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Zhuangzi with Lacan

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Abstract: The two main figures of authority in contemporary psychoanalysis are Freud and Lacan. Yet there is an intrusion that is missed in this utterance. Zhuangzi serves as this extra intrusion, the third figure of authority in psychoanalysis. Both Freud and Lacan arguably owe their existence to such a text. There is a gap, however, in that Freud and Lacan published limited engagements with Zhuangzi. This study aims not to plug the gap altogether, but to confront it. A close reading of the text suggests a pairing of Zhuangzi with Lacan and not the other way around, in the precise sense that Lacan materialized Zhuangzi.

Keywords: Žižek; Lacan; Zhuangzi; Laozi; Philosophy; Critical Theory

Introduction

The motivation for this reengagement of Zhuangzi, at least on my part, comes partially from a rather funny story. One day I was reading an older interview the *New York Magazine* conducted with Žižek, likely the most controversial and unapologetic philosopher since Diogenes. There was a particular response that struck me; it goes as follows:

But what interests me is that there is one genre where it breaks—hard-core pornography...Friends told me that the latest trend, at least in Europe, is public sex. They showed me some clips, and they're terrifying. A couple enters a streetcar, half-full, simply takes a seat, undresses, and starts to do it. You can see from surprised faces that it's not staged. It's pure working-class suburb. But what's fascinating is that the people all look, and then they politely ignore it. The message is that even if you're together in public with people, it still counts as private space (Cohen, 2013: unpaginated).

What Žižek is referring to here is the new totalitarianism the liberal order has birthed in which we are *not* controlled, that the ruling ideology becomes invincible through this. There was a complete mismatch of signifiers here for what struck me was this idea of the Gaze. This unscripted public sex terrifies me in a different way in that the way the Other's Gaze, the way in which the order of appearances looks upon its subjects, sees the public turn into the private as if the Other negates itself. It was this precise line of thought which led me onto Lacan's use of Zhuangzi's dream of the butterfly, but rather quickly I found that scholarly work similar to the pairing of Zhuangzi with Lacan was rather limited.

At the points in which psychoanalysis engages with Zhuangzi (or Eastern philosophy in general), the texts are treated *not* as some dense enigmatic text nor as, in some Orientalist fashion, a mystical text full of wonders that contains the key to 'happiness.' It is on the contrary, for both Freud, the man who founded psychoanalysis, and Lacan, the man who returned to Freud's concept and birthed an even stronger framework, treat it simply as another text of great interest from which to extract value. Freud engaged with Zhuangzi and other Eastern philosophies later in his life with the publishing of his 1930 book *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Lacan maintained interest from early in his career, notably stemming from his partnership with the Chinese writer François Cheng, but his most notable engagement comes from his seminar titled *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, published during his later years in 1973.

This is in great contrast to Western pop culture views on Daoism and other “Eastern philosophy.” Much of the West still views Eastern philosophy as impenetrable and disconnected. More insultingly however, and this trend is unfortunately still alive, is this ongoing perversion of Daoism and Buddhism. Paraphrasing Žižek, Buddha and the Dao are now “opiums of the people,” allowing us to participate in the insanity of global capitalism while maintaining sanity (Žižek, 2001: unpaginated).

Lacan’s remarks go against this notion, and Žižek employs them nicely, turning them into something very readable. In his 1989 book *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, he shows that Zhuangzi is paramount when it comes to fantasy, that is, what the subject fantasizes about outside of the symbolic order, the order in which we *act*, the signified. Zhuangzi’s dream of the butterfly “was the whole consistency of his positive being outside the symbolic network,” but the question that comes out of this is: how can Zhuangzi be certain he is *not* a butterfly dreaming of itself as Zhuangzi (Žižek, 1989: 46-7)? The point is Zhuangzi, in the Real of his desire which eludes any signification, is in fact a butterfly until he is awoken; the Gaze, which instantly looks upon him when he wakes up, mandates that he is Zhuangzi dreaming about being a butterfly. This is the Real which can be described as a void and nothing more. *It is felt all the time, yet we cannot grasp it.* And in this context, the crucial factor that cannot be missed in the dream of the butterfly is that Gaze runs only in one direction.

Though few and far between, several other scholars have taken a stab at linking Lacan to Zhuangzi. Kyoo Lee, a professor of philosophy writes, “I have come to see and am trying to show in ‘sum’ ways Zhuangzi’s parable of ‘the butterfly dream/dreaming butterfly’ from a richer, onto-phenomenologically relational and materialist perspective” (Lee, 2015: 198). To simplify this jargon, she uses Lacan to materialize the ‘abstract’ thought of Zhuangzi. For David Chai, an East Asian Studies scholar, Daoism contains the *thing* 跡 which Lacan demonstrates is beyond-the-signified, an element of the Real that is permanently kept at a distance by the subject. Quan Wang, a professor of English, offers a different vision. Wang illustrates the story of the cicada, mantis, and magpie using the Imaginary-Symbolic-Real triad. This triad can be described via a game of Uno. The imaginary order is the images printed upon the cards. The symbolic

order is what the images allow each card to do, like a “+4” making you draw four cards. The Real is every other external intrusion: the players themselves manipulating the cards, the anger that arises from stacking six “+4” cards and forcing the player to draw 24 cards, or a bomb going off making the players abandon the game entirely. There are two triads birthed out of this story for both Zhuangzi and the magpie occupy the position of silent observers, of the Real. Wang essentially equates the Lacanian subject to the subject in Zhuangzi (Wang, 2017: 249, 252, 260). These are all small-scale works; the discussions which arise are correlatively small.

As a result, there is a gap. *My goal is not to plug this gap.* To plug this gap would result in something unanalyzable, akin to the pervert or psychotic. Rather, the following is a *confrontation* of this gap. The reason it is Zhuangzi with Lacan and not Lacan with Zhuangzi is because it is Lacan who materialized Zhuangzi.

At the same time, I also want to show that Zhuangzi is not ‘enigmatic,’ nor is he full of ‘mystical’ abstract nonsense. Through Lacan, it becomes evident that Zhuangzi’s concepts and framework are neither nonsensical nor obscure; it offers far more concreteness than what the positivists claim and is far more rigorous than any “theory” that comes from the Anglo-Saxon empirical tradition. In fact, it is *only* Lacan who does this simply because he was the last anti-philosopher of the modern era (Badiou, 2020).

For those who are familiar with Zhuangzi, there may be some confusion with the way I use the word. Most of the time it is referred to as *Zhuangzi*, that is, a text. Freud and Lacan are seminal figures in psychoanalysis; they act as Name-of-the-Fathers, restricting the laws of communication as figures of authority. Zhuangzi should be seen as a third seminal figure in psychoanalysis, as a *he*. Zhuangzi is another Name-of-the-Father in psychoanalysis, a figure in which I reference to argue from authority. The debates over his own existence nudge him perfectly into this—he is a material abstraction. There are thus three Fathers: Zhuangzi, Freud, and Lacan.

As a final note, going into this with a single translation of Zhuangzi would be stupid. So, I will be using two translations and the text in Chinese. My main choice of translation is from Brook Ziporyn who does a more direct translation of the words. The other translation used mostly for comparison is by James Legge, a much older

translation written in the 19th century, but keeps the poetic aspect of Zhuangzi. With the translations of the names, I use Legge's translation of the pronunciation rather than the direct word for the sake of consistency for there are times when Ziporyn also translates the pronunciation. Both the Chinese text and Legge's translation are hosted online by the Chinese Text Project.

The remainder of this essay is structured chapter-by-chapter for the purpose of easing the reader's eyes. Here is a short summary for the reader's convenience: Chapter 1: ethics, Chapter 2: the Other, Chapter 3: drive, Chapter 4: the Symbolic, Chapter 5: lack of being, Chapter 6: incompleteness, and Chapter 7: trauma.

Chapter 1

The first chapter of Zhuangzi begins with the flight of Peng, a gigantic bird. Peng routinely journeys vast distances to reach the Pool of Heaven, a massive feat contrasted with Pengzu, a man that supposedly lived for hundreds of years. Upon hearing the story, the Cicada and Dove respond with, "What's all this ascending ninety thousand miles and heading south?" (Zhuangzi, 2020: 4). In this bout of cynicism, the Cicada and Dove act as an Other to Peng, refusing to even ask a question.

The ethical can thus be gauged with the following question: Why would Peng go on such a long, needless journey to this "Pool of Heaven?" This question is meant to be unanswerable, for only Peng would know; in fact, it is stated that only those with large unobstructed consciousness would know. What can be discerned is Peng's desire to fly towards the Pool of Heaven. The Pool of Heaven is Peng's own desire, pursuing his own desire despite the opposing desire of the Other, in this case the Cicada and Dove. Liezi then acts as a contradistinction, who still depends on something, some Other. His desire is thus not truly his.

Lacan materializes this ethical dilemma with his quest for a "cure", that is, how do you desire your own desire? Can you enjoy your enjoyment rather than needing some Other to enjoy for you? There is some kernel of enjoyment Peng knows which is lost to the Cicada and Dove. For Lacan, ethics is the realization of radical (root) autonomy, "your wandering could nowhere be brought to a halt" (Zhuangzi, 2020: 5). It is the

realization of enjoyment, which to clarify is enjoyment-in-pain and pain-in-enjoyment, where each leads to each other. It is enjoyment of everything that makes autonomy.

We see this enjoyment occur in pages 6 to 8, where Xu You rejects inheriting an empire, Lian Shu rejects the words of an apparent madman, and Huizi rejects a giant gourd by destroying it. In each case, these characters enjoy the act of rejection as seen in their long elaborations. Huizi destroys the gourd, enjoying the destruction of the object. Huizi's case is special, for Zhuangzi scolds him upon hearing of his deeds. But why scold the man? Zhuangzi demands Huizi realize it is not the gourd's fault for being useless, but his fault. Zhuangzi's essential question to him: "Why do you desire what the Other wants? You only have your own desire, so do what you want!"

In this sense, James Legge's translation of the title "Enjoyment in Untroubled Ease" 逍遙遊 better captures the essence of this chapter. Enjoyment implies the ethical dimension.

Chapter 2

"Equalizing Assessment of Things" moves into the realm of language. The realm in which "human speech is not just a blowing of air. Speech has something *of which* it speaks, something it refers to...but what it refers to is peculiarly unfixed" (Zhuangzi, 2020: 13).

Then what is this unfixed point? What follows is Nan-Guo Zi-Qi and his disciple Yan-Cheng Zi-You engaging in a back and forth dialogue, an exercise attempting to anchor the field of meaning. It goes with "this" and "that" and "not this" but "not that," or more confusingly "not-yet-beginning-to-be-a-beginning" (Zhuangzi, 2020: 14-7). These expressions and their subsequent negations create the *point de capiton*, anchoring the field of meaning, the signified, within their respective dialogues. But Zhuangzi calls into question the stability of such points. After this "not-yet-beginning-to-be-a-beginning," he remarks, "has what I have said really said anything? Or has it not really said anything?" (Zhuangzi, 2020: 17). It in fact has not said anything, for the stability of the *point de capiton* is, as Lacan found, an illusion.

The meaning of illusion is stronger than at a fixed point. Such is the question, “How could I know that what I call ‘knowing’ is not really ‘not-knowing’...How could I know that what I call ‘not-knowing’ is not really ‘knowing’...Of these four [animals], which ‘knows’ the right thing to eat?” (Zhuangzi: 2020, 18-9). It is much like a baby crying. Is the baby tired, in pain, afraid, hungry, etc.? For the mother, it is a total unknown, so she must interpret it in a particular way. She decides what crying means retroactively. Then which of the four animals knows the right thing to eat? Zhuangzi knows only *after* the fact, that the entire *punctuation* of his ‘rambling’ which creates the illusion of a fixed meaning is this illusion.

What does Zhuangzi do in this deadlock? His intervention begins with this: “Suppose you and I get into a debate. If you win and I lose, does that really mean you are right and I am wrong...So neither you nor I nor any third party can ever know how it is—shall we wait for yet some ‘other’?” (Zhuangzi, 2020: 20). In a sense, he asserts that this mythical complete Other does not exist, the consequences of which comes from the shadow. Upon questioning by the penumbra, the shadow replies, “Do I depend on something to make me as I am...How would I know why I am so or not so?” (Zhuangzi, 2020: 21). The clear answer to the first part is yes—the entrance into language is what makes the barred subject. The second part is a total unknown; a follow up to Zhuangzi’s declaration of the inexistence of the Other. Without the symbols of the Other, all that is left is the Imaginary and the Real.

Thus, we land on the final passage of the butterfly. Not about the Imaginary, but about the Real. Lacan and Žižek have already written extensively about this, but what should be noted in both of their analyses is the Real of Zhuangzi’s desire. The shadow’s reply on page 21 sets the foundation for this step, “How would I know why I am so or not so,” for Zhuangzi is really a butterfly because of this known unknown. How would Zhuangzi know why he is or is not a butterfly? The Real of his desire means he is a butterfly dreaming of itself being Zhuangzi. However, some third party must intervene on behalf of Zhuangzi’s subjectivity. It is the Other’s Gaze, the symbols it gazes with, which forces Zhuangzi to be Zhuangzi dreaming of himself as a butterfly.

Chapter 3

“The Primacy of Nourishing Life” is set up by a commentary on knowledge and how it exceeds the limits of mortality. On this notion of limits, “When something thus bounded is made to follow something unbounded in this way, it is put in danger...And this is what enables us to maintain our bodies, to keep the life in them intact” (Zhuangzi, 2020: 29). It is a paradoxical statement; some uncharacterized danger pushes indifferently, acting as the handyman of life.

What comes next is the dialogue of the cook and the king. The cook describes cutting up the corpse of an ox, and the king replies with, “I have learned how to nourish life!” (Zhuangzi, 2020: 30). Why this apparent paradox of learning how to “nourish life” from a dead animal?

Such is the nature of drive, “As far as the object in the drive is concerned, let it be clear that is, strictly speaking, of no importance. It is a matter of total indifference” (Lacan, 1964: 168). It does not reach a destination, but follows its aim, or the way itself. The cook uses his knife swiftly, moving in between the gaps and cutting without resistance. He perpetually circles around the flesh of the carcass. This answers the paradox of nourishing life from cutting up a carcass—drive itself is a paradox. Drive is this unbounded thing that puts us in danger, for it aims to annihilate itself without ever actually doing so.

At the end of the chapter, we are forced into a confrontation with this “danger.” Lao Dan is born at the right time and his death is quick and simple. No big funeral, no mourning, only the end and nothing more (Zhuangzi, 2020: 31). For Zhuangzi, human life is not simply life—he would never have to speak if this were the case. Human life is characterized by the drive to enjoy life where enjoyment is excess. Lao Dan is an acknowledgment of this tension between the symbols and the biological.

Chapter 4

For those who are familiar with the historical debates of Zhuangzi’s time, it should be no surprise that Confucius makes a big appearance in the chapter “In the Human World.” Nothing is spared here; he contradicts himself in every utterance.

It is immediate with Yan Hui telling Confucius he is going to the state of Wei because Confucius said so, citing him as saying, “Leave a well-ordered state and go to one in chaos. At a physician’s door there are always many invalids.” He dares to take these words seriously, but upon hearing of this Confucius tells him, “You will most likely go and get yourself executed!” In Confucius’ own words, Yan Hui is a fool for listening to him (Zhuangzi, 2020: 34). It is parallel to the dialogue in the first chapter when Jie Yu the Madman makes his first appearance and Jian Yu refuses the madman’s words, deeming them as abstract nonsense. But here, we see an inversion of the Confucian accusation against Daoism, that the Daoists are all limited by the abstract. Through Jie Yu, we see that it is the Confucians who are limited by the human.

The criticism of Confucianism gets particularly brutal in the later passages. It comes as an inversion, “Everyone knows how useful usefulness is, but no one seems to know how useful usefulness is” (Zhuangzi, 2020: 43). In its essence, uselessness nourishes life. The Confucians cannot learn this—it exists as an impossibility. To paraphrase Žižek, they are idiots who cannot register the symbolic order; they exist in it but cannot acknowledge this existence.

Zhuangzi makes an important observation of the Symbolic Order. Here, there are two images of the imaginary: the useful and the useless. The useful in the symbolic is transformed into some other object while the useless in the symbolic is allowed to exist as its own signified. Thus, the warped tree remains a landmark and the disfigured man becomes legend, both of which upon their eventual deaths turn into tales of a properly ‘nourished life.’

Chapter 5

“Fragmentations Betokening Full Virtuosity” begins with a funny passage. It starts with Chang Ji asking Confucius a question. The characters of this name Chang Ji 常季 can be translated as ‘unchanging season,’ an important backdrop for the rest of the chapter. He describes a man who has as many followers as Confucius himself, “When he stands he offers no instruction, and when he sits he gives no opinions. And yet they

go to him empty and return filled.” This man apparently is, to Confucius, “my master...a sage” (Zhuangzi, 2020: 45). He is revealed to be Shu-Shan the Toeless.

Toeless visits Confucius expecting some words, but is instead greeted with, “You were careless in your past behavior and thus have ended up in this condition. Isn’t it a little late to come to me now?” (Zhuangzi, 2020: 47). So, he leaves, and Confucius proclaims to his disciples that Toeless still wants to learn as a sort of coping mechanism, despite his former conviction. Toeless then visits Laozi, the legendary author of the *Daodejing*, and asks about Confucius, to which Laozi tells him, “Why don’t you simply let him see life and death as a single string, acceptable and unacceptable as a single thread, thus releasing him from his fetters?” But “how can he be released?” (Zhuangzi, 2020: 48). Toeless finds that Confucius is unanalyzable. He has somehow plugged the gap that is the unconscious.

In the next passage, Duke Ai of Lu describes a mysterious man to Confucius, a man so ugly and vague yet captivating to the point where Ai gave him control of his state. Eventually, he vanishes without a trace, leaving Ai totally confused. Confucius attempts to describe the man as holding some “intrinsic virtuosity” that refuses signification, unable to be expressed in any definite form. There is a subtle irony to be found, for Duke Ai tells this story to one of Confucius’ disciples. He remarks that, “Now that I have heard the words of the Utmost Person, I fear I have not lived up to my post. By neglecting my personal welfare, I’ve ruined my state. And Confucius and I, we are not ruler and subject. We are simply each the companion of the other’s intrinsic virtuosities [or a virtuous friendship]!” (Zhuangzi, 2020: 50). But who is the Utmost Person whose words strike Ai so harshly? Two cases are possible: Confucius or the mysterious man. The previous passage, however, indicates that it is not Confucius. This case is further struck down by Ai admitting to his failures and following it with the friendship he shares with Confucius. Rather, it is the mysterious man whose sudden departure forces Ai to reflect on himself.

The last passage contrasts from the previous passages in the chapter. Huizi asks if it is possible for a human being to be “without the characteristic human inclinations.” Zhuangzi sees it not only as possible but implies that it is a trait of the Utmost Person.

The human being that is *without* such inclinations is never damaged internally by “likes and dislikes.” Zhuangzi’s anti-philosophy is almost obscene here, in that he follows his words by criticizing Huizi’s engagement in the ongoing philosophical debate at the time, that he “crow[s] on about ‘hardness’ and ‘whiteness!’” (Zhuangzi, 2020: 51). For what Zhuangzi sees as obvious, Lacan describes the human being as a lack of being. The internal damage arises from a ‘like’ of a missing object, something the Father has which the mother desires, and a ‘dislike’ of its unattainability. The Utmost Person is immune to damage only when he comes to accept these ‘likes and dislikes’ as external to the symbolic, that is, it is utterly meaningless.

Chapter 6

A first look at the title “The Great Source as Teacher” seems to be disconnected from the incompleteness of the subject. However, its contents say otherwise.

It begins with the “Genuine Human.” What is “genuine” about these people are their ethics—the acceptance of autonomy. They “slept without dreaming and awoke without worries...understood nothing about delighting in life or abhorring death...They neither forgot where they came from nor inquired into where they would go. Receiving it, they delighted in it,” they *enjoyed* it. “They took punishments as their own body, ritual as their wings, understanding as a temporary expedient, and virtuosity as a sliding along,” the brief moments in which the symbols give way to the Real are meaningless to them—it simply happens. So, “why not gladly accept death on account of what does so even more genuinely?” (Zhuangzi, 2020: 54-6). They reject symbolization and all subsequent searches for some deeper meaning, indifferently accepting the traumatic Real in its utter meaninglessness. They see the *lack* for what it truly is. What Lacan calls subjective destitution is what leads to the Genuine Human.

Hence, the Genuine Human is inauthentic (Moeller, 2017). To be authentic, genuinely in the Real, is to be utterly traumatized. Confronting the void of the Real is the best that can be done (subjective destitution), so the only true knowledge the Genuine Human possesses is the impossibility of authenticity.

With elaborations on such a figure, the crux of Zhuangzi's message against Confucianism is on full display: we are never complete subjects; we are permanently incomplete. Such is described in the lines, "To understand what is to be done by the human': that would be to use what your understanding understands to nourish what your understanding does not understand" (Zhuangzi, 2020: 53). Incompleteness goes further, like where Nan-bo Zi-kui asks Nu Yu about her appearance. She is old but has a youthful face. How?

The translations of the names are important, for it reveals how Nu Yu apparently learned this miracle. She tells Zi-kui, "I learned it from the son of Aided-by-Ink, who learned it from the grandson of Caught-in-Recitation, who learned it from Look-and-See, who learned it from Heard-in-a-Whisper, who learned it from In-Need-of-Labor, who learned it from There-in-the-Singing, who learned it from Dark-Oblivion, who learned it from Joined-in-the-Void, who learned it from Doubt-Beginning" (Zhuangzi, 2020: 58). Answering *how* necessitates a reversal in order of these names: from Doubt-Beginning to Joined-in-the-Void to Dark-Oblivion to There-in-the-Singing to In-Need-of-Labor to Heard-in-a-Whisper to Look-and-See to Caught-in-Recitation and finally to Aided-by-Ink. Something seems to be lost here, but "Doubt-Beginning" negates this 'something.' There was no special miracle after all. Nu Yu's youthful looks elude her as well.

At this point of the chapter the passages switch to the topic of death. Discussions of death are brief. In each case, no proper funeral or mourning service is held, with some singing in front of a corpse. For those who are "normal to Heaven," death simply *is*.

The final dialogue ties up the chapter ironically. Zi-sang after enduring freezing rains and starvation concludes the chapter with, "Heaven covers all equally, earth supports all equally, so how could heaven and earth be so partial as to single me out for impoverishment? I search for some *doer* of it all but cannot find anything—and yet here I am in this extreme state all the same. This must be what is called Fate, eh?" Fate is thus used ironically as the signifier for *lack*, for Zi-sang lacks the completeness of some mythical Other (Heaven) who brings suffering down upon him. It is in his last question where the Other unravels and Zi-sang is forced to conclude that all the hardship he

suffers is meaningless. Zi-sang, in his encounter with the Real, accepts that everything simply *is*.

Chapter 7

The inner chapters end with civilization. Here is the big break from Laozi—Zhuangzi engages with civilization rather than attempting to leave it altogether. It is a rhyme that comes sporadically in history from Jesus with Saint Paul all the way to Marx with Lenin. It is his traumatic encounter with the foundations of political force.

Chapter seven, “Sovereign Responses for Ruling Powers,” is where Zhuangzi is at his most *radical* in the most precise sense of the word. Its Latin root is *radix*, meaning root, and Zhuangzi challenges the roots themselves.

Most of the passages act as conclusions for the major themes of the previous chapters, but the final passage brings something new to the mix. It is the passage on Chaos;

The emperor of the southern sea was called Shu. The emperor of the northern sea was called Hu. The emperor of the middle was called Chaos. Shu and Hu would sometimes meet in the territory of Chaos, who always waited on them quite well. They decided to repay Chaos for such bounteous virtue. ‘All men have seven holes in them, by means of which they see, hear, eat, and breathe,’ they said. ‘But this one alone has none. Let’s drill him some.’ So every day they drilled another hole. Seven days later, Chaos was dead (Zhuangzi, 2020: 72).

Is this not a purely rational act? Chaos treats the two emperors Shu and Hu well, so they must give back to Chaos. One may be tempted to see this as a warning, “do not do this, or else...” But Chaos is already dead.

Two things are apparent here: Chaos *was* complete, and it was Shu and Hu that made him incomplete (quite literally by drilling holes), thus killing him. Chaos always treats his guests as if he is the ego responding to the chaos of the Real. The passage ending with his death indicates the newfound incompleteness Shu and Hu have created

in their rational action. Thus, naming him “Chaos” acts as an ironic gesture for it is what happens after his death which is truly chaotic. His death—the necessary death of unreason civilization needs—leaves only the emperors and a missing third. Shu or Hu cannot take the place of the id, and this is where Lacan is important, for the id is not mere unconscious but a function of the Real. It must be in both Shu and Hu for they are *both* the murderers of Chaos. Nothing is there to treat the emperors, what is left is a void: the Real.

The link between this final passage and Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontent* is apparent. Where Zhuangzi declares the death of Chaos Freud, some thousands of years later, concludes that civilization is founded on the repression of our aggressive and chaotic instincts—a sort of universal repression stemming from *both* Shu and Hu. Thus, for Zhuangzi there is a hidden trauma beneath all civilization. Freud and Lacan were painfully aware of this and its consequences. For Freud, it was the return of the repressed in the horrors of war. For Lacan, post-1960s he saw the Name-of-the-Father was losing its efficacy, hinting at a turn towards a psychotic society. Something would replace the paternal metaphor, and here an explicit agreement between Zhuangzi and Lacan is present. Something worse will come (Fink, 1997: 111). But these were issues for their time. Zhuangzi leaves us with a question: what unforeseen consequences does this harbor for us in the future?

Conclusion

Hilarity is sprinkled throughout Zhuangzi’s work, but precisely as irony. However, the distinction between humor and irony is important, and as chief psychoanalyst Jacques-Alain Miller defines it, “humor is inscribed in the perspective of the Other... It grabs the subject in the misery of his impotence... Irony, on the contrary, is not of the Other but of the subject, and goes against the Other” (Miller, 2001: 9). Zhuangzi’s deliberate misinterpretation of signifiers, especially when Confucius is in the picture, is this subject going against the Other. Dao, or the way, can be read reminiscent of Freud: it is the royal road to the Real. The unconscious implies signs, but the Real refuses them. There is no ‘taming,’ no ‘harnessing’ of anything. It is impossible to seek further

wisdom with it. The irony is that the Dao as the guiding force of the universe is unknowable.

Abstracting the details away reveals Zhuangzi's universalism manifest as anti-philosophy. Paraphrasing Alain Badiou here, there exists an alternative current to the philosophical tradition—thinkers who suggest we do something else other than waste time thinking about the current nonsensical philosophical questions—and Zhuangzi fits right into this.

The relationship between Laozi and Zhuangzi is one that rhymes with many throughout history. Take, for example, the figures of Jesus and Saint Paul, or Marx and Lenin. Zhuangzi is a deployment of Laozi—he is the truly violent one who attacks the Confucian dogmas and changes the foundations entirely. We can equate the Confucian dogmas to the Anglo-Saxon empirical tradition and the advent of Daoism to psychoanalysis today. It is in this sense that Zhuangzi is our contemporary. There is no deeper and no other meaning to him; Zhuangzi, through psychoanalysis, is the radical shift necessary for our times.

How do I justify these conclusions? Some years ago in an interview, Slavoj Žižek elaborated on his methodology, “Hegel didn't know what he was doing. You have to interpret him” (Rasmussen, 2004: unpaginated). Žižek describes it using Deleuze—anal interpretation. Medical terminology deems the anus as having a single anti-retentive function, but the existence of some who enjoy anal sex proves this wrong. With lots of lubricant and preparation there is another function of the anus. To anally penetrate is for the purposes of the anti-retentive nature of the anus of past philosophy, of finding a new function, and out of it coming some uncomfortable conclusions—new heterodox monsters. What lies next is to anally penetrate the remaining chapters.

So, Zhuangzi did not know what he was doing. He is explicit about it in almost every chapter. He must be interpreted. All this talk would be utter nonsense unless I conclude it as such: I do not know what I am doing either.

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