Replies to Commentators

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I am deeply grateful to each of the commentators—Henry Allen, Karyn Lai, Huanyou Li, Winnie Sung, and Ellie Wang—for their very kind and rich contributions, especially their extensive critical feedback, which I hope will prompt much fruitful discussion. Limits on space preclude offering a thorough response to every point they raise, so from each set of remarks I will pick a few salient issues to address.

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Karyn Lai's remarks are insightful, piquant, and wide-ranging. I'll try to address four prominent topics she mentions.

First let me respond to the methodological questions Lai raises. As explained in the book's Introduction (pp. 13–15), the interpretive approach pursued in *Late Classical Chinese Thought* (henceforth "*LCCT*") attempts to build on the implications of the best available theories about the formation and nature of our primary sources for the period, the early Chinese "masters" anthologies. Specifically, as Lai notes, this approach treats the sources as collections of discrete short writings of unspecified authorship that were most likely written at different times, for various purposes, and then compiled and edited under various historical conditions. As the Introduction and Appendix of *LCCT* explain, the "masters" anthologies have significantly different features, and so the best explanation of the processes by which the anthology was produced and of relations between the individual constituent writings will vary from case to case. However, an important consequence for interpretation of all these anthologies is that since they are not single, unitary "works," the primary object of interpretation must be the individual short pericope, not the anthology as a whole. Interpretations of the thought in the anthologies must be built up from interpretations of their constituent pericopes and plausible hypotheses about relations between them. Moreover, since the "masters" anthologies are not integral works, we cannot assume in advance that the constituent pericopes will all converge on a single, unified doctrinal standpoint. Some of them may show signs of doctrinal debate or development; some may disagree with each other in various ways.

Lai asks, methodologically speaking, by what processes we can decide that, for example, the component texts of the *Xúnzǐ* share a more consistent doctrinal outlook than those of the *Guǎnzǐ*. My response is that the only defensible approach is to proceed by interpreting and

studying individual pericopes, comparing what we find in them, and discussing our tentative findings. In working with the *Xúnzǐ*, for example, we quickly find that certain pivotal Xunzian ideas, such as the account of the origin and function of ritual propriety in the sages' aversion to conflict and disorder or the need to rely on "teachers and models" in moral development, are repeated in multiple pericopes across several books of the *Xúnzǐ* using similar phrasing. This and similar observations about other Xunzian claims provide pro tanto grounds for thinking that a certain portion of the *Xúnzǐ* writings show a relatively high degree of doctrinal agreement, although there are also signs of doctrinal development and of disagreement. (To give just one prominent example, many *Xúnzǐ* pericopes do not reflect a view that people's nature is bad.) By contrast, in different component texts of the *Guǎnzǐ*, we find both a more "ethical" line of political thought, which emphasizes the role of moral norms and virtues in social stability and effective governance, and a more "realist" or "legalist" line of thought, which dismisses the role of moral norms and virtues in favour of an approach based purely on standards and institutions. These two outlooks seem sharply opposed to one another.

A related question Lai raises is, if there is no presumption of agreement between different pieces of text within a collection, on what grounds can we conclude that some text is "corrupt," as I suggest the Mohist "Greater Selection" is. Again, my response is that we work from the level of the individual pericope. The claim about the "Greater Selection," then, is that the text is corrupt at the level of the pericope—that is, within single, short pieces of text, we find sentences that make no sense as written and appear to be fragments formed when the bamboo strips on which the texts were written were damaged or jumbled.

An important topic that Lai raises is the place of women in late classical ethics. I agree that the ethics chapter of *LCCT* could be improved by adding a subsection addressing the place of women in the ethical thought of this period. I do remark, on p. 106, that the roles of women tend to be neglected in the sources. The role ethics of the *Guǎnzǐ* "Five Aids" text covers the husband-wife relation, as I mention on p. 107, but this is one of few writings that mention women in an ethical context and the attention devoted to their role is brief indeed.

Although women's status and roles are rarely addressed explicitly in the sources, let me suggest that perhaps they are less overlooked than may seem to be the case. Of course, notoriously, in some early texts the paradigmatic list of social relations completely omits female roles, mentioning only ruler and subject, father and son, elder and younger brother, and (male) friends. Often, however, such lists at least acknowledge one role of women, mentioning ruler and subject, father and son, and husband and wife. Taking a cue from lists of social relations and from the discussion in "Five Aids," let me suggest that the "role ethics" presented in "Five Aids" and, I think, implicitly incorporated into much Ruist ethical practice could be expected to treat women-specific ethical issues under the rubric of norms of propriety and duty associated with social roles. When a text such as the *Xúnzǐ* speaks of propriety and duty, then, I suggest we

can plausibly assume that the scope of the proprieties and duties alluded to includes those associated with the roles of women. Some evidence for this suggestion comes from the *Lǐ Jì* 禮記, which in many places describes norms of ritual propriety specifically applicable to women.

I suggest too that although the *Zhuāngzǐ* writings mention women in only a few places, the ethical views we extract from them probably apply equally to men and women. Section 4.2 of the *Zhuāngzǐ* addresses the plight of an aristocratic diplomat caught in a difficult, stressful situation arising from political and familial roles that he cannot escape. The advice it offers can easily be adapted to apply to the circumstances of women or others who find themselves in oppressive yet inescapable social roles. And some exemplary figures in *Zhuāngzǐ* may be gender-neutral. Indeed, a few, such as the spirit-person of Gū Yè mountain depicted in "Freely Wandering About," may well be female.

Lai is concerned that my use of the term "moral psychology" may have led to an uncharitable evaluation of Chinese approaches to moral agency. Perhaps here there may have been a misunderstanding. "Moral psychology" is merely the most general, nonspecific label I know of for the subfield in which we examine psychological aspects of ethical life—the study of people's ethically relevant inclinations, dispositions, habits, education, cultivation, thought processes, and other psychological features and processes, along with how these bear on normative ethical theory and ethical practice. As I use the term, it is neutral as to any particular theoretical framework or orientation and implies no normative or evaluative claims. The passage Lai cites as implying that late classical sources do not consider the psychology of the "morally competent individual" was intended not to criticize these sources but to defend them against a hypothetical critic who might assume that any plausible account of human moral psychology must have a roughly Kantian shape. My point was that discussions in pre-Qin texts that address ethical cultivation as a social and political project—involving instruction and encouragement by authority figures, reinforced by peer approval or disapproval—are not attempting to examine the moral psychology of the individual moral agent. They are devoted to presenting a kind of communal education and coaching program. If we seek texts that do address moral psychology from the perspective of the individual agent, examples are readily available, whether reflecting prevailing moral norms, as in discussions we find in *Xúnzǐ,* or unconventional approaches to *dào,* as we find in *Zhuāngzǐ.*

Discussions in *Xúnzǐ* also highlight a broader point I tried to make. I suggested that the central focus of many familiar treatments of moral agency—Kant's is a good example—is the process of reasoning about and deciding what to do, and that early Chinese approaches to agency focus more on norm-governed, skill-like performance than decision-making. To be sure, the *Xúnzǐ* writings contain passages treating the issue of how the adept moral agent deliberates about how to act and in so doing overcomes urges for sensory satisfaction issuing from inborn, untutored inclinations. However, other passages in *Xúnzǐ* suggest that at the most advanced

levels of moral agency, such deliberation tends to vanish, as the agent's moral expertise renders it unnecessary. In such passages, the focus is not moral reasoning but excellence in the performance of *dào.* The agent acts immediately and automatically, in a manner that seems more similar to a skilled performance than to the outcome of a process of conscious deliberation.

A fourth issue Lai mentions seems to me especially worthy of discussion: the basis for normative evaluations in Zhuangist thought. As she notes, in *LCCT* I suggest that for a prominent stream of thought in the *Zhuāngzǐ*, the performance of *dào* is skill-like—and so skills are to some extent models of how to follow *dào*—yet unlike skills, *dào* has no built-in ends. The performance of Cook Dīng, the ferry pilot, the swimmer, and other skill exemplars is measured by how well they perform their tasks—producing clean cuts of meat, crossing the lake safely, swimming the rapids without injury. By contrast, in many *Zhuāngzǐ* writings*, dào* in general has no such fixed ends. For a Zhuangist, then, by what standards do we assess the performance of *dào*? What amounts to ethically apt action? As Lai notes, I link this question to a Zhuangist conception of "Virtue," or *dé* 德. However, I do not, as she suggests, propose that *dé* provides the normative ground by which to evaluate an agent's *dào* performance. On this point, I apologize if the discussion in *LCCT* is insufficiently straightforward (pp. 128–30). When I propose that this stream of Zhuangist thought offers "an ethics of *dào* and *dé*" (p. 129), my hypothesis is that this is an ethical approach with two distinct evaluative focal points: *dào*, or our path of activity, and *dé*, or our agentive powers. Evaluations of *dào* assess the aptness of the agent's conduct; evaluations of *dé* assess the excellence of the agent's character or agency. In contexts of ethical evaluation, rather than appealing to *dé* to explain excellence in *dào,* I interpret these focal points as equally fundamental. (In ontological and metaethical contexts, on the other hand, I take *dào* to explain the existence of *dé*.)

If *dé* is not the basis for evaluating *dào* performance, then, what is? Using the terminology of the *Zhuāngzǐ* itself, my suggestion is that Zhuangist writings evaluate agents' *dào* as to whether, in a particular context, it is "responsive" (*yīn* 因), "free-flowing" (*tōng* 通), "fitting" (*shì* 適), "harmonious" (*hé* 和), and so on. Agents' character is evaluated as to whether it manifests the resilience, responsiveness, creativity, equilibrium, and so forth needed for flourishing health and *dào* performance. This set of evaluative concepts also provides the basis for my response to another interesting question Lai raises: what features mark a Zhuangist political society? Must the ends of coordination and cooperation inherent to any political society inevitably force a Zhuangist political community to promote one model of human excellence at the expense of others, in the process running afoul of the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s own critical challenge to those who claim their singular conception of *dào* is uniquely well justified? It seems to me that a Zhuangist political society is one devoted to facilitating the apt performance of *dào* among its members and nurturing their *dé*. As I say in the book, "Zhuangist politics is not liberalism or anarchism but social, collective Daoism." The specifics of *dào* are likely to be plural

and contextual, varying among societies and among members of the same society. Although *LCCT* does not develop a fully fleshed-out account of such a Zhuangist approach to political life, I do sketch a few general features (pp. 89–97), and a Zhuangist politics will need to be consistent with the Zhuangist ethics of dealing with others (pp. 130–33).

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Huanyou Li and Henry Allen offer a meticulous review of key points from chapter 5 of the book, on epistemology. They emphasize a key implication of the chapter, namely that the epistemic stance or stances we find in the *Zhuāngzǐ* are in important ways critical responses to mainstream themes in discussions of knowledge of the time. Against this background, as they summarize, knowledge claims are expressions of ways of drawing "this/that" (*shì bǐ* 是彼) or "this-right/not" (*shì fēi* 是非) distinctions, and such distinctions "are made according to a fixed way or *dào*, each accompanied by its respective bias and neglect of other perspectives." Sagely agents grasp these points and so seek to "adapt [their] methods of differentiation according to the context and situation," all the while recognizing "that their contextual understanding is contingent, provisional, conditional, and thus fallible." In this theoretical context, scepticism is not the denial that we can—sometimes, at least—attain knowledge as determined by one set of norms or another. It is a recognition of the constraints and limitations on such knowledge, along with the consequent stance of allowing that what we take to be knowledge by some familiar set of norms may not hold in the context of other agents' practices or, for that matter, by practices we ourselves may adopt at other times. In other words, scepticism here is a practical disavowal of the stance that our way of drawing "this/that" or "right/not" distinctions holds for all agents at all times.

Li and Allen's response to the chapter is to propose a further aspect of a Zhuangist approach to knowledge and understanding—they see it as "an additional form of understanding" not covered by the discussion in the book. They call this "self-illuminating knowing," by which "individuals comprehend their own situation concurrently with perceiving external phenomena." I find much to agree with in their discussion, but for brevity my remarks will necessarily be imbalanced, focusing mainly on places where perhaps we disagree.

Regarding "self-illuminating knowing," a first point to note is that passages in "Discourse on Evening Things Out" (*Zhuāngzǐ* 2) and elsewhere also take a sceptical stance toward knowledge of the self or one's own situation. Part of the point of the stories of the butterfly dream and the conversation between the penumbra and the shadow—to cite just two examples—is that although we can know our identity and the content of our activity well enough for the purposes of acting in our present situation, this knowledge is always inherently limited both by the boundaries of our context and by the possibility of transformation. An implication of the discussions in the "Discourse" and in "Autumn Waters" (*Zhuāngzǐ* 17) is that

contextual factors affect both the content of the norms we apply in knowing and our performance in applying those norms. But a further implication of some of the material in these texts and others—such as "Freely Wandering About" (*Zhuāngzǐ* 1)—is that at any one time, we may have only a limited capacity to identify what contextual factors are operative and how they affect our ability to know. "Unknown unknowns" may be in play. Just as they affect our understanding of other things, blind spots and perspectival constraints may limit the extent of any illumination of the self and its situation.

Li and Allen suggest that "self-illuminating knowledge" is illustrated by the story of Huizi's useless tree, which if replanted in an open wild would provide a shady spot for relaxing or enjoying a nap. From their brief remarks, it is unclear to me how this particular story illustrates a distinctive form of self-illuminating knowledge that is "different from general knowledge." Of course, the interplay between different perspectives on use and uselessness in this and other stories may be instructive as to how our particular standpoint and practices are but one alternative among a plurality. But since this and related writings prompt us to appreciate multiple perspectives, we might equally or more informatively dub the enhanced understanding they offer "other-illuminating," rather than "self-illuminating."

Given the conceptual dependence of notions such as "knowing" and "use" on *dào*, or ways of activity, I find it instructive to understand different perspectives on knowing or usefulness as resulting from different *dào* that one might follow. Perhaps this approach corresponds roughly to what Li and Allen call "another way of engaging with the environment." However, I don't see why shifting from one *dào* of distinguishing useful from useless to another—or to a *dào* on which we drop this distinction altogether—counts as attaining a distinct kind of "self-illuminating knowledge." It seems to me rather an application of a Zhuangist conception of practical wisdom, perhaps overlapping with what in "Evening Things Out" is referred to as *míng* 明. The object of knowledge or understanding here is not the self or its activities, specifically, but the different possibilities by which one might respond to features of one's environment, including the criteria that might shape an appropriate response, such as "responsiveness" (*yīn* 因), "good fit" (*shì* 適), or "smoothly proceeding through" (*tōng* 通). The ability to notice and shift among *dào* in this way is one aspect of competence in *dào*, which I suggest we can think of as part of a Zhuangist conception of *dé* 德 (agentive power).

My worries about the plausibility of the account of "self-illuminating knowledge" extend to another Zhuāngzǐ-Huìzǐ conversation Li and Allen treat, the dialogue about the happiness of fish. They propose that when the Zhuāngzǐ character in the dialogue asserts, of the fish swimming about, that "this is fish happiness," he is actually "highlighting his self-knowledge of his own mode of existence," namely a kind of happy wandering about. If the gist of this interpretive proposal is that Zhuāngzǐ understands that, like all assertions, whether his claim stands or not depends on features of the context, I agree. But I suggest that the implications of

the happy fish dialogue for such contextualism can be explained more simply and directly. The perspectival nature of knowing in *Zhuāngzǐ* raises the question of whether we can know how things are from others' perspectives, especially when the others are significantly unlike us, as fish and people are. The dialogue defuses this question by, in effect, showing how the use of "know" depends on context. Borrowing a phrase from "Discourse on Evening Things Out," we might say it "lodges" the use of "know" "in the ordinary"—that is, an ordinary, provisionally useful way it is applied in practice, without further claiming that this use applies across all contexts. In the dialogue, when Zhuāngzǐ remarks that freely, relaxedly swimming about is the happiness of fish, he is in effect stipulating an ostensive definition: within his *dào*, from his perspective on the bridge over the river, just this sort of carefree swimming counts as the happiness of fish. (I take this to be the point Zhōng Tài is making in the comment Li and Allen quote, which I read as, "the happiness of fish is confirmed precisely by their relaxed, carefree behaviour."[1])

Of course, in the dialogue, Zhuāngzǐ does not actually claim to know the happiness of fish, let alone claim, *per impossibile*, that he knows the happiness of fish from the fish's perspective. It is the Huìzǐ character that construes his remark this way, implying that only if one is a fish can one know the psychological states of fish. As Zhuāngzǐ indicates, however, this contention seems self-defeating: if it is true, then Huìzǐ cannot consistently claim to know that Zhuangzi does *not* know the happiness of fish, because according to Huìzǐ's own proposal, he cannot know the psychological states of others and so can't know what Zhuāngzǐ does or doesn't know. The overall point, as I see it, is that assertions of any sort issue from the performance of some *dào*, situated in some context, and are to be assessed by the norms of that *dào*. In this case, the *dào* and the context are those of an observer strolling along a bridge over a river watching the fish swim about.

I suggest, then, that the dialogue implies that Zhuāngzǐ is correctly distinguishing the happiness of fish by the standards of his own contextual *dào* and that we need not occupy the perspective of others to justifiably make assertions about their psychological states. Unlike Li and Allen, I don't see that these implications identify a distinctive form of knowledge different from "general knowledge." The contrast Li and Allen seek to draw between "object-directed cognition" and "self-illumination of objects occurring in a mode of personal engagement" seems to me unsustainable here. Perhaps they are aiming to underscore the Zhuangist stance that the application of norms governing *shì-fēi* distinctions inevitably involves contextual features referencing the agent, their *dào*, and their circumstances, and accordingly all cognition issues from engagement between an agent, the *dào* they perform, and their circumstances. The Zhuangist adept—the person of *míng*—understands these relations. But the crux, as I understand it, is that this relationality is an inescapable fact about knowledge in general, not a feature of a distinct type knowledge.

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Winnie Sung presents an inspiring attempt to explore the implications of discussions of cognitive blinkering, bias, or fixation (*bì* 蔽) in pre-Han texts in a way that helps to illustrate their potential relevance to contemporary epistemology. This is an exemplary project, for one dimension of the value of studying Chinese thought is that doing so may prompt us to notice issues and approaches that bear on—and perhaps have been overlooked in—more familiar philosophical discourse.

The concept of cognitive blinkering is interwined with what in *LCCT* I called the "part-whole" conception of cognitive error. On this conception, mistaken judgments are attributed to an agent's one-sidedly considering only part of the relevant information while neglecting how that part relates to the whole situation. The agent fixates on part of the scene and is "blinkered" or "obstructed" (*bì*) from considering the rest, in particular how the part fits into the overall picture. For a simple example, consider a case of availability bias. Suppose that, because of a friend's bad experience, I form the belief that brand X automobiles are prone to mechanical problems, even though large-scale surveys show that in fact brand X owners report fewer problems than other brands. I could be correct about the problems with my friend's car—and thus correct about part of the information—but mistaken in my belief about brand X as a whole because I attended mainly to my friend's case, "blinkering" myself from considering more fully representative data.

Sung conducts a thought-experiment to explore a related, special sort of case in which agents hold only true beliefs arising from their epistemic reliability in some domain yet precisely because of their fixation on that domain are blinkered from forming correct beliefs about or becoming epistemically reliable in other domains. Unlike in the automobile example, agents in this special case form no false beliefs and so seem not to have committed any error. Instead, they simply have no beliefs at all about the blinkered domains. As Sung suggests, the localized methods they apply in their domain of epistemic expertise could obstruct them from even inquiring into issues beyond that domain. Although such agents hold only true beliefs, then, they seem to fit the description in the *Xúnzǐ* of persons who, "blinkered by one corner, are in the dark about the larger patterns (*dà lǐ* 大理)."[2] Sung contends that because epistemic competence rests on the norms and methods of a particular epistemic community, which may focus on one domain to the exclusion of others, this sort of blinkering is indeed practically possible.

In light of such a scenario, she makes an instructive suggestion concerning how to understand epistemic excellence. Given the part-whole conception of error, we might initially think of epistemic excellence as simply a matter of reliability: the adept agent avoids errors due to fixating on the part at the expense of the whole. As Sung explains, however, admirable

epistemic performance cannot be this simple. After all, locally competent agents might avoid error simply by never thinking about domains beyond their expertise, all the while remaining blinkered to a wide range of other domains. Surely a grasp of a wider range of matters—and probably also the relations between them, where applicable—is in some important respect epistemically "better" than only narrow, local competence. Sung explicates this point by introducing the concept of a better or worse "epistemic position." A better epistemic position is measured not merely by how many true beliefs one has, nor only by whether one avoids error. We might say that, like a scientific theory, it is evaluated at least partly by the explanatory power of the beliefs the agent holds, which is a product not only of their truth or accuracy but of their scope, coherence, simplicity, and fertility. As Sung says, "not all true beliefs are equal." A better epistemic position involves a grasp of the "larger patterns" of things—how they relate to and affect each other both within and across domains. Closely related themes are reflected in the concern in *Lǚ's Annals* about understanding how things "develop" or "evolve" (*huà* 化); in pericopes across the pre-Han literature that refer to "knowing kinds" (*zhī lèi* 知類), or understanding how different objects fit into a system of interrelated kind distinctions; in the importance, again found across different texts, of *lùn* 論, or the ability to discursively "sort out" the kind relations among things; and in contexts such as the *Zhuāngzǐ* "Autumn Waters" dialogue, which claims that the value of knowing *dào* lies in the accompanying mastery of general patterns (*lǐ*), which yield an understanding of how to apply contextual discretion (*quán* 權) in varying circumstances.

An implication of the link "Autumn Waters" draws between *dào* and mastering the general patterns is that epistemic excellence amounts to a competence in a certain sort of *dào*, or way of recognizing, distinguishing, and responding to things. As discussed in *LCCT*, this point is also prominent in *Xúnzǐ* 21, "Resolving Blinkering," for which epistemic excellence or a good epistemic position ultimately rests on recognizing, affirming, and applying the right *dào*, which is the correct "scale" by which to "weigh" things in determining how to distinguish them into various action-guiding kinds (21/29). Accordingly, the *Xúnzǐ* sums up its criticisms of various opponents by claiming they are each blinkered as to the "larger" *dào* because of how they one-sidedly focus on one factor while neglecting the function of complementary factors. (For instance, Mòzǐ was supposedly fixated on utility and so neglected the role of cultural form.) In each case, the *Xúnzǐ* argues, the opponent deems their favored factor central to *dào*, in so doing restricting their conception of *dào* to a narrow, constrained domain while blinkering themselves to the "larger patterns" discernable through a more balanced, comprehensive *dào*.

Since *dào* incorporates epistemic practices, including the purposes that guide them and the sorts of inquiries they raise, the reference to different *dào* or conceptions of *dào* offers an illuminating alternative vocabulary by which to understand Sung's suggestions about different epistemic communities and their different methods of inquiry. In effect, these methods are different *dào* or aspects of the *dào* of those communities. The methods of some community

here can be thought of as a *dào* that community follows, which may be different from *dào* that are followed by other communities, in other contexts. Just as a community could hold only true beliefs yet be blinkered, they could follow a *dào* that works well enough locally but blinds them from noticing or trying other *dào*, which for various purposes might work even better. The issue at stake is not maximizing true beliefs—indeed, the aim cannot be assessed quantitatively—but grasping and applying a certain sort of *dào*, which provides the ability to apply general patterns to attain whatever true beliefs are needed in particular circumstances. This is a respect in which knowing *dào* is as much a matter of practical wisdom or ability as it is one of holding a certain body of true beliefs.

Sung raises the question of "how some limited epistemic beings manage to overcome their own epistemic blinkering and grasp the larger patterns in the first place." I see this query as reflecting the "perspectival predicament" underscored by discussions in the *Zhuāngzǐ,* especially in "Autumn Waters" and "Discourse on Evening Things Out." Through creative responses to contextual challenges, we limited beings can indeed expand our blinkered perspectives—here including our methods of inquiry—to take into account more aspects of the "larger patterns." However, no perspective or method can allow us to wholly overcome epistemic blinkering. Every perspective *qua* perspective focuses on some factors to the exclusion of others and so is to some degree blinkered or biased. Such blinkering becomes a problem only when it interferes with how well we follow *dào* or when the *dào* we follow prevents us from living as well as we otherwise might. Of course, we may disagree about what our *dào* should be and how well we follow it. We may ascribe some of our disagreement to what we take to be one-sided, blinkered views on our opponents' part, and they are likely to rejoin that it is we who are one-sided. The likelihood of such disagreement seems an unavoidable consequence of the contested nature of social *dào*—a consequence to which the most fruitful response can only be to continue seeking to broaden and refine our epistemic outlook.

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Ellie Wang's critical comments are especially instructive, because they stem partly from methodological differences arising from the different premises we adopt in approaching late classical Chinese texts. Wang and I seem to be working on the basis of different paradigms, in a Kuhnian sense. Our different approaches are evident in how she frames the pair of critical concerns with which she begins her discussion. The first of these is whether, on a topic-oriented approach, "individual texts may lose their internal coherence or become fragmented, making it harder for readers to fully appreciate the philosophical integrity of each work." As I explain in the book, I do not consider the early Chinese masters anthologies to be individual texts that we should expect to display the sort of internal coherence or integrity we expect from a modern book or even from the collected works of a modern author. I propose that different parts of

these anthologies in fact cohere in a variety of ways. For example, some of the masters volumes include writings presenting sharply distinct views on shared topics; some include writings presenting sequential developments of related ideas or discussing different subtopics, which may or may not complement each other; some include a mixture of materials that may have been collected together only because they happened to be part of the same library or archive. As Wang notes, the different chapters of *LCCT* do attempt to point out conceptual connections between views from the same masters volume that likely represent overlapping or closely related doctrinal outlooks. Whether the book succeeds in doing so perspicuously is of course for the reader to decide.

Wang's second concern is that the topical organization of the book may result in discussions that risk anachronism. In particular, she worries that because the organization of several chapters places material from the *Zhuāngzǐ* after material from the *Xúnzǐ* and *Lǚ's Annals*, the discussion may "[overlook] developmental trajectories" in which "other schools might have drawn on resources in the *Zhuāngzǐ* to offer criticism of or challenges to" views presented there. Specifically, she seems to want to attribute certain "Zhuangist" ideas to a historical Zhuāngzǐ who lived before and prompted critical reponses from the historical Xúnzǐ, whom she sees as the author of a systematic, coherent set of doctrines presented in the *Xúnzǐ.* Here again it seems we are working from different paradigms. I do not date the masters collections to particular points in time but to spans lasting decades or centuries, and with few exceptions I do not think we have sufficient evidence to tie the constituent writings to particular persons. (I now regret having used the name "Xúnzǐ" in discussing Xunzian doctrines rather than only the title *Xúnzǐ*. I did so because we have good evidence that Xún Kuàng was a historical person who was alive while much of the *Xúnzǐ* material was produced. But it is difficult to say what his role was in producing the *Xúnzǐ* writings, and I now think that using the person's name as a label for the material invites misleading inferences about authorship and coherence.)

My view is that our knowledge of the chronology of the individual pericopes in the *Xúnzǐ* and *Zhuāngzǐ* is so coarse-grained that in many cases it is impossible to marshal compelling evidence for a claim of anachronism concerning their relative precedence or the direction of influence between them. My working hypothesis is that the bulk of the material in the *Zhuāngzǐ* and the *Xúnzǐ* was probably produced at various, unknown times during the third century BCE, although a significant portion of both anthologies is probably of somewhat later date (examples include several of the last nine books of the *Xúnzǐ* and *Zhuāngzǐ* material such as "Robber Zhí," "A Persuasion on Swords," "The Fisherman," and "All the World"). Is, for example, the *Zhuāngzǐ* "Autumn Waters" dialogue chronologically earlier or later than the epistemological material in *Xúnzǐ* "Resolving Blinkering"? Are the critical, sceptical ruminations in the "Discourse on Evening Things Out" earlier or later than the account of how to correct names in *Xúnzǐ* "Correct Names"? Given the limited historical information available, these sorts of questions seem

intractable. Consequently, I treat these and numerous other sources as making roughly contemporaneous contributions to ongoing, criss-crossing discourses. Just how particular contributions may relate to each other is an open question, a matter of interpretive hypothesis. *LCCT* offers one set of what I hope are plausible and illuminating hypotheses, but of course alternative accounts are available, some of which I expect may be insightful. (As always, we assess all such hypotheses by a comparative evaluation of their explanatory power.) I heartily agree with Wang that it is well worth exploring how—for example—we might read parts of the *Xúnzǐ* as responding to ideas along the lines of those found in parts of the *Zhuāngzǐ*. Indeed, although *LCCT* does not frame its discussion that way, I hope readers find it offers much material on which to draw in exploring plausible alternative interpetations.

As Wang observes, several chapters in *LCCT* are organized such that views drawn from the *Zhuāngzǐ* are treated last. This arrangement is not intended to imply that voices from the *Zhuāngzǐ* get the last word on or provide a conclusive response to the issues discussed. The material is ordered this way simply because, on many issues, *Zhuāngzǐ* writings reject assumptions shared by multiple other outlooks or lineages of thought and offer novel, sharply contrasting alternatives. For the rhetorical and pedagogical purposes of *LCCT*, it seemed effective to first treat other views, which have more in common, and then point out the contrasts between them and the rather different lines of thought explored in the *Zhuāngzǐ*.

Of course, as Wang mentions, *Xúnzǐ* 21, "Resolving Blinkering," criticizes Zhuāngzǐ by name, treating him as a figurehead for an outlook supposedly so fixated on nature that it fails to understand humanity (21/22). However, this brief reference does not tie the name "Zhuāngzǐ" to any particular piece of text, nor even to a well-defined doctrine. Arguably, some writings in the *Zhuāngzǐ* might fairly be described as fixated on nature, but many cannot. Indeed, the relation between nature and humanity is a contested topic among pericopes within the *Zhuāngzǐ*. So I don't see that this mention of Zhuāngzǐ tells us much about how or to what extent Xunzian doctrines postdate or are responding to the wide range of ideas in the *Zhuāngzǐ*. Nor, on the other hand, does the fact that numerous *Zhuāngzǐ* passages criticize the Rú establish how much of the *Zhuāngzǐ* material postdates or is responding to Xunzian views. To formulate informative hypotheses about relations between the ideas in the two anthologies, we can only closely examine the contentions and arguments in particular pericopes.

When we do, Wang and I reach different conclusions. Most prominent of these, perhaps, is that I find a strand of dogmatism and conservatism across many pericopes of the *Xúnzǐ* that she does not. My explanation of this difference again lies in the diverse, composite nature of the masters anthologies. Chad Hansen suggested long ago that readers can find "at least two different thinkers" in the *Xúnzǐ*, one a philosophical pragmatist, the other a political dogmatist.[3] I agree that we can find passages expressing moderate, pragmatic views in *Xúnzǐ*—indeed, several chapters of *LCCT* discuss such views. But to me these are often overshadowed by the

dogmatism and conservatism of other *Xúnzǐ* passages. Examples include passages that adamantly reject the suggestion that different *dào* may be called for in different historical conditions, because the sages were purportedly able to grasp patterns that remain the same no matter how much time passes (5/32–36); that assert that in all speech, debate, use of terms, and judging right from wrong, we must "take the sage-kings as our masters" (18/102–103); that a particular system of social roles and associated norms of propriety and duty is uniquely authoritative, "of the same pattern as Heaven and Earth, enduring for a myriad ages" (9/67); that the main point in study is to learn where to stop, namely by taking the sage-kings as one's masters, since they are "the ultimate in the world" (21/81–82); and, most notoriously, that the gentleman-prince debates assertions he disagrees with only because "he lacks a position of power over them and punishments by which to prohibit them" (22/36). Indeed, as I understand the grammar, the "Discourse on Ritual" does not say, as Wang suggests, that "to be able to reflect and ponder what is central to ritual is called being able to deliberate." It says "to be able to reflect and ponder *within ritual* is called being able to deliberate."[4] In other words, the passage appears to assert that a particular tradition of ritual propriety sets the boundaries of acceptable thought.

When *LCCT* suggests that ultimately the conception of *dào* presented in much of the *Xúnzǐ* rests on cultural identification with certain ethical, political, and ritual traditions, I am not implying that the *Xúnzǐ* writings do not argue for their normative conclusions. (Indeed, *LCCT* devotes much space to exploring Xunzian arguments, some of which I find profound.) Nor am I suggesting that in the *Xúnzǐ* ethical understanding amounts only to grasping the specifics of Zhōu rituals. I am attempting to explain why Xunzian claims about norms or practices often outrun what the arguments for them can support. Indeed, I agree that the *Xúnzǐ* contains passages distinguishing between specific ritual practices and the general "patterns" (*lǐ* 理) on which these are supposedly based. The problem is that the general patterns could be invoked to justify a range of specific practices, but discussions in the *Xúnzǐ* sometimes proceed as if they justified only the writers' favored cultural tradition. The example Wang cites of a purportedly commonsensical, non-dogmatic Xunzian argument for a ritual practice—the defense of the three-year mourning ritual in the "Discourse on Ritual"—perfectly illustrates this rhetorical tendency. The text remarks that an appropriate mourning ritual must give form to the survivors' grief in a way commensurate with the depth of their feelings, their relation to the deceased, and the deceased's social status (19/93–108). It contends that mourning must be "moderate" (*zhōng* 中) and "measured" (*jié* 節), as it must come to an end at some point, allowing mourners to resume normal life. From these entirely sensible premises, which might support a range of mourning rituals, it then makes a breathtaking leap to assert that the only adequate mourning practice when grieving one's parents is to move out of one's home and live in a rough hut for 25 months, wearing only coarse garments, eating only gruel, and sleeping on a mat on the ground—and all this after already having held a wake lasting 50 to 70 days. Doing so is supposedly the "ultimate form of the human *dào*" and the practice of the "hundred kings"

(19/107–08). My proposal is that the best explanation for the immense gap here between the highly specific, extreme practices defended and the very general reasons given for them is that the writers have other, personal and cultural grounds for these practices. Indeed, we might construe the passage not as offering an argument as much as simply elucidating the writers' understanding of the cultural significance of these rituals.

Our different characterizations of Xunzian ethical views lead me to suspect that in reading the *Xúnzǐ,* Wang and I may be pursuing distinct aims, with different methodologies. Her project is reflected in her remark that "the most charitable reading of the *Xúnzǐ* need not bind Xúnzǐ's conception of the Way…to very particular cultural practices" but "should maintain its central ideas [of] humaneness and rightness through the practice of rituals." This is an informative description of her laudable effort to develop Xunzian themes into a plausible version of a progressive Confucianism, a project toward which I am sympathetic. However, *LCCT* is engaged in the rather different project of trying to give a plausible philosophical explanation of late classical texts as they stand, warts and all. Toward this end, we are seeking the best explanation of the texts, not the most charitable reading. Charity is a measure neither of intelligibility nor of explanatory power.[5]

Wang proposes an account of Xunzian epistemology as a response to what she perceives as the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s failure to provide a substantive general orientation for human life. Well-known passages in *Zhuāngzǐ* imply that no single substantive, general *dào* can be justified, because the best-fitting *dào* is plural, contextual, and variable and because any fixed, substantive *dào* we pursue will in various respects be limited, contingent, and incomplete. In *LCCT*, I propose that *Zhuāngzǐ* writings nevertheless do provide a formal framework for evaluating better or worse ways of performing *dào* in terms of how "free-flowing," "responsive," "fitting," "useful," and "harmonious" they are, as assessed according to a fluid, defeasible cluster of default values, such as preserving life and caring for family. (A summary of this framework appears on pp. 50–54 and 128–33.) Wang rejects this approach as practically empty, contending that it offers no clear criteria for success in *dào*. She proposes that the *Xúnzǐ* aims to resolve this deficiency through the account in "Resolving Blinkering" of how one can come to know a singularly authoritative *dào* by being open-minded in seeking it, focused in practicing it, and calm in pondering it.

One point to note concerning this proposal is that the "open-minded" passage (21/34–44) is curiously isolated within the *Xúnzǐ* corpus. None of the ethical or political discussions in the *Xúnzǐ* refer to the concepts or methods introduced in it. No pericope applies them to explain how the sage-kings invented the *dào* or how individuals can guide their own ethical development. So I question the extent to which these ideas play much of a role in Xunzian thought, let alone a foundational role.

The “open-minded” passage indeed offers intriguing practical advice about remaining receptive to new information; focusing on distinct items without interference from how we relate them to other, contrasting items; and preventing one’s fancies from disrupting one’s grasp of the facts. But this advice simply does not address the Zhuangist critical contention that no single substantive *dào* can be justified generally, across all contexts, because any *dào* we pursue will be partial and blinkered in some respects. That the *Xúnzǐ* passage fails to appreciate this point is clear from its denouement, which makes the grandiose, unsupported claims that through open-mindedness, focus, and calm one can become a “great person” who completely escapes “blinkering” and thus can sort out all the myriad things “without error,” “comprehensively observing the myriad things and knowing their characteristic features,” and so “instituting great patterns that contain the whole cosmos” (21/41–44).

Wang concludes by asking, metaphorically, whether the difference between what we might call the two “musical genres” of the *Xúnzǐ* and the *Zhuāngzǐ* is a matter of kind or only of degree. Like her, I lean toward the latter characterization, on the grounds that many portions of both anthologies share a concern with the extent to which the good way of life is a human construct and just how such a life is shaped by and engages with features of nature that are beyond our control. Regarding these questions, we can all agree that jointly the *Zhuāngzǐ* and the *Xúnzǐ*—and indeed many pre-Han texts—offer an incredibly rich stock of ideas to ponder.

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[1] “魚樂正從其從容處體勘得來.” Zhōng Tài 鐘泰, *Zhuāngzǐ Fāwéi* 莊子發微 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 1988), 393.

[2] *Xúnzǐ* 21/1. Citations to the *Xúnzǐ* give book and line numbers in *A Concordance to Hsun Tzu*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series, Supplement no. 22 (Taipei: Chinese Materials and Research Aids Service Center, 1966).

[3] Chad Hansen, *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 308.

[4] The text reads “禮之中焉能思索謂之能慮” (19/35).

[5] For an explanation of this point, see Ken Warmbrōd, “The Need for Charity in Semantics,” *Philosophical Review* 100.3 (1991), 431–58.