The Pre-objective and the Primordial: Elements of a Phenomenological Reading of Zhuangzi

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I) Anti-rationalist, skeptic or mystic: is Zhuangzi unintelligible?

The eminent Western scholar of Chinese Philosophy A. C. Graham presents Zhuangzi as an “anti-rationalist”, be it a “great” one.¹ To Graham Zhuangzi’s entire intellectual effort consists in nothing other than conducting an “assault on reason” and “dismiss[ing] reason for the immediate experience of an undifferentiated world, transforming ‘All are one’ from a moral to a mystical affirmation.”² One of the arguments Graham puts forward to substantiate his diagnosis of Zhuangzi as an anti-rationalist is that this Pre-Qin Daoist philosopher always refutes rational thought in the form of analytic thinking. As Graham sees it, one of Zhuangzi’s persistent thoughts is that “in accepting what fits in with one’s ideas as ‘this’ and rejecting what does not, analytic thinking lights up only a lesser whole around the thinker and casts the rest into darkness”.³ Graham explains further his rather pejorative diagnosis of Zhuangzi in the following terms: the latter “shares that common and elusive feeling that the whole is more than the sum of its parts, that analysis always leaves something out, that neither side of the dichotomy is wholly true.”⁴ Thus he sums up Zhuangzi’s whole doctrine as a skepticism.⁵ This diagnosis of Zhuangzi has received a large echo among scholars plunging into the difficult texts collected under the generic title of The Thirty-Three Chapters of Nanhua True Sutra, alias Zhuangzi.⁶

² A. C. Graham, Disputers of the TAO, p. 176.
³ A. C. Graham, Disputers of the TAO, p. 178.
⁵ A. C. Graham, Disputers of the TAO, p. 186.
To the present writer, to present Zhuangzi as an anti-rationalist, a skeptic and even a mystic is nothing surprisingly new. The works of Zhuangzi has always been presented in these ways since their very early reception among the Western audience. To defend rational thinking is the vocation of a philosopher. However, is Graham’s understanding of rational thinking as a somewhat narrowly defined form of analytic thinking not too exclusive? When he criticizes Zhuangzi of holding the view that “the whole is more than the sum of its parts”, is he aware of the fact that Gestalt theories since the first decades of the Twentieth Century have shown precisely that in elementary perception, the whole is greater than the summation of its parts? And the acknowledgement of this kind of perceptual truth gives rise to the acknowledgement that the logic of perception as a logic of perceptual meaning is irreducible to the logic of physical properties as a logic of mathematical summation?

Illustration of the pre-objective order by examples of Gestalt psychology:

a. Lines of Müller-Lyer:

![Lines of Müller-Lyer](image_url)

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7 One of the first full English translation of the Zhuangzi texts was published in 1889 by Herbert A. Giles under the title: Chuang Tzu, Mystic, Moralist, and Social Reformer (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, Limited, Second revised edition, 1926; reprinted 1974 by AMS Press Inc., New York). On the other hand, James Legge, the other great early English translator of Zhuangzi’s works, has put the generic title of “The Sacred Books of China” before the specific title of “The Texts of Taoism” in his translation of the Daodejing and the Zhuangzi texts: The Sacred Books of China. The Texts of Taoism, Part I: The Tao Teh King, The Writings of Kwang Ze Books I-XVII, trans. James Legge (Oxford University Press, 1891). Thus Legge presented Laozi and Zhuangzi’s works foremost as works of religion, comparable to works of Christianity. Martin Buber was among the few Western thinkers in the early Twentieth Century to have presented Zhuangzi as a philosopher in his own right. This is expressed in the “Afterword” to his German translation of the Zhuangzi texts Reden und Gleichnisse des Tschuang-tse (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1910): “Zhuangzi may perhaps be compared to the entirety of Greek philosophy, which completed that which he only adumbrated—the Greek philosophy which expanded the teachings from the sphere of the real life to the sphere of the explanation of the world, of the knowable, and of the ideological construct, and thereby indeed created something very individual and very powerful of its own.” Martin Buber, Chinese Tales. Zhuangzi: Sayings and Parables and Chinese Ghost and Love Stories, Eng. trans. Alex Page (New Jersey and London: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1991), p. 103. For an in-depth discussion of Buber’s relation to Zhuangzi, cf. Jonathan R. Herman, I and Tao. Martin Buber’s Encounter with Chuang Tzu (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).
The above well-known illustrative examples of Gestalt psychology reveal a stunning truth that one identical geometric figure can give rise to two entirely different perceptual meanings. This discovery of the Gestalt theories leads to the discovery of the pre-objective order of things, an order which goes beyond or beneath the order of empirical visible objects: the perceptual field is structured by the two heterogeneous elements of the figure and the ground; it is only upon this phenomenal field, which is itself not of the order of the visible object, that any empirical object can come to appearance and be visible to the naked eye. The pre-objective order is an order of things which organizes itself into meaningful appearances prior to the active intervention or interpretation of the reflective perceiving subject. Thus this is an order of things incomprehensible to objective thought, the mode of thought prevalent in modern scientific and positivistic thinking which relies on logical deduction and judgment of the reflective knowing subject on empirical visible objects. The truth of Gestalt theories have been acknowledged by Edmund Husserl, the father of modern phenomenology, in his *Logical Investigations* of 1900-01\(^8\) and by Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of

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Merleau-Ponty in particular wanted to go deeper than the level of objective thought in order to understand in its fuller extent the operation of rational thinking and at the same time the works of great thinkers such as those of Husserl. While some commentators have once seriously criticized Husserl, Merleau-Ponty had defended Husserl against those who apply a so-called objective critique of Husserl’s doctrine by subjecting it “to analytic observation or out-of-context thinking”. This latter attitude is a positivistic one which “requires the meaning of [a man’s] work to be wholly positive and by rights susceptible to an inventory which sets forth what is and is not in those works”. To Merleau-Ponty, by adopting a purely positivistic and analytic attitude one will end up destroying the heritage of Husserl the thinker. On the example of Merleau-Ponty with regard to the works of Husserl, we would like to adopt a similar attitude towards the works of Zhuangzi in order to understand them philosophically. In the pages below, we will attempt a phenomenological approach to the reading of the Zhuangzi texts in order to go into the pre-objective order of things to which we think that these texts convey us. By proposing such a reading we hope to render Zhuangzi more comprehensible to a contemporary reader.

II) Epochè: from getting rid of prejudices to “fasting of the mind” (xin-zhai 心齋) and “sit and forget” (zuo-wang, 坐忘)

What does it mean by adopting a phenomenological approach with regard to a famous text or group of texts such as those of Zhuangzi? It means first of all that we are guided by the moto “going back to the things themselves” and follow strictly the principle of description prior to interpretation. In concrete terms we carry out the

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12 Husserl himself has explained this moto in different places. In the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl writes: “Meanings inspired only by remote, confused, inauthentic intuitions—if by any intuitions at all—are not enough: we must go back to the ‘things themselves’.” *Logical Investigations*, Vol. 2, p. 252; German original: “Bedeutungen, die nur von entfernten, verschwommenen, uneigentlichen Anschauungen—wenn überhaupt von irgendwelchen—belebt sind, können uns nicht genug tun. Wir wollen auf die ‘Sachen selbst’ zurückgehen.” Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, Bd. II/1, p. 6. In the *Ideas I*, Husserl says: “But to judge rationally or scientifically about things signifies to conform to the things themselves or to go from words and opinions back to the things themselves, to consult them in their self-givenness and to set aside all prejudices alien to them.” *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book*, General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology, Eng. trans. F. Kersten (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1982, as *Ideas I* hereafter), p. 35;
époque, i.e. suspension of judgment, with regard to any prejudice and any unexamined thesis about these texts, be they from traditional or modern authoritative exegetes, prior to our own examination. \(^\text{13}\) We let the texts speak for themselves and describe what these texts reveal to us in a language as close and faithful as possible to the state of affairs thus revealed. \(^\text{14}\) In this regard, we find that the opening paragraph leading to the discussion of the impossibility of attaining truth among those who profess affirmation and negation or right and wrong (shi-fei 是非) while remaining in the everyday mundane attitude in the Qi-Wu-Lun (齊物論), i.e., *Treatise on the Equality of Things*, expresses precisely the necessity of guarding against the attitude of upholding unexamined prejudices which is prevalent in our pre-reflective everyday life. Let us listen to Zhunagzi:

“If we follow our prejudices and take them as our guide [or teacher], who will not have his own guide [or teacher]? Why should only those who are intelligent enough to know the laws of change by heart maintain their own guiding principle? The foolish do the same thing. If one makes an affirmation or a negation prior to the judgment by the cognitive mind, it is just as [absurd as] saying that one sets out for the Viet Country today but arrived there yesterday. To do so is to make something out of nothing. Making something out of nothing is a state of affairs that even the Holy Sage Yu is unable to understand. How could I alone make sense of it?”\(^\text{15}\)

Here Zhuangzi, at the outset of considering whether ordinary opinions can attain truth, make a preliminary distinction between two kinds of attitude held respectively by

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the foolish and the wise man. While the wise man lets himself guided by the reflective judgment conducted by the exercise of his faculty of cognition in accordance with the laws of change, the foolish lets himself guided by prejudices. The unreflective attitude of the latter leads to absurdities. Thus Zhuangzi announces a first principle for true cognition: do not let yourself be guided by prejudices; otherwise you will result in absurdities which even the sage cannot resolve. This amounts to calling for the practice of épochè, advocated by Husserl and his phenomenological followers, as the way leading to the transformation of the unreflective attitude of natural life into a reflective attitude as the methodological guidance to any true cognition.

But how can we guard against our prejudices as we are always preoccupied by all kinds of mundane practical interests in our everyday existence? To abstain from pursuing activities motivated by mundane life interest is the first step: this is what Zhuangzi reports from someone who claims to have learned the dao (wen-dao 聞道) in Da-Zhong-Shi (大宗師), namely “The Great Ancestral Teacher”:

“In any event, it should have been easy to teach the Way of a sage to someone with the ability of a sage. Still, I had to instruct him and watch over his practice. After three days, he could get rid of all mundane preoccupations. Once he was able to get rid of mundane preoccupations, I continued to watch over his practice. After seven days, he was able to remain unaffected by the concern of external things. Once he was able to remain unaffected by the concern of external things, I continued to watch over his practice. After nine days, he was able to abstain from any concern about life [and death]. Once he was able to abstain from any concern about life [and death], he was able to achieve enlightenment comparable to the clarity of the morning. Achieving enlightenment comparable to the clarity of the morning, he could then envision the Unique. Envisioning the Unique, he could transcend [the historical time of] past and present. Transcending [the historical time of] past and present, he could gain access to the state of [spiritual] immortality.”

16 「 以聖人之道告聖人之才，亦易矣。吾猶告而守之，三日而後能外天下；已外天下矣，吾又守之，七日而後能外物；已外物矣，吾又守之，九日而後能外生；已外生矣，而後能朝徹；朝徹，而後能見獨；見獨，而後能無古今；無古今，而後能入於不死不生。 」《莊子今注今譯》, 陳鼓應注譯, 頁 184。 Wandering on the Way. Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu, Trans. Mair, p. 57; English translation modified; translation Graham, Chuang-Tzū. The Inner Chapters, p. 87; translation Watson, The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu, pp. 82-83; translation Ziporyn, Zhuangzi, The Essential Writings, p. 44.
In this seven stage step-by-step progressive process of spiritual exercise leading to the learned acquisition of dao, all begins by abstaining from the preoccupation of mundane interests, which leads to the giving-up of concern over external things and hence to the liberation from reification of the mind. This in turn leads to the abstention from concern about mundane life and death which is the precondition for enlightenment of the mind and the seeing of the Unique, another name for the dao. The attitude of abstention from all sorts of mundane interests, material concerns as well as concerns of the mundane life span is the attitude of épochè with regard to all mundane life interests. It is the gateway to enlightenment and the seeing of the dao. The talk about “fasting of the mind” (xin-zhai 心齋) in Ren-Jien-Shi (人間世, “The Human World”) \(^{17}\) and “sit and forget” (zuo-wang, 坐忘) in Da-Zhong-Shi (大宗師, “The Great Ancestral Teacher”) \(^{18}\) should both be understood along this line: they are practices of spiritual asceticism which, beginning by the épochè in regard to all mundane life interests, bring about self-transformation leading ultimately to enlightenment and experience of partaking of the dao.

Xin-zhai ("fasting of the mind") and zuo-wang ("sit and forget") are two modes of spiritual exercise or self-cultivation which manifest a quasi-religious attitude of asceticism. One may query: how can these practices be assimilated to the phenomenological épochè of Husserl who invented this methodological devise aiming at the acquisition of knowledge with scientific rigueur? In other words, how can the épochè which is at the origin epistemologically oriented be extended to an usage which is practically and quasi-religiously oriented? While it is true that Husserl had at the beginning understood the épochè purely from the epistemological standpoint, his invention of this method was first inspired by the aesthetic attitude as one which abstains from any practical and pragmatic interest with respect to the object of aesthetic contemplation. \(^{19}\) Husserl later saw that the épochè is at the basis of the religious attitude of Buddhism which, through the practice of prayers and meditations, aims at the

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\(^{17}\)《莊子今注今譯》，陳鼓應注譯，頁 117; *Wandering on the Way. Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu*, Trans. Mair, p. 32.

\(^{18}\)《莊子今注今譯》，陳鼓應注譯，頁 205; *Wandering on the Way. Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu*, Trans. Mair, p. 64.

overcoming of all mundane life interests. In his last unfinished but important work *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Husserl explicitly stated that “the total phenomenological attitude and the époche belonging to it are destined in essence to effect, at first, a complete personal transformation, comparable in the beginning to a religious conversion.” So there is a profound proximity between the usage of époche in the epistemological domain, the aesthetic domain as well as the religious domain in terms of their common attitude in relation to mundane life interests: abstention or indifference. If we take into account the fact that this attitude is also at the basis of the ascetic attitude of Stoicism as a philosophic school prevalent in Western Antiquity, we can see that the attitude underlying the époche is both a cross-cultural phenomenon (as shown in Chinese Pre-Qin Daoism, Indian Buddhism, Greek-Roman Stoicism, and contemporary European phenomenology) and a multi-domain technique of the self (*technique de soi*), to use the terminology of the last Foucault, observable in philosophical reflection, aesthetic contemplation and religious practice, because all these activities necessitate a pre-requisite process of self-transformation undergone by the subject of philosophical meditation, aesthetic appreciation and religious *askesis*.

Hence to Zhuangzi, the practice of the époche through spiritual exercise is not only a guiding principle for the formation of true and sound cognitive judgments, it is also the condition *sine qua non* for achieving enlightenment of the mind as a pre-requisite for seeing the dao and gaining access to the state of spiritual immortality. In this regard Zhuangzi shows a great sense of rigueur in terms of methodological considerations with respect to ascertaining sound and true cognitive judgments as well as securing systematic execution of practical steps which lead to spiritual self-transformation as the precondition to the learned acquisition of the dao.

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22 The step-by-step sense of progression as technique of self-cultivation leading to the enlightenment by the *dao* is also shown in the following descriptive passage in *Da-Zhong-Shi* (大宗師, “The Great Ancestral Teacher”): 「南伯子葵曰: 『子獨惡乎聞之?』曰: 『聞諸副墨之子,副墨之子聞諸洛誦之孫,洛誦之孫聞之瞻明,瞻明聞之聶許,聶許聞之需役,需役聞之於謳,於謳聞之玄冥,玄冥聞之參寥,參寥聞之疑始。』」 (*The Zhuangzi of Today and Tomorrow*, translated by Chang Kuo-chi, 1945-75, p. 184.) It goes the following way: from writing or script (副墨) back to reading aloud (洛誦), then back to understanding (瞻明), then back to apprehension by the mind (聶許), then back to ascetic practice (需役), then back to
III) Description : Return to the pre-objective and the primordial

Though Zhuangzi is good at argumentation, as seen from his debate with Hui-Shi, and analysis, he proceeds always by description in the first place. In the following, I will take three passages from the *Zhuangzi* texts as example to show what it means by the pre-objective and the primordial order of things. They are respectively from the passage about the Cook Ding in “Essentials for Nurturing Life” (*Yan-Sheng-Zhu*, 養生主), about the Wheelwright Bian (meaning Flat) in “The Way of the Heaven” (*Tian-Dao*, 天道), and about the swimmer in “Understanding Life” (*Da-Sheng*, 達生).

a. Cook Ding’s technique of the self-cultivation towards perfection: body-schema as knowledge of the pre-objective order, coincidence of the capacity to know and the capacity to act, integration of theory and practice

“Cook Ding was cutting up an ox for Lord Wenhui. Wherever His hand touched, His shoulder leaned, His foot stepped, His knee nudged, the flesh would fall away with a swishing sound. Each slice of the cleaver was right in tune, zip zap! He danced in rhythm to ‘The Mulberry Grove’; moved in concert with the strains of ‘The Managing Chief’. ‘Ah, wonderful!’ said Lord Wenhui, ‘that skill can attain such heights!’ The cook put down his cleaver and responded, ‘What your servant loves is the Way, which goes beyond mere skill. When I first began to cut oxen, what I saw was nothing but whole oxen. After three years, I no longer saw whole oxen. Today, I meet the ox with my spirit rather than looking at it with my eyes. My sense organs stop functioning and my spirit moves as it pleases. In accord with the natural grain, I slice at the great crevices, lead the blade through the great cavities. Following its inherent structure, I never encounter the slightest obstacle even where the veins and arteries come together or where the ligaments and tendons join, much less from obvious big bones. A good cook changes his cleaver once a year because he chops. An ordinary cook changes his cleaver once a month because he hacks. Now I’ve been using my cleaver for nineteen years and have cut up thousands of oxen with it, but the blade is still as fresh as though it had just come from the grindstone. Between the joints there are spaces, but the edge of the blade has no thickness. Since I am inserting something without any thickness into an empty space, there will certainly be lots of room for the blade to play around in. That’s why the blade is still as fresh as though it had just come from the grindstone. Nonetheless, whenever I come to a complicated spot and see that it

chanting admiration before the universe (於謳), then back to meditation (玄冥), then back to contemplation of Unique (參寥), then back to the commencing doubt (疑始). It is interesting to note that the term “the commencing doubt” reminds us of the *thaumazein*, i.e. wonder and puzzlement as the origin of the philosophical attitude in Plato and Aristotle.
will be difficult to handle, I cautiously restrain myself, focus my vision, and slow my motion. With an imperceptible movement of the cleaver, plop! and the flesh is already separated, like a clump of earth collapsing to the ground. I stand there holding the cleaver in my hand, look all around me with complacent satisfaction, then I wipe off the cleaver and store it away?’ ‘Wonderful!’ said Lord Wenhui. ‘From hearing the words of the cook, I have learned how to nourish life.’” 23

In this celebrated passage in “Essentials for Nurturing Life” (Yan-Sheng-Zhu, 養生生主), there is a widespread understanding that it shows Zhuangzi’s indifference and even negative attitude towards both cognitive activities and moral activities, for what is essential for Zhuangzi is nurturing life. In this regard, both cognitive activities and moral activities are both harmful to achieving the ultimate end of nurturing life. Yet if we return to this famous text in Zhuangzi, we find that it contains meticulous descriptions about the way and steps leading to the technique of self-cultivation in the profession of a cook. They contain rich elements of an ethic of self-cultivation, in terms of the perfect coordination of the body and the mind (we will return to this in the next paragraph). Ethic is the term to capture the relation between the moral subject to herself. So if one can say that Zhuangzi is an a-moralist in the sense that he does not care about conventional moral norms, it is difficult to maintain that Zhuangzi has no ethical concern. On the contrary, we can even say that Zhuangzi’s ultimate concern is an ethic of self-cultivation. But this very formulation “ethic of self-cultivation in Zhuangzi” needs clarification, as there will be question about the sense of self in Zhuangzi. For if Zhuangzi is a thinker of non-identity, how can we talk about the self understood as a form of identity of the subject in Zhuangzi? This needs another work to clarify which we cannot undertake here.

Returning to the technique of self-cultivation which arrives at a degree of perfection as professed by Cook Ding. Cook Ding’s action of cutting ox is not guided by perception by the naked-eyes, but by some sort of vision of the whole body animated by the spirit.

23 「庖丁為文惠君解牛，手之所觸，肩之所倚，足之所履，膝之所踦，砉然嚙然，奏刀騞然，莫不中音。合於《桑林》之舞，乃中《經首》之會。文惠君曰：『譆！善哉！技蓋至此乎？』庖丁釋刀對曰：『臣之所好者道也，進乎技矣。始臣之解牛之時，所見无非牛者。三年之後，未嘗見全牛也。方今之時，臣以神遇，而不以目視，官知止而神欲行。依乎天理，批大郤，導大窾，因其固然。技經肯綮之未嘗，而況大軱乎！良庖歲更刀，割也；族庖月更刀，折也。今臣之刀十九年矣，所解數千牛矣，而刀刃若新發於硎。彼節者有間，而刀刃者無厚，以無厚入有間，恢恢乎其於遊刃必有餘地矣，是以十九年而刀刃若新發於硎。雖然，每至於族，吾見其難為，怵然為戒，視為止，行為遲。動刀甚微，謋然已解，如土委地。提刀而立，為之四顧，為之躇躇滿志，善刀而藏之。』文惠君曰：『善哉！吾聞庖丁之言，得養生焉。』《莊子今注今譯》, 陳鼓應注譯, 頁 95-96; Wandering on the Way. Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu, Trans. Mair, pp. 26-27; translation slightly modified.
When the vision is guided by the spirit in coordination with the whole body, what is in front of him is no more an ordinary empirical object, but the texture and inner structure of this object. His action is thus no more exercised at the surface of the empirical object but goes deep-down into the inner space of this object. Thus Cook Ding is able to act, or more precisely to articulate his action, within this inner space. This is no more an action guided by some sort of representational thinking, i.e. a mode of thinking characterized by the attentive fixation of the eyes on the object seen or of the mind on the object of thought through some sort of idea or image. Cook Ding’s cutting act can be better understood by the Merleau-Pontian term of “body-schema” (schéma corporelle) (we will return to this again a bit later).

The description of the inner space of the object as the deep-structure of the thing in terms of void and fissure reminds us of the term “écart” employed by the late Merleau-Ponty in his description of the flesh (la chair). This is a term which is used to describe the ontological character of a level of being which is pre-objective. A thing is not only a compact composition of positivities and fullness, but of void and fissure, a certain form of absence which is yet not a pure absence. This is part and parcel of the texture and inner structure of a thing. Yet this level of being is no more that of an object understood by the sense of empirical sciences, but at a level underneath it, hence the term pre-objective. Only in this way we can understand the world as world structured by texture and depth, and not merely composed of flat-being. It is tempting to use the Merleau-Pontian term “flesh” to describe the flesh of the ox revealed under the spiritual vision of Cook Ding. In any case the concept of matter employed by the positive sciences is unable to do justice in the description of the pre-objective order of things of the world. Merleau-Ponty calls being at this pre-objective level brute being, that is, being not yet domesticated by objective thinking, a mode of thinking shared by objective sciences and intellectualist philosophy during their operation. To Merleau-Ponty this level of pre-objective brute being is not materiality, but sensibility: “the sensible (le sensible) is the universal form of brute being.”

It is manifest that the representational mode of thinking at the basis of the operation of objective thought in the Merleau-Pontian sense, which remains an act of attentive

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fixation on the empirical object, is far from able to understand the spiritual vision of Cook Ding when his technique of cutting ox arrives at perfection. We think that Merleau-Ponty’s concept of body-schema captures better this kind of technique as shown by Cook Ding, which is a perfect coordination between the mind and the different senses of the body guided by a certain non-representational spiritual vision. Let us first look at the way Merleau-Ponty explains the term body-schema:

“If the need was felt to introduce this new word [body-schema], it was in order to express that the spatial and temporal unity, the inter-sensorial unity, or the sensorimotor unity of the body is, so to speak, an in principle unity, to express that this unity is not limited to contents actually and fortuitously associated in the course of our experience, that it somehow precedes them and in fact makes their association possible… the body schema will no longer be the mere result of association established in the course of experience, but rather the global awareness of my posture in the inter-sensory world, a ‘form’ in Gestalt psychology’s sense of the word.”

There is a global form which gives unity to the different senses distributed over the body-subject, such that these different senses can coordinate with one another to achieve the execution of an action. But how is this global form generated? The body-subject is a subject-in-the-world who is polarized by her tasks to be accomplished through her non-representational body movement.

“Psychologists often say that the body schema is dynamic. Reduced to a precise sense, this term means that my body appears to me as a posture toward a certain task, actual or possible.”

With the concept of body-schema, not only we can understand the possibility of basic bodily gestures which the practical necessity of daily life requires us to accomplish at the pre-reflective level, we can also understand better the execution of complicated and sophisticated bodily techniques which are not at a state of absence of knowledge, but knowledge integrated with skills and bodily gestures, such as that of martial arts, dance, gymnastic, playing of musical instruments, etc. The execution of bodily gestures required by these kinds of arts are motivated by the end to accomplish certain artistic tasks. They are either below or above the level of objective thought. They have to mobilize the body-schema as knowledge of the pre-objective order, coincidence of the capacity to know and the capacity to act, as well as integration of theory and practice. The technique of cutting ox at perfection demonstrated by Cook Ding is an eminent example of the realization of

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perfect integration of the knowing and acting capacity of the body and mind through the body-schema.

b. Further illustration by the example of the Wheelwright Bian in “The Way of the Heav’n” (<天道>):

“Duke Huan was reading in the upper part of his hall and Wheelwright Flat was hewing a wheel in the lower part. Setting aside his hammer and chisel, the wheelwright went to the upper part of the hall and inquired of Duke Huan, saying, "I venture to ask what words Your Highness is reading?" "The words of the sages," said the duke. "Are the sages still alive?" "They're already dead," said the duke. "Then what my lord is reading are merely the dregs of the ancients." "How can you, a wheelwright, comment upon what I am reading?" asked Duke Huan. "If you can explain yourself, all right. If you cannot explain yourself, you shall die." "I look at it from my own occupation," said Wheelwright Flat. "If the spokes are loose, they'll fit sweet as a whistle but the wheel won't be solid. If they're too tight, you won't be able to insert them no matter how hard you try. To make them neither too loose nor too tight is something you sense in your hand and feel in your heart. There's a knack to it that can't be put in words. I haven't been able to teach it to my son, and my son hasn't been able to learn it from me. That's why I'm still hewing wheels after seventy years. When they died, the ancients took with them what they couldn't transmit. So what you are reading are the dregs of the ancients?" 28

In this passage, what the Wheelwright Bian faces is also the pre-objective order of the things. To solve his problems, he has to mobilize a certain kind of technical knowledge which is best understood as arising out of his body-schema, and not from a cognitivist or intellectualist mode of thinking, as shown by Duke Huan. Thus both the examples of

28 「桓公讀書於堂上, 輪扁斲輪於堂下, 釋椎鑿而上, 問桓公曰：『敢問公之所讀者何言邪？』公曰：『聖人之言也。』曰：『聖人在乎？』公曰：『已死矣。』曰：『然則君之所讀者，古人之糟魄已夫！』桓公曰：『寡人讀書，輪人安得議乎！有說則可，無說則死。』輪扁曰：『臣也，以臣之事觀之。斲輪，徐則甘而不固，疾則苦而不入。不徐不疾，得之於手而應於心，口不能言，有數存焉於其間。臣不能以喻臣之子，臣之子亦不能受之於臣，是以行年七十而老斲輪。古之人與其不可傳也死矣，然則君之所讀者，古人之糟魄已夫。』」《莊子今注今譯》，陳鼓應注譯，頁 357-358; Wandering on the Way. Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu, Trans. Mair, pp. 128-129.
Cook Ding and Wheelwright Bian show the anti-cognitivist or anti-intellectualist approach of Zhuangzi.

IV. Back to the Primordial Nature: Critique of Over-civilization and in praise of brut being and savage spirit

- Illustration by the example of the observation of Confucius on the swimmer in “Understanding Life” (Da-Sheng, 達生)

“Confucius was observing the cataract at Spinebridge where the water fell from a height of thirty fathoms and the mist swirled for forty tricents. No tortoise, alligator, fish, or turtle could swim there. Spotting an older man swimming in the water, Confucius thought that he must have suffered some misfortune and wished to die. So he had his disciples line up along the current to rescue the man. But after the man had gone several hundred yards he came out by himself. With disheveled hair, he was walking along singing and enjoying himself beneath the embankment. Confucius followed after the man and inquired of him, saying, "I thought you were a ghost, but when I looked more closely I saw that you are a man. May I ask if you have a special way for treading the water?" "No, I have no special way. I began with what was innate, grew up with my nature, and completed my destiny. I enter the very center of the whirlpools and emerge as a companion of the torrent. I follow along with the way of the water and do not impose myself on it. That's how I do my treading." "What do you mean by 'began with what was innate, grew up with your nature, and completed your destiny'?" asked Confucius. "I was born among these hills and feel secure among them—that's what's innate. I grew up in the water and feel secure in it—that's my nature. I do not know why I am like this, yet that's how I am—that's my destiny."”

This passage shows a state of being and a state of mind exemplified by the swimmer which I would borrow the terms of “brut being” and “savage spirit” from the late Merleau-Ponty to describe them in order that they can be more intelligible than the term “spontaneity” used by Graham and some others. This is a state of being and a state of mind which remain in close contact of primordial Nature, i.e. nature which is not yet domesticated by civilization. The swimmer is unable to explain in civilized language, the language of Confucius, to explain how he can arrive at this state of affairs. The only thing he can do is to demonstrate it in accordance with the capacity he acquired by his close

29 『孔子觀於呂梁，縣水三十仞，流沫四十里，鼉鼉魚鼈之所不能游也。見一丈夫游之，以為有苦而欲死也，使弟子並流而拯之。數百步而出，被髮行歌而游於塘下。孔子從而問焉，曰：『吾以子為鬼，察子則人也。請問蹈水有道乎？』曰：『亡，吾無道。吾始乎故，長乎性，成乎命。與齊俱入，與汩偕出，從水之道而不為私焉。此吾所以蹈之也。』孔子曰：『何謂始乎故，長乎性，成乎命？』曰：『吾生於陵而安於陵，故也；長於水而安於水，性也；不知吾所以然而然，命也。』《莊子今注今譯》，陳鼓應注譯，頁 486-487; Wandering on the Way. Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu, Trans. Mair, p. 182.
contact with primordial Nature since his childhood. While Confucius is the representative of civilization at its maturity, following in each life-situation the rituals and social norms prevalent under the reign of Zhou, he has lost any contact with primordial Nature. His potentiality of being is thus immensely limited according to Zhuangzi. Here there is an implicit critique of over-civilization by Zhuangzi. There is an explicit critique of over-civilization in the famous story of *Wonton* 蠡沌 killed by the goodwill of other self-esteemed civilized emperors in “Responses for Emperors and Kings” (應帝王).  

To qualify Zhuangzi’s position as critique of over-civilization means that he is not against any form of civilization. The examples of Cook Ding and Wheelwright Bian show that Zhuangzi emphasizes a certain kind of technique of self-cultivation, and this is the affirmation and high-lighting of some form of civilization.

We are even tempted to say that if Zhuangzi can be understood as some kind of social reformer, the social reforms he would propose would necessitate a certain form of cultural renewal. This form of cultural renewal is not the further development of the very anthropocentric conception and practices of human civilization, but regaining inspiration from primordial Nature, from the “brut being” and the “savage spirit” embedded within it. In this regard we can also find some resonances from Merleau-Ponty when he talked about the contribution of Husserl to cultural renewal: “Willy-nilly, against his plans and according to his essential audacity, Husserl awakens a wild world and a savage mind” yet domesticated by the classical rationalism of objective think. I think the greatness of Zhuangzi is to have revealed this wild world and savage spirit in his own way more than two thousand years ago in a more non-intellectualist way.

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