

Competing Schools and Warring States

Section 1: The Hundred Schools of Thought

The last module, we talked about Confucius and Mencius and Xunzi. And I mentioned that by the time Mencius and Xunzi have appeared, there's been a critique of Confucianism that has been launched.

And what we're talking about today is sometimes called, in Chinese, the zhuzi baijia, or the Many Masters and the Hundred Schools. The Many Masters referring to thinkers, philosophers, rhetoricians, persuaders, and the Hundred Schools, some notion of a proliferation of different belief systems, different ideas, different things people could follow, that there was a proliferation of competing thinkers.

At what period? The period of Warring States. The idea that there were competing states and thus competing thinkers goes together. In a sense, there's a market for ideas.

But it's more than that. I think it's a moment at which people are beginning to see the power of ideas, of thinking through a proposition, of making an argument, of besting somebody at an argument. And there's a kind of sense of discovery of what it means to have an idea and a willingness to go out to rulers and to states to say, I have an idea that you could follow. And if you follow my ideas, you'll be more successful than anybody else.

Now, I should say, though, that from our perspective, this proliferation of thinkers is something that we regard as wonderful and interesting. We say this is parallel to the Greeks. As you see things happening in the Middle East and India all around the same time, it's as if there's a whole proliferation of new concepts at a moment when civilization is moving from an older order to something else, but the something else isn't known yet.

And so one way of thinking of all these thinkers is to say they're people who have ideas about what the world should become, but no one is quite persuaded by any one of them. In the Chinese tradition, this is not, until very recent times, a period that was regarded as glorious in any sense, this proliferation of thinkers.

Rather it was a period of decline. It was a period when, precisely because people couldn't agree, they didn't have unity, that there was a sense of decline,

that people had split apart, that something was wrong with the world. And that, of course, was very much said from a later point of view when empire and a centralized bureaucratic empire had been created.

Now, I think we can talk about some core issues for these Many Masters and Hundred Schools. And one is political, one is ethical. The ethical issue is, how do I act? And remember when we were talking about Mencius, and Mencius talking about the child who falls into the well, asking, do you feel something? That's a way of answering the question, how should I act?

The other issue is the political one. What should the ruler do? How should the ruler act? So we want to look at these many schools of thought in terms of these issues. But there are lots of ways we could think about them, lots of ways of dividing them up. And we can't do them all, so I've sort of settled on one.

I want to talk about their strategies and what kinds of strategies they have, the goal that they are developing a strategy for. And one of these goals is to say, well, how can we do good? Mencius was working along those lines. How can we do good in a world that's becoming increasingly chaotic? How can we survive is another kind of strategy. What are the strategies for survival in a world that's very chaotic?

And there's a third strategy that appears that's worth mentioning, and that is, how can I gain control over the situation? In other words, if this is a world of chaos and warfare and civil war, what can I do that would give me power over it, to change that world, to stop it, to control it? This is at least one way of approaching trying to differentiate between these schools of thought.

There are other ways we could have done this. We could have asked, for example, if the schools of thought are regional. Another kind of more philosophical question, which is, where do these different thinkers get their ideas from? Do they get them from antiquity, from a set of classical texts, for example? Do they get them from looking at the way the natural world works? Are they natural philosophers?

All these are different ways we could go about trying to divide up and study these different schools of thought. And the one I've settled on is this one of different strategies for doing good, for surviving in a chaotic world, and for getting control over that world.

Section 2: Strategies for Doing Good

1. Mozi

So the first person I want to mention is Mozi, Master Mo. That word "zi" that appears in so many of the titles of these words refers, in fact, to the notion of master. And so Master Mo was born after Confucius died. He was anti-Confucian. He thought that the Confucian focus on ritual was a waste of time and money.

His family background was very different. He was not an aristocrat. There's some evidence that he came from a family of craftsmen, for example. His school was very interested in technologies. He had followers. They lived as a community. They would travel around from state to state offering, for example, their technical skills in defending states against attack, but refusing to aid states in attacking others.

Mozi is the first person we know to offer a test of the validity of a proposition. Now, the test may not be what we would find persuasive. But he is trying to figure out how you argue that this proposition is right versus that. He's trying to figure out a standard by which we measure things.

And what he proposes is that there should be three standards. Did the ancients think it was right? Does it accord with what people in general know to be so? And does it bring benefit to the people? If a proposition meets all three standards, then it's right.

What's interesting is that he uses this proposition to defend the idea of sacrifice to the spirits. Well, he said, the ancients sacrificed to the spirits. Most people in daily life think the spirits are real and sacrifice to them. And moreover, it's beneficial because even if there aren't spirits, after all, at the end of a sacrifice, who eats the food? We do. So his proposition can stand in his view.

What makes Mozi interesting as a thinker is that he's really the first thinker we have that's interested in universal ideas. I want to talk about some of the ideas he has and ask you, also, to think about how you would evaluate them.

We can begin with a political idea, the idea of rule by the worthy. Now, this is, in essence, the idea of meritocracy. Worthy people ought to hold positions. You

ought to hold positions according to your competence, not according to your birth, not according to family background.

But he combines that idea with what he calls conformity to one's superiors. That is, you should rise to a position based on your worth and talent, but you should conform absolutely to your superiors. And of course, if your superiors are there in their position because of their worthiness and talent, then conforming to them is a good thing to do.

The problem is that the one position that is not based on talent is the ruler. The rulers have talent by heredity, hereditary right. So Mozi solves that problem by saying, the ruler, after all, is the son of heaven. And so Mozi goes on and says, well, what is it that heaven has that the ruler is conforming to?

So he's not treating heaven as an anthropomorphic god. He's just saying, he's the son of heaven in name. And what is it that he is the son of? What should he conform to? He says, well, heaven covers everything. Heaven brings light to everything. Heaven nurtures everything with the rain and the spring, for example. Heaven is predictable. Heaven is regular.

So heaven is the natural world, the natural world that nurtures an agricultural society. And the ruler should conform to exactly those values that that natural world represents, that heaven represents for him. And that's a kind of a way of trying to pin the ruler down and saying, there are, in fact, certain values that you as ruler should follow. They tend to be universal, inclusive, concern for the well-being of the populous.

Now, on an ethical level, Mozi also adopts a universal strategy. And the universal idea that he offers up, beginning at a personal level, with the idea of family. He makes the argument that goes something like this in a chapter called Universal Love.

We should love universally. What does this mean? He says, well, he says, we all have fathers. So take the emotions you feel for your father and extend them to all the fathers in the world. And if you do that, then you will start to treat all father figures, so to speak, equally, and you will love them all equally. And in that way, we'll bring about harmony in the world by you universalizing your own family relationships and extending them to all society.

Mozi is probably the first thinker we have in Chinese history to be interested in absolutes, propositions that he can hold to absolutely without variation, without making them contingent on circumstances, with universal ideas, universal

values. But will his universal love work? And that's a question we're going to ask you to think about for a moment.

2. Yang Zhu and the “Utopians”

You take somebody, another person, that sort of follows the strategies for doing good, but is the extreme opposite of Mozi. This is a person called Yang Zhu. And Yang Zhu makes the argument that I should do good for myself alone. His most famous proposition is, "if I could save the world by pulling a hair out of my head, I would not do it", that people, everyone universally-- this is his proposition-- should only act in their own self-interests. And if everyone acts in their own self-interests, we'll have a better world.

In some ways, what Yang Zhu is doing is saying, look, forget the difference between the ruler and me. Forget the notion of governmental hierarchies. Everybody is for himself or herself. And they should be going out there making deals with each other to solve their own problems, to get what they want.

And so my question for you here again is, does Yang Zhu work? What would your critique or agreement with Yang Zhu be?

This notion that Yang Zhu had, that I should not benefit, try to benefit others but just to benefit myself, is not in his view anarchy. In his view, of course, it's a world where people will learn to cooperate. I was giving this lecture a number of years ago. And there was a professor from the economics department at Harvard attending the lectures. And she looked up and said as I got to this, he's an economist, which may be a true proposition.

But it's also true that Yang Zhu's sense of what is of benefit to me has a particular definition. He does not think that gaining more wealth and power is a benefit to me. His concern of what's good for me, for myself, is very much caught up with the physical, emotional life of an individual, my being as a person.

What is good for my health? What will make me feel better? How do we help each other to feel better? It's not a world where people are striving and competing for wealth and power.

There's a third group that also has a strategy for doing good. But this is a group. These are utopians. They're agrarian.

They're farming communities led with a leader, but very minimal hierarchy, that go around to feudal lords in the various states and say, give us land and we

will set up an ideal community. Everyone will work. Everyone will be the same. Everyone will be equal. And we will be a model for society.

3. Mencius' Objections

Turn to those who have strategies for survival. And these will be, in fact, the two great Daoist figures of early China, Zhuangzi and Laozi. Now I want to begin by talking not about the Daoist, but something else that happened, which is a kind of language skepticism that emerges, a sense that language is something through which we view the world, the medium of our understanding of the world. But in the end, language is somewhat arbitrary, that there isn't a necessary connection between language and reality, but language is something that we construct and read onto reality.

And I'll give you two examples of this. One is a friend of Zhuangzi, a man named Hui Shi. And in the book *The Zhuangzi*, we have a number of conversations between Zhuangzi the Daoist master and Hui Shi. And Hui Shi is famous for his paradoxes. And let me give you two and ask you to think about what you make of them. The first paradox is that simultaneously with being at noon, the sun declines. Simultaneously with being alive, a thing dies. So that's a paradox that has to do with the way we divide time.

And the second paradox is, the east is the center of the world, the west is the center of the world. And that's a paradox that has to do with how we divide space. So I leave it to you to talk a little bit about what you make of these.

The way I would read Hui Shi is that we can divide time, but we can keep dividing. It's infinitely divisible. And yet there must be some moment at which that something that's rising is also falling. Now how is that possible? The way we divide time is something that obscures that moment and, similarly, that we divide space. You say, this is the center. But if space is infinite, then every place is the center, there is no one center. So he takes what we regard as normal divisions of time and space and says, their ways of seeing these is problematic.

But he has a purpose to this, apparently. His purpose is to try to say, since everything is divisible, everything is infinite, there's no one right place, no one right moment, no one center-- that in fact you ought to see the world as one-- everything, heaven and earth and the myriad things, are all one thing. And you should love everything inclusively. It's very much a moral sort of conclusion.

The other language issue that I think this is really quite interesting in this period comes from-- oh by the way, these books I'm looking at are from a 19th century

collection of The Books of the Many Masters. And this is from a text by Gongsun Long, Master Gongsun Long. [Baima fei ma, ke hu? Yue: ke]. Or in English, a white horse is not a horse. Is that possible? Yes it is. And so that's his proposition, a white horse is not a horse. I think we could turn this around in a slightly different way and say, why do you think a white horse is a horse? And you are now free to defend the proposition, which is wrong, that a white horse is a horse. And in a moment, I'll come back and convince you that, in fact, a white horse is not a horse.

So why do you think a white horse was a horse? I would suspect that for many of you, a white horse is a horse because you think that a white horse is a member of a set or a category of things called horses. Gongsun is fully aware that a white horse is a horse in the sense that we have sets and members of sets and things like this. But he proposes, as he works on, that we actually could understand one way in which a white horse is not a horse, that is if we take white as a color, and let's give a color the value 1, and horse as a shape, let's give that the value 2. To say a white horse is a horse is to say 1 plus 2 is 2, which is not possible. A white horse is not a horse.

It's a small example, but it is getting at the way in which we use language to make certain statements about the world without being fully aware of what we're saying. He has another essay, which is to kill a robber is not to kill a man. But I won't go into that.

Section 3: Strategies for Survival

1. Language Skepticism of the School of News

Mencius' objections to the Mohists, the Yangists, and the Utopians really is based on a certain prospective on society and the world. Against Mohists he says, you know, you begin by taking the family as a model and then universalizing it, but you do that precisely because the family is special. Your feeling for your parents is going to be stronger than your feeling for other parents. The family is not going to go away. The question is, can you improve families?

And he turns to Yang Zhu and says, your position disowns government. You pretend government isn't there. There's only this market of negotiation between individuals in their own interest. But in fact, government is there. Government is there to limit the egregious behavior of individuals. Government has a role to play. And our job is not to try to get rid of government, rather it's to make government work better, to improve government.

And he turns to the Utopian agriculturalist and says, when you cook your millet, you cook it in a pot, an iron pot? And the guy says, yes, we do. And did you make that yourself? He said, no, no, we traded for it. We don't have time. We have to be out there in the field, plowing the fields.

And so Mencius looks at him, he says, well, so that's the problem, isn't it? That, in fact, you're not self-sufficient. You depend on others, and that there's a division of labor. And from that, Mencius takes the next step and says, and that's why some work with their hands, and some work with their minds, and the economy is real. The issue is not to pretend the economy isn't there, the issue is to try to make the economy work more fairly for everybody.

So that's Mencius's general objections. But I think it also touches on the Confucian point of view, largely, that government, family, society, the economy, these are real parts of life. And they may not work well. They may hurt others. We have to reform them, but we can't get rid of them.

2. Zhuangzi

Let's turn to The Zhuangzi, Master Zhuang in the book called The Zhuangzi. Famous essays, but funny essays. Zhuangzi is the first great relativist in Chinese history. He likes jokes. He thinks Confucius is a fool, a doddering old man. Very unusually, from everything we've seen to this point, his anecdotes often use figures from the natural world, animals, as a way of talking about his philosophical ideas. And yet at the same time, he's a very, very sharp, sharp debater. And it seems that he's fully conversant with a very sophisticated vocabulary of argumentation at the time.

But he doesn't wear it on his sleeve. He uses it to dispose of people who want to assert that there are eternal verities, eternal truths, that we should all follow. Makes the argument that things are relative, that what you think is right is relative to what you see from where you stand. Thus the Mozists, the followers of Mozi, look at the Confucians and say, you're wrong. And the Confucians look at the Mozists and say, you're wrong. Neither one of them is right. They're just relative judgments from their various perspectives.

The bird looks small to us, but it looks enormous to the insect it's about to eat. But he takes this further. Can anything by definition be called good and right? And in fact, why do we think that the mind has a special privilege of deciding what's good and right? Why shouldn't it be your belly, why shouldn't it be your gut or your hunger, that decides what's good, what's right? Everything is relative.

We have a position with Zhuangzi of don't try to take a fixed standpoint, don't try to define things perfectly. And he goes on and says at one point, throw things open to the light. Let things come and let things go. Develop your own skills. Live your own life. Let things be. Don't try to force them. Life is a dream of a kind. Death is not to be feared. It's all part of a natural process.

He says at one point-- and here, let me draw on the last passage from the "Qi Wu Lun." "So one day, one afternoon, I was taking a nap under the trees, and I dreamt I was a butterfly and didn't know I was Zhuangzi. I didn't know I was Zhuang Zhou, his name. And when I awoke, I had the question, am I Zhuang Zhou who dreamed he was a butterfly, or am I a butterfly dreaming he is Zhuang Zhou?"

There ought to be some distinction between Zhuang Zhou and the butterfly, but I'm not sure what it is. He's the first great spokesman, perhaps, for dropping out

in Chinese history. A famous story in Zhuangzi of Butcher Ding. And Butcher Ding used his knife to carve up oxen, and he never sharpened his knife through his whole life. And he's asked, why, Butcher Ding, don't you sharpen your knife?

And he says, well, he says, you know, in the ox there's always room between the muscles, and all I'm doing is moving through that space and the whole ox falls apart. I never have to go against the current, go against the grain. I go with the flow. I go with the grain, and everything is cut up. And the King looks at him and says, Ah. So I'm learning not just butchery from you. I'm learning about life. I'm learning the Dao.

But I remember telling my son, who was then very young, this story. And he looks at me and says, but he has no ambition. And that was right. He had no ambition. Butcher Ding wants to be good. He has ambition for-- he's going to be good with the skill. He's going to live in unity with his skill, but he's not going to be striving after wealth and power. So we have a selection from Zhuangzi for you, and we hope you'll want to take a look at that and comment on it.

3. Laozi

The other great Daoist figure of early China is Laozi. The person may have antedated Confucius. The book is The Way and its Power, The Daodejing. It is one of the most translated books in the world. It begins with a very famous line. [Daokedao, feichangdao; mingkeming, feichangming]. "The way that can be spoken of is not the constant way. The name that can be named is not the constant name. "

The point of that is, if something is universal and all inclusive, to define it as anything, to name it as something, is in fact to reduce it, to deny its inclusiveness. Now it's a book about the way and its power, The Daodejing. But it talks about the Dao a whole lot. So how can you say that the way that can be spoken of, the Dao that can be spoken of, is not the constant Dao if you're going to spend a lot of your time talking about the Dao.

What he can talk about is not a definition so much of the Dao, but he can talk about how the Dao works. And in his book we find repeated models for how nature itself works. Nature works through reversal. It works through cycles. Something begins from nothing, becomes existent, and then disappears back into nothingness. And there's a sort of a mystical point here of unity with the Dao, unity with this universal process, that one should stay in the dark, stay low, not get out in front, keep in retreat, so to speak.

Laozi also has advice for the ruler. And it's interesting advice and somewhat unsettling. Zhuangzi, I guess, looks to the ruler, to the extent he's interested in rulers, he basically says, you should drop out, too. He's not interested in telling them how to rule. But Laozi is. And at the core of Laozi's advice to the ruler is, if you want to rule successfully, keep your people stupid, keep your people dumb. Make sure that life is sufficient, their livelihood is sufficient. Don't encourage them to want to acquire. Keeping people ignorant and simple makes them easy to satisfy.

But there is another message in Laozi which is very important and enduring, and that's the idea of non-action, of [wuwei], of not interfering, not trying to make things be some way, of not forcing the world to be as you want it. Again, letting things be, of non-action. Do not seek wealth and power, for certain. The short end of the stick is less likely to break than the long end of the stick. The taller they are, the harder they fall, right? The softness can contain a below. Hardness is brittle and breaks when hit.

Always take the dark side, the quiet side, the soft side, the short side. Don't seek. Don't strive. Stay out of harm's way. Don't try to accumulate. Don't try to acquire, and you won't have anything to lose. The room that is empty can contain everything. The hub at the center of the wheel is what makes it possible for the wheel to work. It's empty, too.

But there's also, I think, in this a turn away from the idea of cumulative learning. We think back to the Confucians like Mencius, whose idea of constant cultivation of Xunzi, with his interest in cumulative knowledge. That for the Daoist, unlearning is better than learning. Laozi, in The Daodejing at one point says, you know, the only reason why you've humaneness and righteousness is because people have lost the way. If people truly lived according to the way you wouldn't need ritual, you wouldn't need humaneness. But he says-- the phrase probably comes from the Laozi-- be like a newborn babe.

It doesn't build the world. It doesn't try to control the world. It doesn't aim to do good for or to other people. But what it does do, I think, with this whole notion of dropping out is saying, there's a way to survive. If you don't compete, if you don't get involved, at least you can survive and you can be happy in your own life.

Section 4: Strategies for Gaining Control

1. Zou Yan

By the end of the Warring States Period, it had become clear to some, both political leaders and intellectuals, that the only way really to survive this period of ever-increasing warfare was for somebody to win, somebody to take control, some of them to organize the world and bring about peace. In Confucius' time, the Zhou king was not powerful, but no one was quite willing to overthrow the Zhou king.

But by the middle of the third century BCE, the Zhou king has waned to the point of lacking any kind of power. He's overthrown in, I guess, 256 BCE. And at this point, people are very anxious to know, how do we succeed? How do we win? And a number of thinkers appear that have a solution.

I'm going to give you the most philosophical one first, which is a man named Zou Yan who's a cosmologist. And Zou Yan's basic ideas are built around the notion that the cosmos follows predictable patterns and temporal sequences. The cosmos evolves in a certain way. Human society goes this way and that, but it too actually could follow the same patterns of development if rulers understood the cosmos correctly and how it worked.

Now, there's a larger theory here, Cosmic Resonance, we'll be getting to later, but let me sort of give you the basic idea. So Zou Yan says, there are cycles that have changed the world, and we can figure these cycles out by classifying different categories of things.

Well, take the agricultural year, right? There are times when humans need to act in a certain way to be successful. You should plant in the spring, harvest in the fall. If you plant in the fall, you will not have a harvest. So the very idea in an agricultural society of trying to fit your actions to the times is a fairly straightforward idea.

But Zou Yan wants to extend this further. He wants to see history as going through cycles, that the Zhou was a part of a cycle, and another cycle is beginning to emerge. And the ruler who can understand that cycle and how to act in accord with those times will be the ruler that succeeds in conquering all the other states and unifying them. This was something that was of particular attractiveness to rulers, and he went out to sell his wares.

Now, one of the basic ideas he comes up with, and we'll be coming back to it again, is the notion of five phases of change, and they have names. There's wood, metal, fire, water, earth. These represent different categories of change. Everything in all domains, human society, the natural world, plant life, animal life, and so on, all has these different phases. You can categorize things accordingly. And it follows for him that to be in accord with the times is to do things that fit that moment. So there's a time to fight, the time to battle, and so on.

Now, this goes also hand in hand with the popular phenomena that we've now started to learn about, which are sometimes called yinyang books or almanacs. And the idea was that at all moments, yin and yang are in cycle of some kind. And to really accord with the times in daily life and just in the mundane things of the day, you have to follow the cycles of yin and yang.

And we find them in graves all over the place, I believe, in which it says, day by day, almost hour by hour, how you should act according to the yinyang cycles of those days. And apparently, people are actually doing this or following this. At least they're acquiring the books and burying the books with them.

Who will succeed the Zhou king now that he's gone? It's the person who knows how to catch time and master time.

2. Sunzi

The second thing that I'll mention is from Sunzi, The Art of War. Sunzi himself is probably a 6th century figure. This book, as far as we know, really appears in the 3rd century. It's a book about tactics. It's a book about how to win in battle. Filled with very practical, often very simple, advice. But some big slogans, popular with Mao Zedong as well. The strategy of guerrilla warfare: "Advance when your enemy retreats. Retreat when your enemy advances."

He talks about how to understand the terrain. He talks about how to use spies. He talks about how to sow dissension in the enemy camp. It even has simple little things like this-- at night, you should use a lot of beacons and flares. In daytime, you should use a lot of flags and banners to control your army.

But if you take all of Sunzi together, what we see is somebody who says, there are practical ways for understanding how the world works, and you should not deceive yourself. You need to see yourself as part of the strategic situation. You need to see what's possible. You need to act accordingly. And Sunzi's book sets out to tell you how to do that.

Like the Laozi, it has had a life in the 20th and 21st century as well. It's said that during the Vietnam War, all Viet Cong officers were supposed to study the Sunzi. Mao Zedong's On Guerrilla Warfare draws on the Sunzi. It's the required reading at one point for CIA officers in the United States. Japanese executives have read The Sunzi as a way of doing battle as executives and taking advantage of enemies and so on. It's even said that here in Boston, the coach of the Boston Patriots, a football team, Bill Belichick, has read The Sunzi as well.

It's a book about how to succeed. And it's not a book that's concerned with the morality of your ends. But on the other hand, to succeed well, you actually have to learn how to see the world objectively, which has some advantage, perhaps.

3. Han Fei

The final example of a strategy for gaining control is Hanfei, sometimes called a legalist. Hanfei began as a student of the Confucian philosopher Xunzi and quits it and turns instead to a very different proposition. Rather than relying on rituals, why not rely on laws? But he's also interested by the relativism of the Daoists and writes a commentary, in fact, on Laozi's Daodejing.

He said, well, if you can get people to act like you want them to act by using rewards and punishments, because people are basically self-interested, and the ruler wants to secure his state, then what he needs to do is decide what he wants and reward people for doing it and punish them for not doing it. And since everything is relative, and since people are self-interested, you basically will be able to control society with the two handles of reward and punishment.

Now, he says, this seems like it's a very simple thing. It's obvious. It's true. You would think that every ruler in the world who wanted to be successful and conquer all the other states would follow this rule. How come they don't? The problem is this, is people really are very self-interested, and that goes for rulers, too. They think the point of having so much power is that it can indulge themselves and follow their own desires.

And the minute they start to indulge themselves, their underlings, their officials, will start to see, uh-huh, now I could get ahead at court, not by doing a good job, but by making my ruler like me. I could appeal to things he wants. I could flatter him. I could provide them with things that he desires. And I wouldn't have to do anything except provide those things, and I could do what I wanted. That's true, says Hanfei. And you as a result will lose your state, because your officials will not be doing their jobs.

So what are you to do? You as a ruler, you must never reveal, never reveal-- and here we can see some of the Daoist influence as well-- never reveal what you want. In fact, you should not want anything except the perpetuation of your state. And if you perpetuate your state, you must get your officials to be competent. And how are you going to do that? You do not propose what they should do. You invite them to come to you and say what the problem is and what solution they have in mind. And then you say, go and solve it. And if they succeed, you reward them. And if they fail, you punish them. And that's the way you keep your officials being efficient.

In fact, this view took hold in early China. And it became common-- for example, generals who took their troops into battle and failed would then be brought to the law courts afterward and punished for having failed in battle. Officials need to see that their only hope for advancement in government is by being competent, by making the state stronger. And if they can do that, then they will be successful and the state will be successful.

But the ruler has to pay a price. The ruler must become in some sense invisible. He can have no desires. He must lead a very frugal and simple life. He must make sure that the law is obeyed absolutely. Hanfei begins as somebody who says, this is how you as ruler can become the strongest ruler. In fact, what he's done, I think, is he's pinned the ruler down and limited his options. You, in fact, must subordinate yourself to the interests of the state if you are to be successful. You can't have a life of your own. So paradoxically, the person who believes the most in rewards and punishments ends up fencing in and constraining the ruler in a way that's quite unexpected.

Section 5: Conclusion

To summarize this, we've seen a range of concerns, strategies for doing good, for surviving, for conquering, for gaining control. We've seen different ideas about The Dao, or The Way, from something that is from antiquity that's a set of ideas, set of propositions, to the way it's something that's of the natural world, for the Daoists, for example. Something that's inherent in the cosmos, or for Zou Yan too, rather than something that's humanly constructed.

And I think we also see some commonalities. This is, at least these thinkers, are not religious thinkers. It's probably true that, for the vast majority of people alive at the time, there was an afterlife. There were ghosts and spirits and gods that they worshipped. But for these thinkers, they have not made that part of their philosophies. It's very much a secular, this worldly set of concerns that they share.

There's also, I think, in general, a real concern with the human world at a personal level and at a political level. Above all, I think there's a conviction that we as humans could figure things out and know what to do. And if we can figure out, we can bring the world to peace, we can establish order, and it'll be a better world for all of us.

But what, in fact, was the path that China would take? Was it to find a way to do good, find a way to survive, or to find a way to gain control? And the answer to that question will be in the next module.

Section 6: Professor Puett on Zhuangzi (Optional)

The figure we will be talking about today is named Zhuangzi. Z-H-U-A-N-G-Z-I.

And in the alternate-- and again, older Romanization-- this is the same figure that used to be spelled C-H-U-A-N-G-T-Z-U. You of course don't need to know that. I simply mention it because that other name has made it into English lexicon and based upon the older spelling, it's often been mispronounced as "Chuang Tzu." So if you have heard the name "Chuang Tzu," that's actually a mispronunciation of indeed the figure we're talking about today, Zhuangzi. Same person, just the spelling we now use looks a lot more like it was actually pronounced.

So this is the same person. He is the third of the so-called Daoist that we're reading in this class. We first read the Laozi, then the Inward Training. We are now turning to the Zhuangzi.

As we mentioned, and here I want to underline because it becomes all the more important today, Daoism is a later retrospective school. None of these thinkers were thinking of themselves as being part of a school called Daoism.

And that's particularly the case with our figure today. This is a figure that would resist any possible means of classification, would resist anything saying, my thinking represents this category in opposition to other categories of thinking. He would, in part or strongly, say he's really not part of any kind of a school.

So again, when we call him a Daoist, we're putting him and giving him a label that he probably wouldn't have agreed with. Not necessarily the name, but simply a label, period.

Let me say a few words about him. Which will be quick, because we actually don't know a lot about him. We have a ton of stories about him, and you're reading them. He tells lots of stories in his own book about himself. For reasons we'll get to momentarily, I wouldn't take them as being historical artifacts of things that really actually happened in the world.

So this is a text probably put together fourth century BCE, roughly contemporary with and perhaps a bit later than the other ones we've been mentioning so far, just because he'll incorporate some of the figures we've

mentioned in his stories. But we don't know a lot about him. That's good, because I think he would be very happy about that fact.

What he wants is to have a text that is going to change us. And that's what he's left us. And it will change you, and I think in some very intriguing ways.

Let me begin by saying a few words about it. I realize since the papers were literally due at 10:00 AM, you might not have yet read the Zhuangzi in depth as of now. So let me say a few words about what you will be facing. You will be facing one of the most exciting, imaginative texts you have ever read. But it's a difficult text in an intriguing way.

Note if you go back to the texts we've read, we began of course with The Analects. And part of the power of that text was an attempt to give you this figure, Confucius, working with his disciples, explaining what he did on a daily basis, what these rituals were he was following, how he would talk to disciples. And it was a portrait of someone trying to live his philosophy.

And as we discussed, part of the power of the book was just giving you those vignettes. Him saying something to a disciple, him acting in a certain way, portraying what it would mean to live a life as Confucius was calling on us to live.

We noted this was true in a different way, a somewhat more elaborate way with Mencius, where there too we have a text that will give you portraits of Mencius as a human being. Spending a life trying to be a good human being, trying to develop a philosophy and a way of thinking and a way of life that will affect others for the better. Striving in a complex way-- it's a complex portrait-- to be a good person given the moral psychology he is developing. And again, part of the power of the book was to get you into him as a person, given his philosophy.

Versus something like the Mozi, which was of course, an attempt to lay out clear arguments. Here are my criteria for argumentation. Here are our standards. Follow these standards and you will be a proper rational human being.

And the text was largely shorn of the kind of exciting writing, anecdotes, intriguing stories that we get in the other text. It was what we would think of as a more straightforward philosophical analysis. This is what is good. Here's how you define it. Here are the standards of argumentation.

And now we've seen two so-called Daoist texts that go about this in yet a different way, a third way of writing a text. In this third one so far, we have no figures mentioned, unlike the Confucian texts. Certainly no rational standards of argumentation in texts like the Laozi or the Inward Training.

Rather what you get are these-- and we actually don't, tellingly, have a good word for it in English-- powerful phrases for the Laozi. "The Way that can be spoken of is not the enduring Way." These very paradoxical phrases that ask you to work through them to understand the implications. In the Inward Training, these incredibly powerful lines trying to get you in the mode of thinking of the world in terms of these energies and your training that you can give through these energies.

Again, no names mentioned, no anecdotes. Simply trying to pull you in with the language of what it's trying to say.

Now we have yet another one. Perhaps the most intriguing of them all, or certainly the most challenging of them all. What you're going to find is a text that is going to give you incredible numbers of stories, but they're wild stories.

You don't get a portrait of what Zhuangzi did on a daily basis. Or you get a portrait of Zhuangzi, but it's, you'll see, a rather wild one. Rather what you get are wild anecdotes, with these incredible fictional characters, including many animals-- birds, fish, all these sorts of creatures. How the world seems from their perspective.

Very, very humorous stories too, extremely funny where he'll love to bring you down a path with a story and then give you this ludicrous and hysterical pun or this crucial twist, this surprise twist. He will talk about historical figures, but he'll have them spout rather odd things. Confucius will appear talking to his disciples saying some rather un-Confucian things.

In other words, it's this incredibly imaginative text. Wildly fictional, wildly imaginative. And as with all of our texts, it's written this way to enact what it wants us to do.

So one of our questions will be what does it want us to do? Why is it written this way? Why is it such a challenging text? Because as we'll see, that will be a bit counter intuitive with what he's calling on us to do. And how should we understand the larger argument here?

To begin with, let us as always pull back and give some general views about what he's up to. And then we'll get into the nitty-gritty.

First some general views. Since he's classified as a Daoist, you might imagine, and you will quickly see when you begin reading, he does talk about this thing called the Way. Very much as did Laozi. You also might notice he seems to be emphasizing rather different things about the Way.

So why don't we just begin right there? What is the Way for Zhuangzi? First of all, a contrast. For Laozi, as we saw, the Way is, in a sense, everything. Everything in its absolutely undifferentiated state.

So again, cosmologically, that state from which the differentiated cosmos emerges. And to which someday it may return.

On a more mundane level, that ground from which things grow and to which they may return. Grass grows, grass dies. It grows from the Way, it returns to the Way.

Experientially, if we see the world differentially, the Way would be the degree to which we could experience the world as everything interrelated to everything else. In its stillness, in its emptiness, in its calmness. And if we can still ourselves, calm ourselves, empty ourselves, we get closer to that Way, closer to that ground.

And as we noted, the verbs therefore are returning. We're going back, returning, holding fast to the Way. It's that basis, that ground from which the differentiated world converges, and again, to which it will return.

Note the different ways that the Way will be spoken about with Zhuangzi. In some ways similar, of course. It's everything, as we'll see, in its absolutely interrelated state.

But the focus isn't so much on absolute undifferentiation. It's not so much the ground. It isn't even a verb of going back, holding fast to, returning to. Rather think of the Way for Zhuangzi as absolutely everything in its constant flux and transformation.

Everything for Zhuangzi is constantly, constantly in flux, constantly transforming into everything else. Everything is moving constantly, and as we will see, spontaneously. That, for Zhuangzi, is the Way.

The seasons change. That's the Way. Sure, grass grows and grass dies. But also grass grows, interacts with everything else in the world. When it dies, the stuff that are the grass enter the soil and that stuff goes into other things.

Or before it dies, it might be eaten by say, a bird. And then the stuff that was the grass become part of the bird. And a bear may eat the bird and the stuff that was part of that bird may become part of the bear.

And over time, everything is slowly becoming everything else. Over the millennia, literally all the stuff that is us, and this, and everything around us will slowly become part of everything else too.

And if we could take a larger perspective, we would see a world of constant flux, constant transformation. And indeed, we would also see that everything in the world-- with as we'll see, a little exception-- everything in the world is inherently a part of this. Everything is constantly, spontaneously becoming everything else, shifting in relationship to everything else. Constant movement, constant relationships in a kind of endless movement and flux and shift.

Everything is like this. When birds fly, that's what they're doing. They're flying around because they have these certain organs and they have certain faculties and they have wings. And they float around depending on the different shifting winds and the topography below them. They are spontaneously following the Way.

Fish, of course, swim around because they have gills and they have a tail. And they shift around with the currents, moving around with the currents, which shift around them. They're following the Way spontaneously.

They don't think OK, now I should turn this way because the current is going this way, and then I'll turn that way. They just do it. They're fish. They're spontaneously part of the Way. Everything is spontaneously a part of the Way.

Except I mentioned that one little exception. There's one thing in the world, in the whole cosmos as far as we can tell, that does not spontaneously follow the Way. And I'm sorry to say it's us. We alone seem to not do this. And we alone seem to not do it for a very interesting reason.

You see, we have this organ called a mind. Now Zhuangzi loves the mind. It's great. As we will see, it can allow you to do unbelievable things, not least of which is write these incredible stories and incredible poems and incredible books. And as we will see, do many, many, many more things as well.

It's great to have a mind, just as it would be great to have wings and fly around, and gills to swim through the oceans. It's great to have a mind. But we misuse it.

The way we use our mind is something like if say, a bird were using its wings to try to swim through the oceans. It's taking something that could be incredible with how it could flow with the cosmos and instead using it to work against the cosmos, work against this endless flux and transformation.

And hence, we as human beings are miserable. Because we're endlessly fighting against the Way, endlessly trying to construct lives that fight against the Way, endlessly trying to close ourselves off from this incredible endless flux and transformation. And endlessly, by battling against the Way, slowly destroying ourselves.

And the result of this is clear. Because we will be miserable. We will spend our lives fighting against the Way. And we will lose. And we will pass away and we will join the rest of the cosmos, but having lived a life fighting against something that instead could've been unbelievably energizing and inspiring.

And so the key for Zhuangzi, the reason he writes this text, is to open us up, to teach us how to use our mind in this exciting way that allows us to become one again with the Way. To connect with the Way and become, he will argue, an unbelievable extraordinary human being during this brief time when the stuff of us happens to be in the form of a human being. We're capable of incredible things and we cut ourselves from them.

Now from this way of putting it, you might think well, at least here we've got a pretty clear cut way of getting there, right? I mean, we saw with the Laozi, it's a tough text and tough to get there.

Here you might think well OK, here it's pretty clear what happens. The problem is everything in the world is spontaneously part of the flux and transformation of the Way. And if we humans are not spontaneously part of the flux and transformation of the Way because we have this mind that creates these problem, then clearly the solution is painfully obvious, right? Right?

I mean, if the mind is cutting us off, what is it doing? And sure enough, he will say all that I'm about to say. It cuts us off in the following ways.

It cuts us off because we try to control this flux and transformation. And we can't.

We try to say OK, I will have a clear plan for my life and I will do the following. And that will be my goal and I will direct everything to that goal. Which makes perfect sense except of course, from this point of view, you set the goal, you direct everything to it, you're closing your mind off from this unbelievable flux and transformation, all the things that could be exciting you and energizing you, you restrict yourself from.

In fact, you literally begin forming blinders to prevent them from pulling you away from your plan. And slowly but surely, you destroy yourself.

Or you try to find stable things in this world of flux and transformation. You try to say OK well, one thing I can be sure about is me, right? There's me, I know who I am. I'll look inside, find my true self, and that's just me.

No. Because for Zhuangzi, you're reifying yourself. You're taking this current set of stuff that's you and saying, this is me. Well, it's you right now. But it's not what you necessarily need to be in 20, 30 years if you're opening yourself up to this constant flux and transformation and allowing yourself to be inspired and moved and created by it.

How else do we do it? We try to create stable foundations for thinking. This is right, that is wrong.

Well, even if at best at this particular moment, that's accurate-- and that may not be-- but even if it is, here again, create stable categories. I'll direct my life accordingly. Well then no, because you've restricted yourself. You've cut yourself off from the flux and transformation.

In other words, all the ways that we act in the world, all the ways that we direct our lives, all the ways that we think about ourselves are foolish attempts to create stable things. Ourselves, goals, clear cut ways of being in the world that actually, ironically and counter intuitively are destroying ourselves.

And then again, you might think OK, but again at least it's clear what we do. So we stop doing this and become spontaneous, right? If everything is spontaneously part of the Way, and we are using our mind to restrict ourselves, then we just stop doing it and we become spontaneous.

So I could, for example, jump on top of here and dance if I felt like doing that, and that would be really spontaneous. And that would mean I'm part of the Way, right? No. No!

Don't worry, I'm not going to do it! And the reason I'm not going to do it is because I've read the Zhuangzi. That is not, for him, spontaneity.

It is not simply spontaneous to do OK, I'll do whatever I want to do. Because whatever I want to do would probably be based upon, again, all of the things we were just talking about. It would be based upon this world that we've created for ourselves. And what we think of as spontaneity is the opposite of what we usually do, right?

So OK, normally I would try to give you a good lecture, and I'm sure often failing. But then to be spontaneous, I jump on here and dance. But again, that's simply the same thing as what I'm trying to otherwise do.

I'm simply jumping on a table and dancing. That's not spontaneity. That's simply trying to do immediately the opposite of what I usually try to do.

In itself, that is not good for Zhuangzi, to say the least. That's not spontaneity. Spontaneity actually requires altering the way we think, altering the way we act in the world, and opening ourselves up to this enduring flux and transformation, which will mean things that we could not yet imagine. It doesn't simply mean doing the opposite, the fun thing of what we normally do.

In other words, it doesn't simply mean OK, during my weekdays, I will then have my plan and on weekends, I'll do something fun. That's all fine and good, but that fun stuff for Zhuangzi would not be where you're going to find your spontaneity. It's simply the way to relax based upon doing the opposite of what you usually spend your life doing.

So it turns out it's really complicated. Yes, you're supposed to become spontaneous and spontaneously one with this endless flux and transformation. But it's really difficult to do. It takes a lot of work, it turns out. A lot of effort.

And since again, goal directed effort is what tends to get us into trouble, it takes a lot of work to understand the work that Zhuangzi is talking about. So as always, why don't we simply look at one of his stories to try to get us into his way of thinking?

And the one I'll pick to begin with is one about a butcher. A butcher. So that's what he is. He's a butcher, right?

And so his life consists of taking big things of meat and he's got of course, his big knife and he just stabs away at the meat. 'Cause meat, it's got all these tendons and muscles and bones and things. You've got to just dig through it.

So he's got this big knife and he digs through it to cut out the slabs of meat. And this is his life. Just cut, cut, cut, slab of meat, slab of meat, and putting out the slab of meat.

So it's a kind of tough job. Most of us have tough jobs, because we have to work against things. In this case, working against all the tough stuff of the meat. So that's what he does.

But then over time, he begins to notice that instead of simply having to take his knife and cut and try to work against all of these different muscles and bones and things in the meat, he begins to notice that actually in the meat itself, there are all of these flowing patterns. For example, yeah there are all of these muscles and bones. But actually what they really are are like here's a bone. And then there's the way the muscle wraps around the bone and the way the tendon wraps around the muscle. And at any given moment in the meat in front of you, there are all these lines and patterns in it.

And if, instead of simply trying to hack through the meat with the knife using all of his strength, the butcher begins to notice that with training-- this is not easy-- he can begin to sense where these actual flows and patterns in the meat are. And to do this, he doesn't think too much with his mind. Thinking through OK well, the last piece of meat there was a place here where I could cut through easily. And so with this new piece of meat, I'll cut in that same place.

What he does therefore is using his spirit, he is beginning to sense the different fluctuations in the meat. So that what he starts doing is simply picking up his knife, and with the knife, simply sensing with that spirit where these patterns are and flowing the knife through the patterns in the meat, each meat of course being different.

So he's sensing it. And once he gets to the point where he can truly sense this, he gets to the point where he can simply pick up his knife, slide it through the meat perfectly, and yes, spontaneously, to the point where he never has to sharpen his blade. The butcher, the butcher has understood it.

Now let's take apart this story, because typically Zhuangzi ends the story there. What is he saying?

Well, first note what he's not saying. Note if this is how we achieve spontaneity, note to begin with, spontaneity does not mean the butcher throws down his knife and dances on the floor. Or dances on the table, as the case may be. No.

It also doesn't mean he simply stops doing whatever he's doing and can suddenly become spontaneous in any sense of the word. It also doesn't mean he says OK well, I have to cut through these slabs of meat during the week, but on weekends, then I can dance on my table and be spontaneous. No. He actually achieves it through the seemingly daily mundane activity of, in this case, hacking through pieces of meat.

Note also he doesn't achieve it by cease being a butcher. That could well be. We'll see later stories where that could well be the case.

But in itself, the key here is not reject anything you're doing in the world in order to become spontaneous. On the contrary, there's nothing inherently wrong about being in society and having social duties and having jobs. Zhuangzi has no problem with that, per se. We'll see, he wants it to be something that will excite you. But per se, that's not the problem.

You don't need to again, dance off in the woods and reject what you do on the weekdays to gain spontaneity. So what is the butcher doing?

Well clearly, Zhuangzi means the story analogically. We're not all of us going to be butchers. And some of us may be vegetarians. We might not even ever cut up a piece of meat, anyway. That's not the point.

Clearly what he means by the butcher and this piece of meat is the way we live our lives. The way we live our lives is the equivalent of the poor butcher before he started doing this hacking through the meat.

Think of your life this way. What your life consists of from this perspective is simply trying to hack through life. There are all of these complex patterns out there that we ignore because we set this idea, I'm going to cut this meat into slabs this way. And that's how I'm going to live my life.

Or putting it analogically, slab, slab, slab. This is the way I'll do it according to this certain definition of how big the slab should be. And you're hacking and hacking and hacking.

That's how we live our lives. Ignoring the patterns, driving ourselves through our lives, closing ourselves off to all else that's going on.

And the way you become spontaneous is you counter intuitively enough, train yourself to be spontaneous. In this case, sticking to our analogical story, you train yourself to be able to sense the patterns out there.

Because there are differences in the world, right? The pieces of meat. There are differences, these patterns.

And what he's doing when he's sliding through these patterns, is he is learning how to spontaneously feel the patterns moving through the world spontaneously, or in this case analogically, with his knife spontaneously through the meat such that he's no longer hacking against it. But also note spontaneously moving through the world does not mean simply accepting the world as given. Because again, I'm pushing this analogy but I think this is part of the implication, the meat does change. I mean, he literally cuts up the meat and it becomes something different.

So spontaneity is a training act where you are using your spirit, seeing, sensing the different patterns around you, working with those patterns, but in a way that, as we will see, will change things. And note the key part of the story as to what's changing. When he's doing this, he becomes-- ironically, but I think this is part of the intriguing power of a Zhuangzi story-- more alive. Because he's able to sense things so well.

And indeed, the story concludes precisely with the ruler seeing this saying yes, now I understand life. Because he becomes alive through this training exercise.

Now before we finish our discussion of this story, let me immediately give two more and then work out the implications. These two other ones, I will intentionally draw from modern examples, things we do in our lives, to give you a sense of the kind of experience he's talking about. But then we'll return to the butcher and note how different it is.

But first, let's try to think of a couple of examples from our lives where we seem to get the sort of thing that Zhuangzi's talking about. In other words, we train ourselves to spontaneously become somehow more alive by sensing things better with what he's calling our spirit.

That may sound like a very, very abstract way of putting it, but it's not. We have all done the equivalent of this.

Think for example, if you've ever learned a musical instrument. We'll take piano as an example.

How do you learn the piano? Do you simply sit down at the piano and spontaneously play? Well, you can and it will be painful to you and everyone around you. And I'm sure your parents would have slammed the door shut, saying please, stop.

That is not how you learn a piano. You learn a piano by spending years, years, sitting at the piano. At first doing the rote chord progressions. Boom, boom, boom, boom.

Slowly, the years go by, you learn more and more about how to play the notes, you're training your fingers to move through the notes, training your fingers to be able to hit these keys. And the years go by, you're training beyond that.

You're training to be able to sense a piece of music. You see it in front of you, you're playing the piece of music. But slowly but surely, you're not simply doing the standard progressions that you're reading, you're sensing the music. You're sensing the music, you're playing with the music.

Over time, you get to a point where you begin to really truly resonate with the music to the point where you even can perform. And when you're performing for people around you, you're sensing in the room, sensing how to play to affect the room.

You may play in a certain way because there's a calm mood in the room, or an anxious mood. You may play more calmly to make it less anxious. You may play a little more strongly to build up energy in the room.

And you'll play it in slightly different ways, sensing the room around you, playing in ways that open up that room in various ways, all of which you're sensing. You're not thinking.

At no point are you thinking OK, I'll play a little harder now, a little softer now. I better hit this chord progression. No.

When you get this, you get a point where you're simply sensing it and resonating with it. It takes you years of rote training, but slowly through that rote training, you get to the point where-- now shifting to our terminology-- you spontaneously can resonate, spontaneously sense the room, and spontaneously do this craft in a way that alters the room dramatically. When you do that, note

how you feel. It's this incredible just rush of excitement, because you're sensing things so well.

Your senses are alive, you're sensing things, you're playing in a way that brings out everyone else. And there's this incredible sense of just the moment where you feel, to use a kind of Americanism, there. Fully present in that moment. That, I think, is precisely the experience he's talking about.

One other quick example before we get to the point. If you haven't learned an instrument, think about playing a sport. Basketball, we'll choose. Same thing, right?

Basketball, you begin playing. It's kind of awkward to bounce a ball and throw it at a basket if you remember what it was like when you were a child. But slowly, you can spend tons of rote work learning to throw the basketball over and over and over again.

And eventually, you hit the point as the years go by where you begin to really be able to sense in a situation where you are on the court, how to jump, how to move precisely your fingers at just the right moment so you can avoid your opponent and put it in. And there are those moments.

We even have a term for it in English, when you're in the zone. When all of that training comes together and you're able for whatever else is stressing you out going into the game, whatever else is going on, you hit the game, you suddenly hit this higher plane where you're able to sense perfectly the ball around you, the mood of your opponents, how to move the ball. You start hitting the ball every single time right into the hoop.

Again, we call it in the zone. That just moment when you sense things so incredibly well. You sense how to move the ball, how to shift away from your opponents, where to go with the ball.

And when you're in that zone, note the coach will always tell you during those time outs, don't think, just keep doing it. Keep doing it.

Because if you think oh yeah, the way I'm in the zone is because I'm jumping up and I'm moving my fingers in a certain way and I'm worried about this guard over here so I'm moving in a certain way, as soon as you think that, you've lost it. You're no longer in the zone. You're going to miss every single basket.

Your coach will always say, don't think, don't think, keep playing. Don't think.

In other words, don't use your mind. Don't try to actually stabilize this, come up with some clear explanation of what's going on. Sense it with your spirit because you can, after these years of training, now that you're spontaneously sensing it.

Both of those examples-- basketball, piano-- you're training yourself to become spontaneous. Feeling, once you've attained it, that incredible rush of excitement, resonance with everything around you, that incredible rush-- again, shifting into our terminology here-- of the flux and transformation of the Way that you're now fully a part of, but notice engaged in.

You're not simply passively following these patterns. You're part of these endless shifting patterns. You're changing the room with the way you play the piano. You're literally changing the pace of the game, to put it mildly, by the way you're playing in the zone. You are actively engaged and becoming energized and alive and vibrant by being in the Way.

But notice immediately the contrast with those stories with our butcher. Because both of those examples, unless you're going to become say a professional basketball player or professional concert pianist, or even if you are the same point would hold, they're things we do in restricted moments of our life.

For most of us, these are the things we do on weekends. During the weekdays as we do the normal work we're doing, and then we do the stuff like this on the weekends to relax and have fun. So for fun we'll play basketball or play the piano.

Because we do, if we've been doing it for enough years, you get that rush of excitement, and it's a fun thing to do on the weekends. And then you go back to your mundane daily life. Or if you're a concert pianist or a professional basketball player, yes, you do it on the weekdays, but you probably have something else then to do to relax on the weekends.

Note our butcher. Our butcher doesn't just do this on the weekends for fun, away from his normal everyday life. He's a butcher. This is what he does.

In other words, I think what Zhuangzi's getting at with this story is to say that is what you should be aiming at. We all know the sort of thing he's talking about. Again, we've experienced it. Basketball, piano, or whatever equivalent. We've done things like what Zhuangzi's talking about.

But what I suspect none of us have done, precisely because it's so difficult and cuts against the way we live our lives, is through our mundane, daily everyday lives, being like the butcher. Through the daily rote stuff we do on a daily basis, what if you're doing, as you do those, precisely what you were doing on those weekends when you're learning the piano or playing basketball?

You are training yourself in precisely the same way, but it's more difficult because you're not just training your fingers as with a piano, and ultimately your senses, you're training everything. You're training your way of being in the world.

Imagine, to give some intentionally ludicrous examples, but you would say these aren't ludicrous if you were really doing it, imagine if you're reaching a point where, through the daily stuff you're doing every day, including walking through a grocery store and buying groceries, that very act can become incredibly exciting. There are things that will excite you. You're opening yourself up to the exciting things of that.

In other words, all the drab stuff we have to do, imagine if you did them the way the butcher, instead of hacking his way through the meat, is able to do. Imagine through your daily, everyday life, you are training yourself to once again become spontaneous. Training yourself to once again be excited and resonating with the world around you. Training yourself to sense things, and with your spirit, be part this endless flux and transformation of the Way.

And if you're doing that, then of course you don't have yet another artificial distinction of daily stuff and fun stuff on weekends. Then your whole life becomes this. Your whole life becomes a training exercise to achieve the spontaneous enraptured presence in and active engagement with everything around you.

And if you're doing that, what do you achieve? Well, for Zhuangzi, absolutely everything. Because if you're doing that, then you are becoming a radically different type of human being.

If you say, I am just the sort of person who is x. I just am this certain person. I can't do certain things. Don't think that way.

Train yourself to be involved in the world. Note how the certain sorts of things will intensely excite you and inspire you. Work on those, develop those, open yourself up to those.

And you will find over time, it will be stunning the different type of a human being you slowly become. It will be incredible how these seemingly mundane activities can become incredibly exciting. You also, of course, begin to sense in terms of future career options, et cetera, what sorts of things really, really excite you.

And if you think you can't do them because you're not good enough, well no. That's because you're claiming I am the sort of person who can't do this. If you don't think that way, notice in practice over time, how dramatically different a type of human being you can become.

In other words, what Zhuangzi is saying is, think of your life as this daily training to become spontaneous. Spontaneous meaning fully, totally, absolutely in accord with the endless flux and transformation of the Way.

Now note by putting it that way, there actually is someone who actually sounds, in some very counter intuitive ways, a lot like this. And not necessarily Laozi, although there are lots of parallels with Laozi. But perhaps the one, at least in this regard, focusing on the daily mundane stuff we do to train ourselves. Ironically, it sounds a lot like Confucius, doesn't it?

Note how incredibly similar this is to Confucius where Confucius, it's of course, different terminology. Crucial as we'll see, but nonetheless, through these daily ritual works, training yourself through the mundane rituals to transform yourself into a radically different type of human being.

And this, I think, is precisely why Zhuangzi loves to give these stories about Confucius. Because I think he feels Confucius is on to something exactly like he wants to develop. And yet he clearly wants to make a critique of Confucius. And this is something we should take seriously.

I think what he's saying about Confucius, or maybe about what Confucianism could potentially be read as being, in other words, the ways that vision in The Analects can be interpreted is if you read it that way, if you read in other words The Analects as there are rituals out there that if we think of them as the means to achieve goodness as opposed to lack of goodness, we will slowly become better people. The danger of that I think he's saying, Zhuangzi, is well, be careful. Because, even though I don't think this is the portrait you're getting in The Analects, the danger is if you think of that as OK, there are clear steps I need to take by doing these rituals to get at a clear goal, namely goodness which is opposed to something else, it becomes too much of a clear path that can close you off from the Way.

Now as we discussed with The Analects, I don't think that's quite what Confucius is saying. For Confucius, rituals are a daily stuff we're doing. And that can mean any of these daily things we're involved with.

And goodness as we saw, is about as an amorphous a term as it could possibly be. He literally can't define it, or will define it radically different every time he talks to any disciple. So I think Confucius himself was actively trying not to fall into a trap of giving you too clear a guide.

But this, I think, is what Zhuangzi's getting at too. Which is to say, quite apart from what Confucius was portrayed as doing in The Analects. At least the danger is he could be read as giving you too clear a path. And I think this is why Zhuangzi loves to give you these endless stories about Confucius and his disciples, where instead of talking about ritual and goodness, he's talking about all of this, spouting Zhuangzian thought.

And I think what he's trying to get there is to say, if you really want what Confucius is saying you can achieve, this is the way to do it. This is how you actually can achieve this through your daily work.

All of which, of course, raises for us an intriguing issue. If these thinkers are onto something, and again, given that we know what they're talking about-- piano, basketball, I mean, we've had these experiences. And given at least the conceivably powerful argument that we could be doing this in our daily lives, I think what they were doing here in the power it's bringing to us is to think through what are the implications of thinking about it as ritual and goodness and that complex interplay we saw with Confucius, or this incredibly intriguing vision on the other hand possibly of spontaneity and the Way and this radically different terminology wheel we'll get with the Zhuangzi?

And it's helpful to think through how radically different are these? Intriguingly enough of course, because both would say, if we think of them as too much of a dichotomy, then we're going to fall into a dangerous trap.

So let me simply conclude with the following point. As always, I will ask you to put this into place, to begin to get a feel for what these figures are talking about. In this case, do a little bit of what Zhuangzi is saying.

In other words, take what you've done-- piano, basketball, anything like this-- learning a skill based activity over years, and begin doing that. And obviously, briefly we're talking with days not years, but begin doing it in your daily life, your mundane life.

Begin trying the same kind of thing you were doing when you were training yourself in that skill activity. Begin trying to do it in the sense of you're walking through campus. Note we're anxious, we're stressed, we're thinking about this, thinking about that.

Self-consciously begin shifting your mind, allowing your spirit to sense things more. Note the exciting things out there. Begin to get a sense of what excites you. Begin to do a little bit more of what excites you.

Open yourself up to what this text would call the patterns that are out there. Begin to sense how you begin to live your life a little bit differently. And then do it a little bit more.

Section 7: Professor Puett on Zhuangzi in Relation to Confucius (Optional)

This, too, is a good segue for our conversation today because Zhuangzi is someone who, as we've seen, is very, very into things like opening up realms of possibilities, finding ways to open up those realms, thinking through, and, in practice, preventing our tendency to close off possible options, and giving very practical advice as to how to do so. We were discussing some of this practical advice. We were discussing this intriguing story of the butcher. The butcher who spends his entire life, again, just hacking meat, but then realizes through that seemingly mundane stuff he has to do every day that he actually can, ultimately, find the way.

And we noticed how incredibly similar that vision was to Confucius, ironically enough. Here's Confucius, seemingly a radically different thinker, arguing against something very much as we're seeing in Zhuangzi. Both are saying it's through the daily ways we live, our seemingly mundane, everyday lives, but you can become something extraordinary. And it's on that point I would like to begin our lecture today. Because immediately, as we've noted the very tail end of the Monday lecture, that surprising counter-intuitive parallel raises a ton of questions for us.

The first is the most obvious. If there's a surprising similarity, what's the difference? In other words, why does Zhuangzi think he needs to change a ton of what Confucius was talking about? Why does he think we need a dramatic change in terminology? Why does he think we need a radically different way of writing a text? Why does he think it's very helpful to give tons of stories of Confucius talking to his disciples, saying, to put it mildly, rather different things than he's actually being portrayed as saying in the Analects?

In other words, what is Zhuangzi up to? And I'd like to begin with that as our opening question. If it's through the daily stuff that we can achieve all of this, if that's how we do it, what's different? To get at this, let's say a bit more about Confucius, reminding ourselves of some of what Confucius was up to, and then drawing the contrast-- and parallels, but also contrast.

First let's remember Confucius a bit. As we noted, very similar. It's through these daily rituals that we're training ourselves, training our ways of responding to the world. Training ourselves to respond in better ways. Training ourselves to act in ways that will affect others for the better. And slowly, over time, training ourselves to become an incredible human being.

Note, however, the key for Confucius is precisely that this was by focusing on the human. Let me just remind you of a few of these examples. The wonderful one we discussed about ancestral sacrifices, where he's asked about these ancestral spirits. And his response was, well, you sacrifice as if they are present because, of course, the focus of the ritual is the human. You do the ancestral sacrifice to transform yourself as a human being, to be better able to understand and sense the degree to which what you are comes, in part, from what the previous generations did for you. And you're trying to inculcate that, learn lessons from that, to help you also, down the road, be a good parent for those generations to come after you.

You focus on the human. And if there's spirits up there, fine. If they're not, it's irrelevant. Focus on the human.

Remember, also, that statement we looked at where there's a fire in a stable. And Confucius says, oh, well, was anyone hurt? And the disciples noted, he didn't ask about the horses. He only asked about the human beings. In other words, it's human.

Disciples ask him about death. What happens after death? To which, he, of course, gives his famous response-- I have no idea. Don't be silly. We don't even understand life yet. Worry about that. Focus on how to live well. Focus on that.

And who knows what happens after that. But let's work on what we can work on. Humans, here and now, as we live our lives, how do we become better human beings? And how do we create a better world? That, for Confucius, is the key.

It's also, of course, the key of the Analects. It's why we get this text portraying a person, Confucius, living this life-- in book 10-- doing these rituals, talking to disciples, trying to help them. It's portraying a person living his life by these ideas-- the common, the mundane, what he does on a daily basis.

Now let's draw the contrast. Yes, the butcher is doing these daily, mundane tasks. Through those, he achieves these incredible things. But notice how radically different everything I've just mentioned is when we turn to Zhuangzi.

First of all, does he really focus on the human? Absolutely not. He thinks that's part of the problem. Because anything that potentially will limit what we can do, anything, for Zhuangzi is a problem.

If, at any point, we simply say, a set of things is what we should be focusing on, we are at grave, grave risk of cutting off everything else. And in the case at hand, if we are simply focusing on the human, look at all of the wondrous things out there that we're ignoring. And think about how those incredibly wondrous things could potentially open up our perspective in unbelievable ways, with dramatic effects, yes, on how we live our daily, mundane lives.

Let's begin with some of the toughest parts of this to think through. To really get a sense for why Zhuangzi thinks this is so important. Death. As we noted, for Confucius, death is something we just don't know about, in terms of what happens after. Is there an afterlife? Are there spirits up there who used to be human beings?

We just don't know about it. Don't think about it. Focus on what you know. We're alive now. Be good now. Do what you can now. That's the focus. And then someday, we die. And who knows what happens after that.

Zhuangzi, on the contrary, does have an idea about what happens to us. And he thinks it's the one that we actually should be thinking about-- and, intriguingly, not in a negative way, or even in a scary way. He thinks it's an important way for us to open up our vision of the world and, therefore, ironically enough, to live life more fully and more completely.

Why, to begin with, do we fear death? We fear death for very obvious reasons, right? But look at me. I'm a human being. And when I die, I won't be. And that's going to be really sad. I won't be here anymore. This is this horrible thing. I'm a human being, and I'm going to be gone.

That's because I'm making a false distinction, yet again. I am looking at current distinctions in the world, which are true. I'm a human being. And I'm not this table. That's certainly true. There are real distinctions in the world. But they are momentary.

And I'm focusing on this current moment, me as a human being, as opposed to being something else. The exact same way we mentioned on Monday, when we think of ourselves as, oh, I just am a certain type of person who is the following. We are reifying a certain moment of ourselves, not allowing ourselves to transform, not seeing ourselves as part of a larger world.

And in the case at hand, at a larger level, it's the same thing when I fear my death. So let's think through what's going to happen when I die. I die. And of course, the stuff that's me, the qi that is me, the stuff, all of it-- my spirit, my

flesh, all of it-- it sits on the ground, or may even be buried, depending on rituals in question.

And then of course, worms will come in and start eating my flesh. And then, after the worms eat my flesh, birds might eat those worms. And then bears might eat those birds. And part of what is me now, the stuff that's me, that's qi that's me, will someday be worms, and birds, and bears, and all of this will be going on endlessly, and has been going on endlessly. And isn't this fantastic?

I mean, what could be more amazing? This is incredible, incredible. And the only reason I fear that is because I foolishly think that I should make this distinction of humans and the rest of the natural world.

No, the rest of the natural world is equally incredible. It'll be wonderful when pieces of what are us now are birds. We can fly around. How incredible is that? This is wonderful. We should not be fearing it.

Now, why is Zhuangzi saying this? Obviously one of the most difficult things for us to work through. He is not saying it in the sense that, therefore, we should look forward to dying. He certainly isn't saying, and we should hope to die soon. Very much the opposite, as you can see pervasively in the text.

He wants us to live life totally, and fully, and completely. The reason this is so important is precisely because it's part and parcel of the key way we limit ourselves. If we're really opening ourselves up to the way, fully opening ourselves up to the way, fully in the sense that we know we have always been, or the stuff that is us now, it has always been part of this endless flux and transformation, and endlessly always will be, if we can really do that to the point where we wouldn't even fear our ultimate death, then we can truly live life fully. Because we can truly live our life fully engaging with the way, which, again, in a deeper sense, we've always been engaged in. And instead of fighting against that, we allow it and become an active participant in this incredible flux and transformation.

What would that mean while we live our lives? And why would we live it more fully and completely if we follow this? Well, let's look at some of these terms. Again radically, different from Confucius. And let's think through them.

To begin with, one intriguing one that we've seen only briefly so far, a little bit in the Laozi, but Zhuangzi is going to use it more often and in some very intriguing ways, the concepts of yin and yang. Yin and yang are two modalities

of qi. So qi, as we've discussed, is everything. Everything is composed of qi, this matter and this energy. Everything is composed of that.

And, as we've seen, there are different types of qi-- some more refined, some more turbid. And there are different modalities of it. Yin is associated with softness, coldness. Yang is associated with incredible heat, but also passions. Yang is also associated with Heaven. Yin with Earth. They are simply different modalities of qi.

Cosmologically speaking, when everything, if you're thinking from a Laozi cosmology, if everything comes from this undifferentiated state, the way, cosmologically the yang moves up. The yin moves down. You get Heaven and Earth, and we humans are in between, surfeit different modalities of qi.

Now, for Laozi, of course, the key with this is you're trying to return to this oneness. And the way Laozi will do this, in a constant rhetorical play, is by thinking of hierarchies and always undermining the hierarchy in a way that will actually open us up to this oneness.

So with yin and yang, for example, we will say, we think yang is the bigger one, the more important one, the more powerful, and yin is the lower one, the lesser one, the one associated with softness, weakness. And of course, hardness is better than softness.

And for Laozi there, for what you do, is you emphasize the lesser term, we think-- softness, weakness, yin, and by focusing on that, you turn over the dualism. But of course, by turning over the dualism, you ultimately break it down. Because, essentially, what you're saying is, if you focus on yin, you're focusing on the soft, the weak. And the soft and the weak is what allows you to actually connect with things better, sense things better, become one with things better.

And therefore, if you focus on yin rather than yang, you ultimately break down the dualism. Again, this sense of returning to the one, returning to the way. And we noted all the implications that has.

Note, in contrast, the slightly different way that Zhuangzi will use these terms. He's not saying, so much, focus on the yin as opposed to the yang in order to undermine the dualism and get closer to the way, to get closer to oneness. The way he's going to do it is a bit different. The way he will put it is everything in the cosmos, because it's this endless flux and transformation, consists of everything in endless interplay-- equally true of yin and yang. Equally true.

We mentioned seasonal change. Why does that happen? Because spontaneously, the forces of yin and yang are endlessly in interplay. So you get, at the height of winter, pure yin. But by definition, pure yin, in its purest form, will bring it round its opposite, yang. And hence you get the slow growth of spring, the slow growth of warmth.

That grows until it reaches its height at the pure height of summer. Heat, incredible heat, which draws out its opposite, yin. And slowly, yin, over the course of the fall, grows. Things get colder. Again, don't be sad about the fact that it's getting colder. It's part of a natural cycle moving ultimately toward winter, pure yin.

And that endless interplay creates the seasonal change. That's what allows, I should say, the birth of all of the things in the world because it generates life through that endless interplay. And it's part and parcel of all of the generation of life that happens throughout the entire world-- natural species, human species, everything, endless interplay. Endless flux and transformation.

Endless except those moments if it's going to be blocked, when that spontaneous, endless interplay is going to be stopped. And, you can imagine, that happens primarily with that little being we talked about on Monday-- human beings.

We, again, uniquely, in the entire cosmos, bring this to an end. And instead of having this incredible endless interplay of yin and yang, we, on the contrary, disrupt it. How do we disrupt it?

Precisely through the ways we were discussing on Monday. We will have a clear plan. I am going to be the following sort of person because of my natural endowments. I will do the following set of things to get to this place in which I will be the perfect person doing this perfect set of things. We set ourselves on this perfect plan to do it thinking that's the way we can accomplish something in the world.

Meanwhile, as we mentioned on Monday, we are endlessly closing ourselves off from all of the other possibilities. And now, using these terms, what we're also doing is closing off this incredible endless spontaneous interplay of yin and yang because this will always entail an attempt to say, the typical one for us. OK, by doing this, I must be strong-willed, assertive, and powerful. That's yang.

And if that is yang, then, of course, by saying that's what I will be, we close off the yin. And what happens when we do that? It means we lose the harmony of yin and yang, the endless interplay of yin and yang. And this is why, as we destroy it, we close ourselves off from those yin elements in the self. And as we do that, as we disrupt this harmony, as we disrupt this interplay, we cease to have the kind of interplay of yin and yang around us and within the body. We disrupt that harmony, and, sure enough, we become miserable, sick, and we die young because we're destroying the natural spontaneous processes that create, that generate, life.

We literally are living in a way that is making us sick, unhappy, and leading us to an early death, literally. What do you do on the contrary? Imagine, on the contrary, you live your life embrace this incredible spontaneity, this incredible generation. Then what you're doing is encouraging the endless interplay of yin and yang.

If you're doing that, with that interplay and allowing that harmony to go on as it does in the rest of the natural world, there's life. And there's not just life. There's life in the most exciting, expansive sense that we can imagine-- or rather, beyond, because of our limited human perspective, we are likely to imagine.

That is what we are taming and we are taming the way. You become fully engaged, at every level, in terms of literally, your body, your emotions, your physical health, with all of the endless interplay of yin and yang going on in the universe. Instead of fighting against it, you are engaged. And you are enlivened by it.

Now that's putting it, needless to say, very-- I won't say abstractly, but certainly using a terminology we're not used to. So immediately, let's get back to what this would actually mean. OK, you're not trying to follow too clear a plan. You are not trying to close yourself off. You're not trying to focus on, say, the yang as opposed to the yin. But you're trying to harmonize these. What does this actually mean in practice?

Hence Zhuangzi's stories. That is what they are aimed at doing. Because what this means in practice, he wants to say, is completely up for grabs once you start doing it. And the problem is we are limiting ourselves. So let's return to some of his stories.

What is it that we're supposed to do to really get at this? We've mentioned how you live your life in this daily, mundane way, training yourself to become

spontaneous. But we've also now today noted that the spontaneity means becoming engaged in this endless interplay, and flux and transformation, of yin and yang and engaging fully in the way.

With that latter part, what are we actually doing? Well, let's give, again, a few more stories. There's one very nice story where Zhuangzi falls asleep. And he dreams he's a butterfly. And when he dreams he's a butterfly, the butterfly is floating all around. It's really fun to be a butterfly. And so it's a nice dream. The butterfly is sweeping here and there.

And then of course, Zhuangzi wakes up. So he's Zhuangzi again. But then, of course, it becomes clear to him that there's a problem. Because is he Zhuangzi dreaming he was is butterfly while he was asleep, or is he actually a butterfly who is actually asleep and, right now, dreaming he's Zhuangzi? Which is it?

And then the story, as so often with Zhuangzi, ends with these intriguing lines. There must be a difference between the butterfly in Zhuangzi-- in other words, the parable isn't saying it doesn't matter, we're all one and the same. No, there's a real difference. If you're a butterfly dreaming you're Zhuangzi, and you're Zhuangzi dreaming you're a butterfly, there's a real difference.

But if you can understand the perspectives of both, you're beginning to understand the transformation of the 10,000 things-- the 10,000 things meaning everything in the cosmos. Let's unpack the story.

What's going on here? Well, the problem is we humans have this closed perspective. We see the world, by definition, since we're humans, purely from this human perspective. That presumably, would be true of all the beings in the world.

But again, we are the really problematic ones because we think, by being a human, we're something special-- so much better than anything else in the cosmos, that we alone are the ones that really matter, and everything else should, of course, be under our control because we're the important ones.

If however, we could actually begin to open up that perspective and start seeing the world from all of these other perspectives in our parable, think of the world as if you were a butterfly. If you could really start doing that, then what you're doing is beginning to get a sense of how all of these radically different perspectives-- what it would be like if you were a piece of mud, or a butterfly, or a bird, or a fish, or a human being-- how you see the world in radically

different ways. Or, more immediately, how you see it if you're this person versus that person.

And you begin to notice, if you really, self consciously start doing this is, how incredibly limited our vision is. And as you're doing that, seeing those dramatic limitations, seeing the world from so many different perspectives, then you're getting a sense-- not, again, that everything is purely one at any given moment. No, those things really are out there with different perspectives.

Rather, what you're getting is a sense, slowly but surely, of how all of these radically different perspectives are perspectives on this endless flux and transformation of the way. That is the transformation of the 10,000 things. That is the way. And what you're trying to do is open yourself up to that way, open yourself up to a world of radically different perspectives. More and more becoming, and note again, this incredible contrast with Confucius, more and more becoming like Heaven.

Because what is Heaven for Zhuangzi? Heaven is the entire natural world. If we were seeing the world from perspective of Heaven, which is simply the entire natural world around us, if we are seeing it from that perspective, we would truly be seeing, and one with, the way, seeing it from every possible perspective. Then we would be truly sensing the endless transformation of things. The human perspective always limits us dramatically, and chillingly.

Again though, what does this actually mean? Well, let's return to some of these stories. If you're becoming like Heaven, as opposed to simply a human being-- again, human beings are great. He just doesn't want it to limit us-- what is it like?

Well, there's another story where Zhuangzi tells us what it was like. It turns out there have actually been some people who have really achieved this. It turns out, actually, there are quite a few who really achieved this oneness with the way.

And they become true people, which is an intriguing way of putting it. They are still human beings, because they will be human beings until they pass away and their qi becomes other things. But they're really true human beings, fully alive human beings.

And what were those people like when they've achieved it? They are people like-- and again typical, Zhuangzi way of putting it, in these radically imagined

fanciful ways-- they can walk through water and not get wet. They can walk through fire and not get burned. These were true people.

Does he really mean this? Well, let's leave that aside for the moment. Because I think he wants us to think in radically imaginative ways and not limit the possible meanings. But certainly, he's also meaning them analogically.

What he is meaning is the following. If you are really doing this, you start living your life in a radically different way, a fearless way, in which all of the things of the world, instead of hurting you, and stopping you, and limiting you, and being causes of our anxiety and worries become, on the contrary, things that enliven you, and excite you, because they are parts of the transformation of things.

For example, again, moving immediately to the really mundane stuff before we jump up to the huge cosmic stuff-- oh, those little things really annoy me, right? It really annoys me when that door creaks. Or when my roommate comes in and closes the door in a certain way.

Think about how these little things just annoy us so much. We're walking down the campus and someone rides a bike in front of us . We have to stop. Just these little things that get us so angry.

Note how those add up over the course of the day. Note how those little worries and anxieties build up. Note, in other words, how things are controlling us. Note how these things are controlling our emotions and bringing out these ugly emotions of angers, these resentments, all of these things, the little things.

Imagine, on the contrary, if you're training yourself such that the little things don't bother you at all. It doesn't matter in the slightest. Imagine if you start doing this at an extensive level, beyond the little things. And the big things cease to disturb you.

And it not only is that they cease to disturb you in the sense that, and most importantly, you are closing yourself off from the world, but they cease to disturb you because you're opening yourself up to the world. And the world becomes incredibly exciting because you are becoming more and more engaged in it. And slowly but surely, you're becoming the sort of person who, again, analogically speaking, if you are walking through water, you don't get wet. And if you are walking through fire, you don't get burned. Don't try this.

But analogically speaking, what this means is none of these things are affected you in this negative sense. All of these things simply become part of the excitement of the world. The little things don't impinge on us, make us anxious, make us worried. They actually become things we embrace and can become incredibly excited by. Again, you're beginning to embrace the transformation of the 10,000 things. If you're doing all of this, in other words, you begin to experience the world in this radically excited, openly way.

Now let's return to our earlier question. What then, exactly, are you doing? And how does this compare and contrast with what Confucius was saying? Well, let's return, as always, to these stories, which are so incredibly powerful .

There's one where one of his disciples, the disciple of Confucius, I mean, asks him what he should do. Because he says, Confucius, I'm actually thinking of going to a state and trying to teach the king to be a really good king. To be very good human being. So I'll go there and teach the king.

And Zhuangzi's response is very intriguing. Zhuangzi's response, is, well, if you go right now, the way you're phrasing this, you're going to see this king. And you're basically going to say, oh, you're being a bad king. You should be good. You should be good, bad king.

And of course, you're not going to make any impact on him of any kind. He's just going to get really angry at you. And he'll probably become, by being more angry, a really even worse king, and he's probably going to take it out on you. And you're going to have this miserable life if you even survive the whole thing.

And so, instead, cultivate yourself. And don't throw off your yin and yang. Harmonize them and cultivate yourself. And then see what happens. Note the story. Note immediately, how it seems to contrast with our butcher. With our butcher, remember, the butcher finds the way through cutting the meat. And, analogically speaking, sensing these shifts in the meat, moving his knife through them, analogically speaking, the way we should be living our lives, embracing our lives by flowing and moving with the way, with our spirits sensing things and moving with them.

In other words, doing his daily work, continuing, by the way, to be a butcher, and also, by the way, being a really good butcher, and through that daily work, achieving the way. But also being in society. Being a very active member of society. Being very actively engaged. And that's how he finds the way.

Well, here we have this other story where Confucius seems to be saying, well, literally is saying, in so many words, to his disciple, whoa, whoa, whoa. Cultivate yourself. Cultivate yourself. You're not ready to head out there yet. Cultivate yourself.

And if you add up all the other stories, and there are a lot of them. They're all amazing. You'll notice they go in-- not just one of those two ways. They go in about any way you can imagine.

All these people he's talking about, some of them, like the butcher, do their work, and they're great. There are rulers in it who actually cultivate themselves and, by the way, are amazing, amazing rulers, sensing things well and being incredible leaders. There are also people who run off into the mountains and cultivate themselves, and harmonize with the yin and yang.

There are other people who have these wild things growing out of them. They start transforming into other animals. And they have the way as well. All of these, all of these, are ways of achieving, in this human form, the way.

And I think this, too, is a key point that he's trying to get at with the workings of these stories. The danger, I think he is saying, about Confucius, despite what he clearly does agree with, this sense of daily working through things at a daily, mundane level and, through that training, becoming someone extraordinary-- I think the concern Zhuangzi has with Confucius is precisely the terminology, his way of putting it, potentially limits us.

It potentially is saying, the only real way to do this is to do it in a way that you're engaged in society, in a certain way, that you can take a leadership position and spread goodness in the world. That's the danger for Zhuangzi. Note that's not to say it's a bad thing. That's precisely what many of the Zhuangzi figures do. But many of the Zhuangzi figures do radically, completely, different things. And that, I think, is the key that Zhuangzi is trying to get at.

If, in other words, you start doing this, if you start training yourself in all the senses that we've been discussing-- so you're training yourself through the daily stuff to open yourself up, sense with your spirit the movement of things, harmonize these forces in your body, the yin and yang, slowly gaining health, and vitality, and excitement in the world around you, as you're doing this, you also become more and more aware of the things that excite you and the things that inspire you.

And you become more willing to flow, in a very strong sense of that term, with those things that are pulling you in an exciting way, not because you're being pulled by external forces. Again, you're becoming like someone who could walk through fire not being burned, analogically speaking. You're not being driven by external forces. You're engaging with things. And through that engagement, you slowly become fully engaged with everything around you-- always trying to break the dangers of thinking in too limited a way, in too perspectival a way, endlessly playing the game of am I the human being dreaming I'm a butterfly, or the butterfly dreaming I'm a human being?

In other words, seeing the world from as many possible perspectives that you can, noting how the ways you're living your life are closing you off from things. An endless process of training yourself to spontaneously be engaged in whatever that would mean. And, as you're doing that, hence you get, in Zhuangzi's stories, an unbelievable variety of possibilities opening up to you.

What would this actually mean you should do for your life? Zhuangzi is being not only as intentionally ambiguous about that, I think he's trying to give you these unbelievable stories saying, this could take you in any conceivable direction, or, more importantly, directions you actually could not conceive. It could mean anything. And hence these incredible stories of the incredible things you start achieving once you do this-- going in radically different directions.

And note, for all of these, all of these different things that people start doing, all of these different directions that people start going in. Note the types of terminology he's using. Because it's so telling of what he's getting at. The terminology are always things along the following lines-- this unbelievable excitement, unbelievable vitality, unbelievable sort of joyous exuberance at the possibilities of life, unbelievable embracing of this endless flux and transformation, constantly breaking free from these things that limit us, that prevent us from seeing and be engaged in this incredible set of possibilities. Every single story is precisely aimed at doing that, inspiring you to engage this way, trying to teach you not to close off what you think you are doing, or close off what you're doing thinking it's liberating you, when, in fact, it probably isn't, and endlessly trying to break our perspectives.

So if in short, we think, OK, I am a good, liberated individual because I'm going to look inside, find myself, find my true self, and therefore become what I want to become, it sounds great. But I think Zhuangzi would immediately say, in practice, it limits you. Because what you're going to find is a piece of you.

Imagine if you think of yourself in this radically different way, this stuff, stuff that was the other stuff over the past many millennia, stuff that will be other stuff over the millennia to come. But in this current type of stuff, this incredibly wonderful thing, a human being, but a complex thing, with all these different emotions and dispositions. And then, what you're doing is realizing how that stuff that is you now is always, by the way we are living our lives, in danger of becoming limited, constrained, not exploring what you could be, and hence becoming sick, dying young, miserable-- well, sick, miserable, dying young.

Basically In other words, we're slowly destroying what we could become. And if, on the contrary, you think, no, this stuff that's me is kind of like the same, in fact, literally, in this cosmology, is the same as all the other stuff out there. And what I'm going to be doing is therefore actively engaging with all of this different stuff out there. And through that active engagement with all that different stuff out there, we'll actually slowly but surely start fully engaging in it, fully finding all of these things that excite me and inspire me, finding all of these ways, returning to our text, of truly becoming one with this endless flux and transformation, realizing, absolutely from day one, you have no idea what direction this will take you in because it could take you in directions, literally, you could not imagine.

And therefore, part of the endless training process is constantly trying to prevent these limitations we put on ourselves. Constantly trying to stop these blinders we put on ourselves. Constantly trying, again, returning to our text, to see the world from the point of view of Heaven, not from our limited human perspective.

And if you do that, the text is saying, then you truly live as a human being. This isn't an anti-human text. It's saying truly live as a human being. Truly engage as a human being. Truly become all that you can be as a human being, which is extraordinary. And yes, we will die. But the adventure doesn't end. It just means it continues in radically, radically, radically different ways.

In short, Zhuangzi has taken a key vision of Confucius, training through daily rituals to become a radically different human being, and is now trying to dramatically expand what that would mean in terms of an entire way of thinking cosmologically, and the entire engagement with the entire world around us. It is an incredible text. And that, returning to our opening points on Monday, is why he feels he needs to write it as he does.

If he simply laid this out, it would be interesting. But would it really change our lives? The reason he has to lay it out as he does is he's trying to inspire us to

change our lives. He's trying to give us these stories that will inspire us to think of the world in these incredible ways, to think of the world as if we were a bird, or a fish, or a butterfly, to engage us in these incredibly exciting ways, to give us these people from all sorts of walks of life doing radically different things, endlessly trying to inspire us to do something unbelievably beyond what we think we're capable. Endlessly, in other words, trying to say, live life unbelievably if you're a human being, because it's incredible to be a human being. Precisely because we limit ourselves, prevent ourselves from thinking that, that's why we don't live our lives fully.

Note, in short, that he is taking this Confucian vision and reading it in this radically different cosmological way to try to open up everything. And let me note, immediately, in terms of where we're going-- next week we will be reading Xunzi, a Confucian, and a Confucian who has read Zhuangzi incredibly carefully, thinks Zhuangzi is incredibly on to something. And we will see how Xunzi will try to redirect the Confucian project to try to engage all of this. In short, even the Confucians will realize Zhuangzi's on to something incredibly exciting and important.

And as always, let me just conclude with a recommendation. Over these next few days, as we mentioned, but now I'll use some of these new terms that we've introduced, begin to do this. Begin to feel this harmony of yin and yang, which may sound an odd way to put it. But concretely, note, when you get angry, a flourishing of yang, you calm yourself. That's yin.

Notice when these little things bother us-- anger, yang. Calm yourself, yin. Begin to go through the day harmonizing this yin and yang, seeing things that really excite you, and instead of being angry at them, begin to engage them more. Begin to feel that higher resonance that comes. Begin to feel that excitement that comes, what Zhuangzi would call feeling the way, becoming part of this transformation of the 10,000 things.

Begin to do this. Begin to gain a sense of what he's talking about. And in a deeper sense, begin to notice how the world begins to open up, and how the possibilities of the world begin to develop in front of you. Notice how you're limiting what you think you can do and begin to self consciously break that, thinking I'm not capable of doing this.

Well, what happens if you think of the world in which you are capable of doing this and self consciously start breaking down these limits, engaging more, and start feeling how dramatically different you begin sensing and engaging the world? That is what Zhuangzi is calling on you to do. And as you begin to get a

sense of this, you'll find these stories will just become a part of your life, because they are incredibly inspiring visions of what it would mean to live a life this way. Thank you so much, and see you all soon. Thank you.