

Harmony as a Normative Ideal in Zhuangist Thought

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The word *hé* 和—often interpreted as “harmony”—has a pivotal normative role in several prominent pericopes of the *Zhuāngzǐ* dealing with how best to follow *dào*, especially in interaction with others.¹ Just what is this role, and why is it expressed by the term *hé* 和? I’ll try to answer these questions by first surveying the content of *hé* 和 as used across the classical Chinese literature, then giving an interpretation of its use in *Zhuāngzǐ* writings, and finally offering a hypothesis about why the term was adopted to express a Zhuangist normative ideal.

My proposal is that for many *Zhuāngzǐ* writings, the adept performance of *dào* involves a “fitting” or “flowing” relation to one’s context—including one’s relations with other persons—and *hé* refers to a state achieved through such a relation of “good fit,” in which agents engage with others or with their circumstances in a way that sustains a productive capacity to continue smoothly proceeding along *dào*. *Hé* is thus probably not only causally but conceptually related to the notion of “walking two ways” or “proceeding along both sides” (*liǎng xíng* 兩行) with which it is associated in “Discourse on Evening Things Out” (齊物論), book 2 of the *Zhuāngzǐ*. Although *hé* may require conflict-free interaction between different agents, sides, or factors, it does not necessarily require agreement or uniformity. An intriguing hypothesis is that the Zhuangist use of *hé* is modeled on the productive interaction or blending of different forces or energies in nature. If this hypothesis stands, then an implication is that, as in the example of musical harmony, a *hé* relation may bring about an admirable result that is greater than the sum of its parts.

¹ “*Hé* 和” is pronounced roughly like the English “her?,” with a rising tone but omitting the final “r.” The “h” is pronounced roughly like the hard German “ch,” as in “Bach.”

1. *Hé* 和 Across the Early Literature

Hé is a widely used concept in early Chinese thought. Any interpretation of its role in a relatively narrow sample of texts is likely to be enriched by considering how that role relates to the implications of the term across a wider body of texts. As background, then, let's explore the semantic range of *hé* in a variety of pre-Hàn and Hàn sources.

Perhaps the most prominent use of *hé* is to refer to musical harmony:

聲之和調 “the *hé* (harmonious) tuning/blending of their voices” (Mz 8)

五聲和 “the five notes *hé* (harmonize)” (Zuo, Xiang 29)

音聲相和 “Notes and voices mutually *hé* (harmonize).” (DDJ 2)

相和而歌 “In mutual *hé* (harmony) they sang together.” (Zz 6)

One passage uses it to refer to resonance:

彈角角動，此同聲相和者也

“Pluck the *jué* [string on one zither] and the *jué* string [on another zither] moves; this is [strings of] the same tone mutually *hé* (resonating).” (Hnz)

An important subset of uses refers to accompanying or singing along with a lead voice:²

一人唱而千人和 “One person sings (lead) and a thousand persons *hé* (join in harmony).” (Hnz 17)

和而不唱 “*hé* (join in with others) but not sing lead” (Zz 5)

子思唱之，孟軻和之 “Zisi sang this and Meng Ke *hé* (accompanied) him.” (Xz 6)

人唱我和 “Others sing lead and I *hé* (join in harmony).” (LSCQ)

Hé 和 need not entail sameness:

² As these examples show, in many contexts, the sense of the word *chàng* 唱 is not “sing” but, more precisely, “to sing the lead part.” “Sing” is *gē* 歌.

君子和而不同，小人同而不和。“The gentleman is *hé* (harmonious) without being the same (without uniformity or identity); the petty person is the same without being *hé* (harmonious).” (LY 13.23)

However, in some contexts it can refer to different parts unifying into a single entity:

群居和一之道也 “the *dào* of living together as a community and *hé* (harmonizing as, joining into) one (a single society, a single whole)” (Xz 4)

Hé 和 can refer to two things fitting together:

衣服適身體和肌膚 “Clothes fit the body and *hé* (fit) the skin.” (Mz 6)

唇吻之和 “the *hé* (good fit) of the lips joining together” (Hnz 9)

It often refers to mixing or blending, as when cooking:

舐筆和墨 “licking brushes and *hé* (mixing) ink” (Zz 21)

庖人調和而弗敢食 “Cooks mix-and-*hé* (blend) without daring to eat.” (LSCQ)

五味異和 “[In different cultures] the five flavours are differently *hé* (mixed).” (*Liji* 5)

調和五味 “mixing-and-*hé* (blending) the five flavours” (Hnz 21)

寒暑之和不成 “The *hé* (interaction, moderation) of cold and heat fails.” (Zz 11)

Hé is often used of social relations. In some contexts, it refers to the peacefulness of or good relations between people or all the world or, when used as a verb, to pacifying them:

以德和民 “*Hé* (harmonize, pacify, bring together) the people with virtue.” (Zuozhuan)

百姓和 “The hundred surnames *hé* (get along well, are at peace).” (Xz 9)

萬民和 “The myriad people are *hé* (get along well, are at peace).” (Mz 27)

天下和 “All the world was *hé* (at peace, in concord).” (Mz 10)

In many contexts, *hé* refers not simply to the absence of conflict but to normatively admirable, beneficial interaction between persons of different roles or statuses. This use can be thought of as an extension of the use of *hé* to refer to musical harmony.

不能相和合 [Family members] “could not mutually *hé* (get along) together.” (Mz 11)

上下不調和 “Superiors and subordinates did not attune-and-*hé* (adjust to each other, get along, harmonize).” (Mz 25)

六親不和 “The six kinship relations are not *hé* (in harmony, getting along well).” (DDJ 18)

So it may be justified, then, to interpret *hé* 和 in the preceding examples about peace or good relations as referring more strongly to normatively admirable interaction between people.

Several texts indicate that the social use of *hé* can sometimes imply not only concord but responsive obedience. Perhaps we can regard this use as a metaphorical extension of the use in musical contexts to refer to singing along with a leader.

上者下之師也，夫下之和上，譬之猶響之應聲 “Superiors are the leaders of subordinates, and so subordinates *hé* (harmonize with, obediently follow) superiors analogous to how an echo reacts to a sound.” (Xz 16)

上唱而民和，上動而下隨 “Superiors sing and the people *hé* (join in harmony); superiors move and subordinates follow.” (Hnz 20)

A passage in *Xúnzǐ* links *hé* to *shùn* (obeying, flowing along with):

以善和人者謂之順...以不善和人者謂之諛 “*Hé* (joining together, following along in harmony) with others on the basis of something good is called *shùn* (obeying, according with)...*hé* with others on the basis of something bad is called fawning.”

This connection places *hé* in the same conceptual neighbourhood as notions such as *shùn* (comply, flow along with), *yīn* 因 (accord with, respond to), and *yìng* 應 (respond, react), terms that in *Zhuāngzǐ* are associated with adept performance of *dào*.

In many texts, *hé* is used of the productive, complementary interaction or blending of natural energies or forces. For example, the *hé* of *yīn* and *yáng* 陰陽之和, or productive interaction between natural forces or energies of opposing polarities, is mentioned in many sources, including passages in *Mòzǐ*, *Zhuāngzǐ*, *Lǚshì Chūnqiū*, *Hánfēizǐ*, *Huáinánzǐ*, and *Lǐ Jì*. Two examples from *Huáinánzǐ* 3 are these:

陰陽合和而萬物生 “The negative and positive energies joining-and-*hé* (blending, harmonizing), the myriad things are produced.”

兩者交通成和而物生焉 “The two [energies] interconnect, achieving *hé* (harmonious interaction), and things are produced therefrom.”

The *Xúnzǐ* uses *hé* to refer to how the various constituent parts or energies of things join together to produce or generate them:

萬物各得其和以生，各得其養以成... “The myriad things each obtaining the *hé* (blending, harmony) by which they are produced, each obtaining the nurture by which they mature...”

性之和所生，精合感應，不事而自然謂之性 “What is produced by the *hé* (blending, intermixing) of the inherent dispositions, the vitality engaging in sensing and responding to things, which is so-of-itself without work is called *xìng* (inherent nature).”

Numerous texts use *hé* 和 to refer to a state of psychophysiological balance or equilibrium within the person crucial to good health, including mental health. Presumably in this state different constituents of the person interact or balance in a beneficial, complementary way.

心志，欲其和也 “Regarding the mind-intent, one wants it to be *hé* (in harmony, calm).” (LSCQ)

精神之和 “the *hé* (harmony, calm) of the vital spirit” (Hnz)

耳目聰明，血氣和平... “the ears and eyes keen and acute, the blood-*qì* *hé* (calm) and balanced...” (Xz 20)

天全則神和矣，目明矣，耳聰矣，鼻臭矣，口敏矣，三百六十節皆通利矣。 “When one’s natural endowment is whole, the spirit is *hé* (in harmony, calm), the eyes acute,

the ears keen, the nose sensitive, the palate discerning, the 360 joints all nimble.” (LSCQ 1.2)

養生之和 “the *hé* (calm, harmony, intermixing) that nurtures life” (Hnz)

不以欲滑和 “Do not allow desires to disrupt *hé* (calm, harmony).” (Hnz)

和喜怒 “*hé* (calm, pacify, balance) joy and anger” (Zz, Hnz)

心莫若和 “As to the mind, nothing is better than *hé* (calm, harmony)” (Zz 4)

In *Zhuāngzǐ* and *Huáinánzǐ*, this inward *hé* is closely associated with *dé* 德 (virtue, agentive power, potency of character):

樂亡乎富貴，而在於德和 “Happiness lies not in wealth and rank but in the *hé* (harmony, calm) of *dé* (virtue, agentive power).” (Hnz)

夫德，和也；道，理也 “*Dé* is *hé* (harmony); *dào* is pattern.” (Zz 16)

游心於德之和 “Let the mind wander in the *hé* (harmony) of *dé*.” (Zz 5)

The association of psychophysiological *hé* with *dé* and with a healthy or robust constitution explains a famous line in *Dàodéjīng* 55:

終日號而不嘎，和之至也 “[The infant] crying the whole day without going hoarse, [this is] the ultimate in *hé* (harmony, well-integrated power).” (DDJ 55)

Famously, the *Zhōngyōng* 中庸 (“Equilibrium and Moderation”) states that having the emotions “conform to measure” is *hé*, which is “the most perfect *dào* in the world”:

喜怒哀樂之未發，謂之中；發而皆中節，謂之和；中也者，天下之大本也；和也者，天下之達道也。致中和，天地位焉，萬物育焉。

[The state] before joy, anger, grief, and happiness issue forth is called “equilibrium.” Issuing forth while all conforming to measure is called “*hé*.” Equilibrium is the greatest foundation in the world; *hé* is the most perfect *dào* in the world. Attain equilibrium and *hé*, and heaven and earth will thereby be in their proper places, while the myriad things are properly nurtured.

Let’s sum up this wide-ranging survey:

- *Hé* 和 can refer to calm, peace, or concord.
- It often refers to productive, beneficial blending or engagement between different, even opposing things.
- It can refer to responding to something by following along with it in a complementary or mutually beneficial way.
- It is a condition for natural, social, or psychophysiological processes or relations to proceed in a normal or healthy way. For example, *hé* between *yīn* and *yáng* is needed for the weather and seasons to function normally, sustaining agriculture and animal life, and psychological *hé* seems to be a component of mental health and healthy psychophysical functioning.

So *hé* 和 is characteristic of different factors fitting, blending, or complementing each other such that things proceed well, following *dào*.

Conceptually, in some contexts, *hé* can imply responsiveness (*yīn* 因) and following or conforming (*shùn* 順). However, I suggest *hé* is distinguished from *shùn* by the implication that a *hé* relation is complementary or productive, not merely one side conforming to the other. Similarly, *hé* is not merely the aggregation of or a static relation between parts. Factors or constituent parts that combine in a *hé* relation with each other are understood to do so in a productive or constructive way that yields a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts.

2. *Hé* 和 as a Norm in *Zhuāngzǐ*

The story of the goose that couldn't honk in *Zhuāngzǐ* §20.1 presents *hé* 和 as the “measure” of proficient performance in *dào*. Two sections in *Zhuāngzǐ* book 2, “Discourse on Evening Things Out” (§§2.6c, 2.15b)—the monkey keeper story and the irresolvable debate story—depict *hé* as a means by which to follow *dào* well. Let's have a closer look at these three sections in light of our survey of the semantic range of *hé* in the early literature.

(Another prominent use of *hé* in *Zhuāngzǐ* is as a feature of *dé* 德. Since we briefly treated this use in the previous section, I will set it aside here.)

2.1 The Monkey Keeper Story

The monkey keeper story is presented as an illustration of “three in the morning,” a label for the foolishness of laboriously committing oneself to one way of distinguishing things for the purposes of guiding action when alternative, more feasible, yet in some sense equivalent ways may also be available.³ In the story, the monkey keeper proposes to give the monkeys three nuts in the morning and four in the evening. The monkeys angrily reject the proposal, so he instead offers four in the morning and three in the evening, which pleases them. This adjustment is offered as an example of action guided by adept *yīn* 因, contextual responsiveness, rather than clumsy *wéi* 為, an imposed, predetermined way of doing things. The text explains:

名實未虧，而喜怒為用，亦因是也。是以聖人和之以是非而休乎天鈞，是之謂兩行。

There was no loss in either name or object, yet joy and anger were applied—this is just “adjusting ‘this’ in response to the context.” Thus the sage *hé* (harmonizes) things by means of ‘this’ and ‘not’ and rests in the evenness of nature—this is called “proceeding two ways at once.” (Zz 2.6c)

Both of the action-guiding labels (*míng*, “names”) in question—“three” and “four”—were preserved before and after the switch, as were the facts or objects (*shí*) they denote—the seven nuts per day. Nothing was lost. The keeper merely rearranged the items in response to the discovery that one arrangement incited obstructive anger, while another prompted cooperative delight. He thus defused the conflict and attained *hé* (harmony).

The story raises complex interpretive issues, but for our purposes we can set most of these aside to focus specifically on the role of *hé* 和. According to the text, the monkey keeper illustrates how the sage—the Zhuāngist adept—handles situations through a contextually variable norm of *hé*. The sage holds no standing commitment to any general way of drawing action-guiding distinctions (that is, distinctions between “this/right” and “not”). Rather, they “rest” in a stance that “evens out” the differences

³ The text introduces the phrase 朝三 *zhāo sān* (“three in the morning”) as a humorous tag for misguidedly laboring one’s intelligence to deem all things definitively “one” (一), or a unity, without understanding the various ways things can be considered “the same” (同). This attitude contrasts with that of the Zhuangist adept, who understands the various ways things can be divided out of (and ultimately return to) the whole of nature and so does not definitively deem things to be one way or another, instead adapting to whatever proves effective in different contexts. See *Zhuāngzǐ* 2/33–40.

between things, just as nature itself treats everything as “even” or “level,” rather than bestowing a predetermined action-guiding significance on things.⁴ (Agents, not nature, institute action-guiding distinctions.) In action, on the other hand, the sage adjusts guiding distinctions so as to seek *hé* (harmony). The result is dubbed *liǎng xíng* 兩行, which we can interpret as proceeding or walking in two ways at once or as proceeding along both sides of some dichotomy. (In early Chinese logic, *liǎng* 兩 in a technical sense refers to logical contraries or contradictories, which normally could not both “proceed” at the same time.) The implication seems to be that the adept agent finds a way to proceed by which they can, in different respects, affirm both of two sides that might have seemed incompatible. By extension, in engagement with others, the agent finds a way to proceed that allows both sides to carry out a *dào* satisfactory to them, even if initially their *dào* seemed incompatible.

An intriguing implication of the story is that *hé* need not require agreement. Insofar as attaining *hé* is a matter of *liǎng xíng*—simultaneously proceeding in two ways, without causing them to converge into one—it seems that agents can attain *hé* without agreeing on the same *dào*. They need only agree to cooperate on some overlapping portion of their respective paths.

Focusing on the conceptual connections between *yīn* 因, *hé* 和, and “proceeding two ways,” we can say that, in this story, *hé* refers to a normatively admirable relation attained by contextually adjusting (*yīn*) one’s response to an interaction with others such that both sides are enabled to proceed (*xíng* 行) in a manner suitable to them. By eliminating conflict, *hé* enables different sides to move smoothly along their *dào*.

2.2 *Hé* as a Response to Irresolvable Disputes

Another significant occurrence of *hé* 和 is in a pericope questioning whether disputes between proponents of different views can ever genuinely settle how to distinguish *shì* 是 (this/right) from *fēi* 非 (not), or whether such exchanges in the end amount merely to repeatedly restating the different views at stake. Such disputes cannot be resolved in any “ultimate” or “final” way, the text claims, because any outcome either merely reasserts one of the perspectives in contention or introduces a further perspective on equal footing with the others. If some way of drawing a *shì-fēi* distinction were “ultimately”

⁴ I read 鈞 as equivalent to 均.

correct, the passage claims, disputation would not arise, as all sides would simply accept it without discussion. Accordingly, “the mutual exchange of voices” in disputation settles nothing—it is no better than if these voices didn’t interact at all.

Given the unlikelihood of ever resolving fundamental disagreements, the text advocates “harmonizing” the interacting “voices” by “natural divisions.”

...然則我與若與人俱不能相知也，而待彼也邪？化聲之相待，若其不相待。和之以天倪，因之以曼衍，所以窮年也。何謂和之以天倪？曰：是不是，然不然。是若果是也，則是之異乎不是也亦無辯。

...So if I and you and others together can’t jointly know, shall we await another? The mutual exchange of voices is just as if they didn’t exchange. *Hé* (harmonize) them by natural divisions, responding to them by flowing over—this is how to live out life. What is called “*hé* (harmonize) them by natural divisions”? I say: ‘this’ isn’t ‘this’; ‘so’ isn’t ‘so’. If ‘this’ were ultimately ‘this’, then as to the difference between ‘this’ and ‘not-this’ there’d indeed be no dispute. (Zz 2.15b)

What is “harmonizing” the competing voices “by natural divisions”?⁵ Most likely, the text is suggesting that, without settling on any definitive way of drawing action-guiding distinctions—and so without actually resolving the debate between two sides—we can find naturally occurring openings, gaps, or differences about which, in a particular context, there is no dispute, which we can then employ to seek a relation of *hé* (harmony) between two sides. We are to apply this approach to adaptively “respond” (*yīn*) endlessly, without any fixed boundaries or limits, and thus “respond by flowing over.”

The result of such “harmonizing,” I suggest, is likely to converge with that of the approach depicted in the monkey story. In both scenarios, we seek an adaptive balance between the parties involved, remaining prepared to continue “flowing over” and adjusting to conditions as circumstances change. At the same time, in both passages, *hé* leaves open the possibility of fundamental disagreement. The two sides may disagree

⁵ The “goblet speech” passage in Zz 27, “Allegorical Speech,” which is partly a commentary on this pericope, suggests that the noun phrase *tiān ní* 天倪 is equivalent to *tiān jūn* 天均, “natural evenness.” This suggestion is probably mistaken, however. Although we have only a few examples of the use of the word *ní* 倪 in the *Zhuāngzǐ*, in every case it means, roughly, “to divide,” “gaps,” or “divisions.” Accordingly, I interpret it here as “divisions.”

about which meal arrangement or approach to distinguishing *shì-fēi* is best, but they can attain some contextually specified relation of *hé* by which to facilitate their ongoing course of activity.

2.3 Riding Along with *Dào* and *Dé*

Section 20.1—the story of the goose that couldn’t honk—is among the most informative pericopes in the entire *Zhuāngzǐ* concerning the practice of *dào*. The issue the text poses is whether we can identify any fixed norm by which to live well. Some earlier *Zhuāngzǐ* pericopes suggest that by positioning ourselves as “useless” (*wú yòng* 無用) or “worthless” (*bù cái* 不材) by conventional social standards, we can avoid “burdening” or “entangling” (*lěi* 累) ourselves and thus live a better life. The goose story contrasts a mountain tree that grows tall because carpenters find it worthless for timber with a goose chosen to be slaughtered because it couldn’t honk. In some cases, such as the tree’s, being perceived as worthless might protect us, but in others, such as the goose’s, it could endanger us. So, a student asks *Zhuāngzǐ*, should we position ourselves so that others perceive us as worthy or as worthless? *Zhuāngzǐ* replies that no fixed “positioning” can reliably guide our path—not even a mean between the extremes of worthiness and worthlessness.

How then should we proceed? Because of how circumstances vary, the story suggests, we should follow no fixed norm but instead “float-and-wander by riding along with *dào* and *dé*.” Without regard for “praise or criticism,” we are to be:

...一龍一蛇，與時俱化，而無肯專為；一上一下，以和為量...

...now a dragon, now a snake, transforming along with the circumstances, without committing to a single mode of action; now above, now below, taking *hé* as a measure....

The only relatively concrete guideline offered for navigating this drifting and wandering path is *hé* (harmony, harmonizing). Apparently, *hé* is a mark of admirable “riding with *dào* and *dé*,” yet the context makes it clear that *hé* cannot be a fixed, determinate norm. The variable, *dào-dé* approach is said to allow us to avoid “burdening” or “entanglement” (*lěi* 累)—a description I suggest describes a failure to follow *dào* well, by contrast with positive descriptions such as being “free-flowing” (*tōng* 通), “connecting through” (*dá* 達), “proceeding” (*xíng* 行), “attaining” (*dé* 得), and “wandering” (*yóu* 遊).

The pericope informatively contrasts such adaptive, “*hé*” (“harmonizing”) *dào*-following with “the actual conditions of the myriad things and the traditions of human relations,” which the text claims fall short of the apt *dào*. I suggest that the text’s critical view of such failures may offer contrastive clues to the substantive content of *hé*. The relevant lines read:

合則離，成則毀，廉則挫，尊則議，有為則虧，賢則謀，不肖則欺。

Joining yields separation; completion yields damage; honesty yields frustration; respect yields argument; forcing things yields deficiency; worthiness yields scheming; unworthiness yields deception.

These lines seem concerned with cases in which the pursuit of some end eventually generates an opposing, unwanted result. Perhaps the negative results are due to what the preceding lines dubbed *zhuān wéi* 專為, or focusing exclusively on a single mode of action or a single end of one’s activity. On the basis of these clues, let me suggest that to take *hé* as a “measure” is to balance contrasting factors so as to avoid one-sided outcomes that “burden” or “entangle” the agent and so prevent them from “wandering about” by “riding along with” the flow of *dào*. By shifting their approach with the circumstances (與時俱化), the adept agent seeks the sort of fitting relation with other persons or with their context that allows them to continue “proceeding” (行) or “flowing over” (曼衍).

3. *Hé* as a “Measure” of *Dào*

In the monkey story (§2.6c) and the disputation passage (§2.15b), *hé* 和 seems to refer to finding a compatible relation or a compromise between different sides initially committed to conflicting ways of drawing action-guiding distinctions. The *hé* relation is facilitative or fruitful in that it allows the two sides to interact in a way that eliminates obstruction and enables both to “proceed” (*xíng* 行) smoothly along their respective paths. These paths may remain different—the keeper and the monkeys will not share the same lifestyle, for instance—but because interaction with others is a feature of each side’s path, even to follow their own *dào* smoothly they must learn to “proceed two ways” to at least some extent.

The use of *hé* in the goose story (§20.1) seems distinct, insofar as it refers mainly to how the agent adjusts direction in response to variable circumstances. In practice, however, I suggest the story's implications concerning *hé* largely converge with those of the other two pericopes. The goose story's examples of failed courses of action imply that, as in the monkey and debate stories, *hé* involves finding a fitting path that balances factors which pull in opposing directions. In all three texts, the path is fitting insofar as it facilitates the continued, unobstructed movement of *dào* for those involved.

The goose story is distinctive among *Zhuāngzǐ* pericopes for straightforwardly offering a “measure,” or standard, of “riding *dào* and *dé*,” the ideal Zhuangist mode of conduct. Might our survey of uses of *hé* in the early literature cast light on why this *Zhuāngzǐ* pericope takes *hé* to be a suitable standard of conduct?

In presenting *hé* 和 as a measure of following *dào*, I suggest, the goose story is drawing on the motif of a complementary, productive blending or interaction between different, possibly contrasting or opposing factors, as exemplified by the interaction of the opposing natural energies of *yīn* and *yáng*. Indeed, *hé* in this sense seems a prominent feature of the *dào* of nature itself, so the use of *hé* as a measure may be a way of emulating the *dào* of nature.

Besides the blending of natural energies or forces, our survey showed that a common thread in numerous uses of *hé* in the literature is that it involves a productive relation by which different factors mix, blend, or join together to produce a result greater than the sum of their parts. Examples include passages in which *hé* alludes to musical harmony, to cooking, to relations between members of social groups, such as a family or society, and to a healthy balance among different parts or states of the person.

Agents seeking *hé* do so by responding (*yīn* 因), flowing with or following along with (*shùn* 順), or conforming to (*zhòng* 中) salient features of their circumstances. “Responding to” (因) and “flowing with” (順), along with closely related notions such as “reacting” (*yìng* 應), fitting with (*shì* 適), and riding along with (*chéng* 乘), are prominent guides to apt conduct in *Zhuāngzǐ*. On the basis of the conceptual associations between these terms, we can infer that across many *Zhuāngzǐ* writings, finding a *hé* relation with one's circumstances is indeed pivotal to following *dào* well.

To circle back to our central question, why might the goose story propose *hé* as a “measure” by which to follow *dào*? One reason is that, for many *Zhuāngzǐ* materials, the sort of responsive, complementary relation denoted by *hé* is characteristic of adept *dào* performance, especially when interacting with others. A further reason is that *hé* between various factors appears to be a salient feature of the *dào* of nature itself, and so the notion presents a fairly obvious choice for a loose, contextual guideline by which to follow a variable *dào* modeled on natural processes.