. The *Nèijīng* introduces a medical theory in which five canonical emotions—joy, sorrow, anxiety, fear, and anger—stand in bidirectional causal relations with the five viscera (heart, lungs, liver, spleen, and kidneys). (The exact correspondence between the individual emotions and organs varies across different *Nèijīng* passages.) Excessive concentration of *qì* 氣 or *jīng* 精 in the viscera can cause the corresponding emotion, while occurrence of the emotion can injure the *qì* and cause illness in the corresponding organ. As in *Lǚ's Annals*, emotions are conceptually analogous to conditions in the environment. Excessive emotion harms the viscera just as extreme heat or cold harm the body.

Moderating or harmonizing emotions is again an aspect of "nurturing life" (*yǎng shēng* 養生) or maintaining good health, parallel to adjusting one's clothing and dwelling to suit the four seasons. One seeks to preserve a healthy flow of *qì* and to avoid injuring, disturbing, or scattering the spirit (*shén* 神) through the occurrence of disruptive emotions. The "Based on the Spirit" section of the *Líng Shū* 靈樞 book of the *Nèijīng* states:

> 故智者之養生也，必順四時而適寒暑，和喜怒而安居處，節陰陽而調剛柔。如是則僻邪不至，長生久視。是故怵惕思慮者，則傷神，神傷則恐懼，流淫而不止。因悲哀動中者，竭絕而失生。喜樂者，神憚散而不藏，愁憂者，氣閉塞而不行，盛怒者，迷惑而不治，恐懼者，神蕩憚而不收。

[19] Compare Knoblock and Riegel (2001) section 3.2.

> So as to how the wise nurture life, they surely conform to the four seasons, adjusting to the cold and heat; harmonize delight and anger, while securing ease in their living conditions; and moderate *yīn* and *yáng* while attuning the firm and pliant. If they proceed like this, deviations will not come, and they live long and see much. Thus startled thoughts injure the spirit; if the spirit is injured, fear arises and wanton excess flows without cease. Being moved within by sorrow and grief exhausts [the vitality], losing life-force. Delight and joy scatter the spirit instead of accumulating it. Worry and anxiety clog up the *qì* so that it does not flow. Furious anger brings confusion and disorder. Fear and terror disrupt the spirit so it cannot be collected.[20]

As this passage indicates, the targeted emotions are considered traumatic, potentially illness-inducing conditions that are best avoided or moderated, as they can harm the life process, disperse the spirit, and obstruct the *qì*. Early medical writings thus complement the Zhuangist theme that affective equanimity or harmony contributes to psycho-physical health and promotes the integrity of the spirit (*shén* 神).

Beyond these points, the opening section of the *Sùwèn*—the first book of the *Nèijīng*—echoes terminology from the *Zhuāngzǐ* that ties medical discussions to *dé* (agentive power, virtue). According to this text, if we are "tranquil and empty" (*tián dàn xū wú* 恬惔虛无), genuine *qì* will follow; if we "preserve the vital spirit within" (*jīng shén nèi shǒu* 精神內守), diseases have no way to come. We can thus attain longevity and avoid physical decline because our *dé* is whole (*quán* 全) and we avoid danger.[21] Just as several *Zhuāngzǐ* passages contend, then, affective tranquility, neutral emptiness, and attentive preservation of the spirit keep one's *dé* robust and complete.

6. *Huáinánzǐ*

Several chapters of the Hàn dynasty anthology *Huáinánzǐ* 淮南子 (completed by 139 BCE) develop and extend Zhuangist themes on equanimity and *dé* 德. In several places, the *Huáinánzǐ* writers seem to have duplicated and expanded on the sayings collected in *Zhuāngzǐ* book 15, "Forced Intentions." Let me first sketch the metaphysical and ethical background to the text's stance and then examine how several key passages address emotion and equanimity.

Huáinánzǐ chapter 1, "Fundamentally Investigating *Dào*," presents a view of *dào* 道 as the underlying cause of everything, the source that gives life to all things and imparts whatever abilities they possess. The text valorizes activity in which we follow the self-so (*zìrán* 自然) propensities of things we interact with, reflecting them in the manner of a mirror or of still water, without relying on our own know-how or reasons. We are to follow along with what exists by nature or heaven (*tiān* 天) rather than guiding action by values or norms posited or constructed by humanity (*rén* 人). The

[20] Compare Unschuld (2016) 149–50.
[21] Compare Unschuld and Tessenow (2011) 34 and 36.

key norm in guiding action is *yīn* 因, or responding to the inherent patterns of things. To do so is to attain the exemplary state of "wandering with *dào*."[22]

The sage preserves the vital spirit (*jīng shén* 精神) within and practices non-action (*wú wéi* 無為), which the text explains as responding to things rather than acting in advance of them. Knowledge or intellect and self-conscious intentions are to be set aside in favor of a tacit responsiveness driven by the vital spirit.

> 是故聖人內修其本，而不外飾其末。保其精神，偃其智故，漠然無為而無不為也，澹然無治也而無不治也。
>
> The sage cultivates the root within rather than embellishing the branches without. He preserves the vital spirit and lays aside knowledge and reasons; he indifferently takes no action while leaving nothing undone and calmly does no managing while leaving nothing unmanaged.[23]
>
> 故得道者，志弱而事強，心虛而應當。
>
> So those who attain *dào,* their intent is weak yet their performance is strong; their hearts are empty yet their responses are fitting.[24]

Dé is treated as a power or capacity obtained from *dào* that drives the activity of all things. Echoing a motif from "Forced Intentions" (and from the *Dàodéjīng*), the text cites water as illustrating utmost *dé* because of how it "floods together" with heaven and earth, without bias or predilection, "beginning and ending with the myriad things."[25] Hence the ultimate in *dé* is to be "clear and still," and the crux of *dào* is to be "pliant and soft." In emptiness and tranquility, we allow the myriad things to function.[26]

Against the backdrop of this discussion, a familiar list of affects—joy, anger, anxiety, sorrow, like, and dislike, here supplemented by appetites and desires—are introduced as aberrations or deviations from *dào* and *dé*, presumably arising from a failure to apply one's *dé* to respond (*yīn* 因) to things in a water-like manner. A passage that closely parallels remarks in "Forced Intentions" reads:

> 夫喜怒者，道之邪也。憂悲者，德之失也。好憎者，心之過也。嗜欲者，性之累也。

[22] "Those who follow heaven/nature are those who wander with *dào*" 循天者，與道遊者也. Translations from the *Huáinánzǐ* are my own. For comparison, see Major, Queen, et al. (2010) 58.
[23] Compare Major, Queen, et al. (2010) 59.
[24] Compare Major, Queen, et al. (2010) 60.
[25] Compare Major, Queen, et al. (2010) 62.
[26] Compare Major, Queen, et al. (2010) 64. An alternative reading is that emptiness and tranquillity are the source of the myriad things.

> Joy and anger are deviations from *dào.* Anxiety and sorrow are failures of *dé.* Likes and dislikes are errors of the heart. Appetites and desires are encumbrances to one’s nature.[27]

Emotions, preferences, and desires disturb the balance of *yīn* and *yáng* (active and passive vitality), disrupt normal functioning, and bring disease. In their place, we are to cultivate what amounts to a list of nonmoral, “alternative” Daoist virtues: *dé*, stillness, emptiness, levelness, and purity. Continuing the parallels with “Forced Intentions,” the text goes on:

> 故心不憂樂，德之至也；通而不變，靜之至也；嗜欲不載，虛之至也；無所好憎，平之至也；不與物散，粹之至也。能此五者，則通於神明；通於神明者，得其內者也。
>
> So the heart not being anxious or happy is the utmost *dé*; flowing through without alteration is the utmost stillness; appetites and desires not weighing one down is the utmost emptiness; having no likes or dislikes is the utmost levelness; not being distracted by things is the utmost purity. If one can attain these five, he will connect through to spirit-awareness; connecting through to spirit-awareness is attaining the “inner” [what is inherent and crucial].[28]

These five traits are said to bring robust health, keen physical and mental functioning, psychological tranquility, and success in one’s endeavors.

“Forced Intentions” may also be a source for a further, partly parallel passage in *Huáinánzǐ* chapter 7, “Vital Spirit.” Here the discussion assumes a cosmogenic background in which *yīn* and *yáng* and the eight directions emerged from a formless, dynamic totality, after which lower creatures were formed from turbid *qì* and humanity from refined or vital *qì* (*jīng qì* 精氣). As in the *Nèi Yè*, people’s vital spirit (*jīng shén* 精神) is said to come from heaven and their physical frame from earth. This relation to heaven and earth underpins the value of stillness and emptiness and thus equanimity.

> 天靜以清，地定以寧，萬物失之者死，法之者生。夫靜漠者，神明之宅也；虛無者，道之所居也。
>
> Heaven is still and thereby clear; the earth is stable and thereby tranquil. Those of the myriad things that lose these die, those that emulate them live. Stillness and calm are the abode of the spirit-awareness; emptiness and absence are where *dào* resides.[29]

[27] Compare Major, Queen, et al. (2010) 66.
[28] Compare Major, Queen, et al. (2010) 67.
[29] Compare Major, Queen, et al. (2010) 241.

The discussion presents a complex series of correlations between parts of the body and calendrical, meteorological, and astronomical features, on the basis of which it claims that to achieve robust psycho-physical health, the blood-*qì* must be concentrated in the five viscera, such that that the chest and abdomen are filled out and desires are few. Vital spirit then becomes abundant and *qì* is concentrated and well organized, so that it is evenly distributed and flows freely. This concentration and free flow of *qì* yield spirit-like (*shén* 神) acuity in vision, hearing, and action and, in phrasing shared with "Forced Intentions," "anxiety and worries cannot penetrate, while deviant *qì* cannot attack."[30] This passage thus presents an explicit link between the physiological and the psychological, contending that an abundant supply of *qì* in the torso prevents harmful emotions. Again paralleling "Forced Intentions," the text states that "sorrow and delight are deviations from *dé*; joy and anger are errors in *dào*; likes and dislikes do violence to the heart."[31] Through stillness and emptiness, the sage sets these affects aside, cultivates *dé*, and thereby conforms to heaven or nature.

> 精神澹然無極，不與物散，而天下自服。……恬愉虛靜，以終其命，是故無所甚疏，而無所甚親，抱德煬和，以順於天。
>
> The vital spirit being placid without limit, not dispersing with things, all the world submits of itself….Tranquil and calm, empty and still, in this way [sages] live out their lives. Thus they are neither extremely distant from nor extremely close to anything; they embrace *dé* and foster harmony in order to follow along with heaven/nature.[32]

An implication is that equanimity and *dé* are instrumental to following the *dào* of nature.

A passage in *Huáinánzǐ* chapter 2, "Initiating the Genuine," draws an analogy between how anxiety and worries disrupt the heart and how wasp stings or mosquito bites disturb the spirit or awareness. Again, disruptive emotions are to be supplanted by stillness, calm, harmony, and emptiness.

> 靜漠恬澹，所以養性也；和愉虛無，所以養德也。外不滑內，則性得其宜；性不動和，則德安其位。養生以經世，抱德以終年，可謂能體道矣。
>
> Stillness and calm are how to nurture our nature; harmony and emptiness are how to nurture *dé.* The outward not disrupting the inward, our nature (*xìng*) obtains what suits it. The nature not disrupting harmony, *dé* is secure in its place. To pass through the world by nurturing life, to live out your years by embracing *dé*—this can be called the ability to embody *dào.*[33]

[30] Compare Major, Queen, et al. (2010) 244.

[31] 夫悲樂者，德之邪也；而喜怒者，道之過也；好憎者，心之暴也. See Major, Queen, et al. (2010) 246.

[32] Compare Major, Queen, et al. (2010) 247.

[33] Compare Major, Queen, et al. (2010) 103.

The claim that stillness and calm nurture our inherent nature (*xìng*) resonates with the emphasis in the *Nèi Yè* and *Nèi Jīng* on the importance of stillness in building up vital fluid (*jīng* 精) or nurturing life (*yǎng shēng* 養生). The passage also echoes the *Zhuāngzǐ* in linking *dé* to inward harmony and emptiness.

An intriguing feature of the treatment of emotion in “Fundamentally Investigating *Dào*” (*Huáinánzǐ* chapter 1) is that—like the passage from *Zhuāngzǐ* 13, “The Way of Heaven”—having declared the familiar list of intense affects detrimental to health and *dé*, the text goes on to present an alternative, positive conception of happiness (*lè* 樂), which is said to result from *dé*.[34] By contrast with the denigrated conception of joy—also expressed using the graph *lè* 樂—this happiness is not a positive response to external circumstances. It comes not from wealth and honor, nor from material pleasures, since all of these are contingent and can be lost through factors beyond our control. Instead, it lies in the “harmony of *dé*” (*dé hé* 德和), which is achieved by mastering the “arts of the heart” (*xīn shù* 心術) and achieving self-fulfillment.

> 吾所謂樂者，人得其得者也。夫得其得者，不以奢為樂，不以廉為悲。與陰俱閉，與陽俱開。……聖人不以身役物，不以欲滑和，是故其為歡不忻忻，其為悲不惙惙。萬方百變，消搖而無所定。吾獨慷慨，遺物而與道同出。
>
> What I call happiness is people achieving self-fulfillment. Achieving self-fulfillment is not finding happiness in luxury or sorrow in frugality. It is closing with the *yīn* and opening with the *yáng* [following the natural patterns of waning and waxing]….The sage does not enslave his person to things nor allow desires to disrupt [inward] harmony. Thus when pleased he is not delighted; when saddened he is not distressed. Through a myriad directions and a hundred changes, he wanders freely while being nowhere fixed. “I alone remain magnanimous, setting things aside and proceeding forth with *dào*.”[35]

Apparently, according to this passage, sages do encounter situations in which they are pleased or saddened; perhaps they feel mild positive or negative responses. But these mild attitudes do not disrupt their inward harmony by causing excited feelings of delight or distress.[36]

Those who master this approach obtain satisfaction or fulfilment from what is within, not without. They make themselves whole (*quán qí shēn* 全其身) and by so doing become one with *dào* (*yǔ dào wéi yī* 與道為一). Nothing in particular brings them joy, anger, delight, or suffering; instead, they attain a profound identification with

[34] Compare Major, Queen, et al. (2010) 68.
[35] Compare Major, Queen, et al. (2010) 69.
[36] For an interpretation of *Zhuāngzǐ* along these lines, see Machek (2015).

all the myriad things (*wàn wù xuán tóng* 萬物玄同).[37] Regardless of circumstances, sages allow nothing to confuse their vital spirit, disrupt their *qì* and intent, or alarm the heart such that it deviates from its genuine nature.

> 是故夫得道已定，而不待萬物之推移也。非以一時之變化，而定吾所以自得也。吾所謂得者，性命之情處其所安也。
>
> Thus their achievement of *dào* being stable, they do not depend on the pushing and shifting of the myriad things. How we achieve self-fulfillment is not determined by changes that occur at any one time. What we call fulfilment is for the genuine features of one's nature and fate to be where they are at peace.[38]

"Nature" (*xìng* 性) here seems to refer to our intrinsic character and dispositions, such as our sex, height, and abilities. "Fate" (*mìng* 命) refers to our extrinsic life circumstances, such as our social roles and relations. The genuine features of our nature and fate are secure or at peace when our physical form, spirit, *qì*, and intent are all in their proper place, such that we follow along with the activity of heaven and earth.

What interferes with preserving this psycho-physical integrity? The text proposes that problems arise from failing to control our attention properly. Inappropriate direction of the attention can "bind" (*xì* 系, here read as 繫) the spirit, impairing our functioning, as when we fail to notice someone beckoning to or calling us because our attention is directed elsewhere. In such cases, "the spirit loses what it should be guarding" (*shén shī qí shǒu* 神失其守), namely a neutral, open state of attentiveness in which the *qì* uniformly fills out the physical form.

> 故在於小則忘於大，在於中則忘於外，在於上則忘於下，在於左則忘於右。無所不充，則無所不在。是故貴虛者，以毫末為宅也。
>
> If [the spirit] attends to small matters, it neglects large ones; if it attends to what is within, it neglects what is without; if it attends to what is above, it neglects what is below; if it attends to the left, it neglects the right. If there is nowhere [the *qì*] does not fill, there is nowhere [the spirit] does not attend to. Thus to value emptiness (*xū*) is to dwell in even the most minute things.[39]

The psycho-physical state of neutral emptiness or openness (*xū* 虛) is a prominent motif in discussions of emotion. Here it clearly refers not to an absence or void but to an unblinkered, unbiased attentiveness or awareness. Maintaining this neutral, calm awareness allows us to cultivate the spirit and *qì* and let *dào* guide our activity, such that we apply our spirit, *qì*, and physical form only as circumstances guide us to.

[37] Compare Major, Queen, et al. (2010) 72.
[38] Compare Major, Queen, et al. (2010) 73.
[39] Compare Major, Queen, et al. (2010) 75.

夫精神氣志者，靜而日充者以壯，躁而日耗者以老。是故聖人將養其神，和弱其氣，平夷其形，而與道沈浮俯仰，恬然則縱之，迫則用之。

As to the vital spirit, *qì*, and intent, when still they daily fill up, becoming strong; when perturbed, they are daily depleted, becoming old. Thus sages will nurture their spirit, harmonize their *qì*, relax their physical form, and sink or float, bend or straighten with *dào.* When tranquil, they free them [their spirit, *qì*, and body]; when compelled, they apply them.[40]

Here the psychological and physical are treated as wholly intertwined. The adept preserves stillness in the spirit, *qì*, and physical frame so that nothing interferes with following *dào*. Intense, imbalanced emotions disrupt this stillness and distract the agent's attention, interfering with the capacity to follow *dào.*

These sections of *Huáinánzǐ* thus elaborate views on emotion largely consistent with but considerably more detailed than those in the *Zhuāngzǐ*. They shed light on the connections implied in the *Zhuāngzǐ* between emotions, harmony, and *dé.* To be sure, we should avoid retrospectively projecting all the details of the *Huáinánzǐ* account back onto earlier *Zhuāngzǐ* writings. The *Huáinánzǐ* may represent a comparatively radical development of themes that are more moderate in the *Zhuāngzǐ* or that are present only in some, not all *Zhuāngzǐ* material. For example, the well-known story about how Zhuāngzǐ first grieved and then celebrated his wife's death exemplifies an outlook on *dào* and emotion that overlaps that of the *Huáinánzǐ* without advocating constant equanimity. Without criticizing Zhuāngzǐ, the story acknowledges that he was at first deeply upset and only later recovered by contextualizing his wife's life and death as inherently part of a grand cosmic process, akin to "the procession of the four seasons" (*Zhuāngzǐ* 18/18). Still, the *Huáinánzǐ* does offer an informative picture of a rich framework of background beliefs that may help explain prominent Zhuangist statements about emotion. The story of Zhuāngzǐ's wife concludes with him remarking that his wailing over her passing showed "incompetence with respect to fate" (*bù tōng hū mìng* 不通乎命, 18/19). "Forced Intentions" and the *Huáinánzǐ* present one way to develop this idea, on which full competence with respect to fate yields sustained affective equanimity.

According to this strand of early Daoist thought, the *dào* of nature presents patterns by which the wise person guides action. It fixes our psycho-physical constitution, which determines what conditions benefit healthy functioning and what activities are suitable for us, and it presents an ongoing course of events to which we must respond. The adept exercise of *dé* in following *dào* constitutes a meaningful, life-affirming course of activity that is wholly self-sufficient, within our control, and insulated from contingency. To maintain health and respond to events aptly, we must maintain equanimity and a calm, unimpeded, attentive responsiveness. Intense affects arise from failure to adapt to and flow along with *dào,* and they interfere with our ability to

[40] Compare Major, Queen, et al. (2010) 76.

continue following *dào.* They are thus inconsistent with normatively ideal, fulfilling agency.

7. Discussion

Let me now summarize the findings of the preceding sections regarding the three topics highlighted in the Introduction: the specific character of and the grounds for Daoist equanimity; the psycho-physical or medical assumptions behind it; and the methods for achieving it.

In the tradition of thought represented in the selections from *Zhuāngzǐ*, *Huáinánzǐ*, and other texts surveyed here, the sage or adept is free of disruptive or imbalanced affective states—specifically joy, anger, grief, delight, worry, fear, like, and dislike—and instead maintains a psychological equilibrium variously characterized as level (*pīng* 平), harmonious (*hé* 和), still (*jìng* 靜), tranquil (*tián* 恬), peaceful (*ān* 安), balanced (*zhèng* 正), clear (*qīng* 清), and empty or open (*xū* 虛). As these descriptions indicate, the valorized state is not an utter absence of affect but the sustained presence of a calm, peaceful alertness. It contrasts especially vividly with intense, upsetting emotions such as rage, worry, or grief.

The chief justification for this stance is that equanimity facilitates activity that is physically healthy and ethically exemplary. Such activity employs our *dé* 德—roughly, our power of life and capacity for agency—to follow *dào* 道—the appropriate path of conduct—and thereby attentively respond to the "self-so" (*zì rán* 自然) propensities of situations we encounter in line with our nature (*xìng* 性) and life circumstances (*mìng* 命). According to some texts, though not all, in applying our *dé* this way, we bring ourselves into alignment with the cosmos—the patterns of heaven and earth.

For *dé* to fulfill this function, we must cultivate an open, indeterminate readiness to notice and respond to changing circumstances and then quickly recover our equilibrium to be ready for whatever comes next. This balanced, open readiness is incompatible with intense affective states that bias, fixate, or disturb one's attention and so obstruct flexibility and responsiveness. The relation between such states and attention is two-way: they occur because of inappropriate direction of the attention, and once they occur, they divert and dominate the attention.

How tightly is this view of emotion tied to prevailing beliefs about health and physiology? The same open, responsive state of *dé* is associated with psycho-physical health and wholeness of the spirit (*shén* 神), the core of the person. Robust health requires that the chest be suffused with a balanced, clear, still, free-flowing supply of *qì* 氣 or *jīng* 精, the refined, condensed form of *qì*. Maintaining this healthy equilibrium again requires equanimity, because affective states may disturb, imbalance, or block the *qì*. In the original context, then, medical and physiological beliefs about emotion complement and reinforce the ethical value of equanimity and associated states such as *xū* (emptiness). Equanimity is both ethically admirable and partly constitutive of a healthy equilibrium in the *qì.* Nevertheless, the *Zhuāngzǐ* and *Huáinánzǐ* generally do

not treat emotions as disease-like states calling for medical treatment, and their approach to managing emotions is fundamentally psychological, focusing on attention control, not medical therapy.[41] Arguably, then, although as a matter of intellectual history, the texts' views about emotion were most likely influenced by medical beliefs, conceptually they can be detached from them. The ethics and moral psychology are not inherently or necessarily dependent on the medical or physiological doctrines.

In previous work, I have suggested that the Zhuangist conception of agency can be elucidated by features of contemporary performance psychology.[42] *Dé* is a nature-endowed capacity for agency. The psychological and physical conditions under which this capacity functions smoothly largely overlap those relevant to performance in sports or the performing arts. The open, calm, attentive state of responsiveness associated with *dé* resembles in various respects that of a tennis player awaiting the opponent's serve, a soloist awaiting the conductor's cue, or a basketball player driving for a shot while attending to opponents' moves to block the ball. The *Zhuāngzǐ-Huáinánzǐ* ideal, I suggest, is for something like this state of ready equilibrium to be our default, whether in action or at rest.

How do the texts suggest we might attain such equilibrium? The challenge of doing so is similar in key respects to that of managing performance anxiety, and some of the same techniques are applicable.[43]

One crucial technique, explicit in the story of Zǐgāo, the anxious diplomat, and in the *Huáinánzǐ* discussion of happiness and self-fulfillment, is to direct our attention appropriately. We should attend to the task at hand, rather than fixating on sources of anxiety or being distracted by disruptive emotions. Several of the *Zhuāngzǐ* skill stories, such as those of the masterful cicada catcher (19/18–21) and the preternatural wood carver (19/55–9), suggest that one way to develop effective attention control is by adopting a disciplined training regimen directed at mastering skills. Indeed, an implication of the many *Zhuāngzǐ* passages about skill is that the pursuit of skills facilitates learning how to "nurture life," as the famous story of Cook Dīng the butcher puts it (3/12).

A second technique—not discussed above, but illustrated in two *Zhuāngzǐ* stories about Yán Huí, Confucius's most talented student—is apophatic meditation. In one story, Yán achieves an advanced state of ethical development by gradually learning to "sit and forget," thereby dispensing with conventional values and norms that might impede him from fully conforming to natural processes (6/89–93). In the other, Confucius admonishes Yán to undertake "heart-fasting" to "empty" (*xū*) his heart of preconceived plans or strategies, instead learning to respond to circumstances fluidly and immediately by means of *qì* (4/1–34). Neither story is specifically about emotion, but the meditative practices they sketch aim at the same empty, calm equilibrium advocated in treatments of emotion. Another example is again the woodcarver who produces work of sublime beauty: he describes himself as fasting for seven days to

[41] As we saw in section 3, the *Nèi Yè* holds that attention control can itself be a means of *qì* cultivation.
[42] See especially Fraser (2019). Relevant discussions also appear in Fraser (2011) and (2014).
[43] See Fraser (2019) 173–76, from which some of this discussion is adapted.

empty his mind of all worries or concerns, until, he says, he forgets even his limbs and body (19/56–7).

A further approach, illustrated by the story of the one-footed Wáng Tái and by the *Huáinánzǐ* discussion, is cognitive adjustment or reframing. How we understand and contextualize our circumstances affects how we direct our attention and our emotional responses to events. If we adopt, for example, the *Huáinánzǐ*'s view of human life as issuing from, guided by, and devoted to *dào*, we may come to regard events in our lives as inevitable parts of *dào* and so cease to experience strong emotions concerning them. For example, if we frame death as an inexorable part of *dào*, the loss of those close to us or the prospect of our own death may cease to incite grief or anxiety. Such cognitive reframing focuses our attention less on feelings of grief or loss and more on the process of adapting to the ongoing flow of *dào*.

A fourth, interrelated approach is to reshape or reorient our values. Emotions typically occur in response to the attainment or loss of value. How we frame our understanding of our place in the world and events we experience is likely to affect what we value and thus what emotions we experience. In yet another *Zhuāngzǐ* story, a high official named Sūnshū Áo maintains equanimity by investing value only in inherent features of the self that are independent of external influences. Despite being thrice elevated and then dismissed as premier of his state, Sūnshū felt neither honor nor dismay, because, he explains, such gains or losses are not part of his identity, "present in me" (21/64–5). If, as the *Huáinánzǐ* advocates, we understand ourselves primarily through our relation to a cosmogenic *dào* and regard adaptive conformity to that *dào* as the central project and source of value in our lives, we are likely to devalue events that for others might prompt intense emotions. Even without sharing the *Huáinánzǐ*'s vision of a cosmic *dào*, if we value *dé* and its exercise, then everyday successes and failures are less likely to incite joy, anger, or grief. Our attention and evaluative attitudes will instead be focused on adapting to the changing circumstances that result from these events.[44] If we see human life as grounded in something roughly like a *dào*-process, we may even cease to see death or loss as disvalues, in that they too are part of *dào* and hence just as valuable as life or gain.

8. Comparative Reflections

How do Stoic and Daoist sources compare with respect to the three points just discussed—the nature of equanimity, its relation to medical beliefs, and practical techniques for moral-psychological improvement?

Neither Daoist "harmony" (*hé* 和) nor Stoic *apatheia* refers to a complete absence of emotion. The Stoics advocate elimination only of unhealthy *pathē*—desire, fear, pleasure, and distress. *Apatheia* allows for healthy passions (*eupatheiai*) based on rational judgment, such as joy about virtue. The problem with *pathē* is that they are irrational responses to mistaken *dogmata* (opinions, conceptions, doctrines). In the Daoist sources, the states to be pacified are joy, anger, sorrow, delight, likes and

[44] See Fraser (2011) 106–8.

dislikes, and in some contexts desires. Quelling these yields affective calm and peace. The problem with intense affects is that they disrupt the *qì*, distract the attention, and fill the heart, thus interfering with the agent's *dé* 德, the capacity for responsive agency needed to follow *dào* 道.

Roughly, the Stoics and Daoists share an abstract ideal of living according to nature, which they elaborate through fundamentally different accounts of what nature is and how one can live by it.[45] For the Stoics, to live according to nature is to live in accordance with reason and with a rational, providential deity immanent in the natural world. *Pathē* interfere with this end—or manifest a failure to attain it—because of their irrationality. Ethical development involves rectifying the mistaken *dogmata* on which *pathē* rest and thereby becoming more fully rational.

For the Daoists, to live according to nature is to live by using one's *dé* to follow *dào*, the paths or patterns according to which things proceed. Strong emotions interfere because they disrupt the calm, attentive balance needed to effectively notice and respond to these paths and patterns. Disruptive emotions are not regarded as irrational, nor are they explicitly tied to mistaken judgments. (Daoist texts draw no contrast between rational and irrational attitudes.) Arguably, however, they are implicitly presented as arising from a misunderstanding of *dào* and our relation to it. In early Chinese epistemology, error is typically explained not as a matter of being wholly wrong about things but of failing to grasp the wider context—of attending to the part rather than its relation to the whole. Accordingly, problematic affects arise from looking at things one way rather than another, attending to certain narrow features of one's situation rather than the wider context. Ethical development involves shifting to a broader view, which facilitates navigating through the world more smoothly and competently.

As to the relation between ethical views about emotion and medical or physiological beliefs, in the Chinese sources the role of medical concepts is literal: *dé* and affects have a physical realization.[46] Equanimity is both psychological and physical, involving both affective states and the state of the *qì* in the body. Disruptive emotions are conceptualized as psycho-physical disturbances that if unchecked may produce illness. By contrast, in the Graeco-Roman sources, the use of medical notions seems primarily metaphorical. Incorrect *dogmata* are analogous to disease agents, but the *pathē* they cause are not literally physically unhealthy states. The use of *logos* to counteract faulty *dogmata* and their consequences is explained by analogy to a drug or a healthy diet but does not directly modify the *pneuma* or the underlying state of the body.[47]

Despite the use of medical concepts, in neither tradition do we find the texts proposing to bring about emotional change directly through medical or physical therapy. A partial exception might be the use of meditative techniques in some Daoist

[45] For a detailed comparison of Stoicism and *Zhuāngzǐ*, albeit one framed mainly in terms of Stoic concerns, see Machek (2015) 521–44.

[46] This feature of *dé* is intriguing, as the partly analogous Graeco-Roman notions of *aretē* (virtue, excellence) and *dunamis* (power, capacity) lack such a physiological realization. See Singer (2023).

[47] Here and below I draw heavily on Singer (2023), although I alone remain responsible for any misunderstandings.

sources, which may seek to manipulate the *qì* directly. However, such techniques generally aim to modify the *qì* and psychological attitudes jointly, rather than manipulating the *qì* as a therapeutic means of "healing" affective disturbances.

Stoic techniques for cultivating *apatheia* are significantly more structured, methodical, and regimented than Daoist approaches to attaining harmony (*hé*) and emptiness (*xū* 虛), involving disciplined, daily exercises and stringent self-examination.[48] This contrast is unsurprising, as the two traditions hold antithetical conceptions of the immediate aims and nature of ethical self-improvement. Stoic ethical cultivation seeks to attain rational control over the self, specifically by training oneself to eliminate incorrect or inappropriate *dogmata* likely to incite non-rational, uncontrollable emotive reactions.[49] For the Daoists, such a forceful, regimented approach would be counterproductive, since the aim is to empty the heart of fixed, predetermined attitudes or commitments.

This difference aside, comparison with Stoic approaches may help draw attention to seldom-remarked features of Daoist practices. One such feature is mentoring relations, which are prominent in both Stoic and Zhuangist ethical life. The importance of interaction with mentors or teachers is not explicitly thematized in the *Zhuāngzǐ*, but many passages depict it as crucial to ethical praxis. Adherents are regularly shown consulting with a mentor one-on-one, as in the Zǐgāo story, or congregating around a charismatic figure, as people do in the story of the amputee sage Wáng Tái (5/1). Besides promulgating teachings and practices, mentors are sometimes said to directly induce positive psychological changes in their followers through the force of their *dé* or through model emulation (5/22, 21/4).

Another feature is the use of visualization, imagination, or projection to reorient practitioners' cognitive and affective responses, bringing them into line with ethical ends. The Stoics prominently employ visualization to incite emotions of shame or disgust concerning unwanted *pathē* such as fear or desire. The emotions incited are irrational, but they and the original *pathē* in effect cancel each other out, yielding *apatheia*. Non-rational, emotional means are thus applied to achieve what the Stoics regard as more fully rational attitudes.

Much Zhuangist rhetoric also seeks to change attitudes through non-argumentative means, employing stories, examples, and jokes to guide and inspire the audience. A common rhetorical move is to loosen the audience's attachment to conventional opinions and values by recontextualizing them from a grand, cosmic perspective. By inciting the audience to visualize their place in the all-encompassing process of nature, the text seeks to trigger cognitive and evaluative reframing—as described in section 7—and so induce equanimity concerning quotidian values and events. The tale of Zhuāngzǐ grieving his wife's death depicts him explicitly engaging in just such a process of visualization. Another use of visualization is narrative presentation of a range of ways of life, leading the audience to see their own path as just one of many alternatives. An example of such visualization is the first several passages of book 1,

[48] See Singer (2023) section B2.
[49] See Singer (2023) section A3.

"Wandering Freely About," which shift between the perspectives of creatures of various sizes, lifespans, and abilities. Still another use of visualization is stories about sagely, even incredible figures such as Wáng Tái or the various skill exemplars. Rather than presenting arguments for a Zhuangist *dào*, these stories seek to illustrate its performance and thereby incite identification with it. Given the rhetorical effects of much *Zhuāngzǐ* material, simply reading and pondering the text may trigger a process of ethical cultivation.

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