Style, Substance, and Philosophical Methodology: A Cross-Cultural Case Study

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ABSTRACT: One challenge involved in integrating so-called 'non-Western' philosophies into 'Western' philosophical discourse concerns the fact that non-Western philosophical texts frequently differ significantly in style and approach from Western ones, especially those in contemporary analytic philosophy. But how might one bring texts that are written, for example, in a literary, non-expository style, and which do not clearly advance philosophical positions or arguments, into constructive dialogue with those that do? Also, why might one seek to do this in the first place? This paper addresses these questions by means of a case study involving the Daoist classic, the Zhuangzi.

RÉSUMÉ : L'un des défis posés par l'inclusion des soi-disant philosophies «non-occidentales» dans le discours de la philosophie «occidentale» a trait au fait que plusieurs textes philosophiques non-occidentaux diffèrent de façon significative, en termes de style et d'approche, des textes occidentaux, principalement ceux issus de la philosophie analytique contemporaine. Comment établir un dialogue constructif entre des textes écrits de façon littéraire, qui n'ont pas l'allure d'un exposé et qui n'avancent pas clairement des positions ou des arguments philosophiques et des textes qui, au contraire, prennent la forme d'un exposé avançant des positions ou des arguments? Pourquoi, de prime abord, voudrait-on ouvrir un tel dialogue? Cet article pose ces questions par le biais de l'étude du cas du classique taoïste, le Zhuāngzĭ.

Keywords: Chinese philosophy, comparative philosophy, cross-cultural philosophy, fictionalism, literary cognitivism, philosophical methodology, Zhuangzi

One challenge involved in integrating so-called 'non-Western' philosophies into 'Western' philosophical discourse concerns the fact that non-Western philosophical texts frequently differ significantly in style and approach from Western ones, especially those in contemporary analytic philosophy.[1] This increases reluctance to engage non-Western philosophies, as perceiving such differences unfortunately tends to—as Amy Olberding has put it—arouse suspicion that non-Western texts exemplify something other than philosophy proper.[2] Moreover, it poses a problem even for those who are already eager to bring non-Western and Western philosophies into conversation with each other, as it is not obvious how this should be done given such stylistic and methodological differences, and questions that arise in virtue of them.[3] For example, many texts that belong to classical, non-Western philosophical traditions are written in a literary, non-expository style, and do not clearly advance philosophical positions or arguments recognizable to us. How might one bring such texts into constructive dialogue with different-looking trends and traditions in Western philosophy? Fundamentally, why might one want to do this?[4]

This paper addresses these broadly methodological and metaphilosophical questions by means of a case study involving the *Zhuangzi,* widely considered

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[1]   I say 'so-called,' as the dichotomy between 'non-Western' and 'Western' is fraught. A better alternative might distinguish Euro-American traditions from non-Euro-American traditions, though this may turn out to be in some ways problematic, too.

[2]   Olberding, "It's Not Them, It's You: A Case Study in the Exclusion of Non-Western Philosophy," 15.

[3]   For example, Jonardon Ganeri says this concerning what he regards as an "insidious dilemma": "There is one extremely frustrating charge that should worry all of us who have dedicated considerable parts of our intellectual careers to this risky business of boundary-breaking cross-cultural thinking … The charge, when formulated abstractly, is this: either we represent an Asian (or African or Islamic or Hawaiian etc.) philosophy in its own original terms, which are utterly alien to Western philosophy, in which case it is not philosophy proper, or we rephrase it in Western terms, in which case it risks ending up as just a repetition of what we already have in the West. Thus we either have no need of comparison with foreign ideas because they are just the same or too similar to our own native ideas, or we cannot allow it to count as hard-core philosophy because it is too different from how philosophy is done in the Western tradition" (Ganeri, "Reflections on Re:emergent Philosophy," 165).

[4]   Please note that this challenge plausibly applies not just to those who would seek to bring certain (literary, non-expository) non-Western texts into dialogue with contemporary (non-literary, expository) Western texts, but to those who would seek to bring literary, non-expository texts into dialogue with non-literary, expository texts more generally. Thank you to an anonymous referee for encouraging me to clarify this. I say more about this below.

to have been originally composed in China during the fourth century BCE by a philosopher of the same name and—alongside the *Daodejing*, or *Laozi*—a foundational Daoist philosophical text.[5] The *Zhuangzi* provides an appropriate object of study for this purpose because of its interweaving of stylistic form with philosophical content and its powerful suggestion that what drives us to do philosophy is rooted in background interpretive assumptions that stand either to be merely reinforced or to be productively challenged and expanded depending on the scope and complexity of our philosophical perspective. As Paul Kjellberg and Philip J. Ivanhoe have summed up the central stance of the work:

> One of the greatest challenges facing any interpreter of the *Zhuangzi* is that its protean nature and literary subtlety are inseparable from its philosophical message: one cannot understand its content without careful attention to its multifarious and moving form. The very difficulty of the text is one of the ways the *Zhuangzi* uses literary style to make its philosophical point. On the level of individual characters, technical terms like … *ming* 'clarity' and … *dao* 'way' are obviously of central importance though they are never precisely defined. On the level of whole stories, even when the sequence of events is more or less straightforward, the overarching moral often remains unclear. Is the hermit Xu You, for instance, a hero or a fool? Are we supposed to reject the cicada or reconcile ourselves to being one? The *Zhuangzi* presents us with interpretive challenges at every turn. It does not seem possible to read the text without relying on a host of assumptions; and yet there is no way to verify those assumptions except on the basis of some reading, all of which leaves readers wondering whether or not they know what the text is really about. But these are exactly the issues that Zhuangzi is trying to raise: the impact that interpretive assumptions make on our everyday experience and the consequent difficulty of figuring out what human life is "really about." Thus the text presents us stylistically with an example of the problem it examines philosophically.[6]

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5   For a succinct and lively introduction to what the *Zhuangzi* is and what it does, see Hansen, "Zhuangzi." For the purposes of this paper, I will be using 'the *Zhuangzi'* and 'Zhuangzi' more or less interchangeably. For even if the *Zhuangzi* was not written by a single person picked out by the name 'Zhuangzi,' it might still be interpreted as somehow suggesting a view that could have been expressed by such a person. Also, for simplicity, and in keeping with common practice, the interpretation that I defend here is principally constructed so as to apply to the so-called 'inner chapters' of the text (those most widely considered to be attributable to a historical person called 'Zhuangzi'). However, I am open to reconsidering this approach, especially since I do not think that there is any reason to worry that it cannot be extended beyond the inner chapters. That said, I am also open to the possibility that the interpretation I defend here might be further restricted even within the inner chapters (say, to the *Qiwulun*, Chapter 2, alone).

6   Kjellberg and Ivanhoe, "Introduction," xiii-xiv.

In what follows, I further examine how the form of the *Zhuangzi* is related to its content, and what this relationship has specifically to teach us about the work's abiding message. One might think that this project need not incite us to delineate the interface between the *Zhuangzi* and contemporary analytic philosophy. But, in fact, it well can: I argue that many of the chief lessons of the *Zhuangzi* are intimated in fictionalist accounts of human discourse that are gaining prominence among analytic philosophers today, which may be aptly used to clarify the motivations and content of this classical Chinese text. It is, however, ultimately the *Zhuangzi* that motivates and justifies this comparative approach through its pluralistic, ecumenical, and synthetic view of productive discourse—a view that is reflected in the more promising commitments of fictionalism. Additionally, I suggest, the *Zhuangzi* and contemporary fictionalism mutually illuminate the question of how style and form should be taken into consideration when engaging texts philosophically.

I proceed (in Section 1) by saying a bit more about the central motivations underlying this project of comparison and synthesis, before exploring (in Section 2) the possibility that interpreting Zhuangzi as a fictionalist may prove useful for supplying a more detailed account of how the form of the *Zhuangzi* is related to its content. Then (in Section 3), I take up the question of what this study suggests about bringing different philosophical methodologies together— even 'across borders.'[7] More precisely, I argue that this case study is instructive in at least two significant ways: it illustrates how a text, composed in a literary, non-expository style and in a much different cultural context, can be interpreted in a way that both a) contributes to and is informed by ongoing discussions in contemporary analytic philosophy, and b) provides a template for bringing similarly literary, non-expository philosophical texts—non-Western and otherwise—into dialogue with each other.

1. Engaging Non-Western Philosophy and the *Zhuangzi* as Case Study: Preliminary Remarks[8]

I began by stating a challenge facing those who would wish to integrate Western and non-Western philosophical texts and traditions. The problematic that I took them to face, and which motivates the case study presented below, rests on three major assumptions:

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[7]   By 'across borders' in this context I mean something along the lines of: across stylistic, methodological, and cultural borders, although I do not wish to presuppose that the account I provide below cannot be further extended so as to address how we might philosophize across borders in other ways. Many thanks again to an anonymous referee for suggesting that I be clearer here, also.

[8]   I am deeply indebted to Zachary Gartenberg for having provided a wealth of perceptive suggestions regarding how to best frame the issues discussed below and flesh out this section.

1. Non-Western philosophy should be integrated, or brought into constructive dialogue, with Western philosophy—in particular, contemporary analytic philosophy.
2. There is a bias held by some philosophers towards thinking that (contemporary analytic) Western philosophy constitutes 'philosophy proper,' and that because much non-Western philosophy is too different in style and approach from the former, it is simply not philosophy strictly speaking (and thus they haven't any reason, *qua* philosophers, to engage it).
3. Even for those philosophers who endorse (1), there are practical and methodological issues that stand in the way of realizing the goal stated in (1).

One might wonder, however, whether these views, especially (1) and (2), are correct. A number of questions arise in connection with them. First, concerning (1): Why ought we assume that non-Western philosophy should be integrated with Western philosophy? Does this not inadvertently imply an asymmetry between the two philosophical 'traditions,' such that the former must be brought within the scope of the latter?[9] Moreover, why should we be concerned to effect integration or dialogue between ancient non-Western and contemporary analytic philosophy? Does this not even more strongly reflect a bias toward assimilating historically and culturally distant non-Western philosophies to our concerns and methods? Furthermore, even if the notion of 'constructive dialogue' is less suggestive of such asymmetry, why should we try to construct such dialogue? Why not simply respect the intrinsic differences between traditions and seek to understand them on their own terms, perhaps occasionally elucidating each in terms of similarities and differences between them?

Regarding (2), we might worry that, in positing a bias on the part of some philosophers towards thinking that much non-Western philosophy does not constitute 'philosophy proper,' we are unjustifiably imputing too strong a position to them. Perhaps they do not see (contemporary analytic) Western philosophy as defining philosophy *per se*, but rather are simply not interested in non-Western philosophy because they are exclusively interested in the kind of philosophy that they pursue. This latter position is compatible with viewing non-Western philosophy as genuine philosophy: people's exclusive interest in one way of doing philosophy does not imply that they think other ways of doing philosophy are not genuine forms of philosophizing.

One way to accommodate these concerns—in a way that will set the stage for the case study to come—is as follows. We do not need to assume that non-Western philosophy should be integrated with, much less assimilated to, Western philosophy (in this case, contemporary analytic philosophy) in order to enter

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[9]   I say 'traditions' here because the term 'non-Western philosophy' does not pick out a single philosophical tradition any more than does the term 'Western philosophy.'

into constructive dialogue with it. Rather, we need only take seriously the possibility that contemporary analytic philosophy stands to benefit from engaging philosophies native to other times and places.[10] For not only do non-Western philosophies—both historical and contemporary—provide useful and compelling targets for such dialogue, but the very impetus to philosophical and perspectival integration is one of the central lessons we take away from such culturally and historically distant texts as the *Zhuangzi*.

To attempt to bring about such dialogue is to assume the real possibility of an envisioned phenomenon: cross-cultural, trans-historical syncretism between philosophical texts and traditions. To the extent that such dialogue can plausibly facilitate and internally justify this phenomenon in a controlled and well-defined setting, its possibility and actual existence will appear genuine rather than imagined or *ad hoc*. The remainder of this paper can be seen as an attempt to demonstrate the authentic and productive relationship between contemporary analytic philosophy and classical Daoist philosophy. Moreover, the significance of this proposed cross-fertilization generalizes to philosophical traditions native to different times and places, and with distinct (and distinctive) methods, goals, and assumptions.

The manifestation of fictionalist themes in the *Zhuangzi* serves this purpose particularly well for at least three reasons. First, it crucially does not simply exhibit how fictionalist ideas expressed in contemporary analytic philosophy 'show up' in a non-Western philosophical context and can be used as an interpretive tool there. Rather, it illustrates how such ideas are instructively—

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[10]   It is worth noting that contemporary analytic philosophers do not uniquely hold the view that non-Western 'philosophy' is not philosophy. For although attempts to exclude non-Western 'philosophy' from the domain of philosophy proper have been made by such philosophers, very similar things have been said by philosophers perhaps better classified as belonging to the modern continental tradition as well. Just a few examples of modern or contemporary philosophers who have made claims to the effect that non-Western 'philosophy' is not philosophy proper include: Kant, Husserl, Heidegger, Derrida, Levinas, Rorty, Flew, and Anastaplo. For more comprehensive collections and discussions of such claims, see Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion*, and Van Norden, *Taking Back Philosophy: A Multicultural Manifesto*. (Many thanks to Masashi Kasaki, James Maffie, Evan Thompson, and Bryan Van Norden for recommending these examples.) Also noteworthy is that, since the term 'philosophy' is often strongly associated with the West, some working in non-Western traditions have also sought to exclude it from characterizations of their intellectual endeavours, often in order to emphasize the novelty or the otherness of Western traditions. John C. Maraldo discusses some complexities regarding this point in his historical study on Japanese philosophy in Maraldo, "Defining Philosophy in the Making." (Special thanks to Masashi Kasaki for suggesting this addition.)

and in a manner quite foreign to the methodology of contemporary analytic philosophy—articulated in a vastly different philosophical setting. For fictionalism is currently a dynamic and evolving subject of inquiry, which is uniquely enriched and strengthened by reflecting on the way in which it is presented through literary, non-expository means in the *Zhuangzi*.

Second, the style and approach of the text contributes not only an example of a different manner of expressing a fictionalist view, but demonstrates principles—typically absent from consideration in contemporary analytic philosophy—that explain how there can be a meaningful relationship between stylistic form and philosophical content, a topic that deserves much more attention in contemporary scholarship than it has so far received.

Third, there is a still broader and more complex metaphilosophical and meta-literary lesson that the *Zhuangzi* teaches, namely that: (i) we must always take into account what we, as the audience of a philosophical or literary work (whether Western or non-Western), bring to the table when we read such a work; (ii) we should consider how what we bring to the table relates to what others, perhaps of a distant culture and historical era, would bring to it; and (iii) we should reflect upon how what we and others have thus brought to the table in this regard illuminates the nature of the connection between the direct (i.e., the expository, the literal, the semantic) and the indirect (i.e., the literary, the figurative, the pragmatic) in the first place. Though these are lessons of universal import transcending cultural boundaries, they arise in exemplary fashion out of an attempt to observe the connection between the *Zhuangzi* and our interests as contemporary analytic philosophers (say, in fictionalism). These considerations, taken together, explain why we should seek to effect increased dialogue between diverse texts and traditions, rather than retaining or promoting parochial attitudes on the assumption that there is no pressing epistemic reason to encourage widespread philosophical 'border-crossing.'

2. Zhuangzi as Fictionalist[11]

2.1. What is Fictionalism?

Let me continue by presenting the contemporary side of my proposed synthesis: the philosophical theory of fictionalism. Fictionalism can be provisionally characterized as a constellation of views according to which some regions of discourse are not best seen as aiming at (literal) truth either because (a) they should not be seen as truth-directed at all (*force fictionalism*) or (b) they should be seen as truth-directed, though expressions within them are not (typically)

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[11]   This section draws heavily on Chung, "Is Zhuangzi a Fictionalist?" and Chung, "Taking Skepticism Seriously: How the *Zhuang-Zi* can Inform Contemporary Epistemology."

used literally (*content fictionalism*).[12] Fictionalists grant standard realist semantic interpretations of sentences within the disputed regions of discourse but maintain that the point of accepting them is not to commit ourselves to their truth, as they, unlike realists, do not hold that they are true.[13] To bring out the contrast a bit more clearly, a content (but not a merely force) fictionalist about moral discourse could hold, for example, that when a speaker utters the sentence 'Stealing is wrong,' what they[14] (typically) assert instead is something along the lines of the proposition that, according to the fiction of morality, stealing is wrong. Thus, for a content fictionalist, moral discourse can aim at truth at the level of what is pragmatically, rather than semantically, conveyed— or, if one prefers, what is non-literally, rather than literally, conveyed.[15] This, however, is not the approach of a (purely) force fictionalist, who holds that no alternative propositional content gets asserted or otherwise put forth, and hence that the relevant region of discourse cannot aim at truth.[16] Rather, in uttering such sentences, some other (perhaps perlocutionary) speech act is performed.

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[12] Cf. Eklund, "Fictionalism." Insofar as one finds it helpful to identify a pretence when explicating a fictionalist view, the relevant pretence in this case is plausibly that of assertion, or commitment to truth. Please note also that fictionalism is thus differentiated from certain other forms of anti-realism (e.g., expressivism) as well as from various nearby views, such as pragmatism or contextualism. Further, this leaves it open as to whether a discourse could be—in addition—*non-literally* truth-directed or, in other words, that a discourse might be 'truth'-directed.

[13] Cf. Szabó, "Critical Study of Mark Eli Kalderon (ed.): *Fictionalism in Metaphysics*."

[14] I use 'they' as a singular, generic, gender-neutral pronoun.

[15] For the purposes of this paper, I use 'semantic content' and 'literal content' more or less interchangeably, for ease of explication. It is worth noting that some might take issue with this, e.g., on the grounds that it may be possible for non-literal content to be semantic content, at least in certain cases (see Camp, "Contextualism, Metaphor, and What Is Said," for a discussion of possible examples). As far as I can see, however, accommodating this worry would affect only the letter, but not the spirit, of the view advanced here, as it could easily be restated so as to alleviate this concern.

[16] Note, however, that force and content fictionalism can plausibly be combined, as a fictionalist can hold both that in a typical utterance of a sentence of some region of discourse, D, the literal content of the sentence is conveyed but not asserted, and that some content other than the literal content is asserted. Indeed, one might think that this is even a rather natural view: namely, that, in a typical utterance of a sentence of D, the speaker pretends-true the literal content of the sentence, and in so doing asserts something other than the literal content (Eklund, "Fictionalism"). In this case, one is a force fictionalist regarding the region of discourse literally interpreted, and a content fictionalist regarding the region of discourse non-literally interpreted.

Hence, sentences like 'Stealing is wrong' should be accepted, not because we use them to express truths, but because they facilitate prudential action.[17] As Matti Eklund describes it, the basic idea is often that, for practical reasons— such as the fear of punishment, the desire for ongoing beneficial relationships, the motivation to maintain a good reputation, the simple fact that one on the whole likes one's fellows, and so on—one normally ought to act in accordance with alleged moral requirements even if they are not used to express truths.[18]

2.2 Zhuangzi as Fictionalist: Evidence Concerning Arguments

There is reason to think that Zhuangzi can be profitably interpreted as a force fictionalist about *all* regions of discourse (or, in other words, as a *global force fictionalist*).[19] Some of the evidence in support of this interpretation concerns a variety of arguments, scattered throughout the *Zhuangzi* (especially in the *Qiwulun*, the second chapter of the text), which suggest a global scepticism about linguistic meaning and literal truth, and appear to aim at discrediting the activity of disputation altogether. Consider, e.g., the famous passage concerning 'this' and 'that'[20] or 'it' and 'other,'[21] in which Zhuangzi considers the

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17   Cf. Joyce, "Moral Fictionalism."

18   Eklund, "Fictionalism."

19   Granted, fictionalism—or, at least, the way in which it tends to be discussed in contemporary discourse—is an invention of analytic philosophy, based on certain views of, e.g., language and truth, parts of which may not map onto early Chinese views very neatly. A mere sampling of possible difficulties concern: the nature of truth, (semantic) content, assertion, and linguistic expressions. Nonetheless, the basic insight underlying fictionalism—that a way of talking need not aim at, e.g., (literal) truth in order to be worthwhile, even if it is (or at least purports to be) truth-apt—might well be useful in helping us to better understand the *Zhuangzi* (or so I will claim). For all that is necessary for fictionalism to be an appropriate approach to reading the *Zhuangzi* is that pre-modern Chinese readers recognized the difference between what we would identify as true assertions and fictional statements—and presumably no one thinks that such readers were incapable of noticing the difference between purportedly factual claims and fictional stories, regardless of whether they had or were interested in any theory of truth *per se*. (Thank you to an anonymous referee for this suggestion.) There are also accounts of the nature of truth in classical Chinese philosophy that support this approach; see, e.g., Van Norden, *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy*, and McLeod, *Theories of Truth in Chinese Philosophy: A Comparative Approach*.

20   See Watson, *Zhuangzi: The Basic Writings*, and Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*.

21   See Graham, *Chuang-Tzŭ: The Inner Chapters*.

possibility that human utterances may be no different from the peeps of baby birds, and suggests that (linguistically encoded) distinctions only appear to be accurate or legitimate against a backdrop of contextual factors that have more to do with perception than they do with reality:

> Saying is not blowing breath, saying says something; the only trouble is that what it says is never fixed. Do we really say something? Or have we never said anything? If you think it different from the twitter of fledgelings, is there proof of the distinction? Or isn't there any proof? By what is the Way hidden, that there should be a genuine or false? By what is saying darkened, that sometimes 'That's it' and sometimes 'That's not'? Wherever we walk how can the Way be absent? Whatever the standpoint how can saying be unallowable? The Way is hidden by formation of the lesser, saying is darkened by its foliage and flowers. And so we have the 'That's it, that's not' of Confucians and Mohists, by which what is it for one of them for the other is not, what is not for one of them for the other is. If you wish to affirm what they deny and deny what they affirm, the best means is Illumination.
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> No thing is not 'other,' no thing is not 'it.' If you treat yourself too as 'other' they do not appear, if you know of yourself you know of them. Hence it is said:
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> '"Other" comes out from "it," "it" likewise goes by "other"' the opinion that 'it' and 'other' are born simultaneously. However,
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> 'Simultaneously with being alive one dies,'
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> and simultaneously with dying one is alive, simultaneously with being allowable something becomes unallowable and simultaneously with being unallowable it becomes allowable. If going by circumstance that's it then going by circumstance that's not, if going by circumstance that's not then going by circumstance that's it. This is why the sage does not take this course, but opens things up to the light of Heaven; his too is a 'That's it' which goes by circumstance.
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> What is It is also Other, what is Other is also It. There they say 'That's it, that's not' from one point of view, here we say 'That's it, that's not' from another point of view. Are there really It and Other? Or really no It and Other? Where neither It nor Other finds its opposite is called the axis of the Way. When once the axis is found at the centre of the circle there is no limit to what is it, on the other no limit to what is not. Therefore I say: 'The best means is Illumination.'[22]

Such thoughts are very much in keeping with the spirit of global force fictionalism in particular. For if words either do not have accurate meanings, or

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[22] Graham, *Chuang-Tzŭ: The Inner Chapters*, 52-53. For more detailed explications of the central argument of this passage, as well as several others from the *Qiwulun*, please see Chung, "Is Zhuangzi a Fictionalist?" and Chung, "Taking Skepticism Seriously: How the *Zhuang-Zi* can Inform Contemporary Epistemology."

lack meanings at all, then it would seem to follow that they cannot be used to convey truths, thereby making it impossible for some region of discourse to be genuinely truth-directed, though it may present itself (i.e., semantically) as such. Moreover, Zhuangzi's arguments—as in the case of 'it' and 'other'—can be used to call into question the distinction between, e.g., the notions 'meaningful' and 'meaningless' and 'true' and 'false.' But, despite his apparent scepticism about (accurate) meaning and truth, Zhuangzi still seems to think that language is useful. (The *Zhuangzi* itself, after all, is composed of words!) Thus, insofar as some standard or set of standards is thought to apply to successful linguistic practice, it cannot involve (literal) truth.

2.3 Zhuangzi as Fictionalist: Evidence Concerning Style

Interestingly, however, in addition to evidence that supports an interpretation of Zhuangzi as a global force fictionalist that stems from the philosophical arguments that he offers, there is evidence that supports such an interpretation that concerns the style in which he writes. To begin with, it is possibly significant that the *Zhuangzi* opens with what is most reasonably read as a fictional story, involving a giant fish named 'Kun' that transforms into a bird named 'Peng,' only to be mocked by a talking cicada, dove, and quail (each of whom has far more limited abilities than Peng has):

> In the North Ocean there is a fish, its name is the K'un; the K'un's girth measures who knows how many thousand miles. It changes into a bird, its name is the P'eng; the P'eng's back measures who knows how many thousand miles. When it puffs out its chest and flies off, its wings are like clouds hanging from the sky. This bird when the seas are heaving has a mind to travel to the South Ocean. (The South Ocean is the Lake of Heaven.) In the words of the *Tall stories,* 'When the P'eng travels to the South Ocean, the wake it thrashes on the water is three thousand miles long, it mounts spiralling on the whirlwind ninety thousand miles high, and is gone six months before it is out of breath.' (The *Tall stories of Ch'i* is a record of marvels.) … A cicada and a turtle-dove laughed at it, saying, 'We keep flying till we're bursting, stop when we get to an elm or sandalwood, and sometimes are dragged back to the ground before we're there. What's all this about being ninety thousand miles up when he travels south?' … A quail laughed at it, saying 'Where does he think he's going? I do a hop and a skip and up I go, and before I've gone more than a few dozen yards come fluttering down among the bushes. That is the highest one can fly, where does he think he's going?'[23]

Notably, this fictional story is attributed to an equally fictional ancient classic, variously translated as, e.g., the *Tall stories of Ch'i*[24] or the *Equalizing Jokebook.*[25]

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[23]   Graham, *Chuang-Tzŭ: The Inner Chapters,* 43-44.

[24]   Graham, *Chuang-Tzŭ: The Inner Chapters*.

[25]   Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*.

Consequently, one might think that, from the very beginning, Zhuangzi sets us up to read what he says as fiction (and does so in a way that mocks the pretensions of, e.g., Confucians and Mohists to give literally true or accurate accounts of the world based on literally true or accurate classical works). But, despite being fictional (as well as highly fantastical and in many ways containing paradoxical elements), this story is clearly meant to serve some purpose or another, despite the fact that it is not meant to be taken literally.[26] And there are many other passages in the *Zhuangzi* that are similarly not likely intended to be interpreted at face value. (As Burton Watson notes, "deliberate fantasy … characterizes the book as a whole."[27]) Just a few of the most memorable of these passages include:

- *The Mountain Man* (a story involving a man who "does not eat the five grains but sucks in the wind and drinks the dew" and "rides the vapour of the clouds, yokes flying dragons to his chariot, and roams beyond the four seas"),[28]
- *Three Every Morning, Four Every Evening* (a story involving monkeys that are furious about being given three nuts in the morning and four in the evening, but are satisfied when offered four in the morning and three in the evening),[29]
- *The Useless Tree* (a story involving a talking tree that appears in a carpenter's dream to lecture him about the usefulness of uselessness).[30]

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[26]   In his translation, Brook Ziporyn notes that: "The name Kun … literally means 'fish egg.' The character consists of a 'fish' radical beside a phonetic element that literally means 'elder brother.' If we were to take this as a kind of visual pun, the name might be rendered 'Big Brother Roe.' The paradoxes implicit in this name are not irrelevant. The largest fish is thus also the smallest speck of pre-fish, the tiny fish egg. The youngest newborn here, the not-yet-fish, is also the elder brother." Further, he also says: "The name 'Peng' … is cognate with *feng* … meaning 'phoenix,' a mythical bird of enormous proportions. The phonetic of the form used by Zhuangzi here is the character *peng*, meaning a 'friend' or 'classmate,' 'comrade' or 'peer.' If we wish to render the visual pun, we might translate the name as 'Peer Phoenix.' Again, the paradox is of some importance. Peng is vast, and his superiority to other birds seems to be stressed in what follows, but his name also includes a reference to parity and companionship." (Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*, 3, fn. 1 and fn. 2)

[27]   Watson, *Zhuangzi: The Basic Writings*, 1.

[28]   Graham, *Chuang-Tzŭ: The Inner Chapters*, 46. It is perhaps worth noting that this story is explicitly presented as being hard to believe, but nonetheless worth taking seriously for other reasons.

[29]   Graham, *Chuang-Tzŭ: The Inner Chapters*, 54.

[30]   Graham, *Chuang-Tzŭ: The Inner Chapters*, 73.

Others involve (among other things) what appear to be:

- fictional characters (often with unusual names, like 'Gaptooth' and 'Uglyface T'o'),[31]
- fictional situations (perhaps especially those involving Confucius),
- people with abilities too mystifying or deformities too horrifying to be real (such as a character whom A.C. Graham calls 'Cripple Shu,'[32] and describes as follows: "[H]is chin is buried down in his navel, his shoulders are higher than his crown, the knobbly bone at the base of his neck points at the sky, the five pipes to the spine are right up on top, his two thighbones make another pair of ribs."),[33]
- talking plants and animals (including, as mentioned above, insects, birds, and trees).

Moreover, in addition to the inclusion of many fictional stories, there seems to be no shortage of other devices that can be used to reduce a reader's stock and credence (as Eric Schwitzgebel puts the point) in the literal content of a work to be found in the *Zhuangzi*, including (but not limited to):

- literary devices and tropes (including dialogues, fables, allegories, and metaphors,[34]
- extensive use of quotations (particularly those involving some who were likely perceived as rivals, such as Confucius),[35]
- appeals to unlikely as well as intuitively untrustworthy or disreputable sources,[36]
- frequent changes of subject and non-sequiturs,[37]

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[31] Cf. Graham, *Chuang-Tzŭ: The Inner Chapters*.

[32] Please note that this term is now widely considered to be derogatory and is only used in this context to remain faithful to Graham's original translation.

[33] Graham, *Chuang-Tzŭ: The Inner Chapters*, 74.

[34] Cf. Kjellberg and Ivanhoe, "Introduction," xii. Consider, e.g., the numerous seemingly fictional stories referenced above.

[35] Indeed, according to Schwitzgebel, more than half of the inner chapters are in quotation (Schwitzgebel, "Zhuangzi's Attitude Toward Language and His Skepticism," 72).

[36] Including apparently fictional works, such as, e.g., the *Tall stories of Ch'i*, noted above, as well as so-called 'beggars' and 'madmen.' (Cf. Schwitzgebel, "Zhuangzi's Attitude Toward Language and His Skepticism," 72.)

[37] Cf. Watson, *Zhuangzi: Basic Writings*, 5. Among the standouts is this remark, which directly follows the passage that references the 'Benetnash Star': "Therefore formerly Yao asked Shun 'I wish to smite [Zong], [Kuai], and [Xuao]. Why is it that I am not at ease on the south-facing throne?' 'Why be uneasy,' said Shun, 'if these three still survive among the weeds? Formerly ten suns rose side by side and the

- rhetorical questions,[38]
- reversals of ordinary judgements,[39]
- outwardly dubious, paradoxical, or nonsensical remarks,[40]
- liberal application of humour, parody, and ridicule,[41]

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myriad things were all illumined, and how much more by a man in whom the Power is brighter than the sun!'" Here, A.C. Graham comments: "This story seems out of place. Perhaps it was intended as an illustration of 'This is why the sage does not take this course but opens things up to the light of Heaven.'" (Graham, *Chuang-Tzŭ: The Inner Chapters*, 58).

[38]   Schwitzgebel, "Zhuangzi's Attitude Toward Language and His Skepticism," 72. Sometimes these are even posed in rapid-fire succession, e.g.,: "The penumbra asked the shadow: 'Just when you were walking, now you stop; just when you were sitting, now you stand. Why don't you make up your mind to do one thing or the other?' 'Is it that there is something on which I depend to be so? And does what I depend on too depend on something else to be so? Would it be that I depend on snake's scales, cicada's wings? How would I recognize why it is so, how would I recognize why it is not so?'" (Graham, *Chuang-Tzŭ: The Inner Chapters*, 61).

[39]   Schwitzgebel, "Zhuangzi's Attitude Toward Language and His Skepticism," 73. Here I follow Schwitzgebel in saying, "by reversal, I mean Zhuangzi's tendency to make statements that are the reverse of seeming truisms or ordinary judgments. To the extent that Zhuangzi may succeed in casting a truism in doubt, he succeeds to some extent in undermining the credibility of any statement that seems less certain than the truism initially did" (Schwitzgebel, "Zhuangzi's Attitude Toward Language and His Skepticism," 72). Just a few good examples of this include passages that extol the usefulness of uselessness (such as the Useless Tree story cited above, and the surprising abilities of various disabled characters).

[40]   Cf. Watson, *Zhuangzi: The Basic Writings*, 5, and Schwitzgebel, "Zhuangzi's Attitude Toward Language and His Skepticism," 73. Some of the more memorable paradoxes from the inner chapters are presented in this passage: "Nothing in the world is bigger than the tip of an autumn hair, and Mount T'ai is small; no one lives longer than a doomed child, and [Pengzi, who had a reputation for long life] died young; heaven and earth were born together with me, and the myriad things and I are one" (Graham, *Chuang-Tzŭ: The Inner Chapters*, 56).

[41]   The character of Huizi, who typically appears to be an intellectual foil for Zhuangzi, is often a target of Zhuangzi's mockery; e.g., when Zhuangzi berates him as follows: "… if you had five-bushel calabashes, why didn't it occur to you to make them into those big bottles swimmers tie to their waists, and go floating away over the Yangtse and the Lakes? If you worried because they sagged and wouldn't hold anything, isn't it that you still have a heart where the shoots grow up tangled?" (Graham, *Chuang-Tzŭ: The Inner Chapters*, 47).

- evident contempt for (or at least suspicion of) the adequacy of language as far as attaining a variety of different ends is concerned,[42]
- seeming disdain for (or perhaps merely scepticism about the value of) convention,[43]
- lack of clarity as to what is sincerely proposed and what is merely entertained, cultivated in all manner of ways, especially in the form of statements made and then questioned without any clear resolution (this is related to the 'rhetorical questions' point above).[44]

Kjellberg has also observed that Zhuangzi frequently uses the rhetorical device of rhyming duplicatives, and claimed that some studies suggest it to be a translinguistic phenomenon that such phrases, like 'ooga-booga,' convey a mixture of confusion and mystery.[45] Moreover, as Kjellberg also points out, Zhuangzi is unique among early Chinese philosophers for his extensive use of onomatopoeia, which suggests that, for Zhuangzi, in the absence of agreed-upon definitions, human discourse might in the end be nothing more than empty sounds.[46]

As Bryan Van Norden has noted, such textual features have made the *Zhuangzi* function much like a Rorschach test in that it elicits many different interpretations from different readers, depending on, e.g., their presuppositions and preferences.[47] Of course, it is likely impossible to say for sure whether Zhuangzi can be credited with intending to bring about such an effect. However, even if such an effect was unintended, it at least suggests an author who cares more about provoking reactions than conveying a concrete message. Moreover, perhaps even the fact that the work reads as both literary and philosophical itself suggests that Zhuangzi does not consider the boundary between fictional

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[42] Cf. Graham, *Chuang-Tzŭ: The Inner Chapters*, 4; Watson, *Zhuangzi: The Basic Writings*, 5, 6, and 9; and Schwitzgebel, "Zhuangzi's Attitude Toward Language and His Skepticism," 73. This contempt is perhaps most palpable when Zhuangzi presents some of his most famous sceptical arguments, designed to call into question whether words can get things right, or even say anything at all, in the *Qiwulun*.

[43] Cf. Graham, *Chuang-Tzŭ: The Inner Chapters*, 4, and Watson, *Zhuangzi: The Basic Writings*. See, e.g., the stories involving the Mountain Man, monkeys, and, once again, the Useless Tree referenced above, just for starters.

[44] Schwitzgebel, "Zhuangzi's Attitude Toward Language and His Skepticism," 72. Schwitzgebel provides a particularly nice example of this, though there are many: "The lighting up of 'That's it, that's not' is the reason why the Way is flawed. The reason why the Way is flawed is the reason why love becomes complete. Is anything really complete or flawed? Or is nothing really complete or flawed?" (Graham, *Chuang-Tzŭ: The Inner Chapters*, 54).

[45] Kjellberg, "Zhuangzi," 215.

[46] Kjellberg, "Sextus Empiricus, Zhuangzi, and Xunzi," 24, fn. 12.

[47] Van Norden, "Competing Interpretations of the Inner Chapters of the 'Zhuangzi,'" 247.

discourse and non-fictional discourse to be all that sharp—if indeed he considers it to exist at all. All this lends support to the claim that he can be interpreted as holding a view to the effect that discourse needn't ever aim at truth (even if it purports to) in order to be worth engaging in, and that he often at least appears—and perhaps even pretends—to assert or argue for claims that he does not believe (a practice that a fictionalist stance could both explain and motivate).

2.4 Zhuangzi's Fictionalism as Attitude or Perspective

The proposal, then, is that—in addition to fictionalist arguments—Zhuangzi uses fiction and fictional (i.e., literary) devices, conventions, and techniques to motivate a fictionalist view about all regions of discourse. What, however, is the nature of this view? Is it best construed as a thesis, or something else? Given sensible claims about Zhuangzi's attitudes toward (linguistically encoded) distinctions (suggested by, e.g., sceptical arguments that appear in the *Qiwulun*), it is reasonable to interpret him as being unconcerned with using language to apprehend truths about the world (thus ruling out the thesis option). Rather, he is arguably better interpreted as being concerned with using language to demonstrate or illustrate attitudes or perspectives, which can then be manifested in a multitude of ways in action, depending on the circumstances.[48] For pointing and gesturing, e.g., can have practical rather than theoretical functions: they needn't involve acts of predication, and thus needn't be the kinds of singling-out that presuppose exclusive disjunctions between discrete alternatives. This is because they may only draw attention to a possible attitude or perspective (thus leaving every other possible alternative unspecified).[49] After all, while

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[48]   Attitudes or perspectives, after all, might be best characterized as involving dispositions that at least partially comprise psychological 'points of view' rather than claims. Consider, e.g., Elisabeth Camp's particularly detailed characterization of perspectives: "I think the best way to understand perspectives at an appropriately abstract level is to treat them as open-ended modes of interpretation. Perspectives are dispositions to characterize: to notice and attend to certain sorts of features, to care about certain sorts of questions and issues, to seek certain sorts of explanations, and to endorse certain sorts of affective and evaluative responses. As such, they are essentially non-propositional: while they can sometimes be crystallized in slogans like 'Look out for number one' or 'Turn the other cheek,' explicitly entertaining or endorsing such precepts is neither necessary nor sufficient for deploying the perspective. Indeed, it is not sufficient for having a perspective that one possess any particular beliefs or desires, or even that one intuitively 'get' any particular characterization. Rather, a perspective is a general ability to assimilate information and respond to the world. In this sense, a perspective is a tool for thinking rather than a thought itself: it determines no truth-conditions of its own, but provides a way of organizing and navigating among thoughts." (Camp, forthcoming).

[49]   Thank you to Zachary Gartenberg for this perceptive suggestion.

one can disagree with an (assertive) articulation, one cannot disagree with a (non-assertive) demonstration or performance, such as an illustration. Further, while the purpose of (assertive) articulation is principally to motivate one way of thinking, with an at least implicit aim of excluding others, (non-assertive) demonstrations or illustrations needn't do this. Rather, (non-assertive) demonstrations or illustrations can have contents that are much more open-ended, and can indicate or create attitudes or perspectives whose contents are not propositional.

This is not only consistent with Zhuangzi's apparent approval of characters who are able to adapt to situations, and of flexibility or versatility in general, but also accords nicely with the thought that, for him, using language is one way to live well, even if one's utterances can never express truths. For, given much of what Zhuangzi suggests (such as in the passage from the *Qiwulun* quoted above), the kinds of pointing or gesturing with language that are likely to be the most broadly productive will be those kinds that, say, demonstrate or illustrate highly open-ended attitudes or perspectives (thereby allowing everything to be brought to light). Moreover, pointing or gesturing in ways that subserve interaction and coordination are just the kinds of relevant activities that admit of being more-or-less well performed.

We can thus conclude that Zhuangzi aims to convey a fictionalist attitude or perspective on all discourse, so as to preserve language's open-ended potentialities. After all, that Zhuangzi aims to demonstrate or illustrate (rather than articulate) a fictionalist attitude or perspective, rather than a thesis, not only jibes with many of the sceptical arguments that we find suggested in the text, but also explains why he writes as he does: that is, in a way that's largely literary rather than expository; playful rather than serious; and open-ended rather than committal. It also allows us to understand him as having a positive philosophical project that can avoid charges of self-referential absurdity. This is an important problem that affects both global sceptics[50] and force fictionalists alike, as the claim that nothing can be known, the claim that nothing can be (literally) true, and the claim that nothing can have a meaning all threaten to undermine themselves.[51] Interpreting Zhuangzi as a global force fictionalist can allow us to

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[50]   i.e., with respect to whether anything can be known (or reasonably believed).

[51]   This is because the claims, for example, that nothing can be known (or reasonably believed), that nothing can be (literally) true, and that nothing can have a meaning all arguably presuppose what they deny: after all, if one claims that nothing can be known, or that nothing can be reasonably believed, doesn't this presuppose that one knows, or reasonably believes, at least what one has just said? And things get even worse if we consider the possibility that nothing can be true, or that nothing can be meaningful, two claims that also seem to presuppose what they deny (i.e., that something is true, namely the claim that nothing is, or that something is meaningful, namely the claim that nothing is).

see him as aiming to demonstrate or illustrate attitudes or perspectives, and to inspire us to adopt at least some of them—such as those of a global force fictionalist—rather than to argue for any particular philosophical claim.[52]

3. Zhuangzi, Literary Interpretation, and Philosophical Methodology

3.1 The Zhuangzi *and Literary Interpretation*

Interpreting Zhuangzi in this manner, however, raises the question of how we might apprehend and engage such possibly non-propositional (but rather, attitudinal or perspectival) content. One plausible suggestion is that we accomplish this in much the same way as we apprehend and engage the cognitive content of literary works more generally. For not only is the *Zhuangzi* a literary as well as philosophical work, but it is natural to think that literary works, if they can be thought to have cognitive, or extra-fictional, epistemic (and not just aesthetic) content and value at all, do not generally have content and value that are propositional. This is because it is not clear whether literary fictions[53] make claims about the world, or, if they do, whether their cognitive content and value (solely) consists in the claims that they manage to make.[54] This has led many recent commentators to oppose the traditional view that, insofar as the cognitive value of literature can be explicated in terms of knowledge, it is propositional knowledge in particular—often characterized as *knowing that* something is so. Rather, it is alleged that, insofar as the cognitive value of literature consists in its imparting knowledge, it is more promising to think that it consists in its imparting some other kind of knowledge, such as *experiential knowledge*, *phenomenal knowledge*, or

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[52]   Note that all this is consistent with, and comparable to, the claim that Zhuangzi's scepticism is better construed as, e.g., a recommendation, method, or therapy rather than as a thesis (cf. Kjellberg "Sextus Empiricus, Zhuangzi, and Xunzi"; Ivanhoe, "Was Zhuangzi a Relativist?"; Raphals, "Skeptical Strategies in the *Zhuangzi* and the *Theaetetus*"; Schwitzgebel, "Zhuangzi's Attitude Toward Language and His Skepticism"; Van Norden, "Competing Interpretations of the Inner Chapters of the 'Zhuangzi'"; and Wong, "Zhuangzi and the Obsession with Being Right").

[53]   Although I largely speak in terms of literature or the literary *simpliciter* for convenience, the account on offer is intended to apply to literary fiction specifically. Thank you to Brandon Cooke for suggesting that I make this explicit.

[54]   Cf. Carroll, "The Wheel of Virtue: Art, Literature, and Moral Knowledge," and Gibson, "Cognitivism and the Arts." To illustrate with a classic example: the Sherlock Holmes novels might be understood as making certain true claims about aspects of the city of London, but their cognitive content and value—insofar as they have any—would not (entirely) consist in those claims, or imparting knowledge of them, even if so.

perhaps *knowing how* to do something.[55] Such knowledge is often thought to be non-propositional in nature, though nonetheless concerned with aspects of reality.[56]

This, however, wouldn't mean that we couldn't say anything about the cognitive content and value of literary works, or that we couldn't say anything that might help us to grasp it. We can, after all, say a lot about experiences, attitudes, and perspectives in general, even if we cannot typically—if ever—communicate a complete understanding of, e.g., what they are like and how to adopt and employ them. Rather, it simply suggests that the ways in which we interpret and engage literature (and reap its cognitive rewards) seem to differ in some fashion from the ways in which we interpret and engage (and reap the cognitive rewards of) what we take to be straightforward, declarative sentences about the 'real' world.

Perhaps, then, comparing how we interpret and engage literature in general—especially literature that is thought to have philosophical import—with how we might interpret and engage the *Zhuangzi* in particular will be edifying, if we are interested in investigating how we access literary, non-expository works' cognitive content and value. This involves taking up three questions:

1. How do we interpret and engage literature taken on its own terms, i.e., *qua* literature?
2. How do we interpret and engage literature philosophically, i.e., *qua* philosophy?
3. What does all of this suggest about how we, as philosophers, should interpret and engage the *Zhuangzi*, and what does this suggest about philosophical methodology more broadly?

3.2 Literary Interpretation, Imaginative Perspective-Taking, and the Cognitive Value of Literature[57]

Regarding the first question, interpreting and engaging literature is commonly thought to involve, at least in many cases, imaginative perspective-taking. But just what are some of the specific kinds of imaginative perspective-taking that works of literature standardly demand of readers, speaking more precisely? Two candidates include what might be profitably characterized as *pretence* and

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[55]   Cf. Currie, "The Moral Psychology of Fiction"; Walton, "Spelunking, Simulation and Slime: On Being Moved by Fiction"; Burri, "Art and the View from Nowhere"; Gibson, "Cognitivism and the Arts"; Chung, "Learning from the Arts: Skill, Know-How, and Imagination."

[56]   Compare, e.g., the frequently discussed example, at least in contemporary epistemology, of knowing how to ride a bicycle.

[57]   This sub-section draws heavily on Chung, "Learning from the Arts: Skill, Know-How, and Imagination."

metaphorical 'seeing-as.'[58] We can begin to develop an appreciation for the difference between pretence and metaphorical 'seeing-as' by contrasting two ways of approaching, e.g., a single sentence. Consider a canonical example from Western literature, discussed at length by Elisabeth Camp:

'I am Anna Karenina.'

According to Camp, the main difference between the two activities under consideration is that pretence involves transforming something imaginatively, whereas metaphorical 'seeing-as' involves imaginatively employing something as a lens to structure one's understanding of something else, as in:

Pretence: "I might imagine being married to a bland and unreflective government official, having to attend and host an endless stream of high society events, and being caught between an abiding love for my child and a consuming passion for my lover in a society where divorce means losing all access to my child."[59]—*In this case, I use myself to understand Anna.*

Metaphorical 'Seeing-As': "When I do … find matches within myself for important features of Anna's, then those matched features take on a greater prominence in my characterization of myself. They may also come to be imbued with the explanatory power and emotional valences that the corresponding features play in my characterization of Anna. For instance, my being headstrong may now seem more dangerous than liberating, and also more central to explaining a host of my decisions and actions. The overall result of this matching process is a restructured understanding of myself, one which highlights, connects, and colors my Anna-like features while downplaying the rest."[60]—*In this case, I use Anna to understand myself.*

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[58] Camp, "Two Varieties of Literary Imagination: Metaphor, Fiction, and Thought Experiments." While I use Camp's distinction between pretence and metaphorical 'seeing-as' for simplicity, for the purposes of this paper, I remain neutral between competing theories of the relevant phenomena to the extent that I can. Possibly similar alternatives might include, e.g., content-oriented make-believe, prop-oriented make-believe, and simulation (Walton, "Metaphor and Prop Oriented Make-Believe," and "Spelunking, Simulation and Slime: On Being Moved by Fiction"). Also, others still might wish to exclude anything like pretence and imagination from the process of literary interpretation. I will not delve deeper into the relevant controversies here, however, as for the purposes of this paper it suffices that many accounts of engagement with fiction, and especially with fictional characters, make use of some notion of pretence. Thank you to Brandon Cooke for pointing out that this should be made clear.

[59] Camp, "Two Varieties of Literary Imagination: Metaphor, Fiction, and Thought Experiments," 112.

[60] Camp, "Two Varieties of Literary Imagination: Metaphor, Fiction, and Thought Experiments," 113.

At this point, one might justifiably be sceptical of the claim that fully engaging a work of literature requires that we participate in both (a) pretence (i.e., taking on a new perspective) and (b) metaphorical 'seeing-as' (i.e., using that perspective to better reflect on others). Might it not be the case, after all, that (a) is required, but not (b)? Couldn't one fully appreciate *Anna Karenina*, e.g., without ever using the character of Anna to understand oneself, or anyone else, in the sort of way that Camp discusses? Couldn't one simply attend to the novel considered on its own terms, as it were?[61]

In order to respond to this concern, another example—also from *Anna Karenina*—will be instructive. Although it may initially seem to take us farther afield from our discussion of the *Zhuangzi* and its relevance to philosophical methodology, its bearing on our central case study will soon become apparent.

One of my favourite parts of the novel involves Tolstoy's characterization of Anna's reaction upon meeting Vronsky (who later becomes her lover) for the second time, when he shows up unexpectedly at her brother Oblonsky's home. Louise and Aylmer Maude's translation renders the relevant passage as: "Anna looked down from the landing where she stood and at once recognized Vronsky, and a strange feeling of pleasure mixed with fear suddenly stirred in her heart."[62] Now, in order to fully understand what is going on here, one not only must be following along with the book, so to speak—i.e., engaging in a certain kind of pretence—but also comparing what one takes to be Anna's experiences with certain of one's own experiences. Otherwise, what hope would one have of understanding what one takes to be Anna's experience, even in the slightest? What might 'pleasure mixed with fear' be like, in this situation? Surely, answering this question will involve consulting one's own experiences with the feelings that one takes to be picked out by the relevant terms, as well as with similar experiences, to the extent that one has them. However, if this is right, one is not only likely to be using oneself to understand Anna's feelings (via pretence), but in so doing, one is also (and at the same time) likely to be using Anna's feelings to understand one's own (via metaphorical 'seeing-as'), automatically and simultaneously, in virtue of engaging in the comparison in the first place or at all. For my part, when I initially read the passage that I cite above, I thought, more or less immediately, something along the lines of: 'I know that feeling! Pleasure mixed with fear!'—though I had never (explicitly) cognized the relevant feeling as anything like 'pleasure mixed with fear' prior to having read it. And I will venture that this at least in part accounts for why it resonated with me in the way that it did, as it instantly provided me with a different way of characterizing a feeling that I had experienced before, but not understood all that well. Moreover, I suspect that anyone who has ever felt strongly attracted to someone with whom they were less than completely at

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61   Many thanks to Antony Aumann for suggesting that I discuss this objection.
62   Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 75.

ease (for whatever reason) will be disposed to respond similarly. But, this could only be possible if one were engaging in *both* the imaginative exercises of pretence and metaphorical 'seeing-as' while reading the novel; pretence alone could never yield this result. (After all, had I merely been immersed in the story, without comparing the circumstances that were unfolding in it with anything else—say, my own experiences—by engaging in metaphorical 'seeing-as' (e.g., using Anna to understand myself), I would not have been in any position to recognize the feeling picked out by the phrase 'pleasure mixed with fear' as being one with which I was previously acquainted.) What's more, once one has this result, it is natural to use it in turn to better inform one's understanding of Anna's perspective, again by engaging in pretence, using myself to understand Anna! (For, once I recognized the feeling picked out by 'pleasure mixed with fear' as being one with which I was previously acquainted, I was able to draw on that knowledge of, e.g., what this feeling is like to cultivate a more enriched understanding of what Anna's perspective is like.) Thus, perhaps pretence and metaphorical 'seeing-as' are more intimately related than they might appear at first glance, and as such, are both arguably crucial for full—or at least, fuller—literary appreciation, as there is a complex interplay between the two.[63] Furthermore, both pretence and metaphorical 'seeing-as' depend on attending to elements of style and form: specifically, in the literary case, to narratological features, such as style, voice, focalization, mood, and character development.

What, then, are some of the cognitive rewards that we might reap from interpreting and engaging literature in the manner sketched above? While a highly detailed response to this question is beyond the scope of this paper, one promising way of answering it involves making a case for the claim that, insofar as interpreting and engaging a work of literature requires us to participate

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[63] Interestingly—not that authors themselves are to be trusted unconditionally with respect to these matters, of course—in the edition of Anna Karenina under discussion, it is written that Tolstoy shared something like this view. As W. Gareth Jones notes in his introduction to it: "The story of how *Anna Karenina* eventually emerged from initial primitive sketches through many drafts is complicated and fascinating. It illuminates Tolstoy's understanding of what he believed a novel should be. For Tolstoy the European novel, particularly the English variety, had become too preoccupied with entertaining plots, adventures, and accidental relationships. As he was to show in the passage where Anna Karenina herself is drawn into such a contemporary English novel … he was aware that a novel required such artifices. Yet even that novel, designed for pure entertainment to pass the time on a tedious railway journey, causes Anna to question her own emotions and prompts her to self-reflection. Recognizing the power of the novel to engage a person in this way, Tolstoy regretted the modern novel's lack of concern with the great questions which are the common property of all nations and ages." See Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, viii-ix.

in at least these two varieties of imaginative perspective-taking, its cognitive value resides at least in part in its ability to engender skill and know-how as regards adopting and employing particular attitudes or perspectives that it conveys (attitudes or perspectives that in turn at least partially constitute its cognitive content).[64] And this provides us with a way of answering the second question posed directly above: viz., how do we engage literature philosophically, i.e., *qua* philosophy? For, if those attitudes or perspectives are philosophically significant, they can be brought to bear on, and incorporated into, our philosophizing—even if we are not typically engaging in imaginative perspective-taking in any robust sense while doing so, and are writing in a non-literary, expository fashion, etc.[65]

3.3 Interpreting and Engaging the Zhuangzi: *How and Why*

To see more clearly how this might be so, let us turn to the first half of the third question, concerning what all of this suggests about how we, as philosophers, should interpret and engage the *Zhuangzi* in particular. As discussed in Section 1, the *Zhuangzi* is written in a style that is literary and non-expository, and its philosophical point is plausibly attitudinal or perspectival rather than propositional. And this accords well with the thought that, because of this, we should interpret and engage it in much the same way that we would interpret and engage many works of literature: that is, via (at least to some extent) participating in imaginative perspective-taking, such as pretence and metaphorical 'seeing-as.' Indeed, something like this may even strike some readers—especially in light of the comments from Kjellberg and Ivanhoe quoted near the outset of this paper—as independently plausible. For it harmonizes with the suggestion that one of the things that Zhuangzi is trying to illustrate is the complex interplay between, e.g., assumptions and interpretations, and attitudes and perspectives, as well as the predicament in which this leaves us. After all, when engaging the *Zhuangzi*, what must we, as his audience, do? Initially, we must try to interpret the text as best we can, though this will necessarily involve us in consulting things with which we are already familiar (such as words, concepts, and experiences), in addition to whatever unfamiliar material, such as the text itself. But—as in the example involving 'pleasure mixed with fear,' taken from *Anna Karenina*—this will naturally prompt us to see things with which we are already familiar in a new light. And, this will in turn prompt

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64   A more comprehensive answer to this question along these lines can be found in Chung, "Learning from the Arts: Skill, Know-How, and Imagination."

65   Of course, what it takes for an attitude or perspective to be philosophically significant is unclear. Although I cannot propose a complete account here, the following provisional remark should suffice for the purposes of this discussion: an attitude or perspective is philosophically significant if it can be brought to bear on our thinking about a philosophical question.

us to see the text itself in a new light, as well. Consider, e.g., the passage concerning the Peng bird cited earlier. Interpreting this passage involves first engaging in pretence—i.e., using ourselves, our own perspective on words, concepts, experiences, etc.—to understand the Peng's perspective, which, given the height at which it is able to fly, is at the very least meant to be exceptionally expansive in some way. However, that is not enough. Rather, a full appreciation of the perspective conveyed by this element of the text will also involve metaphorical 'seeing-as': i.e., using what we take to be the Peng's perspective to understand our own, which is obviously much more limited, at least in some sense, though at the same time full of presently untapped potential. However, this will naturally encourage us to see the Peng's perspective in a new light, as well: for instance, as one that is tapping into certain kinds of potential that others have not tapped into, for a variety of reasons (reasons that we can apprehend by engaging in pretence and metaphorical 'seeing-as' when considering the perspectives of the cicada, dove, and quail). And, of course, this—as in the case of *Anna Karenina*—is just getting things started as far as interpreting and engaging the text is concerned, as many other passages within it seem similarly designed to free us from our overly rigid and stifling discriminations. Consider, for example, the story involving Zhuangzi's 'butterfly dream' that concludes the *Qiwulun*:

> Last night [Zhuangzi] dreamed he was a butterfly, spirits soaring he was a butterfly (is it that in showing what he was he suited his own fancy?), and did not know about [Zhuangzi]. When all of a sudden he awoke, he was [Zhuangzi] with all his wits about him. He does not know whether he is [Zhuangzi] who dreams he is a butterfly or a butterfly who dreams he is [Zhuangzi]. Between [Zhuangzi] and the butterfly there was necessarily a dividing; just this is what is meant by the transformations of things.[66]

This story also appears to be crafted to encourage greater perspectival flexibility. As Michael Puett points out:

> In the famous story of the butterfly, Zhuangzi … wants to break us from our usual way of seeing the world. We all wear blinders that prevent us from fully experiencing and engaging with the world, and Zhuangzi argues that the greatest of these is our limited human perspective. What if you were not merely a human being but were actually a butterfly dreaming you are a human being? If we transcend our humanity and know what it means to see the world from all perspectives, we could experience life more fully and spontaneously.[67]

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66   Graham, *Chuang-Tzŭ: The Inner Chapters*, 61.
67   Puett and Loh, *The Path*, 141.

Indeed, as Puett astutely observes, even abstracting away from particular stories, the *Zhuangzi* taken as a whole is reasonably interpreted as aiming to break us from the various limited perspectives that we have adopted and that we don't even realize dominate and constrain us.[68] For, as he notes, reading the *Zhuangzi*:

> … allows us to enter an expansive as-if world that opens up our imaginations. Flux and transformation are embodied by the wild and completely improbable stories that fill the text. We hear from fictional creatures; we read stories, like the butterfly story, purporting to tell us what the world looks like through an insect's eyes. We encounter historical figures, such as Confucius, saying distinctly un-Confucian things. There are numerous surprise twists, puns, and poems that defy logic and understanding. The *Zhuangzi* was crafted deliberately to shake up our perspective and make us think differently about reality from the very moment we encounter it. … [B]y offering [the butterfly] story, Zhuangzi proposes an as-if question: What would it be like if I looked at the world as if I were a butterfly dreaming I am a human being? For that moment, we suspend reality and enter an alternate universe where we expand our ability to imagine all sorts of as-if possibilities in the broadest sense. The entire cosmos is open to us; a world in which everything is flowing into everything else. None of this is prescriptive. Zhuangzi doesn't tell us what we should do after we gain this different perspective; what comes from that is up to us. The key is the break of perspective itself.[69]

Let us take stock. The central claim motivated above is that the *Zhuangzi* conveys a fictionalist attitude or perspective on discourse, and that apprehending and engaging this content plausibly requires us to read the *Zhuangzi* much as we would read other literary works at least to the extent that we engage in both pretence and metaphorical 'seeing-as' to adopt and employ their similarly (possibly non-propositional) attitudinal or perspectival contents. Thus, if we follow Puett here, and apply the fictionalist interpretation of the *Zhuangzi* sketched, as well as the suggestions as to how to interpret and engage literary works in general proposed, we can begin to flesh out a fuller story of how exactly we interpret and engage the text. As argued above, the *Zhuangzi* aims to convey a fictionalist perspective on all discourse. And we access that perspective both by engaging in pretence—that is, by imagining being Peng, the cicada, the dove, the quail, the butterfly, etc.—but also by engaging in metaphorical 'seeing-as,' so as to understand that the shifts in perspective that occur in the various sections of the text are meant to apply to our lived experience as well, so as to open us up to fuller, more expansive ways of living. For by perceiving the limitations, or lack thereof, of various of the perspectives embodied

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68   Puett and Loh, *The Path*, 150.
69   Puett and Loh, *The Path*, 152.

by characters in the text (or otherwise expressed by it), we can also come to see the limitations of our own, as well as how to begin to transcend those limitations, viz., by shedding commitments to (accurate) meaning and (literal) truth: or, in other words, by adopting a globally force fictionalist perspective.

What is especially interesting is that this way of coming to 'see things in a new light' strikingly resembles one of the goals of cross-cultural philosophy: that is, to use diverse perspectives to better understand each other, as well as shared philosophical interests (rather than dimensions of, e.g., Chinese or Euro-American thought in particular).[70] For here, non-specialists and specialists (in, e.g., Daoist philosophy, or analytic epistemology, or philosophy of language) are often well positioned to make their own unique contributions, as they can utilize resources and draw on insights taken from their respective areas of specialization to suggest alternative ways of interpreting and engaging others, and to propose new approaches for bringing discussions from various traditions together. In other words, just as the work of specialists in, say, Chinese philosophy might inform the work of non-specialists who engage it, so too might the work of non-specialists in Chinese philosophy inform the work of specialists. And (as noted in the first remark that closes Section 1), the above case study provides an example of this that exhibits not only how our understanding of the *Zhuangzi* can benefit from our explorations of fictionalism, but also how our explorations of fictionalism can be uniquely enriched and

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[70] For the uninitiated, 'cross-cultural philosophy' (also known as 'fusion philosophy,' 'confluence philosophy,' 'comparative philosophy without borders,' or 'global philosophy'; Chung, "The Upside of Non-Specialist Teaching: A Reply to Cline"; see also Siderits, "Comparison or Confluence Philosophy?"; Chakrabarti and Weber, *Comparative Philosophy without Borders*; and Ganeri, "Reflections on Re:emergent Philosophy") can be approximately characterized as philosophy that weaves together strands from different philosophical traditions. As Jay Garfield explains, it is meant to be different from comparative philosophy in the following sort of way: "The philosopher who coined the [term 'comparative philosophy'] in 1899 was Bajendranath Seal of Calcutta University, who argued that to compare two philosophical systems was to 'treat them as of coordinate rank.' That was a major step, inviting Western philosophers to take Indian and other non-Western traditions seriously as philosophy, as opposed to 'native religious traditions.' Western philosophers gained access to Asian and African traditions initially by noting similarities and differences. But that, as A.C. Mukerji, of Allahabad, was to note in 1932, is not to do philosophy, but is at best a preparation. To take philosophy seriously is to engage with it philosophically. We take Aristotle seriously not when we write about his ideas, but when we take his ideas as part of our discussions. Similarly, we take Nāgārjuna seriously not when we talk about how similar his ideas are to Hume's, but when we take him as an interlocutor." (Garfield, "Buddhist Howls: Jay L. Garfield Interviewed by Richard Marshall.")

strengthened by reflecting on the way in which it is presented by literary, non-expository means in the *Zhuangzi*.[71] Moreover, if it is appropriate to interpret and engage the *Zhuangzi* much as we interpret and engage other works of literature, and if its cognitive content consists at least in part in some attitude or perspective that it conveys, then it is appropriate to expect the cognitive rewards that we might reap to be quite similar as well: viz., skill and know-how in adopting and employing some attitude or perspective. And one such attitude or perspective is plausibly, as discussed above, a fictionalist one—an attitude or perspective that, as we have seen, is highly philosophically significant, in that it allows us to see how at least one interesting philosophical stance (namely, global force fictionalism) can be expressed in a way that does not risk self-refutation, and may be best characterized as involving the adopting of, say, an attitude or perspective rather than the endorsing of a claim. It also permits us to understand why Zhuangzi is appropriately difficult to interpret.[72] For if what he is aiming to do is help his audience to take on the perspective of a global force fictionalist, then what better way to do this than to write in a manner that effectively dislodges confidence regarding the accuracy and even usefulness of (literal) speech?[73] Thus (as noted in the second and third remarks that close Section 1), the *Zhuangzi* not only demonstrates principles that explain how there can be a meaningful relationship between stylistic form and philosophical content, but also illustrates the complex interplay between assumptions and interpretations that explains why we have epistemic reason to seek to effect increased dialogue between diverse texts and traditions.

3.4 Conclusion: Broader Methodological Lessons

We are now well positioned to take up the second half of our third question, concerning what all of this suggests about philosophical methodology more broadly. Let us begin by discussing what this case study suggests about doing cross-cultural philosophy. The first thing worth remarking on is that, as we have seen, it provides a concrete example of how this kind of philosophy can proceed in a fruitful manner, bringing insights from disparate traditions (such as contemporary analytic philosophy and classical Chinese philosophy) to bear on topics in the other, resulting in—with any luck—stimulating and useful new avenues for each to explore: e.g., with respect to Chinese philosophy, the

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71 Cf. Mou, "On Some Methodological Issues Concerning Chinese Philosophy." I would like to thank an anonymous referee for very helpfully suggesting that I elaborate this point along these lines in Chung, "The Upside of Non-Specialist Teaching: A Reply to Cline."

72 Many thanks to Ethan Mills for this suggestion.

73 For elaboration on this point, please see Chung, "Is Zhuangzi a Fictionalist?" and Chung, "Taking Skepticism Seriously: How the *Zhuang-Zi* can Inform Contemporary Epistemology."

possibility that *Zhuangzi* can be profitably interpreted as a fictionalist, and with respect to analytic philosophy, the possibility that fictionalism can be an appropriate and philosophically sophisticated response to globally sceptical arguments.[74] Moreover, in so doing, it suggests ways in which they might be brought together, as Zhuangzi can thus be interpreted as speaking to concerns of analytic philosophers while nonetheless doing so in a novel way, in terms of both style and content. For this interpretation would have it that Zhuangzi motivates what is, in analytic philosophy, an underexplored but relevant and tenable philosophical stance (i.e., global force fictionalism) in a stylistically and substantively atypical but, as we have seen, contextually sensitive way.[75] What's more, this case study also shows that one of the goals of cross-cultural philosophy can be realized, and that Western and non-Western philosophies can be mutually informative, in that—even better—it provides a detailed example that illustrates how, and a template for executing similar endeavours. And all of this suggests an especially exciting methodological upshot: namely, that, even if we take some of our methods with us when we cross certain philosophical lines (at least at first), it is reasonable to expect that we will also be able to weave them together with new methods—which will, at minimum, allow us to broaden our conception of how we might do philosophy, if not inspire us to substantively revise our old methods or replace them with something new and improved. For, it may be that the very best way of motivating global force fictionalism involves writing in a style similar to that of Zhuangzi. After all, if one wants to convey a fictionalist attitude or perspective, rather than substantiate an apparently self-undermining fictionalist claim (along the lines of, say, 'No discourse is truth-directed'), then what better way to write than in a manner that appears—among other things—at once enlightening yet mystifying, earnest yet tongue-in-cheek, and insightful yet enigmatic? And if one wants to convey an attitude or perspective that calls into question the possibility of literal truth, or even the possibility of (accurately) distinguishing, e.g., truth from falsity, meaningfulness from meaninglessness, and fiction from non-fiction, then what better way to write than by extensively employing fiction, and fictional devices, alongside a plethora of straightforwardly philosophical remarks and arguments? Unconventional attitudes or perspectives are sometimes most

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[74] For a more detailed exploration of the former, please see Chung, "Is Zhuangzi a Fictionalist?" and for a more detailed exploration of the latter, please see Chung, "Taking Skepticism Seriously: How the *Zhuang-Zi* can Inform Contemporary Epistemology."

[75] Many of the sceptical arguments proposed in the *Qiwulun* are, after all, very similar to those discussed by Western philosophers. For more on the relevance of the *Zhuangzi* to contemporary debates, please see Chung, "Is Zhuangzi a Fictionalist?" and Chung, "Taking Skepticism Seriously: How the *Zhuang-Zi* can Inform Contemporary Epistemology."

effectively conveyed in unconventional fashions, and if one wants to call into question conventions regarding certain ways of distinguishing, then what better way to do this than to flout those very conventions in one's writing?

The basic idea is thus that interpreting Zhuangzi as a global force fictionalist can help to explain how the text's protean form and literary style is intimately bound up with its difficult-to-articulate (fictionalist, non-propositional) content. And, as we have seen, what is especially interesting—at least in the context of contemporary analytic philosophy—is that this content is highly philosophically significant, allowing us to see how interesting philosophical stances (namely, global scepticism and global force fictionalism) can be expressed in ways that do not risk self-refutation, and may be best characterized as involving the adopting of attitudes or perspectives rather than the endorsing of claims.[76]

Furthermore, because we can see more precisely how this weaving together of methods can work by reflecting on how we might engage a particular, unfamiliar philosophical text, written in a literary, non-expository style—a work that we endeavoured to engage differently at least in part because it seemed necessary to understand how its form, or style, related to its content in order to better grasp its philosophical point—this case study can provide support for two even more general procedural claims. First, we can expect similarly applicable case studies (of which there are many) to be beneficial when it comes to answering tough questions concerning philosophy and its borders—in addition to being interesting and illuminating in their own right—which suggests that we should endeavour to include them in general audience journals to a much greater extent than is presently the norm.[77] Moreover, this is especially crucial for winning greater inclusion for non-Western philosophies, given that, as Olberding points out:

> Insofar as journals symbolically and materially measure what the profession counts as important, the absence of Asian [e.g.] philosophies from the profession's high readership general audience journals implicitly communicates something. At best, we risk suggesting that the philosophies of Asia are simply unimportant, uninteresting, or uncompelling relative to what does appear in the journals—relative, that is, to philosophy constructed within a more limited, distinctively Western canon. At worst, we risk suggesting that philosophy simply does not include Asian traditions, that what philosophy is operates on criteria Asian philosophies simply fail to meet.[78]

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[76] For more on this, please see Chung, "Taking Skepticism Seriously: How the *Zhuang-Zi* can Inform Contemporary Epistemology."

[77] For more on the present dearth of articles on, e.g., Chinese philosophy in general audience journals, please see Olberding, "Chinese Philosophy and Wider Philosophical Discourses: Including Chinese Philosophy in General Audience Philosophy Journals."

[78] Olberding, "Chinese Philosophy and Wider Philosophical Discourses: Including Chinese Philosophy in General Audience Philosophy Journals," 7.

Second, we should focus more attention on developing accounts of literary cognitivism that can explain how literary, non-expository works can have philosophical (and hence, cognitive) content and value, especially since many non-Western philosophical texts (like the *Zhuangzi*) are composed in such a style—a particularly important result given that it remains controversial in analytic aesthetics as to whether literary works can have cognitive content and value at all.[79] For this reason, it also suggests that those who are interested in crossing stylistic, methodological, and cultural borders should do more aesthetics, especially in light of the fact that, as Meilin Chinn has remarked, the arts are often treated as philosophical practices in a number of Asian traditions, and aesthetics occupies a principal place in such philosophies (arguably on par with the preeminent role that metaphysics has played in the history of Western philosophy).[80] Indeed, as this case study suggests, the *Zhuangzi* plausibly exemplifies this, as it can be interpreted both as an aesthetic as well as a philosophical response to scepticism due to its manner of expression, and, as I hope to have shown, can be seen as exceptionally philosophically sophisticated, rather than philosophically impoverished, for it.

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[79]   Indeed, until very recently, interest in developing such accounts had arguably even diminished in light of influential discussions centring on objections ancient (e.g., Plato), modern (e.g., Kant), and contemporary (e.g., Lamarque and Olsen). For an excellent survey of the contemporary state of play regarding this debate, see Gibson, "Cognitivism and the Arts."

[80]   Chinn, "Asian Aesthetics: American Society for Aesthetics Curriculum Diversification Project," 1.

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