Freedom as self-realization : Zide in the Neo-Daoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang

Tan, Christine Abigail Lee

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SINGAPORE

**Freedom as Self-Realization:
Zide in the Neo-Daoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang**

**TAN CHRISTINE ABIGAIL L.
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES
2020**

**Freedom as Self-Realization:
Zide in the Neo-Daoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang**

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School of Humanities

A thesis submitted to the Nanyang Technological University in partial
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2020

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SUMMARY

Freedom is a value cherished by most, and yet it is defined in as many ways as there are people defining it. Possibly one of the most elusive concepts in the history of philosophy, it has definitely been a controversial one in relation to Chinese philosophy—that is, whether or not it even exists, and if so, what it means in such a context.

This work examines the potential of Guo Xiang’s philosophical enterprise to contribute insights to these pressing concerns. Moreover, it aims to provide a comprehensive account of a kind of freedom that is both ontological and political.

As such, the study will focus on Guo Xiang’s notion of self-realization (自得 *zide*), and argue that this conception of freedom introduces a “dependence-based autonomy.” Emerging at a chaotic but also syncretic time in the development of Chinese Philosophy, this notion of freedom is largely ontological and epistemological in nature, yet show considerable potential in understanding social and political freedom.

I suggest thus that Guo Xiang’s philosophy allows us to conceive of a type of freedom which is necessary in as much as it is contingent. This articulation of freedom as self-realization (*zide*), is thus both ontological and political on account of a “logic of convergence.” Such logic has the radical potential to shed light upon the problem of freedom, because it goes beyond dissolving, allowing an absolute convergence of binaries, not only between particular and universal, but also ultimately between self and other.

INTRODUCTION

Freedom is a value cherished by most, and yet it is defined in as many ways as there are people defining it. Possibly one of the most elusive concepts in the history of philosophy, it has definitely been a controversial one in relation to China. The dominant view is that this notion has never really developed in China, at least not until it was imported from the Anglo-European world. On one hand, there are those who claim that freedom, specifically that in the liberal sense and as a basis for human rights, is a universal value that China should adopt upon itself. On the other hand, however, there are those who argue that such a demand is a remnant of “Western” imperialism and chauvinism, because the Chinese have historically developed characteristically distinct traditions which had led to championing other values as more significant than, for instance, democracy. The former dominant view is adopted even by contemporary sinologists such as W.J.F. Jenner. He remarks:

Do concepts of political freedom have any relevance to the long history of Chinese cultures before Western notions of freedom were introduced in the nineteenth century? They have certainly been relevant since then. Only with the armed intervention of the West did ideas of political freedom come into the Chinese world.¹

In the same work, Jenner only builds his claim from here, and continues to say that “colonial rules gave many opportunities for new social, economic and political values and institutions to emerge.”² He claims, moreover, that authority had always had a primal importance in the history of China, and blames Confucianism for this, saying that “the need to remove an extremely bad ruler or, even more drastically, to overthrow an incurably decadent dynasty is one about which Confucian thinkers from Mencius onwards have felt very uncomfortable.”³ It is thus no wonder that an opposing position emerges as a pushback back from the former view. Pointing out the fact that the ideal of harmony, which Confucians value most significantly, is shared among many civilizations including those in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin Americas, Daniel Bell suggests that:

It could be argued that the value of harmony is more widely shared and prioritized in the world’s cultures, ethical systems, and religions than *supposedly universal values such as freedom*. As in many other domains where the

¹ W.J.F. Jenner, "China and Freedom," in *Asian Freedoms: The Idea of Freedom in East and Southeast Asia*, ed. David Kelly and Anthony Reid (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998).65

² Ibid. 65

³ Ibid.68

citizens of Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) societies are the international outliers, the “Western” devaluation of the ideal of harmony is highly controversial in the rest of the world.⁴

However, David Kelly notes that this denial of freedom as a concern in Chinese philosophical traditions, is a “wedge issue,” meaning that there can possibly be no point of overlap between what “Westerners” regard as “universal values” and what scholars such as Bell regard as “Chinese values.” Nonetheless, Kelly examines a few Chinese modern thinkers who advocate for freedom in order to highlight “China’s potential contribution to global social theory as a very live and fruitful field of inquiry.”⁵ While I share Kelly’s goal, as well as agree with him when he points out the essentializing tendencies of Bell’s position, I find myself uncomfortable with his enthusiasm for absolute or universal values that are based on liberal standards, as Jenner seems to take for granted. In fact, not only is Jenner wrong in claiming that freedom is something that “Western” colonialism has brought to China as a sort of gift, but he is also making an erroneous claim when he purports that Confucians, especially Mencius, feel uncomfortable dethroning despots. As Tu Weiming points out:

The significance of the concept of virtue (*te* 德), which features prominently in Confucian political thought, is that since “Heaven sees as the people see and Heaven hears as the people hear,” the real guarantee for the well-being of the rulership lies in its acceptable performance rather than in its preconceived mandate. *The right of the people to rebel against a tyrannical dynasty*, the right of the aristocracy to remove an unjust imperial household, the right of the imperial clansmen to replace an unsuitable king, and the right of the bureaucrats to remonstrate with a negligent ruler are all sanctioned by a deep-rooted conviction that political leadership essentially manifests itself in moral persuasion and the transformative power of a dynasty depends mainly on the ethical quality of those who govern.⁶

Indeed, China has had a long history of revolutions,⁷ from as early as the Zhou dynasty (1046-256 BCE), to the Qin (221-206 BCE), all throughout the dynasties stretching to the Qing dynasty (1644 to 1912) which had the famous Taiping Rebellion and Boxer Rebellion, up until the recent ones under the Republic of China (1912–1949). Among these rebellions is possibly one of the earliest peasant rebellions in the world, the Yellow Turban Rebellion or 黃巾之亂 *Huangjin zhi luan* (184–

⁴ Daniel A. Bell, *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy* (USA: Princeton University Press, 2016).56-57. Emphasis mine.

⁵ David Kelly, "Approaching Chinese Freedom: A Study in Absolute and Relative Values," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 42, no. 2 (2013). 163

⁶ Weiming Tu, *Way, Learning, and Politics: Essays on the Confucian Intellectual* (USA: State University of New York Press, 1993). 6. Emphasis mine

⁷ For a more comprehensive discussion, see Frederick Wakeman, "Rebellion and Revolution: The Study of Popular Movements in Chinese History," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 36, no. 2 (1977).

205 CE), which had ties with religious Daoism. From as early as the Zhou dynasty, moreover, the “Mandate of Heaven,” or the idea that a ruler’s legitimacy is sanctioned by Heaven as manifested by the people, has been used to justify ousting tyrannical rulers, as in the justified overthrow of the Shang dynasty (1600-1046 BCE) by the Zhou. More particularly during the Wei through Jin (266–420AD) dynasties, there had been a unique wave of individualist thinkers,⁸ as well as the emergence of who Etienne Balazs refers to as “China’s first political anarchist,”⁹ 鮑敬言 Bao Jingyan (*circa* 200-400 CE).¹⁰

As such, while it is true that there is no direct equivalent in Chinese to the term “freedom” in classical Chinese philosophy, as shall be discussed in more detail later, it would suffice for now to say that it would be strange, if not simply erroneous, to claim that China did not know of political freedom, or at least had some idea of it—even if not corresponding to the liberal idea—before it had any exposure to Anglo-European traditions.

Nevertheless, I do not wish to establish here that the Confucian alternative of freedom or a Chinese value of freedom that is similar to a liberal one had existed in ancient China, nor do I wish to claim that there is a singular unique notion of freedom that Chinese philosophy puts forward, because there is a plurality of arsenals from which the concept of freedom—in the basic sense of self-determination—is ripe for interpretation. I will cover such plurality shortly, but for now, it would be important to note that my primary aim is to demonstrate that, notwithstanding the diachronic evolution of languages and terms, the concept of freedom is hardly a liberal invention, and so perhaps if we look elsewhere, we might be presented with alternatives that are possibly more holistic, and perhaps even more plausible.

It is thus the goal of this study to explore a specific Chinese philosopher, who may perhaps, present us with a fruitful resource into better understanding and evaluating our notions of freedom, both ontological¹¹ and political. More specifically, this work examines the potential of Guo Xiang, a commentator and philosopher from the Jin dynasty (266–420), and his

⁸ Ying-shih Yü, "Individualism and the Neo-Daoist Movement in Wei-Jin China," in *Chinese History and Culture: Sixth Century B.C.E. To Seventeenth Century*, ed. Michael S. Duke Josephine Chiu-Duke (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

⁹ Étienne Balazs, *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy: Variations on a Theme*, trans. H.M. Wright (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964).243

¹⁰ Although little is known about Bao Jingyan, he has a surviving work entitled *No-Ruler Theory* 無君論 *Wujunlun*, which Balazs translates as “Neither Lord nor Subject,” quite possibly alluding to the anarchist slogan “Neither God nor Master” that had become prominent during the early 20th century anarchist movements, incidentally the same time when Balazs was writing. In this work, Bao criticizes the Confucian justification for the Mandate of Heaven and argue that this is an excuse used by those who benefit from it. Further, Bao points out the exploitation that arises from relationships that involve domination: “The fact is that the strong oppressed the weak and the weak submitted to them; the cunning tricked the innocent and the innocent served them. It was because there was submission that the relation of lord and subject arose, and because there was servitude that the people, being powerless, could be kept under control.” For a translated version of the full text, see Bao Jingyan, “Neither Lord Nor Subject,” in *ibid.* 243-246

¹¹ This would perhaps be more often referred to as metaphysical freedom, but at least in the context of Guo Xiang, there is no such thing as “beyond the physical” as is the case with what is metaphysical. Instead, as I will delve more into later, we simply have something that deals with causality and existence—as such, I refer to it as relating to ontology rather than metaphysics.

philosophical enterprise to contribute insights into a comprehensive account of a kind of freedom that is both ontological and political, through exploring his notion of self-realization (自得 *zide*). Emerging at a chaotic but also syncretic time in the development of Chinese Philosophy, his philosophical enterprise introduces a unique notion of freedom that is largely ontological and epistemological in nature, yet shows considerable potential for deriving social and political aspects to this same concept of freedom. I suggest thus that Guo Xiang's philosophy allows us to conceive of a type of freedom which is as necessary as it is contingent, and where freedom, both ontological and political, is possible on account of a metaphysics that has the radical potential to shed light upon the question of what freedom means, because unlike our dominant notions of freedom, Guo Xiang is able to establish an ontological and epistemological system that places the self as part of the empirical world of radical causality. By "freedom," moreover, I refer here to the basic understanding of it as self-determination and necessity (i.e. uncaused) which, as I shall demonstrate, is inevitably intertwined with freedom as self-realization. From the perspective of a philosopher like Guo Xiang, for who the self has no fixed metaphysical grounds, what then might self-determination and self-realization look like? This is the question that we are going to pursue.

In order to do this, it is important to note that for Guo Xiang, like many other Chinese philosophers, as we shall later discuss, freedom is not a given, as it is in Rousseau, wherein "man is born free."¹² Ideas develop differently in different historical contexts, and it is so with freedom, which does not emerge in identical ways through different traditions of thought. Although there are some dominant overlaps with the conception of freedom as self-determination among differing traditions, there are also differences and debates that are unique within traditions.

More particularly, while Guo Xiang's notion of freedom can indeed be considered in terms of self-determination, I would like to demarcate his conception of freedom from the mainstream understanding of it in Anglo-European discourse. This is because Anglo-European discourse on freedom is deeply embedded in the problem of free-will. While it is true that the free-will problem has different concerns than that of political freedom, the concerns of ontological freedom—as I shall demonstrate—permeates the origins of our mainstream ideas on freedom.

In what follows, I show how the free-will problem had developed throughout history, its relation to political freedom; and why, even though it cannot be applied to a Chinese philosophical context, that might not be a bad thing nor does it imply that there are no conceptions of freedom in Chinese philosophical discourse. I demonstrate the latter by surveying different Chinese philosophical conceptions and terms used to conceptualize Chinese notions of freedom, but ultimately explain why

¹² Jean Jacques Rousseau, *A Treatise on the Social Compact, or, the Principles of Political Law* (London: D.I. Eaton, 1795). 4.

looking at Guo Xiang for a re-construction of a more holistic and comprehensive account of freedom, built on a different ontology, might prove to be fruitful.

A Brief History of the Free-will Problem and its Theological Foundations

Famous philosopher of freedom, Daniel Dennett, notes that free-will is “an almost exclusively Western preoccupation.”¹³ Indeed, the free-will “problem” can be said to have started with the Pre-Socratics, framed as a question of whether freedom of choice, and therefore moral responsibility, was compatible with fate, and more specifically, the foreknowledge of the gods and their divine providence.

Democritus (460–370 BCE), for instance, wanted to take control back from the gods, and the idea that it is the gods who define our fates. Instead, he wanted to wrest the responsibility of man’s life unto himself, saying that:

People ask the gods for health in their prayers, but do not realize that the control of their health lies with them; through lack of self-control they act in opposition to it and so themselves betray their health to their desires¹⁴

Favoring the physical world over that of the gods, discovering the atom, and seeking to assign more responsibility to humans rather than the gods through his materialist philosophy, are among several things for which Democritus can be considered as the first man to have chosen science over the divine. Even though he never outright denied their existence,¹⁵ Democritus made the first bold step towards the banner of scientific inquiry, or the insistence on acquiring knowledge only through empirical observation. For this, one of the most influential philosophers of science of the 20th century, Karl Popper, admired him. He said of Democritus, as well as his fellow countryman Protagoras:

They formulated the doctrine that human institutions of language, custom, and law are not taboos but man-made, not natural but conventional, insisting, at the same time, that we are responsible for them.¹⁶

Incidentally, however, Democritus instead came up with a theory that is closer to modern-day physical determinism,¹⁷ than being able to ascribe moral responsibility to humans. One of the more well-known claims of the Atomists, the school to which Democritus belonged, was perhaps that: “Leucippus says all things happen by necessity, which is the same fate. For he

¹³ Daniel C. Dennett, *Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting* (USA: Oxford University Press, 1984). 5.

¹⁴ Democritus, III.17.39 quoted in C.C.W. Taylor, *The Atomists, Leucippus and Democritus: Fragments: A Text and Translation with a Commentary* (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1999). 34.

¹⁵ In Tim Whitmarsh’s book about atheism and challenging divinities in the ancient Mediterranean, he says about Democritus that “in Democritus’s material world, gods have become parasites rather than hosts.” See Tim Whitmarsh, *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World* (USA: Faber & Faber, 2016). 68.

¹⁶ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London, UK: Routledge, 2002). 202.

¹⁷ Pamela Huby, “The First Discovery of the Freewill Problem,” *Philosophy* 42, no. 162 (1967). 361.

says in *On Mind*, No thing happens in vain, but all things happen for a reason and from necessity.”¹⁸

Nevertheless, Democritus’ attempt to ascribe responsibility to humans had, in turn, influenced Aristotle (384–322 BCE), and a generation after, Epicurus (341–270 BCE). It was Epicurus, according to Pamela Huby,¹⁹ who was finally able to provide a first account of a solution to the free-will “problem.” Huby says that Epicurus was able to do this because: “He took over the atomic theory of Democritus almost unchanged, but introduced one significant new point, the swerve of the atoms, a slight change of direction that could occur without any cause.”²⁰ Cicero (106–43 BCE), in his *De Fato*, criticizes this but also gives us our closest account of Epicurus’ attempt to salvage free-will from the determinism of the Atomists. He says:

But Epicurus thinks that the necessity of fate can be avoided by the swerve of an atom. And so a third kind of motion appears, in addition to weight and collision, when an atom swerves by a minimal interval (he calls it an elachiston [smallest]); and he is forced to concede, in fact if not in his words, that this swerve is uncaused. For an atom does not swerve because it is struck by another atom. For how can one be struck by another if the atomic bodies are moving, owing to their weight, downward in straight lines, as Epicurus thinks? It follows that, if one atom is never displaced by another, then one atom cannot even contact another.

From which it is also concluded that if an atom exists and it does swerve, it does so without cause. Epicurus introduced this line of reasoning because he was afraid that if an atom always moved by its natural and necessary heaviness, we would have no freedom, since our mind would be moved in such a way that it would be compelled by the motion of atoms. Democritus, the founder of atomism, preferred to accept that all things happened by necessity than to tear from the atomic bodies their natural motions.²¹

While there is no clear account of how exactly this swerve accounts for free-will, we know that Epicurus adopted the materialism of Democritus in order to ascribe responsibility back to man. Cyril Bailey, in his book *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus*, says as much:

To escape from the old notion of the divine guidance of the world, the Atomists had set up a materialist philosophy directed solely by uniform laws of cause and effect. Democritus saw that this, if pursued to its logical conclusion, must lead to an unflinching determinism, which with more scientific insight perhaps, but less care for his ethical

¹⁸ [F15] Aëtius [P I.25.4] S I.4.7c (67B2), quoted in Daniel W. Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy: The Complete Fragments and Selected Testimonies of the Major Presocratics* (New York, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2010). 553.

¹⁹ Huby, "The First Discovery of the Freewill Problem."

²⁰ Ibid. 358

²¹ Cicero, *On Fate*, 22-23, quoted in Brad Inwood and Lloyd P. Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy* (USA: Hackett Publishing Company, Incorporated, 1997). 47-48.

precepts, he had wholly accepted. Epicurus, unwilling in this way to risk his moral system, tried to escape from the impasse without abandoning a materialist position.²²

Epicurus, however, saw it necessary to continue to include the existence of the gods in order to defend the existence of free-will and responsibility. He does this by saying that the gods do see our future, but that they simply do not care.²³ Thus, we ought to be held responsible for our actions, and our fates are, to a point, up to our own actions. In his *Letter to Menoeceus*, he says that:

As to [Fate], introduced by some as the mistress of all, <he is scornful, saying rather that some things happen of necessity,> others by chance, and others by our own agency, and that he sees that necessity is not answerable [to anyone], that chance is unstable, while what occurs by our own agency is autonomous, and that it is to this that praise and blame are attached. For it would be better to follow the stories told about the gods than to be a slave to the fate of the natural philosophers. For the former suggests a hope of escaping bad things by honouring the gods, but the latter involves an inescapable and merciless necessity.²⁴

However, Susanne Bobzien²⁵ challenges the claim that Epicurus “discovered” the free-will “problem,” and sure enough, there are many other contenders as to where the problem originated. Nonetheless, such early formulations were all still in relation to whether or not a divine being controls our choices, and if so, to what extent. For instance, Michael Frede claims that it is actually in Epictetus, during the first century CE, that we find the first notion of a free-will.²⁶ Meanwhile, Dihle claims that “the notion of will, as it is used as a tool of analysis and description in many philosophical doctrines from the early Scholastics to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, was invented by St. Augustine.”²⁷ On one hand, Epictetus says that this ability *to do otherwise*, is a faculty shared to us by Zeus. According to Epictetus, Zeus would have said that: “we have given thee a certain portion of ourself, this faculty of choice and refusal, of desire and aversion, or, in a word, the faculty which makes use

²² Cyril Bailey, *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus: A Study* (New York, USA: Russell & Russell, 1964). 321

²³ According to this, Lactantius presents the traditional problem of evil and poses it thus: “And if this explanation [for the existence of bad things] . . . is true, then that argument of Epicurus is refuted. ‘God’” he says, ‘either wants to eliminate bad things and cannot, or can but does not want to, or neither wishes to nor can, or both wants to and can. If he wants to and cannot, then he is weak-and this does not apply to god. If he can but does not want to, then he is spiteful which is equally foreign to god's nature. If he neither wants to nor can, he is both weak and spiteful and so not a god. If he wants to and can, which is the only thing fitting for a god, where then do bad things come from? Or why does he not eliminate them?’ I know that most of the philosophers who defend [divine] providence are commonly shaken by this argument and against their wills are almost driven to admit that god does not care, which is exactly what Epicurus is looking for.” See Lactantius, *On the Anger of God*, 13.20-22, quoted in Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*. 94

²⁴ Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus: Diogenes Laertius*, [1-4] 10.121-135, quoted in *ibid.* 31

²⁵ Susanne Bobzien, “Did Epicurus Discover the Free Will Problem?,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 19 (2000).

²⁶ Michael Frede, *A Free Will: Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought*, ed. A.A. Long (USA: University of California Press, 2011). 175

²⁷ Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity* (USA: University of California Press, 1982)., 123

of external impressions.”²⁸ On the other hand, Dihle tells us that:

St. Augustine approached the problem of will in various ways, but always on the basis of the Biblical belief that man was created according to the image and likeness of the Creator. That the similarity of God and man could only be ascertained in the human soul was the obvious interpretation of Genesis 1:27 for a Roman or Greek intellectual about A.D. 400.²⁹

Either way, the notion of free-will as framed by Epictetus and Augustine alike, pushes forward the claim that we are free precisely because we are made in the image of god. This then allows for a singular event that gives birth to our independent will. Daniel Dennett also references this in his work *Freedom Evolves*:

One widespread tradition has it that we human beings are responsible agents, captains of our fate, because what we really are are souls, immaterial and immortal chumps of Godstuff that inhabit and control our material bodies rather like spectral puppeteers. It is our souls that are the source of all meaning, and the locus of all our suffering, our joy, our glory and shame. But this idea of immaterial souls, capable of defying the laws of physics, has outlived its credibility thanks to the advance of the natural sciences. Many people think the implications of this are dreadful: We don't really have "free will" and nothing really matters.³⁰

At this point, it is perhaps safe to say that the origins and emergence of a concept of free-will as we know it today in Anglo-European scholarship had always had its roots in theological inquiry, guided by anthropomorphic versions of a god or gods. Most apparently, the concept of free-will gets picked up and brought to the fore by monotheistic religions, specifically in theodicy. In Christianity, for instance, God is supposed to be omnipotent and omniscient, but also omnibenevolent. However, we see in the Gospels that God would punish humans to be damned in hell for eternity.³¹ As such, the only way for God to be omnipotent and omniscient, while being omnibenevolent (and not unjust), even while damning humans—the creation of whom He is solely responsible—is to create a stop-gap for the purpose of ascribing blame to humans instead: free-will.³² Without this

²⁸ Epictetus, Book I. I. 12 quoted in W.A. Oldfather, *Epictetus: The Discourses as Reported by Arrian, the Manual, and Fragments* (Great Britain: Harvard University Press, 1925). 11.

²⁹ Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity*. 124

³⁰ Daniel C. Dennett, *Freedom Evolves* (USA: Viking, 2003). 1. It is worth mentioning that Dennett's work, here and elsewhere, is aimed at disproving this. He shows that free will "is not a preexisting feature of our existence, like the law of gravity," See *ibid.* 13. It is, instead, a product of our evolution as humans.

³¹ See, for instance, Luke 10:15 and Mat 11:23, where the city of Capernaum (along with Bethsaida and Chorazin) is damned unto hell for their lack of faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

³² See, for instance, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1036; The logic behind deserving hell due to one's own choices also applies to the Problem of Evil in theodicy itself, as Alvin Plantinga argues in what he calls the "free will defense" where he expresses the idea that "the idea of being free with respect to an action. If a person is free with respect to a given action, then he is free to perform that action and free to refrain from performing it; no antecedent conditions and/or causal laws determine that he will perform the action, or

anthropomorphized God, there would have been much less motivation to problematize the issue of human free-will, as well as the need to conceive of it as a denaturalized absolute metaphysical faculty for uncaused agency—for starting a new causal chain *ex nihilo* and thus having full responsibility for it—because only if it is truly uncaused can the blame be kept off of God’s shoulders.

It is perhaps for this reason, as previously mentioned, that Dennett points out the problem of free-will as “an almost exclusively Western pre-occupation.”³³ Yet ultimately, as Dennett points out:

What we want when we want free will is the power to decide our courses of action, and to decide them wisely, in the light of our expectations and desires. We want to be in control of ourselves, and not under the control of others.

We want to be agents, capable of initiating, and taking responsibility for, projects and deeds.³⁴

This need for power, according to Dennett, is a “natural product of our biological endowment, extended and enhanced by our initiation into society.”³⁵ So whether it is the external pull of something akin to the Greek *moira*, or even *telos*, when we are caused to move to a certain direction beyond our control, or the push of going back to a Christian god that is the precise cause for our free-will—it is the power of that metaphysical or ontological ground zero that allows for free-will, or in Dennett’s words, for “elbow room,” that we seek.

It is often the case that we divide metaphysical freedom with what consider as political freedom, and even Dennett himself, conceding the existence of free-will simply for the fact that nihilistic determinism is a negligible position,³⁶ tells us that: “There are real threats to human freedom, but they are not metaphysical. There is political bondage, coercion, the manipulation inducible by the dissemination of misinformation, and the ‘forced move’ desperation of poverty and hunger.”³⁷

Isaiah Berlin, however, tells us that it is precisely the metaphysical that is a threat to our political freedom. In one of his renowned essays, *Historical Inevitability*, he makes the claim that “one of the deepest human desires is to find a unitary pattern in which the whole of experience, past, present and future, actual, possible and unfulfilled, is symmetrically ordered.”³⁸ This

that he won't. It is within his power, at the time in question, to take or perform the action and within his power to refrain from it.” Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 29. This defense, he says, “shows that the existence of God is compatible, both logically and probabilistically, with the existence of evil; thus it solves the main philosophical problem of evil.” *Ibid.*, 64.

³³ Dennett, *Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting*. 5

³⁴ *Ibid.* 169

³⁵ *Ibid.* 169

³⁶ For a more comprehensive discussion, see X

³⁷ Dennett, *Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting*. 169

³⁸ Isaiah Berlin, “Historical Inevitability,” in *Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (New York, USA: Oxford University Press, 2002). 155

kind of metaphysical coherence, the promise of the One and final truth, he says, is “an image which has often appeared in the history of mankind, always at moments of confusion and inner weakness.”³⁹ Elaborating its dangers, Berlin continues:

It is one of the great alibis, pleaded by those who cannot or do not wish to face the fact of human responsibility, the existence of a limited but nevertheless real area of human freedom, either because they have been too deeply wounded or frightened to wish to return to the traffic of normal life, or because they are filled with moral indignation against the false values and the, to them, repellent moral codes of their own society, or class, or profession, and take up arms against all ethical codes as such, as a dignified means of casting off a morality which is to them, perhaps justifiably, repulsive. Nevertheless, such views, although they may spring from a natural reaction against too much moral rhetoric, are a desperate remedy; those who hold them use history as a method of escape from a world which has, for some reason, grown odious to them, into a fantasy where impersonal entities avenge their grievances and set everything right, to the greater or lesser discomfiture of their persecutors, real and imaginary. And in the course of this they describe the normal lives lived by men in terms which fail to mark the most important psychological and moral distinctions known to us. This they do in the service of an imaginary science; and, like the astrologers and soothsayers whom they have succeeded, cast up their eyes to the clouds, and speak in immense, unsubstantiated images and similes, in deeply misleading metaphors and allegories, and make use of hypnotic formulae with little regard for experience, or rational argument, or tests of proven reliability. Thereby they throw dust in their own eyes as well as in ours, obstruct our vision of the real world, and further confuse an already sufficiently bewildered public about the relations of morality to politics, and about the nature and methods of the natural sciences and historical studies alike.⁴⁰

To this end, Berlin associates this kind of historical and scientific determinism⁴¹ with the traditional belief in God’s providence,⁴² which ultimately allows free-will through an uncaused cause, whether it be from being shaped in *Imago Dei*, or

³⁹ Ibid. 164

⁴⁰ Ibid. 164-165

⁴¹ Throughout Berlin’s work, he most constantly cites Karl Marx and Auguste Comte as such examples, respectively. He discusses them as well in the same work. See *ibid.* More straightforwardly, however, Berlin explains this of Comte and says: “The same attitude was pointedly expressed by August Comte, who asked why, if we do not allow free thinking in chemistry or biology, we should allow it in morals or politics. Why indeed? If it makes sense to speak of political truths - assertions of social ends which all men, because they are men, must, once they are discovered, agree to be such; and if, as Comte believed, scientific method will in due course reveal them; then what case is there for freedom of opinion or action - at least as an end in itself, and not merely as a stimulating intellectual climate - either for individuals or for groups? Why should any conduct be tolerated that is not authorised by appropriate experts? Comte put bluntly what had been implicit in the rationalist theory of politics from its ancient Greek beginnings. There can, in principle, be only one correct way of life” See Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty.” 197

⁴² Berlin notes that: “Sen, with admirable consistency and candour, does indeed explain that, when determinists use the language

replacing the God as final signified with new referents such as Rationality, Absolute Knowledge, or even Emancipation. Berlin would repeatedly criticize this hope and dependence on a remote and distant single narrative, finally culminating in his seminal work, *Two Concepts of Liberty*. In this work, he claims that there are two types of liberty: 1) the '*negative*' sense, is involved in the answer to the question 'What is the area within which the subject--a person or group of persons--is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?'⁴³; and 2) the '*positive*' sense, is involved in the answer to the question 'What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?'⁴⁴ As in much of his works, he goes through lengths to call out different varieties of positive liberty for their inevitable tendencies towards being oppressive and self-contradictory. He argues that positive liberty divides the self into two, the real and false one, the rational and irrational, and that according to these theories, we must strive towards to the real one, because:

I am free if, and only if, I plan my life in accordance with my own will; plans entail rules; a rule does not oppress me or enslave me if I impose it on myself consciously, or accept it freely, having understood it, whether it was invented by me or by others, provided that it is rational, that is to say, conforms to the necessities of things. To understand why things must be as they must be is to will them to be so. Knowledge liberates not by offering us more open possibilities amongst which we can make our choice, but by preserving us from the frustration of attempting the impossible.⁴⁵

For those who subscribe to positive liberty, free-will is only free if it wills what is true, what is rational, and hence correct. Berlin says that this comes from an over-arching metaphysical principle: "This is the belief that somewhere, in the past or in the future, in divine revelation or in the mind of an individual thinker, in the pronouncements of history or science, or in the simple heart of an uncorrupted good man, there is a final solution."⁴⁶ This theologically-charged idea of the freedom of the will consists in aligning our will to that final solution, final truth, which some authority wields. Hence:

of moral praise and blame, they are like atheists who still mention God, or lovers who speak of being faithful 'till the end of time; such talk is hyperbolic and not meant to be taken literally- This does at least concede (as most determinists do not) that if these words were taken literally something would be amiss. For my part I see no reason for supposing that most of those who use such language, with its implication of free choice among alternatives, whether in the future or in the past, mean this not literally, but in some Pickwickian or metaphorical or rhetorical way. Ernest Nagel points out that determinists, who, like Bossuet, believed in the omnipotence and omniscience of Providence and its control over every human step, nevertheless freely attributed moral responsibility to individuals; and that adherents of determinist faiths - Muslims, Calvinists and others - have not refrained from attribution of responsibility and a generous use of praise and blame." See *Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2002). 9-10

⁴³ Liberty "Two Concepts of Liberty." 169, emphasis mine

⁴⁴ Liberty *ibid.* 169, emphasis mine

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 190

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 212

Liberty, so far from being incompatible with authority, becomes virtually identical with it. This is the thought and language of all the declarations of the rights of man in the eighteenth century, and of all those who look upon society as a design constructed according to the rational laws of the wise lawgiver, or of nature, or of history, or of the Supreme Being.⁴⁷

And so, Berlin suggests, that against “the absolute values of our primitive past,”⁴⁸ we ought to follow a definition of freedom as negative liberty instead, that is, the freedom to choose according to our pluralistic values. However in order to make this possible, Berlin seems to preserve the notion of a transcendental self that is exempt from causality. Indeed, Aileen Kelly, in the introduction to Berlin’s book *Russian Thinkers*, says that the idea which penetrates all of Berlin’s works is simply: “that men are morally free and are (more often than the determinists who hold the field believe) able to influence events for good or evil through their freely held ideals and convictions.”⁴⁹ This is a conviction that is central to liberalist conceptions of freedom, but unlike John Locke, from who we get the now dominant idea of inalienable rights (including liberty) as given by God, Berlin attempts to get rid of the final signified. Yet he nonetheless preserves the immediate referent: the soul or, as it were, the Self—a floating individual emerged from nowhere, in possession of *freely held* ideals and convictions. He does not, in other words, fully abandon transcendence, nor does he give up faith on the Self as inherently valuable and powerful, able to influence the world around, and external, to it. As Daniel Dennett points out, this Self is a leftover of an anthropomorphic god, and that:

we can and should replace these sacrosanct but brittle traditions with a more naturalistic foundation. It is scary letting go of such honored precepts as the imagined conflict between determinism and freedom, and the false security of a miracle-working Self or Soul to be the place where the buck stops.⁵⁰

This laying down of the origins of the free-will problem and its foundations in theological inquiry is far from comprehensive, but should be sufficient to show the shape of a problem that shouldn’t be expected to appear in entirely different traditions and societies, such as that of the Chinese, that are not based on being ruled by anthropomorphic gods. Of course, it would be naïve to say that, in Chinese culture, there did not exist any such notions of anthropomorphic gods, or even

⁴⁷ Ibid. 195

⁴⁸ Ibid. 217

⁴⁹ *Russian Thinkers* Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers* (England: Penguin Books, 1994). xxiv

⁵⁰ Freedom Evolves Dennett, *Freedom Evolves*. 306

that the mandating force of the world, “Heaven” (天 Tian) was not itself anthropomorphized,⁵¹ but it had nowhere near in the same sense that Greek and Abrahamic conceptions of god were seen—as “unmoved mover.”⁵² In Chinese culture, even naturalistic manifestations of divine unsatisfaction are often considered to be caused by human choices that are considered to be problematic, and not because a god had divine plans which only he was capable of comprehending. From this cosmological viewpoint of the Chinese, the self is thus far from being a soul or a transcendental being shaped in the image of a wholly transcendent Knower. Rather, it is generally a relational self that is always already within a material and social world, existing in the midst of a complex network of inter-connections.

As such, “freedom” as framed in the free-will problem did not exist in Classical Chinese philosophical discourse, as some scholars have already noted,⁵³ and so neither was there a word equivalent to freedom. In an article entitled “Chinese Perspectives on Free Will,” Christian Helmut Wenzel and Kai Marchal examine the existence of the notion of free-will in Chinese philosophy, and suggest that although there are discussions of concepts that are related to it, such as “fate, predetermination, agency, moral responsibility, choice, and chance.”⁵⁴ As such, if we are willing to expand our mode of inquiry to these problems, they might just contribute to contemporary discussions on free-will and moral responsibility. Nonetheless, “the [free-will] problem seems to be absent in Chinese thought,”⁵⁵ so they conclude their exploratory study with the suggestion that:

...we cannot exclude the possibility that free will might not be a real problem at all. Then the Daoist or Confucian account might be more appealing. We should also notice that some of the questions debated by Western philosophers do not appear to be very meaningful to philosophers in East Asia. Broadly speaking, many Chinese and other East Asians do not share the Western belief in free will. But they often still explain, through the language

⁵¹ An exception, however, was Dong Zhongshu who anthropomorphized Heaven (天 Tian) with a will, as well as attributing it with the creation of humans, saying that “the creator of human beings is Heaven ... Heaven is also the supreme ancestor of human beings.” See Zongshu Dong, *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn*, trans. John S. Major and Sarah A. Queen (USA: Columbia University Press, 2015). Book 11, Part 1, Section 41.1.

⁵² A concept that Aristotle came up with in his *Metaphysics*. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book 12. Ibidem. It was later adopted by the scholastics, including Islamic philosophers, and in Christianity, was popularized by Thomas Aquinas in his magnum opus, the *Summa Theologica*.

⁵³ See, for instance, Chad Hansen, “Freedom and Moral Responsibility in Confucian Ethics,” *Philosophy East and West* 22, no. 2 (1972).; François Jullien, *Detour and Access: Strategies of Meaning in China and Greece*, trans. Sophie Hawkes (Zone Books, 2000). Quoted in Christian Wenzel and Kai Marchal, “Chinese Perspectives on Free Will,” (2017). This is also seen in Erica Fox Brindley, *Individualism in Early China: Human Agency and the Self in Thought and Politics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2010).

⁵⁴ Wenzel and Marchal, “Chinese Perspectives on Free Will.” 375

⁵⁵ Ibid. 374

of *xin*, *xing*, and *ming*, and other terms and ideas, why they feel responsible and ascribe responsibility to others.⁵⁶

Indeed, I have also tried to suggest here—following Daniel Dennett’s criticism of the “sacrosanct but brittle traditions” surrounding the free-will problem—that while there is indeed no discussion of free-will in Chinese philosophy, that might not be a bad thing at all, and it certainly does not mean, as some might have us believe, that Chinese philosophers were unconcerned with the problem of human freedom.

Be that as it may, these same concepts that hover around the free-will problem may well lend themselves into understanding alternative conceptions of freedom in Chinese philosophical discourse. After all, as Wenzel and Marchal point out, “we should open ourselves to the idea that, in a global world, there are very different styles of reasoning, and human freedom is certainly among the problems which should not be discussed in terms of Western traditions alone.”⁵⁷ It is thus in this regard that many studies, including this one, tackle the question of freedom in classical Chinese philosophical discourse which, while taking into account and considering similar problems such as those of Western philosophical discourse, are not limited by their parameters. This is because as I have shown, the roots of the free-will problem (which in turn informs the conversations on autonomy and political freedom) as we see it in mainstream philosophical discourse are Abrahamic and theological nature, and so expecting the same distinctions in Chinese philosophical discourse will be futile. After all, as Hegel says, “each individual is a child of his time; thus, philosophy, too, is its own time comprehended in thoughts.”⁵⁸ The above discussion, therefore, is a historical exercise that encourages the reader to set aside possible biases in relation to previously mentioned assumptions about Chinese philosophy. However, it is also an invitation to be open to the transformative possibility of considering that there are possible alternatives of conceiving freedom as autonomy, both as self-determination and self-realization, but which is not beholden to the same theological roots.

Problem of Freedom in Classical Chinese Philosophy

Thus, we might ask, if freedom in Chinese philosophy cannot be understood in the same terms as the free-will problem in Anglo-European philosophy, however, how then can we frame our understanding of freedom according the context of

⁵⁶ Ibid.386

⁵⁷ Ibid. 375

⁵⁸“Preface,” in *Hegel: Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, Georg Wilhelm Fredrich Hegel, and H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)., 21

Chinese philosophy? Erica Fox Brindley, in her innovative work on Chinese notions of individualism, touches on this topic, albeit indirectly. According to Brindley:

In early China, the individual is always situated within a larger familial, social, and cosmic whole. Such a “holistic” individualism emphasizes the individual from within a complicated and ever-changing web of relationships with people, objects, and events. Because it stresses achievement through individual relationship to others and not freedom through individual separation from others, such a concept of the individual necessarily jogs our current conceptions of what it means to be free, autonomous, and independent beings.⁵⁹

Although Brindley does not dwell on the notion of freedom, she emphasizes that understanding the conceptions of Chinese “individualism,” as unique and of its own kind, is necessary to understanding any notion of freedom or even autonomy in the context of Chinese philosophy. She claims that:

There exists a relative and relational sort of autonomy in early Chinese contexts, a type of autonomy that grants individuals the freedom to make decisions for themselves and to shape the course of their own lives to the fullest degree that they can and should.⁶⁰

She says that although individualism in Chinese philosophy is different from its common conception in Anglo-European philosophy—comprising of an individual who is defined through her separation from others—it exists in Chinese philosophy, insofar as the Chinese “individual” possesses the power of self-determination.⁶¹ As such, “the ‘individual’ is a unique participant in a larger whole—both integral to the processes that define the whole as well as to the change and transformation that stems from itself and its environment.”⁶² Brindley argues that the main difference is in whether this individual is an active or passive agent,⁶³—an agent for another or an agent for one’s own authority. Specifically, whether she is internally or externally motivated, based on the changing views on human agency at the time. She demonstrates this through surveying different schools of thought in ancient China, that “the onset of ideals that stress the power and authority of the individual, either as a conformist agent in relationship to a larger, cosmic whole, or as an individualistic agent endowed with inalienable cosmic powers and authorities.”⁶⁴ Thus, whether it is a.) the more direct conforming to the external upward authority of Heaven

⁵⁹ Brindley, *Individualism in Early China: Human Agency and the Self in Thought and Politics*. xi

⁶⁰ Ibid. xxvii

⁶¹ Ibid. xxx

⁶² Ibid. xxx

⁶³ “Passive agent” is likely etymologically contradictory, as the word “agent” comes the Latin *agere*, meaning to do. However, this is consistent with Brindley’s argument, as we shall see, given that she argues how even when agency is passive or conformist in Chinese philosophy, it consists a kind of autonomous participation and hence, choosing.

⁶⁴ Brindley, *Individualism in Early China: Human Agency and the Self in Thought and Politics*. xvi

(天 *Tian*) as taught by the Mohists, or to the model of the sages as direct bearers of cosmic authority as found in texts like the *Laozi*, *Guanzi*, the *Zhuangzi*, and some Ruist texts; b.) the more internal agency as directed by human beings' innate moral seeds, as taught by Mencius and perhaps even Yangzhu, or; c.) a combination of both internal and external sources of powers as found in the *Zhongyong* and the Syncretist chapters of the *Zhuangzi*; they all generally highlight the empowerment of the individual as derived from participatory conformity. Brindley shows notions of individualism wherein the individual is considered as “a unique and critical participant in a larger whole” through her access to cosmic authority, whether externally, internally, or both. According to her, these holistic conceptualizations of the individual “demonstrate how individual power or agency might be construed in terms of connection rather than isolation and atomistic spheres of authority.”⁶⁵ In other words, Brindley shows us that—very much unlike its Anglo-European conceptions—classical Chinese notions of agency and autonomy never detach the self or individual from the environment, but are always part of the cosmic whole.

It is thus for these reasons that many studies on Chinese notions of freedom, including this one, draw upon a notion of autonomy rather than free-will. In other words, although the theologically rooted pseudo-problem of the freedom of the will does not emerge from classical China, there exists the problem of autonomy, as drawn from conceptions of the self.

Chenyang Li, in his work on Confucian freedom, provides a definition of autonomy that can be applicable to classical Chinese philosophies of freedom in general. He says that “autonomy, literally ‘self- ruling,’ emphasizes one's internal capacity to make decisions for oneself.”⁶⁶ It is from this minimal definition of autonomy—etymologically derived from the Greek *autos*, meaning self, and *nomos*, meaning law—where he later derives a theory of what Confucian autonomy might look like, but nonetheless clarifies that “a free environment is a precondition for autonomy. A person cannot be autonomous without a free environment, even though a free environment does not necessitate personal autonomy.”⁶⁷ If we follow this definition of autonomy thus, we are left with only two major schools of thought as apparent contenders in being rich arsenals for exploring the possible notions of freedom as autonomy in early China: Confucianism and, as we shall later discuss, Daoism. As such, I shall only look at these two major schools of thought here, in order to provide a general overview how contemporary scholars have interpreted the concept of freedom in classical Chinese philosophy.

Nonetheless, we must keep in mind that even though there exists a concept of the individual and the self, there is still no real and direct word for “freedom” in Classical Chinese. The contemporary word for freedom is 自由 *ziyou*, meaning to be

⁶⁵ Ibid. 129

⁶⁶ Chenyang Li, “The Confucian Conception of Freedom,” *Philosophy East and West* 64, no. 4 (October, 2014). 905

⁶⁷ Ibid. 905

caused by one's self, was never really used as a philosophical term in classical Chinese philosophy.

Other words which have been used to discuss freedom in Chinese philosophy include 自然 *ziran*, and 逍遙 *xiaoyao*, among others. These terms as counterparts to the concept of freedom are more readily apparent in Daoism, which we shall go back to later, but as we shall see, Confucianism is just as ripe for an equally valid approach to freedom in its conceptualization of freedom as autonomy.

Indeed, even without these words serving as counterparts, Chenyang Li innovatively suggests that the concept of freedom exists in classical Chinese philosophy by "articulation without coinage" and by "way of implied concept." He defines the second type of framing the concept of freedom, that is framing it by way of implied concept, as "a concept that is logically entailed in another or other concepts so that the other concepts do not make sense without presupposing and understanding the unstated concept." However, it seems to me that the first type of framing, that is articulation without coinage, simply presupposes the second one; since it is merely implied, there is no coinage, despite the fact that it was articulated as a logical precondition or necessary presupposition.

Ultimately, Li claims that for Confucian philosophy, autonomy, and therefore freedom, is competence-based.⁶⁸ He says that "realized freedom is manifested in *ze shan* 擇善 or choosing the good."⁶⁹ Furthermore, Li echoes the non-existence of free-will as a supreme value in Chinese philosophy, but he counters its value no longer through historical contextualization, but by logic of argument itself. Li says:

Benjamin Schwartz asked why "the freedom to choose between good and evil ... never seems to be put forth, , in most Chinese thought, as a supreme value." For Confucians, such a question is odd. Understood in the abstract sense, "freedom" entails logically three possible outcomes: to choose the good, to choose the bad, and to choose neither. If only choosing the good is of supreme value, why should "freedom" per se be given "supreme value"? We praise people for choosing the good, not for choosing between good and bad. Therefore, in the Confucian view, abstract freedom at best has an instrumental value; only "choosing the good" has a supreme value.⁷⁰

As a result, Li argues that Confucian civil liberties should be modeled in such a way that it enables, in a free environment, the capacity to choose the good.

The definition of autonomy as an internal capacity for self-determination is thus key to understanding how freedom in

⁶⁸ Ibid. 902

⁶⁹ Ibid.909

⁷⁰ Li ibid.912

classical Chinese philosophy can only be understood in terms of how one's autonomous capacity draws from, and contributes to, a cosmic and moral whole. This definition is consistent among several schools of thought in Chinese philosophical traditions.

Also elaborating on the Confucian notion of freedom before Li, Tu Weiming had noted that:

The Confucians believe that if we make a conscientious effort to actively incorporate the societal norms and values in our own conduct, we will be able to transcend the linguistic and cultural constraints of our society by transforming them into instruments of self-realization. Like poets who have mastered the subtleties of the language, articulating their innermost thoughts through them, Confucians who have become thoroughly proficient in the nuances of the ritual are said to be able to establish and enlarge others as well as themselves by bringing this personal knowledge to bear on daily practical living. The seeming naivete of the Confucians in accepting their own linguistic and cultural universe as intrinsically meaningful and valuable is based on the collective judgment that the survival and continuation of their civilization is not a given reality but a communal attainment. This judgment is itself premised on a fundamental faith in the transformability and perfectibility of the human condition through communal effort.⁷¹

Tu's description is poignant and this perfectibility of the human condition according to Tu would, if we are to go back to the *Analects*, very much explain Confucius' own growth from childhood to old age. He says,

The Master said, "At fifteen, I set my mind upon learning; at thirty, I took my place in society; at forty, I became free of doubts; at fifty, I understood Heaven's Mandate; at sixty, my ear was attuned; and at seventy, I could follow my heart's desires without overstepping the bounds of propriety."⁷²

According to Sor-hoon Tan, Confucius is "claiming a kind of freedom"⁷³ here, but she distinguishes it from dominant liberal forms and says:

This is not the ready-made freedom of the negative conceptions assuming a fixed and given self. It is a positive freedom that is achieved only after a long, arduous process of cultivating the person, in which the person or self,

⁷¹ Weiming Tu, "Embodying the Universe: A Note on Confucian Self-Realization," in *Self as Person in Asian Theory and Practice*, ed. Roger T. Ames, Wimal Dissanayake, and Thomas P. Kasulis (USA: State University of New York Press, 1994). 178-17

⁷² Confucius, *Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, trans. Edward Slingerland (USA: Hackett Publishing Company, Incorporated, 2003). 2.4.

⁷³ Sor-Hoon Tan, *Confucian Democracy: A Deweyan Reconstruction*, Suny Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture (USA: State University of New York Press, 2012). 169

far from being fixed and given, changes for the better over time.⁷⁴

Given that this would mean that Confucian freedom is what Berlin criticizes as positive freedom, or freedom as self-mastery or self-realization,⁷⁵ Tan defends the Confucian notion of freedom against a more basic negative conception of it. She says:

The boundaries that Confucius from age seventy no longer overstepped are those between ethical and unethical desires. They are the boundaries of his way of ethical living (*dao* 道). The freedom to be found within these boundaries does not posit oneself in opposition to others as negative freedom does; the Confucian way brings self and others together in achieving harmonious community. Confucian values, such as authoritative conduct (*ren* 仁), appropriateness (*yi* 義), ritual practice (*li* 禮), wisdom (*zhi* 智), and keeping one's words (*xin* 信), are understood in interpersonal terms.⁷⁶

While it is not the aim of this study to defend positive freedom from Berlin's criticisms, it does aim, at least partially, to show that negative freedom and its liberal conception of the self is not really something that is found or of concern to classical Chinese philosophies such as Confucianism, not because there is no concern for freedom or individuality, but because it is a remnant of the free-will problem traditionally construed. Tan hints on this herself when she remarks that:

In moral and political philosophy, the Augustinian-Cartesian legacy gives rise to the modern notion of freedom as autonomy that portrays the subject as radically independent, determining her own purposes without interference from external authority, whether natural or social.⁷⁷

This radically independent subject that, in Augustine's conception, is created in the image of god, does not exist in classical Chinese philosophy. What this also suggests, however, is that Chinese conceptions of freedom are never negative, but rather something to be realized and perfected. The reason for this, as we have already mentioned, is because the self in Chinese philosophy is relational. As Tan explains: "Given the relational character of one's self, one's study when successful would benefit others, but it could only do so if the result of studying is *in* oneself, part of what one becomes and therefore how one relates to others."⁷⁸ Freedom, in the Confucian sense, therefore, can only truly be realized through communal effort, as Tu had suggested. Tan spends the rest of her book arguing that we can modify the kind of positive freedom that Confucianism

⁷⁴ Ibid. 169

⁷⁵ Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty." 187-191

⁷⁶ Tan, *Confucian Democracy: A Deweyan Reconstruction*. 171

⁷⁷ Ibid. 18-19

⁷⁸ Ibid. 174

espouses in order to be compatible with a reconstructed democracy for the 21st century, in contrast to Chenyang Li's more straightforward approach to Confucian freedom as competence-based and comprising of "knowing *the* good."⁷⁹ Nonetheless, it is safe to assume at this point that in general, the major contemporary scholars of Confucianism agree that Confucian freedom is something to be realized and achieved, not an automatic given as it is conceived as in negative freedom.

While one might think that freedom as self-realization is distinctly Confucian due to its communal emphasis, Daoist notions of freedom are actually almost always different versions of positive freedom as well, precisely because unlike negative freedom, the self is seen here as still relational, part and parcel to the cosmic whole. Even when the Daoist rejects society and morality as social constructs that constrain us, it is because these artificialities have led us away from the natural *Dao*, which we must become one with in order to become free.

As Ni Peimin points out, the "Taoist way of achieving freedom is to give up the self, to identify the self with the Tao—the great nature—so that the constraints will not apply as such."⁸⁰ This conception of freedom is immediately reminiscent of what Berlin classifies as a variant of positive freedom that prescribes self-abnegation as a form of self-mastery, often adopted when one cannot change the constraints of his surroundings—so one changes himself instead.⁸¹ This conjures up the image of a mystic or hermit who has left society and their moral obligations in order to become one with nature and their "inner self"—an image not all too different from a stereotypical conception of a Daoist sage.⁸² More authentically, such negation manifests itself the most in the Daoist concept of *wuwei* 無為 or non-striving, which Ni says is "based on an understanding that humans are limited in abilities"⁸³ in contrast to the great *Dao* 道, for if "if one separates oneself from and puts oneself in opposition to the great Tao, one is bound to fail."⁸⁴ Moreover, Ni explains that "the virtue of not striving is based on the Taoist view that by identifying oneself with the Tao, one can gain real strength."⁸⁵ According to this interpretation, this type of effortlessness and raising one's arms up in surrender to the *Dao* is the kind of simple wandering that leads to freedom, but perhaps more distinctly, to an identification with the movement of the cosmos itself. As Ni suggests:

to the Taoist, freedom is a state in which there is no line between the self and non-self; it is a state in which the self gains strength from being in harmony with the non-self. The Taoist idea of freedom is therefore not simply

⁷⁹ Li, "The Confucian Conception of Freedom." 911

⁸⁰ Ni Peimin Ni, "The Taoist Concept of Freedom," *Grand Valley Review* 9, no. 1 (1993). 25

⁸¹ Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty." 181-187

⁸² For instance, see the previously mentioned article of Li where he says "Daoist can achieve sagehood alone in separation from human society" Li, "The Confucian Conception of Freedom." 913

⁸³ Ni, "The Taoist Concept of Freedom." 26

⁸⁴ Ibid. 26

⁸⁵ Ibid. 27

dropping the self; it is also enlarging the self.⁸⁶

This kind of nihilistic self-abnegation that seems overly inward, however, is what Ge Ling Shang pushes back against in his book *Liberation as Affirmation*. Ge Ling Shang argues that just like with Nietzsche, Zhuangzi is neither nihilistic nor anti-religion. On the contrary, the affirmation of life is central to Zhuangzi's philosophy; that this affirmation of secular life as religious sacred is the ultimate liberation. In fact, Shang claims, Zhuangzi "tried to dissolve the separation between Dao and everyday life."⁸⁷ Shang eventually rejects Laozi's metaphysical framing entirely and, instead, explores "Zhuangzi's deconstructing metaphysical Dao as an indispensable preparation and necessary *dao* for the ultimate realization of freedom (*xiaoyaoyou*)."⁸⁸ Hence, Shang adopts a more positive and active approach to freedom by switching from negation to affirmation, abnegation to realization.

Although Shang explains that for Zhuangzi, in contrast to Confucianism, "society is a form of mass manipulation in which morality attempts to fix human life into prescribed social roles and thereby suppresses human freedom, which flows from the spontaneity of all things,"⁸⁹ he uses this as a springboard to argue for becoming one with the spontaneity or self-so (自然 *ziran*) of all things, and thus be able to wander far-reaching and unfettered (逍遙遊 *xiaoyaoyou*), often considered a state of personal liberty. As Shang would continue to emphasize, "affirming life as *ziran* is to affirm ... the wholeness and togetherness of all things."⁹⁰

This interpretation of Daoist freedom as self-realization might vary in form, as they do with Ni and Shang, regarding the degrees of how much abnegation is a step towards realizing the Dao, but it draws from a core element of Daoism that has to do with one's goal for self-cultivation as unity with the Dao.

Even in Daoist interpretations that are more popular among Anglophone scholarship, which sees Daoist realization as completely unfettered and unbridled, this unity remains a central element. For instance, Randall P. Peerenboom has authored an article entitled *Living Beyond the Bounds: Henry Miller and the Quest for Daoist Realization*, wherein he compares the writer Henry Miller to Zhuangzi. Peerenboom asserts that "the idea that society corrupts"⁹¹ is present not just in Daoism, but

⁸⁶ Ibid. 27

⁸⁷ Ge Ling Shang, *Liberation as Affirmation: The Religiosity of Zhuangzi and Nietzsche* (USA: State University of New York Press, 2006).159

⁸⁸ Ibid.17

⁸⁹ Ibid.47

⁹⁰ Ibid.55

⁹¹ Randall P. Peerenboom, "Living Beyond the Bounds: Henry Miller and the Quest for Daoist Realization," in *Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi: A Postmodern Critique*, ed. Roger T. Ames (USA: State University of New York Press, 1998). 127

in many other Anglo-European thinkers, including the “metaphysically tinged sex-filled ravings of Henry Miller.”⁹² Peerenboom then describes Miller’s eccentricity and unconventional life as a portrait of the Daoist sage who has achieved ultimate liberation from the shackles of society. Peerenboom also claims that Miller was familiar with Daoism and, fascinated by it, shares:

the *wuwei*-like faith in the underlying harmony of the universe and that all will work out if one simply follows one’s natural inclinations combined with the anarchistic belief that people can govern themselves without need for political or moral authority.⁹³

And so, while Peerenboom highlights Daoism’s break from social convention, perhaps way more than it has traditionally been interpreted, it is nonetheless apparent that such break is but a step towards the “underlying harmony of the universe”—a belief in a unifying principle that renders the universe coherent, at least in Peerenboom’s interpretation. Indeed, he later reiterates that “Zhuangzi and Miller share a common belief in an underlying harmony to the world, a faith that life is good and abundant, and all will work out if one is true to oneself and accepting of life,”⁹⁴ as though implying that there were an authentic self that is separate from the empirical and socially-embedded self.

Such approach, as adopted by Peerenboom, in interpreting freedom as completely unfettered, seems to be shared by Wu Genyou, though in contrast to Peerenboom, Wu claims that it wasn’t understood as a value of sorts in classical Chinese philosophy. Wu goes through the mentions of the word for freedom (*ziyou* 自由) and concludes that in earlier times, “it is used in the derogatory sense, which refers to personal arbitrariness and breach of the institution.”⁹⁵ Of course, Wu does acknowledge that this is not always the case, and even complicating the issue further is the fact “in ancient China, the idea of freedom is not usually expressed by the word *Ziyou* (freedom).”⁹⁶ However, he ultimately argues that these derogatory uses or interpretations of freedom as unfettered self-indulgence are why “since the Qin and Han dynasties, Chinese society and Chinese people are so afraid of the notion of freedom.”⁹⁷ Gu notes that it is not as valuable a concept in Chinese philosophy as harmony and order, concluding that:

The need for order crushes the appeal for open-minded and diverse lives. This closed-view ideology still deeply

⁹² Peerenboom *ibid.* 127

⁹³ *Ibid.* 128

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 134

⁹⁵ Genyou Wu, “On the Idea of Freedom and Its Rejection in Chinese Thought and Institutions,” *Asian Philosophy* 16, no. 3 (2006). 222

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 225

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 232

constrains Chinese thought today, particularly for the politicians. If we could theoretically distinguish freedom from indulgence, clarify the relationship between freedom and responsibility, and freedom and reason, then the Chinese would not be so afraid of the idea of freedom.⁹⁸

Wu Genyou's idiosyncratic interpretation, however, is not without controversy and is indeed one that sticks out among scholars who interpret freedom in classical Chinese philosophy as the valuable goal of self-cultivation. Jiang Tao, for instance, takes issue with Wu, and says that:

While I agree with Wu that there are many concepts of freedom in the classical Chinese tradition, I would take issue with him on the observation that freedom in Chinese traditions is often negatively regarded as antithetical to order. On the contrary, I will argue that the classical Chinese, especially the Confucian, notion of freedom is the very foundation of order and meaning.⁹⁹

Jiang proposes that, through exploring the concept of transformation (*hua* 化) as key to understanding freedom in both Confucianism and Daoism, we will find the kind of freedom that is an achievement, rather than a state that one is born into.¹⁰⁰ Jiang uses *Xunzi* and *Zhuangzi* as representations of two distinct traditions of freedom in classical Chinese philosophy, and argues that though there is a profound difference between the two as a result of "two different kinds of cultivation,"¹⁰¹ both eventually deal "with the connection between the self and various domains of relationality."¹⁰² Jiang explains that:

This profound difference between the Zhuangzian and Xunzian notions of transformative freedom points to their distinct characterizations of the nature of the *ideal* self. ... Both the Confucian and the Daoist projects start with the premise that the everyday ordinary self is relational, but their end points are drastically different. The key to that difference lies in the transformation (*hua*) of the everyday relational self into an ideal self.¹⁰³

Jiang's work highlights their distinction and uses their commonality as a starting point to explore their differences. However, what is pertinent to our purpose here is to emphasize the different conceptions of freedom in major schools of classical Chinese philosophy as almost always relying on conceptions of ideal selves, that is, as *self-realization* rather than simply lack of external intervention or interference. This is consistent all through-out the different classical Chinese

⁹⁸ Ibid. 232

⁹⁹ Tao Jiang, "Two Notions of Freedom in Classical Chinese Thought: The Concept of Hua 化 in the Zhuangzi and the Xunzi," *Dao* 10, no. 4 (2011). 465

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 465

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 484

¹⁰² Ibid. 466

¹⁰³ Ibid. 484

philosophers we have surveyed.

As we have earlier pointed out and emphasized by Chenyang Li, such problem would be odd for a Confucian, and indeed as we have now seen, even for a Daoist, because the self is always relational and connected to her surroundings. As Scott Cook points out, “the idea of ‘ultimate freedom through discipline’ is a theme that would have a long and varied history in the Chinese tradition.” Such discipline in one’s self-cultivation, whether personal or communal, roaming within or without bounds, is always done in acknowledgement of the autonomous self as part and parcel to a larger whole.

It is thus in this regard that I will explore the notion of freedom in this work. Instead of focusing on classical Chinese philosophy, however, I focus on a specific philosopher from the Wei-Jin era: Guo Xiang (252-312).¹⁰⁴

There are two related reasons for this, the first one is because Guo Xiang provides a systematic framework for exploring a comprehensive account for both ontological and political freedom, understood and interchangeable here as autonomy; and the second is because of the historical context that has allowed for this to happen—an age of heightened individualism that emerged from the amalgamation of Confucianism and Daoism. I shall go back to the second reason later but for now, it is important to note that even if we had established the problem of free-will as idiosyncratic to Anglo-European theology and philosophy, suggesting that it might just be a pseudo-problem in a world without god, the issues that surround it, specifically the issue of causality, are real and important to the kind of autonomy that is worth having.

Following the psychological framework of Self-Determination Theory,¹⁰⁵ Valery I. Chirkov sophisticatedly defines autonomy as “a condition of people’s lives when they are self-ruled, self-directed, and self-governed by self-generated or freely internalized rules and norms, that become their laws regarding the choices of the ends and directions of their lives.”¹⁰⁶ Chirkov, however, clarifies that “these laws are built on the awareness of one’s own needs and capacities, on the consideration

¹⁰⁴ We know little about Guo Xiang’s. However, we know that he was articulate. He held a high position in the government, and was favored by his benefactor, Sima Yue (d. 311, Prince of Donghai, regent of Emperor Hui of Jin and throughout various periods during the Jin dynasty, was a power behind the throne). This caused of some to be jealous, since Guo Xiang, unlike many of his peers, was not born from a rich family. See 晉書 *Jin Shu*, 50.

¹⁰⁵ A leading theory in human motivation founded by Richard Ryan and Edward Deci. They describe SDT as “an approach to human motivation and personality that uses traditional empirical methods while employing an organismic metatheory that highlights the importance of humans’ evolved inner resources for personality development and behavioral self-regulation (Ryan, Kuhl, & Deci, 1997). Thus, its arena is the investigation of people’s inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs that are the basis for their self-motivation and personality integration, as well as for the conditions that foster those positive processes. Inductively, using the empirical process, we have identified three such needs--the needs for competence (Harter, 1978; White, 1963), relatedness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Reis, 1994), and autonomy (deCharms, 1968; Deci, 1975)—that appear to be essential for facilitating optimal functioning of the natural propensities for growth and integration, as well as for constructive social development and personal well-being.” Richard Ryan and Edward Deci, “Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being,” *The American psychologist* 55 (2000). 68.

¹⁰⁶ Valery I. Chirkov, “Dialectical Relationships among Human Autonomy, the Brain, and Culture,” in *Human Autonomy in Cross-Cultural Context*, Cross-Cultural Advancements in Positive Psychology (2011). 67-68

of the needs, goals, and personal autonomy of other people, as well as of *the needs and goals of communities and societies*; they are governed by reflective and rational reasoning.”¹⁰⁷ Autonomy, therefore, involves internalizing sets of values that we learn from the world around us, together with the epistemological conditions that cause them to arise. If, therefore, those causes are pre-determined, then autonomy and being able to own one’s choices, is a moot point, by virtue of one’s internalized norms not being freely formed.

An autonomous self-determination worth having, therefore, requires not only conscious awareness of one’s choices as well as the causes for the norms and values we base it on, but how the determining self comes to follow or internalize those norms and values. As Timothy O’Connor points out:

Conscious awareness of one’s motivations¹⁰⁸ is vital to the process by which we come to ‘own’ them in such a way that we can appropriately be criticized for having and acting upon the motivations that we do. It is vital to the sort of freedom that consists in enjoying a significant moral autonomy.¹⁰⁹

He clarifies, however, that “the integrity of the self-formation process is a component of freedom, or of freedom of the most valuable sort. This conclusion is reflected in corresponding judgments about moral responsibility.”¹¹⁰

This is significant to establish because in the context of Guo Xiang’s conception of the ideal self, freedom is understood as autonomy, yet since he has come up with a robust philosophy of causality, he is also able to address the kind of self-formation process that makes this very autonomy coherent, by virtue of it not being influenced by external factors. As we shall later discuss with more depth, Guo Xiang’s ideal notion of the “self” has the capacity to make decisions for itself, and is not a self that is removed from the world of causality. It causes and is caused, it is both an end and a means, non-dichotomous and dynamic because it exists in an organic world where its members affect each other, thereby transforming itself unto itself.

If I have not taken the time to defend the classical notions of freedom as self-realization or achievement, while at the same time presenting Guo Xiang’s notion of freedom as self-realization as well, therefore, it is because I believe that we will

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. Emphasis mine.

¹⁰⁸ O’Connor argues that “human freedom is always limited, fragile, and variable over time and across agents. It is the sort of thing that comes in degrees...” See Timothy O’Connor, “Degrees of Freedom,” *Philosophical Explorations* 12, no. 2 (2009). 124. These degrees, he believes, are enhanced with more conscious awareness of the causal motivations that guide one’s free-will. Also unlike Berlin’s notion of autonomous freedom which derives from a false sense of a dichotomous self that is split between being caused in an internal or external way, O’Connor says that freedom really isn’t an all or nothing matter. He explains that responsible agency is exercised when “I am aware of the motivations on which I act and I actively and consciously forge a link between the goals to which certain of these motivations point and the action, making it the case that these motivations are ones for which (consciously) I am acting” See *ibid.* 122 As such, even though O’Connor’s notion of freedom differs from that of Guo Xiang’s in terms of what this “awareness” consists of, we see that skipping such nuance altogether when speaking of autonomy is an untenable approach to fully understanding the formation and possibility of autonomy.

¹⁰⁹ Li, “The Confucian Conception of Freedom.”; O’Connor, “Degrees of Freedom.” 121

¹¹⁰ “Degrees of Freedom.” 123

find in Guo Xiang a notion of freedom more robust than the simple dichotomy of negative and positive freedom, or *freedom from* and *freedom to*, respectively. That is to say, that in Guo Xiang's philosophy of causality, which I shall call a *logic of convergence*, there is the potential of a philosophy of freedom that has an alternatively more cohesive notion of the self, as well as the operations of the world around it, which we shall refer to as a *dependence-based autonomy*—a notion of freedom that is largely ontological and epistemological in nature, while also having the potential to be understood in social and political contexts. Unpacking this promising theory of freedom, therefore, is the task of this work.

Guo Xiang and the Age of Philosophical Amalgamation

Now the second reason for why I believe Guo Xiang to be an apt philosopher for this task has to do with the specific historical era upon which his philosophical enterprise emerged, which in turn has made the *logic of convergence* possible. This era or movement is often referred to as “Neo-Daoism,” and it is comprised of scholars from the 魏晉 Wei-Jin period whose study is often referred to as *Xuanxue* 玄學 which means the study of something that is far and dark, in the sense of being fuzzy, or perhaps more aptly, the profound.¹¹¹ This time is often associated with the height of individuality¹¹² and the discussion of abstract concepts, which is perhaps most evident in the practice called *Qingtán* 清談 or “Pure Conversation.” Pure Conversation is a practice of philosophical, often abstract,¹¹³ discussion that was performed in public, making a display of aesthetic and argumentation skills, which brought about a type of “celebrity scholar” culture. The best among these scholars was often considered to be Wang Bi, whose reputation within such atmosphere has reached great heights, and throughout different generations of scholars. Though Wang Bi has certainly contributed to the endeavor that I aim to further explore, especially as it can be argued that he was the first Chinese commentator-philosopher to have developed a systematic and synthetic ontology, Guo Xiang was nonetheless described as only “second to Wang Bi”¹¹⁴ in his skill. Furthermore, Guo Xiang is perhaps the most important commentator and editor of the *Zhuangzi*, through whom we now know the text as it is arranged

¹¹¹ The term “Learning in the Profound” is a translation that has been suggested by Alan Chan, though he also suggests that perhaps *Xuanxue* should simply be retained, for the reason that the *Xuan* 玄 is difficult to fully capture in the English language. According to him, *Xuan* can mean to refer to a specific color that is an almost black shade of red, or to something that is far and therefore dark, the vision of which only reaches us as a blur. See Alan Chan, “Neo-Daoism,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Summer 2019 Edition).

¹¹² Yü, “Individualism and the Neo-Daoist Movement in Wei-Jin China.”

¹¹³ This is in consideration that the best representation of *Qingtán* is perhaps the image of *The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove*, which shall be discussed in more detail in the dissertation.

¹¹⁴ I-ch'ing Liu, “Biographical Notices,” in *Shih-Shuo Hsin-Yu: A New Account of Tales of the World* (University of Michigan Press, 2002). 578.

today. He was, however, like most commentators of his time and beyond, a philosopher in his own right. As Richard Mather points out, his work is “probably the most consistent effort to reconcile the opposing claims of activism and quietism,”¹¹⁵ referring to the tension between social order (*mingjiao* 名教) and natural spontaneity (*ziran* 自然), Confucianism and Daoism, which was a defining feature of the period. The success of his amalgamation moreover, as I intend to demonstrate, lies at the very heart of his philosophy of freedom which, if we dare delve more into, shows us a profound image of the individual self who is, at the same time and *on equal levels*, both self-sufficiently independent but also has a unified sense of oneness with the universe through a materially grounded dependence, which allows for a *dependence-based autonomy*. Guo Xiang thus shows us a logical connection that challenges our pre-conceived notions of, as William James put it, “whether a man is a decided monist or a decided pluralist,”¹¹⁶ or as Berlin put it, whether he is a hedgehog or a fox.¹¹⁷

For Guo Xiang, the goal was to have the One and the Many converge, as such, the significance of studying Guo Xiang’s thought as an intellectually mature representation of *Xuanxue* thought lies mostly in the attempt to show that metaphysics cannot be divorced from political and even ethical concerns lest we suffer the same fate of their time when, as Xinzhong Yao would note, “Hypocritical politicians and warlords made an immoral use of Confucian virtues, particularly *zhong* and *xiao*, to strengthen their own positions”¹¹⁸ – precisely because they had little ground and ontological basis to fully comprehend the philosophical magnitude of such concepts.¹¹⁹

I thus engage with the framework of Guo Xiang’s discourse in *Xuanxue* that positions it as “one of the metamorphoses

¹¹⁵ Richard Mather has authored an article which comprehensively discusses the tension between *mingjiao* 名教 and *ziran* 自然 which he translates as conformity and naturalness, respectively. According to Mather, the over-arching aim of the Wei-Jin era is the attempt to synthesize both angles in light of combining both Confucian and Daoist thoughts. However, the attempt to synthesize these two, I believe, has a wider philosophical significance that can tell us something important about freedom and individuality, as shall later be demonstrated. See Richard B. Mather, “The Controversy over Conformity and Naturalness During the Six Dynasties,” *History of Religions* 9, no. 2/3 (1969).

¹¹⁶ W. James, “Lecture IV: The One and the Many,” in *Pragmatism* (USA: Dover Publications, 1995).76.

¹¹⁷ According to Berlin, there are two types of intellectuals: hedgehogs and foxes, or put simply, monists and pluralists. He discusses this at length in relation to Tolstoy, as one who was torn in between, in a work entitled “Hedgehog and the Fox.” See Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*. 22-82

¹¹⁸ Xinzhong Yao, “Confucianism in the Wei-Jin Period,” in *RoutledgeCurzon Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, ed. Xinzhong Yao (USA: RoutledgeCurzon, 2013). 155

¹¹⁹ Paul Demiéville notes: “The Ch’in and Han dynasties had made China into a unified empire. It had been necessary to introduce a method of centralizing power, and a system of order and authority based on a highly structured administrative and military machine; its ideology had to be essentially pragmatic, somewhat like that of imperial Rome. The metaphysical and mystical tendencies of Taoism and the varied speculations in which older schools of the pre-imperial era had indulged were laid aside in favor of Confucianism. Confucianism is a doctrine of this world, a sociology, and also a cosmology that links man to the universe through the heaven-earth-man triad, yet pays little attention to the ultramundane realms of the supernatural” Paul Demiéville, “Philosophy and Religion from Han to Sui,” in *The Cambridge History of China: Volume 1: The Ch'in and Han Empires, 221 Bc–Ad 220*, ed. Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). 808

of the Ju School,”¹²⁰ from as early as Tang Yong Tong, to as current as Chan’s argument that *Xuaxue* scholars were “convinced of the unity of the classics.”¹²¹ Moreover, Guo Xiang was, like his predecessors, a true Confucian¹²² inasmuch as he regarded Confucius to be the paragon of a sage, just as most *Xuanxue* scholars did.¹²³ As such, the social and political import of his philosophical enterprise are worth exploring.

Indeed, *Xuanxue* scholars are more known to have commented on important Daoist classics such as the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, it is still important to note, that they did not confine themselves to Daoist texts nor purely “metaphysical” pursuits – in fact Guo Xiang, among other *Xuanxue* scholars, also wrote his own commentaries to the *Analects* of Confucius, albeit the text is now non-extant. Guo Xiang moreover, regarded Confucius as superior to Zhuangzi¹²⁴ whose work he commented on. More importantly, even though *Xuanxue* scholarship mostly discussed metaphysics and ontology, they did not harbor a sense of escapism which can be the tendency of classical Daoism especially found in the *Zhuangzi*; in fact, *Xuanxue* scholars discussed metaphysical or ontological concepts mostly as a tool for intervention to the political unrest of their time, and in doing so, had used the form of the Daoist discourse in order to reinterpret, as Alan Chan puts it, “the Confucian tradition in a

¹²⁰ T'ang Yung-t'ung T'ang and Walter Liebenthal, "Wang Pi's New Interpretation of the I Ching and Lun-Yü," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 10, no. 2 (1947). 126

¹²¹ Alan K.L. Chan, "Daoism (Taoism): Neo-Daoism (Xuanxue, Hsuan-Hsueh," in *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Antonio S. Cua (Great Britain: Routledge, 2003). 215-216

¹²² An exception is Ji Kang and his generation, which came after the Zhengshi era of Wang Bi and He Yan. Demiéville notes that: “Hsi K'ang (223-262) [is] the rich Wei aristocrat married to a great-granddaughter of Ts'ao Ts'ao. At the end of the Cheng-shih period, he gathered around him a group of intellectuals later known as the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove. This sort of club included practicing believers in Taoist religion, which is sometimes called neo-Taoism. Some of these men cultivated the techniques of longevity, as for example Hsi K'ang himself, while for others, Taoist libertarianism turned to libertinism and *wu* to nihilism. The latter gave themselves up to drink, drugs, and-most scandalizing of all to the Confucian puritans, nudism, justifying these eccentricities by referring to Chuang-tzu's "naturism" (*tzu-jan*).” See Demiéville, "Philosophy and Religion from Han to Sui." 233. His connection to Cao Cao may have been the cause of his death, but throughout his work, he espoused a hostile attitude towards the “teaching of names” (名教 *mingjiao*). David Holzman, however, clarifies that the animosity between the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, all of whom came from rich and noble families, towards the Sima clan, who encouraged Confucian moral codes borrowed from the Han, was not as straightforward as simply rebelling against the artificiality of Confucianism, but a variety of factors, mostly political. In fact, Holzman interestingly points out that while the Sima clan presented themselves as champions of Confucian orthodoxy, the Cao-Wei family adopted a more legalistic tone as set by Cao Cao. This demonstrates that rather than a linear or one-way shaping of governmental policies from philosophical ideology, it was more dialectical and, more often than not, their reality and government shaped their ideological narrative rather than other way around. See Donald Holzman, "Les Sept Sages De La Forêt Des Bambous Et La Société De Leur Temps," *T'oung Pao* 44, no. 4/5 (1956). Furthermore, in the last main chapter, we see how Guo Xiang attempted to push back against such unfettered libertarianism of Ji Kang and his cohort as well. For a biography of Ji Kang, see 晉書 *Jin Shu*, 49.

¹²³ In fact, in Guo Xiang’s preface to his commentary on the *Zhuangzi*, he discusses at length why, even though Confucius was superior to Zhuangzi, Zhuangzi’s work is worth exploring and listening to. Although there is controversy to the authenticity of the preface, see Yaonan Li, "难"《庄子序》非郭象所作说"--兼与王晓毅和黄圣平二位先生商兑 (Was the Preface to Zhuang Zi Not Written by Guo Xiang?)," *History of Chinese Philosophy* 2, no. B2 (2005)., Guo Xiang nonetheless directly addresses Confucius’ sagehood throughout his commentary, as we will cover later.

¹²⁴ Robert Ashmore notes that “Guo Xiang [...] whose commentary on the *Zhuangzi* was instrumental in bringing that work to central prominence in *xuan* discussion, not only authored his own commentary on the *Analects* but in fact devotes a surprising amount of space in the opening passage of his preface to the *Zhuangzi* commentary to an account of the superiority of Confucius to Zhuangzi.” See Robert Ashmore, "Word and Gesture: On Xuan -School Hermeneutics of the *Analects*," *Philosophy East and West* 54 (2004). 458.

new and profound way.”¹²⁵ In other words, *Xuanxue* scholars sought to reconcile the Ru (Confucian) School with the Daoist School, and according to Chan, shared the view that:

The ancient sages shared a profound understanding of the *dao*. On this view, Confucius, Laozi, and other worthies were all “Daoists,” in the nonsectarian sense of the term. The *Yijing*, *Laozi*, and *Zhuangzi* especially afford a wealth of insights into nature and the human condition. Most neo-Daoists concentrated on these texts, which were then collectively known as the “three profound treatises” (*san xuan*). Wang Bi, for example, is best-known for his commentaries on the *Yijing* and the *Laozi*; and Guo Xiang is arguably the most important commentator on the *Zhuangzi* in Chinese history. It should not be overlooked, however, that both Wang and Guo, and He Yan, too, had commented on the *Analects*. Convinced of the unity of the classics, each provided an integral account of the one “Daoist” tradition.¹²⁶

This work thus builds on the framework laid by Richard Mather, T’ang Yung-T’ung and Alan Chan, in following the argument that Guo Xiang, like his peers, was convinced of the unity of the sages’ profound understanding of the *dao*, and by linking the ontological and epistemological theories of Guo Xiang with his social and political thought, via the notion of freedom, it hopes to bring forth a testament to the unity of Daoism and Confucianism, nature and society, in Guo Xiang’s thought, which emerged from a creative interpretation and rigorous syncretism of the classics.¹²⁷

Historical and Ontological Foundations

Many scholars of Guo Xiang who sought to address the issue of freedom, or more broadly the issues around it, have generally treated his enterprise in a more systematic way, as this work does, which is to say that they highlighted his philosophy’s underlying Daoist and Confucian syncretism. These scholars generally considered the social and political context

¹²⁵ Alan K.L. Chan, *Two Visions of the Way: A Study of the Wang Bi and the Ho-Shang Kung Commentaries on the Lao-Tzu* (USA: SUNY Press, 1991). 29

¹²⁶ “Daoism (Taoism): Neo-Daoism (Xuanxue, Hsuan-Hsueh.” 215-216

¹²⁷ On the syncretic project of *Xuanxue*, as well as the place of Wang Bi and Guo Xiang as its greatest thinkers, Ziporyn explains that: “the relation between spontaneity (*ziran* 自然, self-so, spontaneity, “nature”) and morality (*mingjiao* 名教, the teaching of names) was a central concern of this movement, of which Guo is considered, along with WANG Bi 王弼 (226–249), one of the two greatest representatives. Spontaneity was commonly associated with the teachings of the Laozi and Zhuangzi, while moral endeavor, the “teaching of names” concerned with the ordering of society, was associated with Confucianism, which had been the dominant official ideology throughout most of the Han dynasty. From its inception the Mysterious Learning movement placed the unification of the two high on its agenda. WANG Bi and HE Yan 何晏 (190–249), considered the intellectual founders of the movement, both wrote commentaries to both the *Daodejing* and Confucian works like the *Zhouyi* (周易 *Book of Changes*) and the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語) of Confucius.” See Brook Ziporyn, “Guo Xiang: The Self-So and the Repudiation-Cum-Reaffirmation of Deliberate Action and Knowledge,” in *Dao Companion to Daoist Philosophy*, ed. Liu Xiaogan (Netherlands: Springer, 2014). 399.

of the Wei-Jin era as a guiding framework for treating philosophers like Guo Xiang more holistically.

Tang Yijie has made an immense contribution to the study of Guo Xiang, most specifically represented in his book entitled “Guo Xiang.”¹²⁸ Here, he notes that Guo Xiang “merges contingency and necessity (混同偶然和必然),”¹²⁹ it therefore “can’t be without mysticism (神秘主义) or Agnosticism (不可知论).”¹³⁰ which highlights the self-organizing nature of Guo Xiang’s ontological thought, in as much as to highlight the necessary paradox that is inherent in the notion of lone-transformation (*duhua* 独化). That is to say, that there exists on one hand a mutual inter-dependence of things, but also, on other hand, a spontaneous and abrupt emergence of things both in themselves and as a whole, precisely because things are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, Tang Yijie argues that each thing’s independence, self-sufficiency, and lone-transformation is dependent on the independence, self-sufficiency, and lone-transformation of other entities to which each thing is inevitably related with. This over-arching logic is evident in his book where he carefully and systematically analyzes opposing concepts and, not only their compatibility, but their necessary inter-dependence with each other. Needless to say, this study is greatly indebted to the initial efforts of Tang Yijie’s work that tackles both the perennial logic of Guo Xiang’s philosophy as well his situatedness among his intellectual peers which brings his thought into both its historical context as well as its substantial philosophical significance.

Brook Ziporyn’s work on Guo Xiang’s ontology is also a major contribution to this work. His article entitled “Li in Wang Bi and Guo Xiang: Coherence in the Dark”¹³¹ argues that despite the common understanding that Wang Bi emphasizes the One while Guo Xiang emphasizes the Many, it might just be the case that they are interchanged, and that Guo Xiang, by highlighting the *ziran* 自然 of all beings, is actually sweeping all the myriad things into an umbrella of nothing, of a multitude of *ziran* with this lack of a One holding them together, becoming precisely the very coherent thread which holds the multitudes of *ziran* together, united as One. Wang Bi, however, speaks instead of *li* 理 as a mini version of Dao 道. For Wang Bi, *li* is the master of a situation and hexagram and what gives it coherence; it is the least visible element, what it lacks. Ziporyn helps

¹²⁸ Yijie Tang, 郭象与魏晋玄学 (*Guo Xiang and Wei-Jin Xuanxue*) (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2000).

¹²⁹ Ibid. 276

¹³⁰ Ibid. 276

¹³¹ Brook Ziporyn, “Li in Wang Bi and Guo Xiang: Coherence in the Dark,” *Philosophy and Religion in Early Medieval China* (2010).

lay down the foundations for which we can understand how in Guo Xiang, there is nothing at all which serves as the some over-arching principle which guides all. As he notes in a related work, “the idea of mapping all realities definitively and consistently into a single system of words, symbols, and rules, correlative to a single stable, unchanging, and authoritative perspective, is a remnant of the Platonic dream, whether in science, theology, or philosophy.”¹³² Moreover, his earlier work on Guo Xiang, entitled “The Penumbra Unbound,”¹³³ is the most comprehensive ontological account of Guo Xiang. It uses the story of the Penumbra and Shadow as the primary framework for explicating Guo Xiang’s philosophy of being and becoming. Indeed, Ziporyn’s work here and elsewhere lays an important ontological foundation into what I shall later explore to be the systematic underpinning for his philosophical enterprise, from which we can derive the social and political implications of his thought.

Both Tang Yijie and Brook Ziporyn demonstrate how, in Guo Xiang, we find the total convergence of two seemingly opposing elements but united in radicalization—a recurring pattern in of Guo Xiang’s enterprise which I later call the *logic of convergence*.

Very recently (in a book that came out at around the same time I am revising this manuscript), Yuet-Keung Lo also wrote on the ontological concepts of lone-transformation and intergrowth in Guo Xiang. Much of his findings corroborate the analyses I make in the first main chapter of this work. He claims that Guo Xiang introduced “a new cosmology of autogenesis free of an intelligent heaven or primal cause.” (367) This cosmology is what allows him to conceive of a heaven that is downgraded to the level of human, which leaves human beings as responsible for their own. Moreover, Lo explains here that, with his flattened heaven, causality itself is repudiated in favor of transformations that are caused by none other than each other, or mutually. Ultimately, Lo argues, this “inter-growth” is not only what allows for lone-transformation, but they are the same, and “they are just two different ways of explaining the same experience.”¹³⁴ This ontological account, interpreted in this way, is a fundamental aspect of Guo Xiang’s philosophy which allows for a social and political account of freedom. Interestingly, Lo also notes that lone-transformation puts “emphasis on self-reliance and self-determination.”¹³⁵ I agree with

¹³² *Ironies of Oneness and Difference: Coherence in Early Chinese Thought; Prolegomena to the Study of Li* (State University of New York Press, 2012).

¹³³ *The Penumbra Unbound: The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang* (USA: State University of New York Press, 2012).

¹³⁴ Yuet Keung Lo, “Lone-Transformation and Intergrowth: Philosophy and Self-Justification in Guo Xiang’s Commentary on the Zhuangzi,” in *Dao Companion to Xuanxue* 玄學 (*Neo-Daoism*), ed. David Chai (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020). 391

¹³⁵ Ibid.383

Lo up to this point, and like him as well many scholars before,¹³⁶ my position is that Guo Xiang's philosophy does deviate from some of the basic assumptions of the *Zhuangzi*. However, Lo also claims that by practice, "personal choice would be respected in the spirit of lone-transformation"¹³⁷ and so he criticizes Guo Xiang's criticism of Zhuangzi's lifestyle, which is that Zhuangzi did not embody the "philosophy of inner sagacity and outer regality (*neisheng waiwang zhi dao* 內聖外王之道)"¹³⁸ unlike Confucius. In my view, and as I shall later demonstrate, *duhua* is not simply one of the norms among many norms, and therefore, Guo Xiang was being consistent in assessing Zhuangzi negatively in contrast to Confucius. *Duhua* is the "norm of norms" (*zheng zheng* 正正) because the conditions must also be attained such that beings' "natures are *allowed* to flourish on their own." (*wuge renxing* 物各任性)¹³⁹ In other words, there is a normative need to make it so that circumstances allow for this to happen, which Guo Xiang believed Confucius did. This is the reason for Guo Xiang's emphasis on intergrowth, and why he thought Confucius (in contrast to Zhuangzi) was able to fulfill this collective obligation and hence embodied "the fundamentals" (*ben* 本).¹⁴⁰

Another work that situates Guo Xiang's work in his time and thus allows us to glean into the social and political aspect of his project is Wang Xiaoyi's work. In his article entitled "The Destiny Theory of Guo Xiang and Its Significance"¹⁴¹ discusses the historical significance of an essay by Guo Xiang entitled "On the Cause of Fate as Being from One's Own" 《致命由己论》. Wang Xiaoyi notes that, like Wang Bi, Guo Xiang denied the determining cosmic forces that were perpetuated by the earlier Han scholars. Instead, he argues that for Guo Xiang, there is no ultimate cause, or any external motivation for one's actions, aside from *xingfen* 性分 or one's natural allotment, which is, at the same time, only determined by

¹³⁶ Ibid. 386

¹³⁷ Ibid. 386

¹³⁸ Guo Xiang, quoted in *ibid.* 385

¹³⁹ "When things' natures are allowed to flourish on their own, this is called the norm of norms" 「物各任性，乃正正也。」

Guo Xiang Commentary 8.3.1G1, translated in *ibid.* 386

¹⁴⁰ In his preface to the *Zhuangzi*, Guo Xiang wrote that Zhuangzi knew the fundamentals (*zhiben* 知本), and is therefore still the crown of the hundred schools of thought (*Baijia zhi guan* 百家之冠), but unlike Confucius, he did not embody (*ti* 體) them into being. Though beyond the scope of our study, it is worth noting here how Guo Xiang contrasts *zhi* 知 with *ti* 體, and moreover, how Zhuangzi, being stuck in his words, simply responded (*ying* 應) to the things (*wu* 物 and *shi* 事) of the world, rather the meeting into (*hui* 會) them. See "Preface to the *Zhuangzi*" 《莊子序》 in *Guo Xiang Commentary of the Zhuangzi: Coded Edition*, The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), Research Center for Chinese Philosophy and Culture. This text is from Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩. *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋. (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1961).

¹⁴¹ Xiaoyi Wang, "郭象命运论及其意义 (the Destiny Theory of Guo Xiang and Its Significance)," *文史哲 Journal of Literature, History, and Philosophy*, no. 6 (2005).

circumstances, or as Wang calls it, *shiyu* 时遇, that is, what is proper at any given moment in time. Wang further claims that this is because, for Guo Xiang, the nature or *benxing* 本性 of things is *ziran* or self-so but not isolated to themselves and belong to a complex network of inter-relationships. The suggestion thus, being that without an ultimate cause, there is no creator, and as such, Guo Xiang differed from Han Cosmologists and Tang Neo-Confucians in that he is the apex of this atheism, where in all things are self-so and are caused by everything, and which he had supported with his theory of *xingfen* and *shiyu* making intellectual history in this period not a straight line but a “parabola” (*Paowuxian* 抛物线). Needless to say, Wang’s explication of Guo Xiang’s philosophical enterprise and his efforts of historically situating Guo’s thought is a contribution to the endeavor that this work has tried to achieve, in as much as it helps to situate the development of his syncretic project within, but also contra, the determining forces of the cosmos as put forth by both Han-Tang dynasty intellectuals.

A very important work on Guo Xiang that has also recently come out is Richard Lynn’s article entitled “Guo Xiang’s Theory of Sagely Knowledge as Seen in his ‘Essentials of the Analects’ (*Lunyu Tilue* 論語體略)”¹⁴² In this article, Lynn presents sagely wisdom as one of the main themes in Guo Xiang’s overarching philosophical enterprise. In particular, however, he explores the *Lunyu* commentaries of Guo and presents corresponding arguments in the *Zhuangzi zhu*. This does two things: first, it shows the overall syncretic project that Guo Xiang was engaged with, and; two, it presents sagely wisdom as well the image of the sage ruler as a primary concern in Guo Xiang’s work. Though the bulk of the article is comprised of translations of Guo’s commentaries, putting them side by side speaks for itself. Major themes that occur are discussion on footprints and how it is harmful for the common folk to follow those artificial “footprints,” since becoming a sage is a spontaneous process. Ultimately, Lynn highlights how Guo Xiang says that Zhuangzi’s text was of no practical use, but that learning about it can lead one to know how to become a sage, and in turn be a good ruler. The inevitable conclusion of Lynn, thus, is that both the *Lunyu Tilue* and *Zhuangzi zhu* were commentaries that aimed to be a treatise on statecraft, and with all other aspects of Guo’s philosophical system working towards this main goal. I owe much of my analyses in the final main chapter to Lynn’s initial findings, as even though much of it is comprised of passages from Guo Xiang, Lynn took it upon himself to put Guo’s comments on both the *Lunyu* and the *Zhuangzi* side by side, which demonstrates the singularity of Guo’s systematic thought.

¹⁴² Richard J. Lynn, “Guo Xiang’s Theory of Sagely Knowledge as Seen in His ‘Essentials of the Analects’,” in *Dao Companion to Xuanxue* 玄學 (Neo-Daoism), ed. David Chai (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020).

Indeed, this might be one of the closest there is to seeing a holistic account of Guo Xiang's philosophy that broaches into the social and political aspects.

Criticisms against Guo Xiang

So far, however, those who have written on Guo Xiang that seek to address the issue of freedom, or more broadly, agency, as well as the social and political aspects of his philosophy, generally do not treat him as a systematic philosopher, leading to some misinterpretations that categorize him as fatalist or determinist, whether the essentialist and active self-realizing kind, or the more psychological and passive self-abnegating kind.

Livia Kohn's "Kuo Hsiang and the Chuang Tzu"¹⁴³ is seminal in showing the differences between Zhuangzi and Guo Xiang, and according to her, Zhuangzi is carefree and transcendent whereas Guo Xiang was determinist (even fatalistic) and immanent. Nonetheless, she concludes that Guo's philosophical system is an: "apparently deterministic, rigorous, and very depressing concept of the world."¹⁴⁴ I address this in the second main chapter of this work, but it is not an uncommon charge,¹⁴⁵ as we shall see below.

David Machek, in his work "Is Freedom in Necessity or in Happiness? Guo Xiang's and Lin Xiyi's Controversial Readings of Zhuangzi's »Free Rambling«, "¹⁴⁶ similarly calls Guo Xiang a "determinist,"¹⁴⁷ and argues that for Guo, *xiaoyao* one's natural desires and one's natural necessity. To a point, this is of course true, but it is also a rigid and one-dimensional interpretation of Guo Xiang's conception of freedom. This is especially apparent when Machek claims that Guo conceptually distinguishes between freedom¹⁴⁸ (*xiaoyao* 逍遙) and independence (*wudai* 無待),¹⁴⁹ as the latter is reserved for the sage. In

¹⁴³ Livia Knaul, "Kuo Hsiang and the Chuang Tzu," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 12, no. 4 (1985).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 432

¹⁴⁵ A very similar charge has been made by Wang Zhongjiang 王中江, who claims that Guo Xiang's notion of *li* 理 also has the meaning of necessity (*biran xing* 必然性) even though Guo emphasizes change and transformation. According to Wang, this is a result of the many serious contradictions in Guo Xiang's philosophy. See Zhongjiang Wang, "Some Difficulties in Guo Xiang's Philosophy and Its Incoherence 郭象哲學的一些困境及其解體," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy and Culture* 中國哲學與文化 2 (2007).

¹⁴⁶ David Machek, "Is Freedom in Necessity or in Happiness? Guo Xiang's and Lin Xiyi's Controversial Readings of Zhuangzi's »Free Rambling«, " *Studia Orientalia Slovaca* 9, no. 2 (2010).

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 118

¹⁴⁸ Machek uses this interchangeably and as equivalent to *xiaoyao* 逍遙. See *ibid.* *Passim.*

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 117

the third main chapter of this work, I explain in detail how these two are not coterminous but conceptually the same. For now, it is sufficient to point out that like Kohn, Machek treats inner and outer, dependence and independence, as inherently distinct and without convergence, which is a cause of misunderstanding in Guo's philosophy.

Vincent Shen's "From Interpretation to Construction: Guo Xiang's Ontological Individualism,"¹⁵⁰ attempts a more holistic framework. Like many others before him, Shen acknowledges that Guo Xiang's philosophy is fundamentally different from that of Zhuangzi, and argues that we ought to look at it in its own context. Shen claims that Guo's philosophy was built from his life-world of Wei-Jin syncretism. He highlights Guo Xiang's political goals and argue that his ontology becomes the basis of these goals. According to Shen, Guo Xiang argues that "each individual acts for his own interest without relying on others,"¹⁵¹ which emphasizes "the individual's autonomy in the development of his own life, without any interference from the other, but only for the purpose of the fulfillment of one's allotted self-nature."¹⁵² Shen frames Guo's philosophy of freedom in terms of self-determination¹⁵³ which, in Shen's view, should gave potential for political autonomy,¹⁵⁴ and yet becomes a justification for hierarchy and autocracy instead. Like the Kohn and Machek, Shen also concludes that Guo is ultimately fatalistic¹⁵⁵ in his emphasis of the individual. In Shen's interpretative framework, Guo could have had the potential for a liberalist philosophy but ended up as similar to the conservative libertarian who puts his faith in the "free market" and its invisible hand, and yet is content with the status quo, and therefore, not only "cannot safeguard equality,"¹⁵⁶ but also ends up with a self-contradictory philosophy which attempts to respect individuality but also forces one to simply accept oppressive circumstances. This, I contend, is also because like Kohn and Machek, he sees the two sides of Guo's philosophy as inherently opposed, which I argue is not the case.

Another criticism against Guo Xiang is from Jiang Limei, in her paper entitled "The Big and the Great: A Reconstruction of Zhuangzi's Philosophy on Transcendence."¹⁵⁷ Here, she argues that Guo Xiang's commentary underestimates the value of

¹⁵⁰ Vincent Shen, "From Interpretation to Construction: Guo Xiang's Ontological Individualism," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 40, no. S1 (2013).

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 179

¹⁵² Ibid. 179

¹⁵³ Ibid. 179

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 181

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. 183; 186

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 186

¹⁵⁷ Limei Jiang, "The Big and the Great: A Reconstruction of Zhuangzi's Philosophy on Transcendence," *Religions* 10, no. 1 (2019).

transcendence in Zhuangzi. She says that Guo Xiang's concepts, such as "one's own appropriateness (*zishi* 自適)"¹⁵⁸ undermine the significance of transcendence and superiority because he "cancels the necessity of self-cultivation"¹⁵⁹ and "negates the purposefulness of the person united with *dao*."¹⁶⁰ What is most interesting about Jiang's interpretation, moreover, is her claim that Guo Xiang presupposes "a solitary individual isolated from others,"¹⁶¹ through his notion of "solitary transformation (*duhua* 獨化)"¹⁶² that cannot be subject to a measurement of great and small unlike Zhuangzi, who "constructs a transcendent self"¹⁶³ through spiritual transformation and purposeful action. At first sight, it seems that Jiang's criticism or interpretation differs from that of Kohn, Machek, and Shen, in that the former three label Guo as a determinist, an advocate of fatalistic acceptance of one's circumstance, rather than separating oneself from it. At a deeper level, however, Jiang's criticism is the same. On her account, Guo Xiang's philosophy of resigned contentment is an isolation unto one's self, with one's own as the only standard for one's own, regardless of the external circumstance, as opposed to Zhuangzi's spiritual transformation through purposeful actions, and hence leads to fatalism.

Solutions and Directions

Although not challenging these charges directly, there have been attempts to defend Guo Xiang's notions of freedom and agency. Both Liu Xiaogan and Chris Fraser have sought to move away from the fatalist charge through building robust defenses of Guo's notion of freedom through different concepts.

In several of his works, and like all the previously mentioned scholars, Liu Xiaogan also argues that Guo Xiang methodologically veers away from the Zhuangzi. Nonetheless, in his work "Two Kinds of Xiaoyao and Two Kinds of Freedom,"¹⁶⁴ he defends both Zhuangzi and Guo Xiang from what Isaiah Berlin criticizes as the "retreat to the inner citadel,"¹⁶⁵ wherein Berlin faults mystics for taking away the power of freedom for social and political change. Liu makes a strong case

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.6

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 6

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 6

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 7

¹⁶² Ibid. 7

¹⁶³ Ibid. 7

¹⁶⁴ Xiaogan Liu, "两种逍遥与两种自由 (Two Kinds of Xiaoyao and Two Kinds of Freedom)," *Journal of Huazhong Normal University (Humanities and Social Sciences)* (November, 2007). 170.

¹⁶⁵ Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty." 181-187.

for a spiritual freedom or *xiaoyao* 逍遙 in this work, arguing that in accordance to Berlin's negative liberty—which argues that we must be able to pursue a plurality of values—this “retreat” ought to be considered as a value among others.

Like Liu, but a lot more recently, Chris Fraser also sought to defend Guo Xiang's philosophy of freedom. In his work “Metaphysics and Agency in Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi*,”¹⁶⁶ Fraser made the attempt to derive normative values from Guo Xiang's “metaphysics.” To do this, Fraser goes to the concept of “non-mindedness” (*wuxin* 無心), in order to extrapolate a conception of agency in Guo Xiang. He argues that Guo's work must be seen from the backdrop of the metaphysics of *dao* which Guo Xiang elaborates on, and which hinges itself on the principles of being self-generating and lone-transforming. He suggests that non-mindedness “is concerned largely with advocating that we cease to rely on reflectively self-conscious attitudes or states to guide action.”¹⁶⁷ In other words, Fraser argues that lone-transformation and self-generation, concepts which I shall also discuss in more detail later, can only be done by relinquishing the self in order to “join with obscurity” (*ming* 冥) with things. Fraser employs a similar approach to what I have tried to do here, which is to hinge Guo's normative claims on his ontology. However, Fraser ultimately admits that “it remains to be shown to what extent the psychological state of ‘joining in obscurity’ with things is a practicable norm or only a vague theoretical ideal.”¹⁶⁸ Fraser raises a very valid issue to what Liu may see as sufficient, and I will address this in more detail in the final main chapter later. There are also hermeneutic issues at play here, within the specific context of Guo Xiang's philosophy, when elaborating the notion of freedom. Before that, however, another work is worth mentioning, because it represents a similar common misunderstanding in Guo Xiang's philosophy, albeit having a fuller and more elaborate criticism than that of Fraser's.

Mercedes Valmisa, in her work “The Happy Slave isn't Free: Relational Autonomy and Freedom in the *Zhuangzi*,”¹⁶⁹ argues that many modern scholars follow Guo Xiang's account of freedom in the *Zhuangzi* and claim that it is found in contentment and satisfaction. This is a matter of debate and in fact, as I have demonstrated here, many do not, as they take issue with Guo Xiang's interpretation. These scholars disagree with Guo Xiang's interpretation for mostly the same reasons

¹⁶⁶ Chris Fraser, “Metaphysics and Agency in Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi*,” in *Dao Companion to Xuanxue* 玄學 (*Neo-Daoism*), ed. David Chai (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020).

¹⁶⁷ Fraser *ibid.* 357

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 365

¹⁶⁹ Mercedes Valmisa, “The Happy Slave Isn't Free: Relational Autonomy and Freedom in the *Zhuangzi*,” *Philosophy Compass* 14, no. 3 (2019).

which she raises, though her criticism takes on a more contemporary form—engaging with current feminist conceptions of autonomy. Here, she labels Guo Xiang’s account as “the happy slave” problem and argues that this psychologizing account of freedom is inadequate, because it “happens passively to the person.”¹⁷⁰ Moreover, Valmisa argues that these psychologized types of freedom “can be easily manipulated into discourses used to prevent much needed social transformation and attempts to restructure unjust power relations.”¹⁷¹ She then analyzes the notions of “‘transformation’ (*hua* 化) and ‘anger/ exertion’ (*nu* 怒) that appear in the story” of the Peng bird, which she claims Guo Xiang ignores, in order to derive a more plausible and defensible account of freedom from the Zhuangzi. While I agree with Valmisa that a mere psychological account of autonomy is indeed insufficient as an account for freedom, the portrayal of Guo Xiang which she and many others criticize is often simplistic and one-dimensional, leading to a misinterpretation of his philosophy as fatalistic, either as passively (as seen in Valmisa, Liu, and Jia), or actively (seen in Kohn, Machek, and Shen).

What is important to note here is that if the above charges against Guo Xiang, or even Liu or Fraser’s defenses, are to be believed, then Valmisa’s criticism would be perfectly valid. What, if any, does Guo Xiang’s notion of freedom really mean? If there is one, how do we derive it, when there is no equivalent term? Even then, will what we will come up with be really problematic, as some scholars might claim?

These are the questions that I aim to address. Though different scholars can sometimes use different terms to refer to freedom, I use several, finally culminating in the notion of *zide* 自得. This is because, in my view, though terms such as *duhua* 獨化, *wuxin* 無心, and *xiaoyao* 逍遙 (among other terms which I later discuss) imply freedom, in the basic sense of self-determination, it is in *zide* that one’s autonomy is fully realized and achieved, which is dialectically necessary for a truly self-determining agent. I contend, moreover, that these questions can only be answered through a systematic account of Guo Xiang’s philosophy, which builds from previous scholarship, but also addresses a gap in the treatment of his social and political philosophy as part of a larger system.

To briefly summarize, my aim is to show that not only is there a plethora of diverse notions of freedom in Chinese

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. 3

¹⁷¹ Ibid. 5

philosophy, but there is also Guo Xiang's notion of a sophisticated notion of freedom which we can only glean into if we look at it systematically. Indeed, as I have demonstrated early on in this chapter, we would be bound to fail in finding this out if we insist on looking for what is within the ballpark of a type of freedom that is rooted in metaphysical free-will and its theological foundations. However, if we are willing to set that aside and look at this neo-Daoist philosopher on his own terms, then deriving a new and innovative perception on the notion of freedom might be possible.

More primarily, this study aims to build on such non-binary logic that has allowed for Guo Xiang's notion of absolute causality and *the logic of convergence*. It brings forward a notion of freedom that is neither absolute nor deterministic, yet is also both absolute and deterministic; neither pluralistic nor monistic, but also both pluralistic and monistic. The possibility of this, as I would argue, can only be arrived at from Guo Xiang's ontological and epistemological import, which brings forth a self-organizing, self-transforming, image of the cosmos. This, in turn, not only allows, but necessitates an account of a more inclusive, holistic, and irreducible account of ethics and politics. This, moreover, is significant to our modern sensibilities, because philosophy, if it endeavors to have significance in the contemporary intellectual arena at all, should confront the nagging issues of society, such as the pitting of one faction against all others—as a consequence of the reductionism of our time,¹⁷² while drawing from ontological and epistemological foundations. This study thus aims to confront the issue of the fragmentation of consciousness rampant in our time, which leads to considerable conflicts both political and ethical.

As such, the over-arching problematique of this study is: *What is freedom in Guo Xiang's philosophy?* Its premise is based on the conception of freedom as self-realization (自得 *zide*) and, though political in nature, draws largely from ontological and epistemological perspectives.

Although I claim that it is in the term or concept of self-realization (自得 *zide*) that the notion of freedom can be understood, I do not use or translate these terms inter-changeably. Rather, I refer to self-realization as the culmination of a

¹⁷² In Latour's article "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," he shows how critique has now boiled down to two modes: either everything is simply mere projections of your mind, illusions, because there is no access to the things-in-themselves nor to Truth, but also, you are really nothing but the forces or determinations of natural and social sciences. Both these discourses are the language of the critic: "the subject/object produces everything that...", "the subject/object is nothing but..." The reason for this, according to Latour, is because we treat nature and society, as two separate entities, when they are, in fact, part of one and the same reality. In other words, objects and humans alike are what he calls, actors in a network which contribute on their own. That is, we seem to mistake that either the subject or the object should be considered and studied on its own. Either the subject produces all, or objects produce all, creating a logical short-circuit. See Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2004).

complex set of terms and notions that consist of Guo Xiang's philosophy of freedom. Understood in the framework of self-realization, I will demonstrate how determination and attainment are mutually referential in Guo Xiang's philosophy of freedom.

This can be rephrased in more specific terms, in order to ask the question of: *What does self-realization (自得 zide), understood as freedom, mean in the philosophy of Guo Xiang?* The question will be answered with a thesis that adopts a deductive approach, demonstrating how a *dependence-based autonomy* is possible through Guo Xiang's "logic of convergence."

More specifically, the study aims to break down the dichotomous divides between one and many, particular and universal, necessity and contingency, and by extension, the self and other. This will show, in Guo Xiang's philosophical enterprise, a comprehensive and holistic notion of freedom that can finally escape the trap of a split self as found in both positive and negative notions of freedom. Thus, it will not have their idealistic tendencies of conceiving identities that are removed from others around it and their causes, whether it be negative freedom's radically independent subject,¹⁷³ or positive freedom's tug of war between real self and false self.

As I have shown, Chinese philosophers generally speak of freedom in the positive sense, but this is even more pertinent in the philosophy of Guo Xiang, wherein his system consists of freedom both in the positive senses of what is commonly passive self-abnegation as well as what is commonly active self-realization. More precisely, in the positive sense, freedom in

¹⁷³ I have shown here how this notion self has theological roots and hence becomes transcendent from social and material conditions that shape them. Although I have approached in from the Abrahamic point of view, several similar criticisms coming from different perspectives have previously been made against, more broadly, the Western ideas of the self. For instance, Gayatri Spivak tells us much of contemporary philosophy is hinged on classical philosophers such as Kant and Hegel, and yet we fail to realize "how Kant foreclosed the Aboriginal; how Hegel put the other of Europe in a pattern of normative deviations and how the colonial subject sanitized Hegel; how Marx negotiated difference." See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Harvard University Press, 1999), x. According to Spivak, this foreclosure is why "the field of philosophy as such, whose model was the merging of science and truth, remained untouched by the comparative impulse. In this area, Germany produced authoritative 'universal' narratives where the subject remained unmistakably European." See *ibid.* 8. Spivak's criticism comes from an entirely different angle from ours, but it shows the problems of treating the "individual" with such sanctity that the liberal framework does, as well as touching on the causes for this sanctity. I have thus shown how what Spivak refers to as "European" has Abrahamic roots. A similar but more recent criticism comes from the camp of feminist epistemology. Among many others, Lorraine Code, for instance, criticizes what she calls the "perfectly autonomous man" which she says has not only been a cultural ideal in Western societies, but also a primary influence in philosophical knowledge production; According to Code, "autonomous man is-and should be-self-sufficient, independent, and self-reliant, a self-realizing individual who directs his efforts toward maximizing his personal gains. His independence is under constant threat from other (equally self-serving) individuals: hence he devises rules to protect himself from intrusion. Talk of rights, rational self-interest, expediency, and efficiency permeates his moral, social, and political discourse. In short, there has been a gradual alignment of *autonomy* with *individualism*." See Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know?: Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (Cornell University Press, 1991), 77-78. Here I'd like to emphasize Code's remark that this individual's "independence is under constant threat from other individuals," as it is exactly what we find in Berlin's notion of the self, thus motivating his conception of freedom as "lack of *interference*."

Chinese philosophy can be either as a state of *being*,¹⁷⁴ as is usually the case in Daoism, or as a state of *action*, as is usually the case in Confucianism. However, as a syncretic philosopher of the *Xuanxue* movement, Guo Xiang has both, as well as pre-supposing the negative aspect in his goal of attaining the capacity for self-determination, as found in the concepts of self-generation (*zisheng* 自生), self-transformation (*zihua* 自化), lone-generation (*dusheng* 獨生), and lone-transformation (*duhua* 獨化), among others. How this comprehensive type of freedom comes to be, as well as its social and political implications, is therefore the task of this study.

According to this task, I have divided the work into three main chapters. This structure is pretty straightforward and starts with ontology boiling down to the epistemic role of the self in that ontological context, and finally ends with a discussion of Guo Xiang's philosophy of freedom.

The **first chapter** is a discussion of Guo Xiang's ontological philosophy and its "logic of convergence." It demonstrates the oneness of being and nothingness, and in turn, the breakdown of linear causality in how the concepts of *duhua* 獨化, *zihua* 自化, *dusheng* 獨生, *zisheng* 自生, inter-relate with one another. Finally, it examines the concept of 理 *li* as one and the same with non-*li* or its own negation not simply as complementarity of opposites but as a necessity of contradiction. This thus allows for a logic wherein the whole is not simply the sum of its parts, but those parts themselves reflect the whole.

The **second chapter** draws from this logic in its discussion of the nature of the self as both independent of and dependent on the changes and transformations of the cosmos. It will thus be a discussion on one's nature (性 *xing*) and the process of its formation based on Guo Xiang's concepts of allotment (分 *fen*) and endowment (命 *ming*). Ultimately, the chapter shows that, as responses to heaven (天 *Tian*), they can only be spontaneously emerging or self-so (自然 *ziran*), just as heaven itself is self-so (自然 *ziran*).

Finally, the **last main chapter** is an engagement with the concept of freedom as espoused by the term self-realization (自得 *zide*). Here, I introduce a concept which I call "dependence-based autonomy" and argue that beyond freedom from and

¹⁷⁴ Also sometimes referred to as psychological freedom, as was discussed earlier in the works of Valmisa and Fraser.

freedom to, or negative and positive freedoms respectively, Guo Xiang's philosophy has the potential for a kind of freedom that is "freedom in." This kind of freedom is both independent and dependent, as well as possessing aspects that are both passive and active in the concepts of *wuxin* and *xiaoyao* respectively. It is thus an achievement of autonomy that is obtained not by means of transcending causality nor discovering an inner and more true self, but on the contrary, by means of a radical dependence on *others*, because those *other* entities are part and parcel to the self.

CHAPTER ONE: Existence as Absolute

In this chapter, we will delve more into the ontological foundations of Guo Xiang's philosophy, that is, with regard to existence and causality. In order to discuss this, however, what is perhaps most pertinent to Guo Xiang's entire philosophical system is the convergence of opposites that is similar to the unity of *mingjiao* and *ziran* that Guo Xiang himself had successfully amalgamated fully. I call this "the logic of convergence."¹⁷⁵ Let us begin by looking at the following passage, where Guo Xiang describes how the external and internal realms become one. It is perhaps in this passage that the unity between *mingjiao* and *ziran* becomes most apparent in Guo Xiang, and achieves a consistent and coherent ontological ground as well:

When the principle of things reaches its full extent, the external and the internal merge into one. It can never be the case that someone ventures into the furthest of the external realm, but not [,at the same time,] be also fully immersed within the [affairs of the] internal realm. [Conversely,] it can never be the case that someone is able to be fully immersed within the [affairs of the] internal realm, and yet not [,at the same time,] voyaging outside it.

Thus, the sage constantly ventures outside the [internal world of] mundane affairs in order to merge fully with it. He empties his heart-mind in order to be in accord with the world of myriad beings and affairs. Therefore, although the sage assumes different roles [and engages in different tasks, depending on circumstances] all the

¹⁷⁵ The usage of the term "logic" here may perhaps cause some confusion to Anglophone philosophers who are analytically inclined. As such, some clarifications are called for, the most important of which to note is that this term is not used in the formal sense, which is usually an exercise for mathematical or linguistic inference. I do not argue that Guo Xiang provides an alternative logic that can compete with classical or traditional logic. However, I do take philosophical precedence from the usage of this word in European philosophers, both classical and more contemporary, such as in G.W.F. Hegel and Gilles Deleuze, for instance. What I mean by "logic" here refers to Guo Xiang's pattern of thought which, in Hegel's definition, "coincides with metaphysics, i.e. the science of things captured in thoughts that have counted as expressing the essentialities of things." See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline. Part 1: Science of Logic*, trans. Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). 58. This is the same type of logic that Deleuze refers to in his books *Francis Bacon: Logic of Sensation* and *Logic of Sense*; both works contain the word "logic" in their titles but make no mention of any formal logical formulations. In fact, David Lapoujade goes as far as to claim that Deleuze is "first and foremost interested in logic" See David Lapoujade, *Aberrant Movements: The Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze*, trans. Joshua David Jordan (Semiotext(e), 2017). 27, while also clarifying that logic in Deleuze "doesn't mean rational. We could even proclaim that for Deleuze a movement is all the more logical the more it escapes rationality" See *ibid.* 27. In other words, my use of the word logic here is, in the same vein as the said philosophers, simply a *means* to understand the general structure of being and reality, regardless of its rationality.

time, his spirit or qi essence [i.e., inner self] does not change. He watches over the myriad transformations of the world and respond to their affairs, but he is always calm and remains unaffected.

Now, the problem that persistently encumbers the world is precisely that people see mundane affairs but fail to reach [the point where they can see] the sage's [numinous] spirit. As such, when we see the sage mingling and engaging with the things and affairs of the world, it cannot be said that he has abandoned the world and parted from the society of men. When we see him embodying [the world's] transformations and responding to its affairs, we then cannot say that he has sat in forgetfulness and achieved self-realization [in isolation].

How could it be said that Confucius was not so? Rather it must be said that the ultimate principle is not such [that Confucius was only concerned with mundane affairs without spiritual accomplishment].

Therefore, Zhuangzi sought to illuminate the basis of the unity [of the external and the internal], in order to enable an understanding of the world. If he had just depicted Confucius to be thus, [with full convergence of both the internal and the external], some might reject it on the basis of what they observed [of Confucius' appearance]. Thus, Zhuangzi went beyond the internal traces of Confucius, and transmitted [knowledge] through [transcendent] external occupations represented by these masters. It is better to forget Zhuangzi's metaphors to seek the general meaning of [what] the written work [tries to convey]. Then, the way of roaming beyond the [internal] mundane world and yet [being] fully immersed in it would become abundantly clear. [Therefore,] the incomparable discourse in the book of Zhuangzi is after all still a perusal of [the issues within] the mundane world.

夫理有至極，外內相冥，未有極遊外之致而不冥於內者也，未有能冥於內而不遊於外者也。故聖人常遊外以冥內，無心以順有，故雖終日見形而神氣無變，俯仰萬機而淡然自若。夫見形而不及神者，天下之常累也。是故睹其與群物並行，則莫能謂之遺物而離人矣；睹其體化而應務，則莫能謂之坐忘而自得矣。豈直謂聖人不然哉？乃必謂至理之無此。是故莊子將明流統之所宗以釋天下之可悟，若直就稱仲尼之如此，或者將據所見以排之，故超聖人之內跡，而寄方外於數子。宜忘其所寄以尋述作之大意，則夫遊外冥內之道坦然自明，而莊子之書，故是涉俗蓋世之談矣。¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ *Guo Xiang Commentary of the Zhuangzi: Coded Edition*, The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), Research Center for Chinese Philosophy and Culture. 6.29.1G1-8. This text is from Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, *Zhuangzi jishi 莊子集釋*. (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1961). All references in this paper to the Guo Xiang commentary are referred to as either "Zhuangzi" or "Guo Xiang

The concept of *Li* here, or the principle of things, is such that it is not simply found within the concept of nature itself, but consists of social engagement. We shall discuss this concept more later in the chapter, but for now, suffice it to say that Guo Xiang builds his argument with the premise that the internal and external, the mundane and the transcendent are one and the same when *Li* reaches the extreme. What does Guo Xiang mean when he says internal (*nei*) and external (*wai*), however? The internal realm refers to social engagements in relation to finitude, whereas the external realm refer to matters of nature, outside of the realm of social and political obligations. In the rest of the text, Guo Xiang expands on Zhuangzi's famous line, that "outside the limits of the human world, the sage exists but does not theorize, inside the limits of the human world, the sage theorizes but does not debate." 六合之外，聖人存而不論；六合之內，聖人論而不議。¹⁷⁷ We will delve more into this and Guo Xiang's relation of it to nature (*xing* 性) and allotment (*fen* 分) in the next chapter, but for now, it would suffice to note that for Guo Xiang, it was Confucius who truly embodied sagacity, and it was in him that the internal and external realms were truly united. The point that must be highlighted here is that being the external realm, or the type of fulfilment we achieve in becoming one with nature—like in the type of calmness that one gets in an encounter with the sublimity of a natural wonder—can and will be found in the internal and social realm of things. Conversely, when one is truly transcendent or one with the nature of the cosmos, having an empty heart-mind and a full *qi*, then he will be in accord with the society of men and its transformations. Moreover, Guo Xiang's argument here is not simply that internal and external are complementary, but that the fulfilment of one depends on the fulfilment of the other. Confucius, whom Guo Xiang and other Wei-Jin philosophers considered to be the ultimate sage, was a man who has achieved self-realization, as though sitting in forgetfulness [of the mundane world], by fully immersing within the mundane affairs of the world, as well as becoming one with it. This absolute convergence of the external and internal can indeed be said to be the overarching theme of Guo Xiang's philosophical enterprise.

Guo Xiang was probably the first Chinese philosopher who introduced this concept of the ontology of complete convergence, but it wasn't an entirely new concept by any means. It is reminiscent of a Chinese idiom, 物極必反 *wuji bifan*,

Commentary" depending on if it is the primary text or commentary, and in the CUHK markings; unless cited as translated by Brook Ziporyn, Feng Yu-lan, Alan Chan, or others, then translations are of my own.

¹⁷⁷ Zhuangzi, in Guo Xiang Commentary 2.14.9-10

meaning that when things are pushed to their extremes, they reverse into the opposite – a concept that is present in the *Laozi*¹⁷⁸ and can be traced to as far back as the *Yijing*.¹⁷⁹ Guo Xiang simply radicalized this, and it is this *logic of convergence* that allows Guo Xiang to posit the argument that the height of the (internal) mundane is, at its core, (external) transcendence, and vice versa. Because one realm enables the other, the true sage and the emptiness of his heart-mind is what allows him to simply be in accord with the thousand changes and transformations of the world within grasp, that is, to laugh as the ordinary people laugh, and to mourn as the ordinary people mourn, for in those fleeting moments he holds on to nothing and that is ultimately what allows him to be fully present within each moment, feeling, change, and the entirety of the world. This, according to Guo Xiang, is what it truly means to let go and no longer hold onto anything, not even one's own solitude or self. To elucidate this even further, the following passage is from an earlier commentary that Guo Xiang has made when he describes the sage's role in the larger picture:

All this is simply metaphorical language. The “divine man” is what we now call a sage. Though the sage is in the imperial hall, yet his heart differs not from when he is in the mountain forests. How would the world know this! They merely see his dwelling within a yellow canopy and wearing the seal of jade at his girdle, so they speak of it as sufficing to bind his heart; when they see him walking beside mountain streams and taking part in the life of ordinary people, then they speak of it as sufficing to sadden his spirit. How would they understand that those who have attained the ultimate is unwaning!¹⁸⁰

此皆寄言耳。夫神人即今所謂聖人也。夫聖人雖在廟堂之上，然其心無異於山林之中，世豈識之哉！

徒見其戴黃屋，佩玉璽，便謂足以纓紱其心矣；見其歷山川，同民事，便謂足以憔悴其神矣。豈知

¹⁷⁸ The Laozi or Daodejing mentions opposites and pairs many times, especially being and non-being, or non-being as giving birth to being, and continues on to repeatedly use different kinds of opposites for metaphors, such as imageries of long and short, high and low, etc. in order to show the human tendency to think in binaries whereas reality is a totality. Needless to say, the idea of extremes reversing can perhaps be most elucidated by the first two lines of verse sixteen (16), which says: 「致虛極，守靜篤。萬物並作，吾以觀復。」 James Legge aptly translates this as: “The (state of) vacancy should be brought *to the utmost degree*, and that of stillness guarded with unwearying vigour. All things alike go through their processes of activity, and (then) we see them *return* (to their original state).” See Laozi, “Tao Te Ching,” (Chinese Text Project, 1891).

¹⁷⁹ The general assumption in the *Yijing* is that opposites bring about change, but to elucidate this point more clearly, it would perhaps be most crucial to look at the hexagram 復 *Fu* which means “Return.” The hexagram is composed of six yin lines on top and one yang line in the bottom. Take note that in *Yijing*, lines start from the bottom upward, so this hexagram means that the time of darkness or of yin is nearing an end because it has reached its extreme, and will therefore be transitioning to its opposite, that is the light or yang. This hexagram is also often associated with the winter solstice, a season generally perceived as a time when light overcomes or wins over darkness.

¹⁸⁰ Guo Xiang Commentary 1.(10.1-12.1)G1-3, trans. Birthe Arendrup, “The First Chapter of Guo Xiang's Commentary to Zhuang Zi” (University of Copenhagen, 1964). 339-340. Modified.

至至者之不虧哉！

Such a description of the sage's perfect unity and embodied harmony allows us to see the unity of the mundane and transcendent as well. This is why in the previous passage, Guo Xiang says that the ultimate principle (*li*) is no different and operates in the same way. While the burden of the common people is that they are stuck in the mundane, Guo Xiang's sage can operate fully and devotedly within the mundane precisely because he is profoundly in touch with transcendence and the other way around.

Hereon forward, it becomes clear that Guo Xiang wishes to elucidate upon the motivations behind the Zhuangzi, which is “to illuminate the basis of the unity [of the external and the internal], in order to enable an understanding of the world.” In other words, Guo Xiang wishes to clarify that while the Zhuangzi may seem like a text about transcendence, it is as much talking about the mundane world as it is about the world beyond.

It is in this very same vein that 無 *wu* and 有 *you* are treated by Guo Xiang. That is, as not simply contingently complementary to each other, but necessary. In this sense, they are necessary to the constitution of each other. We must note, however, that Guo Xiang provides a new understanding of *wu* or ‘nonbeing’ here in order to make that possible. That is to say, the nonbeing here takes up its literal sense – nothing, pure lack, emptiness. Here, we see that the definition of nonbeing as purely nothing is made possible by the definition of pure being as pure many-ness. This logically amounts to nothingness while in turn, such pure nothingness is the very possibility of being as being. Of course, these are complex concepts to unpack and we will therefore need to further elaborate in the next section.

1.1 *wu* 無 and *you* 有

To recap why such mechanism is possible only because nothingness is absolute, we shall have to look to the following passage, where Guo Xiang describes how *wu* cannot be a kind of creator:

The music of heaven is not an entity existing outside of things. The different apertures, the pipes and flutes and the like, in combination with all living beings, together constitute heaven. Since non-being is non-being, it cannot generate being. Before being itself is generated, it cannot produce other beings. Then by whom are

things generated? They simply spontaneously self-generate. By “self-generation,” it is not meant that there is an “I” to generate. The “I” cannot generate things and things cannot generate the “I”. So “I” is self-so. Because it is so by itself, we call it natural (lit. heaven-so). Everything is what it is by nature (lit. heaven), not through taking any action. Therefore [Chuang Tzu] speaks in terms of heaven. The term “heaven” is used to explain that things are what they are spontaneously, and not to mean the blue sky. But someone says that the music of heaven makes all things serve or obey it. Now, heaven cannot even possess itself. How can it possess things? Heaven is the general name for all things. Heaven does not set its mind for or against anything. Who is the master to make things obey? Therefore each thing self-generate and thus has nothing that makes it emerge. This is the Way of Heaven.¹⁸¹

夫天籟者，豈復別有一物哉？即眾竅比竹之屬，接乎有生之類，會而共成一天耳。無既無矣，則不能生有；有之未生，又不能為生。然則生生者誰哉？塊然而自生耳。自生耳，非我生也。我既不能生物，物亦不能生我，則我自然矣。自己而然，則謂之天然。天然耳，非為也，故以天言之。（以天言之）所以明其自然也，豈蒼蒼之謂哉！而或者謂天籟役物使從己也。夫天且不能自有，況能有物哉！故天者，萬物之總名也，莫適為天，誰主役物乎？故物各自生而無所出焉，此天道也。

Here, Guo Xiang tells us that all things, being what they are, are spontaneously so—they are naturally so. Nothing exists outside of them, and they mutually co-exist in order to let each other exist. This is what is meant by the term Nature (天 *Tian*). Such is none other than the *Dao* of *Tian*. In other words, because things mutually produce each other, they are simply *ziran*. Nothing governs any or all them. This is what it simply means for nothingness and being to mutually co-exist and become necessary to the existence of each other, being that nothingness is necessary to being, and being in itself, purely so, is necessary to the nothingness of an existent producer or creator. Being and Nothing, therefore, are both necessary to each other, but also absolute in themselves—everything exists, so therefore there is no One existence. That is to say, if things then produce

¹⁸¹ Guo Xiang Commentary, 2.6.1G2-G15, quoted in Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Lawrenceville: Princeton University Press, 1963). 328. modified.

themselves spontaneously, there is no principle that governs everything but their own principles of self-generation. In other words, this ontological oblivion¹⁸² is the absolute lack of any being whatsoever.

There are countless passages where Guo Xiang re-iterates this, but in an earlier passage, Guo Xiang also says that everything is so by itself and is self-generating [塊然而自生]. Commenting on the following passage of the *Zhuangzi*:

Tzu-ch'i said, "The Great Clod belches out breath and its name is wind."¹⁸³

子綦曰：「夫大塊噫氣，其名為風。」

Guo Xiang says:

The Great Clod is not anything. So, how can that which belches out breath be anything? The breath is simply being belched out spontaneously. As for the production of things, there is nothing that is not so by itself and self-generating. Since the substance of that which is naturally so is [so vast and] great, it is therefore given the name Great Clod.¹⁸⁴

大塊者，無物也。夫噫氣者，豈有物哉？氣塊然而自噫耳。物之生也，莫不塊然而自生，則塊然之體大矣，故遂以大塊為名。

This is perhaps one of the more materialist passages in Guo Xiang's commentary of the *Zhuangzi*, highlighting that things are simply so. The metaphor for the great clod here is thus powerful because it shows how there is greatness and grandeur in a mere lump of earth. This is a recurring theme in the *Zhuangzi*, but here it is emphasized how the generativity of all things is not a grand process by which things have fixed purpose, they simply are. They are self-generating, and spontaneous: not anything.

¹⁸² Alan Chan calls this absolute lack as the "Daoist Oblivion." See Alan K.L. Chan, "Embodying Nothingness and the Ideal of the Affectless Sage in Daoist Philosophy," in *Nothingness in Asian Philosophy*, ed. JeeLoo Liu and Douglas L. Berger (New York: Routledge, 2014). 221.

¹⁸³ *Zhuangzi* 2.4.1 trans. Burton Watson, "The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu," <https://terebess.hu/english/chuangtzu.html>.

¹⁸⁴ Guo Xiang Commentary, 2.4.1G1-4

According to Yang Lihua, this nothingness (無 *wu*) is what makes lone-transformation (獨化 *duhua*) and self-generativity (自生 *zisheng*) consistent with the rest of Guo Xiang's philosophy. He explains that: "Guo Xiang thinks that not only is 'nothingness' unable to produce 'being,' 'being' also cannot be completely dispelled as 'non-being'. Whatsoever exists, regardless of whether they undergo any sort of transformation, still cannot become 'non-being.'"¹⁸⁵ He continues: "since 'non-being' cannot produce 'being', it also cannot govern nor control the myriad things."¹⁸⁶

Yang Lihua further proceeds to look at a commentary of Guo Xiang in the following passage:

Who, resting inactive himself, gives the cause that makes it go this way?¹⁸⁷

孰居無事推而行是？

Guo Xiang then comments:

As nonbeing, it therefore does not have any capacity to cause [things to become what they are]; as being, then each has its own [sphere of] activity. In that case, who [or what] could it be that is without activity and yet causes and activates [other beings]? Each self-activates on its own, that is all.¹⁸⁸

無則無所能推，有則各自有事。然則無事而推行是者誰乎哉？各自行耳。

Regarding this passage, Yang Lihua explains that since "non-being" is being simply such, it also cannot have any effect or influence that can occur towards things. There is no unified master and ruler behind the myriad things. Therefore, the cause and maintenance of things is but the result "everything simply maintaining themselves." (各自行)¹⁸⁹ Nonbeing thus is simply the breakdown of causality through inter-causality; it is the breakdown of dependence through the inter-dependence of all, resulting in independence. More on the specific logical steps for this will be discussed in the third chapter.

¹⁸⁵ Lihua Yang, 郭象"庄子注"研究 (*an Examination of Guo Xiang's Zhuangzi Commentary*) (北京大学出版社, 2010). 96.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. 96

¹⁸⁷ Zhuangzi 14.1.6, Burton Watson, "The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu".

¹⁸⁸ Guo Xiang Commentary, 14.1.6G

¹⁸⁹ Yang, 郭象"庄子注"研究 (*an Examination of Guo Xiang's Zhuangzi Commentary*). 26

For now, it is important to highlight how Guo Xiang strips non-being of any transcendent role as first cause. In the following passage, Guo Xiang directly explains:

Not only is it impossible for non-being to be changed into being. It is also impossible for being to become non-being. Therefore, although being as a thing undergoes infinite changes and transformations, it cannot itself become non-being. It cannot become non-being, thus even from old, there was never a time when being did not yet exist, as being is eternally existent.¹⁹⁰

非唯無不得化而為有也，有亦不得化而為無矣。是以有之為物，雖千變萬化，而不得一為無也。不得一為無，故自古無未有之時而常存也。

The reason why being can undergo infinite changes and transformations is because being is diverse. In other words, it is a scenario where inter-linkages between different nodes are infinite because those nodes themselves are constantly being transformed by the inter-linkages themselves. Thus, pure nothingness—nonbeing as the opposite of being—doesn't really exist. Furthermore, it cannot exist because at no point in time does being cease to exist; it simply transforms itself through inter-causation. Isabelle Robinet draws a helpful insight from this concept of nothingness and says that:

At the origin of beings, there is nothing external to them that gives birth to them; beyond them, there is nothing either: "At the limit of beings, there is nothing, that is why words and knowledge cannot exceed beings; disappearance and emergence are spontaneous, there is no origin nor that which comes after"(27.43b): *wu* is not an entity which causes or surpasses the beings, it is not an external and transcendent origin to beings; the term *wu* is the negation of all this; "There is nothing that makes them" 未有為之者 (25.31b); the "creator" is "beings by themselves" ("each being is self-created") (3.47a).¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Guo Xiang Commentary 22.58.3G1-2, Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. 335. Modified and supplemented.

¹⁹¹ Isabelle Robinet, "Kouo Siang Ou Le Monde Comme Absolu," *T'oung Pao* 69 (1983). 77

Because *wu* simply means nothing, being is absolute, hence her fittingly titled work “Kouo Siang ou le monde comme absolu.” There is nothing external to the world which causes it to be so, meaning it is absolute and so in itself, which makes the term *wu* or nonbeing simply a reference to pure lack of a first cause or creator. There is no master, no grand narrative, for everything is simply so in and of themselves.

This is an apt articulation of Guo Xiang’s conception of existence and the world as absolute. However, we must be careful not to tip the delicate balance between necessity and contingency here, as Robinet seems to have done due to going one slight step towards necessity. She says that:

This non-contingent world 無分待 (3.47b), without master 無主 (3.47a), possesses all the fundamental attributes of the absolute: the eternal and necessary existence of itself. There is nothing outside of it, no creator, no reality. It is the supreme reality. It is one and all beings are consubstantial to it.¹⁹²

While everything else in this passage is true, it would be misleading to highlight the non-contingency of the world as opposed to its contingency. This is because *ziran* 自然, the very spontaneity and being so in itself of the world, is a kind of pure contingency and such pure contingency is what is necessary to a world that is absolute. More on the logic that allows this to occur will be discussed later, but for now, it would suffice to say that for Guo Xiang, spontaneity is itself necessity, making contingency a necessity, and necessity a contingency at once, as we shall below.

This issue is further highlighted when Robinet continues to say that:

In this language, *wu* plays the simple role of negation and means "to have nothing"; the function of the word *wu*, for Guo Xiang, is to deny that there is an origin. Guo Xiang is probably the only Chinese thinker to use this term in this fashion, at least categorically so. "The *wu* is simply the *wu*, it cannot generate the *you*" (2.7a, 25.48a). This obviously evokes Parmenides’ "being is and non-being is not". For Kouo Siang, there is an impassable abyss between *wu* and *you*; "*wu* cannot change into *you*, *you* cannot be changed into *wu*" (24.38a).¹⁹³

¹⁹² Ibid. 79-80. Translated.

¹⁹³ Ibid. 76. Translated.

Here it becomes clear that Robinet views nonbeing and being as two opposite entities that are contradictory instead of necessary to each other. She continues in a later discussion:

This self-creation is self-identity, which is uniform in all; It is Guo Xiang's way of understanding "the oneness of beings" 齊物 of Zhuangzi. This leads, of course, to monism, as in Parmenides, the premises being the same.¹⁹⁴

While we can easily surmise the self-creative property of Zhuangzi's cosmos as rendered by Guo Xiang, the same cannot be said about the uniformity of all beings in the second inner chapter (齊物論 *qiwulun*). It can only be so in a carefully qualified manner, such that self-identification won't necessarily mean uniformity of all the diverseness of being, but rather that things are all identical in being different or diverse. This is why, as previously mentioned, Yang Lihua points out that nothingness (無物) is what makes lone-transformation (獨化) and self-generativity (自生) consistent. It is precisely because there is no cause at all, that they cause themselves to be so.

This, however, doesn't seem to be what Robinet means as she compares Guo Xiang's ontological import to that of Parmenides' monism, whereas, this can't be the case as we know that Guo Xiang didn't take the same position as Parmenides' who could be more closely be compared to Pei Wei, and even then, it might still be a stretch despite Pei Wei being the most monistic of his Wei-Jin peers.¹⁹⁵ In fact, as we shall later see, Guo Xiang makes several remarks that is contrary to arguing

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. 79. Translated.

¹⁹⁵ Pei Wei's philosophy can be found in his essay entitled 崇有論 *Chongyoulun*, which David Knechtges translates as "Disquisition on Esteeming the Existent" quoted in Alan K. L. Chan, "Re-Envisioning the Profound Order of Dao: Pei Wei's "Critical Discussion on the Pride of Place of Being", in *Dao Companion to Xuanxue 玄學 (Neo-Daoism)*, ed. David Chai (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020). The essay itself can be found in *Jin shu*, *juan* 35. Here, Pei Wei can be seen as disputing the nihilistic tendencies of the time, which he attributed to "esteeming nothingness" (貴無 *guiwu*), deeming the trend of placing significance in the abstract notion of nothingness as dangerous due to the ethical decline it causes, though Étienne Balázs claims that Pei's motives were purely utilitarian and pragmatic in Étienne Balázs, "Entre Révolte Nihiliste Et Évasion Mystique : Les Courants Intellectuels En Chine Au Iiie Siècle De Notre Ère," 2, no. 1-2 (1948). 52. However, it is interesting to note that the first line in Pei's essay, which reads as "Now, it is certainly the case that the all-encompassing undifferentiated root of the multitude of things is the Dao of ultimate origins." (夫總混羣本, 宗極之道也.) See Pei Wei, quoted in Chan, "Re-Envisioning the Profound Order of Dao: Pei Wei's "Critical Discussion on the Pride of Place of Being". 327 Chan, moreover, notes that "The noun phrase 'qunben' has been taken to mean, for example, the totality of beings, the sum total of all there is. As such, the text is basically saying that the ultimate Dao is none other than the world of beings itself." See *ibid.* 327. This interpretation can be seen as quite similar to Parmenides' totality of being, wherein he assumes all changes to be one, saying that "No was nor will: all past and future null; Since Being subsists in one ubiquitous Now—unitary and continuous." See Parmenides, lines 100-102, quoted in Martin J. Henn, *Parmenides of Elea: A Verse Translation with Interpretative*

that there is only being and nothing else for he acknowledges that both Laozi and Zhuangzi often talk about nonbeing, and indeed even makes arguments for the modification of action into stillness *via negativa* in several passages. In the following passage, he refers to what is meant by *wu* or nonbeing:

Obscure, deep, dark, and silent, all of these are [means of conveying] total nonbeing.¹⁹⁶

窈冥昏默，皆了無也。

Note, moreover, that as this characterization shows, nothingness or nonbeing almost always has a positive meaning in Guo Xiang except when he is reacting to an interpretation of it as a kind Ultimate. He repeatedly uses such imagery to describe how the self-generativity and self-activity of all things are possible through nothingness, as well as their mutual enabling. For instance, in the following passage, Guo Xiang says:

One who has an empty heart-mind, and abides by the self-generativity [of things], is worthy of becoming an emperor or king.

夫無心而任乎自化者，應為帝王也。¹⁹⁷

And again in a later passage, he says that:

To gaze into nothingness, is to then bear one's lone-genesis.¹⁹⁸

睹無則任其獨生也。

Essays and Commentary to the Text (Westport: Praeger, 2003). 26. Chan, however, introduces a different interpretation wherein he points at the second line, which reads “The myriad things are differentiated by the species to which they belong, which are of qualitatively distinct kinds.” (方以族異，庶類之品也). He takes this to mean that Pei Wei points to an “an undifferentiated source to differentiated kinds each with distinct qualities...” See Chan, “Re-Envisioning the Profound Order of Dao: Pei Wei’s “Critical Discussion on the Pride of Place of Being”.” 327. In contrast, Guo Xiang highlights singularity and uniqueness, and as we shall later on see, the unique allotment (分 *fen*) of each and every being in the universe—that is, the many-ness of the one.

¹⁹⁶ Guo Xiang Commentary, 11.12.2G1

¹⁹⁷ Guo Xiang Commentary, 7.0G. To mention a few other instances where he associates *zihua* with nothingness are: 理與物皆不以存懷，而闇付自然，則無為而自化矣。See 11.28.3G; 厲，惡人也。言天下皆不願為惡，及其為惡，或迫於苛役，或迷而失性耳。然迷者自思復，而厲者自思善，故我無為而天下自化。See 12.50.9G

¹⁹⁸ Guo Xiang Commentary, 11.32.14G

More will be said on the terms 自化 *zihua* and 獨生 *zisheng* later, but for now, it is important to note that although Guo Xiang applies the notion of nothingness to the cognitive level here, the relation between nothingness or absolute lack and self-transformation as well as lone-genesis is clear: absolute nothingness is not simply what allows self-transformation and lone-genesis, but it also inevitably demonstrates self-transformation and lone-genesis. Guo Xiang does this in such a way that since there is nothing that governs anything, then everything depends on everything else. This ultimately leads to the conclusion that each and every thing is absolutely and irreducibly singular. Even when he talks about being able to rule things, as in the passage above about becoming an emperor or king, he notes that this is simply possible by being *wuxin* 無心 or having an empty heart-mind. As such, such singular beings are not caused and are therefore simply spontaneously so, and will transform spontaneously so. They can do so because nonbeing as nothingness—meaning the complete lack of any being—is the only thing that governs everything, so really nothing governs anything. Furthermore, he clarifies what Laozi and Zhuangzi meant when they talk about nonbeing:

Why is it that Zhuangzi and Laozi often call it nonbeing?

To make it clear that that which generates things is no thing and that things simply generate themselves.

Self-generation, simply, is not generated by action, so what act can be applied to what is already generated?¹⁹⁹

夫莊老之所以屢稱無者，何哉？明生物者無物而物自生耳。自生耳，非為生也，又何有為於已生乎！

Here, it becomes clearer that nonbeing is simply a reference to the 自生 *zisheng* of all things, which is really what the *Zhuangzi* wanted to emphasize whenever it mentioned or talked about nonbeing. In other words, nonbeing is a blanket term for the non-existence of anything that causes everything because everything causes everything, and therefore none does. Guo Xiang then re-iterates this in a later passage and says:

What could exist before there were things? If I say yin and yang came first, then since yin and yang are themselves entities, what came before them? Suppose I say [the event of] spontaneity came first. But

¹⁹⁹ Guo Xiang Commentary, 11.12.2G2-4

spontaneity is only things being self-so. Suppose I say perfect Dao came first. But perfect Dao is perfect non-being.

Since it is non-being, how can it come before anything else? Then what came before it? There must be another thing, and so on *ad infinitum*. We must understand that things are what they are spontaneously and not caused by something else.²⁰⁰

They merely are self-so, thus [their] grace flows through a hundred generations and yet does not fall into neglect.²⁰¹

誰得先物者乎哉？吾以陰陽為先物，而陰陽者即所謂物耳。誰又先陰陽者乎？吾以自然為先之，而自然即物之自爾²⁰²耳。吾以至道為先之矣，而至道者乃至無也。既以無矣，又奚為先？然則先物者誰乎哉？而猶有物，無已，明物之自然，非有使然也。

取於自爾，故恩流百代而不廢也。

On this passage, Tang Yijie notes, moreover, that:

whatever exists are “things” (物), therefore the “myriad things” (萬物) are themselves the sole existence. “*Ziran*” is the state in which the myriad things naturally exist, it simply means to denote that the “myriad things” (萬物) are existing and transforming on their own, and that not one single thing causes them (它) to exist or transform in such a way. For instance, “Dao” is also not a single entity, and is “ultimate non-being” (至無); since it is non-being it cannot exist before “being” (有), it simply is “things” (物) which is why it [Dao] is in such a state of movement and transformation.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Guo Xiang Commentary 22.59.5G, quoted in Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. 335. Modified.

²⁰¹ Guo Xiang Commentary, 22.59.6G

²⁰² Here I have modified Wing Tsit Chan’s translations of 自然 *ziran* and 自爾 *zier* to say spontaneity and self-so respectively but I also use “self-so” for *ziran*. This is because the word “self-so” is apt for both terms, yet they are not interchangeable in Chinese. While the former emphasizes the process of a spontaneous flow of things, the latter places emphasis on the state of things being simply-such in themselves. Thus, I use different words for when they are both present, but when the context does not require them to be distinguished from each other, I often use “self-so” for both *ziran* and *zier*, unless the context requires otherwise (such contextual translation for these words, however, is practiced in the rest of my translations to highlight the contextual nature of the language and the flexibility of the signifier rather than having fixed signified concepts).

²⁰³ Tang, 郭象与魏晋玄学 (*Guo Xiang and Wei-Jin Xuanxue*). 229.

In other words it is clear that 無 *wu* cannot become 有 *you* and vice versa, because things always already are what they are. This would then translate into there being no absolute being, or one single thing that causes everything; there is not even one single thing that causes another thing which can result in linear causation, as shall be discussed later.

This *logic of convergence* in being and nonbeing, and causality itself, is what leads to the ultimate destruction of logical and ontological dualisms. This, moreover, is perhaps why both Tang Yijie and even Isabelle Robinet²⁰⁴ read Guo Xiang as a precursor to Buddhism, and indeed a kind of culmination of indigenous Chinese thought during this era.²⁰⁵ While we have no historical basis as to whether Guo Xiang's *logic of convergence* influenced Buddhist thought, the other way around, or if there was any contact at all, some scholars have certainly proven the distinctive parallels in what would seem to be a logic of contradiction, and in the case of Guo Xiang himself, the convergence of such contradictions. It is in this vein that the logician and Buddhist, Graham Priest's enterprise that is Dialetheism, which he claims is an important import of Buddhist logic,²⁰⁶ is perhaps worth evoking. In most of Priest's works, he argues that "our concepts, or some of them anyway, are inconsistent and produce dialetheias,"²⁰⁷ a term which he coins in order to indicate "the Janus-headed nature of a true contradiction."²⁰⁸ In a different work with Buddhist scholars Jay Garfield and Yasuo Deguchi, they note that contradictions are "a consequence of rationality itself."²⁰⁹ The relationship of contradiction to inter-causality, moreover, is explained by Priest in his work entitled "*One: Being an Investigation into the Unity of Reality and of its Parts, including the Singular Object which is Nothingness*,"²¹⁰ where he explains the concept of Interpenetration and Indra's Net²¹¹ in order to show the true contradiction of **everything** and

²⁰⁴ Robinet, "Kouo Siang Ou Le Monde Comme Absolu." 112, *passim*.

²⁰⁵ It is important to note, that Wang Xiaoyi also describes Guo Xiang's thought the height of a parabola in the history of Chinese philosophy. See Wang, "郭象命运论及其意义 (the Destiny Theory of Guo Xiang and Its Significance)."

²⁰⁶ Graham Priest, "Beyond True and False," Aeon, <https://aeon.co/essays/the-logic-of-buddhist-philosophy-goes-beyond-simple-truth>.

²⁰⁷ *In Contradiction: A Study of the Transconsistent* (Oxford University Press, 2006). 4.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 4, n4

²⁰⁹ Yasuo Deguchi, Jay L. Garfield, and Graham Priest, "The Way of the Dialetheist: Contradictions in Buddhism," *Philosophy East and West* 58, no. 3 (2008). 396.

²¹⁰ Graham Priest, *One: Being an Investigation into the Unity of Reality and of Its Parts, Including the Singular Object Which Is Nothingness*, First edition ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

²¹¹ Francis Cook describes the Net of Indra as such: "Far away in the heavenly abode of the great god Indra, there is a wonderful net which has been hung by some cunning artificer in such a manner that it stretches out indefinitely in all directions. In accordance with the extravagant tastes of deities, the artificer has hung a single glittering jewel at the net's every node, and since the net itself is infinite in all dimensions, the jewels are infinite in number. There hang the jewels, glittering like stars of the first magnitude, a wonderful sight to behold. If we now arbitrarily select one of the jewels for inspection and look closely at it, we will discover that in its polished surface there are reflected all the other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that the process of reflection is infinite." See Francis Harold Cook, *Hua-Yen Buddhism: the Jewel Net of Indra* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977). Quoted in *ibid.* 179

nothing.²¹² Priest uses the example of a magnet to illustrate the concept of interpenetration, and notes that the north pole of a magnet can only be what it is in relation to its south. In the following, Priest illustrates the structure of *n* (north pole) wherein *s* (south pole) is contained:

He notes that “what we see is that the tree for *n* contains the tree for *s* as a proper sub-tree. Metaphysically speaking, then, the ontological structure of *n* contains that of *s*.”²¹³ In the same way, however, the node *s* will have the following structure:

In other words, the tree for *n* is the tree for *s*, and the tree for *s* is the tree for *n*. Each contains the other as a necessary condition of being, and thus *interpenetrate*. As such, Priest concludes that “every object then interpenetrates with itself, and interpenetration is an equivalence relation,”²¹⁴ and that this is the similar logic that goes on in the Net of Indra, where each jewel reflects the entire totality of the net, which means that “**everything** and **nothing** then interpenetrate. And since any thing interpenetrates with **nothing**, it interpenetrates with **everything**.”²¹⁵

Deguchi, Garfield, and Priest say that this dialetheism which we find in Buddhism is inevitable given the nature of the reality it tries to describe. They note that:

In this respect, Buddhism is akin to any of a number of positions that claim that there is an ineffable reality, and then go on to explain why this is so, in the process, saying things about that reality. The phenomenon is to

²¹² Ibid.175-181

²¹³ Ibid.178.

²¹⁴ Ibid.179

²¹⁵ Ibid.181

be found, for example, in Neoplatonism, in Advaita Vedānta, and in Heidegger on Being.²¹⁶

This is similar to what we find in Guo Xiang as well, where that ultimate reality is ineffable or unknowable because it is ultimately contradictory, in reference to nothingness, or in the case of Buddhism, to emptiness, which, as Deguchi, Garfield, and Priest note, “identical with dependent origination”²¹⁷ Similarly, Guo Xiang says that “since knowing comes from nonknowing, nonknowing is always the source. Hence, the Genuine Human Being discards knowledge and thereby knows, does nothing and thereby does.”²¹⁸ 知出於不知，故以不知為宗。是故真人遺知而知，不為而為... At this level of ultimate truth, we can accurately say that this is the same logic behind Guo Xiang’s philosophy. However, unlike in much of Buddhist philosophy which separates Ultimate reality/truth from conventional reality/truth, and where contradictions are only true at the ultimate level, these distinctions do not occur in the same way in Guo Xiang. For Guo Xiang, contradictions do not simply occur at the ultimate level, but because everything at the conventional level can be pushed to their ultimate ontological opposite, as is seen in the discussion above on the boundaries between external and internal realm which disappear into each other. For Guo, everything is ultimately contradictory in that each thing is its own contradiction, which makes the contradiction of anything ultimately *nothing*. In this manner, Guo Xiang may be said to have a similar logic with dialetheism, but pushed to the extreme. A similar ontological position (when it comes to contradictions) worth evoking is that of Hegel, who Priest considers is a pre-cursor for paraconsistency and dialetheism. In his book *In Contradiction*, which is one of the most important works on dialetheism, Priest explicitly says that “the main claim of this book that Hegel was right”²¹⁹ Elsewhere, Priest argues that “Hegel’s and Marx’s dialectics is based on dialetheism.”²²⁰ Indeed, Hegel went so far as to scandalously proclaim that “everything is inherently contradictory”²²¹ and that speculative thinking, in other words philosophical exercise, in thinking about thinking, “consists solely in the fact that thought holds fast contradiction”²²² Hegel explains:

It is one of the fundamental prejudices of logic as hitherto understood²²³ and of ordinary thinking,²²⁴ that

²¹⁶ Deguchi, Garfield, and Priest, "The Way of the Dialetheist: Contradictions in Buddhism." 400

²¹⁷ Ibid. 400

²¹⁸ Guo Xiang Commentary, 6.1.2G1-G5, quoted in Brook Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (2009). 188

²¹⁹ Priest, *In Contradiction: A Study of the Transconsistent*. 4.

²²⁰ "Dialectic and Dialetheic," *Science & Society* 53, no. 4 (1989). 388

²²¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (Amherst, N.Y: Humanity Books, 1998).439

²²² Ibid. 440

²²³ He is referring here to traditional or classical Aristotelian logic, which posits the law of non-contradiction, and writes this under a section entitled “the Law of Contradiction,” turning this classical framework inside-out.

²²⁴ Miller translates the German word “Vorstellen” into “ordinary thinking” here. This contrasts to speculative thinking (begreifenden) or the dialectical nature of philosophical exercise, which takes itself as the content of its own thinking process. As Paul Redding explains, Hegel refers to “the task of philosophy as that of recognising the concept (Der Begriff) in the mere representations (Vorstellungen) of everyday life.” See Paul Redding, "Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/hegel/>>.

contradiction is not so characteristically essential and immanent a determination as identity; but in fact, if it were a question of grading the two determinations and they had to be kept separate, then contradiction would have to be taken as the profounder determination and more characteristic of essence. For as against contradiction, identity is merely the determination of the simple immediate, of dead being; but contradiction is the root of all movement and vitality; it is only in so far as something has a contradiction within it that it moves, has an urge and activity.²²⁵

For Hegel thus, contradiction is only apparent when being is seen as dead—fixed. But the fact that being is indubitably organic, we can say that its root is contradiction, that is, its own negation. In this sense, Guo Xiang would agree that contradiction (between being and nonbeing) is the root of all movement and vitality. This is why, as discussed above, he says that “Zhuangzi sought to illuminate the basis of the unity [of the external and the internal]” by going “beyond the internal traces of Confucius, and transmitted [knowledge] through [transcendent] external occupations represented by these masters”²²⁶ It is thus only by going beyond “ordinary thinking,” in Hegel’s terms, or “the internal realm” that true *comprehension* is possible.

Guo Xiang would disagree, however, that this is where buck stops, for in Guo Xiang’s view, Confucius was able to comprehend *and* embody that unity. For Guo Xiang, it is when one embodies nonbeing in the realm of being that one is self-realized. We will come back to this more in the third main chapter, but for now, it would be sufficient to mention that, obviously, this *logic of convergence* would have different consequences in dialetheism, Hegel, and Guo Xiang, even if merely as a result of the different determinations of their philosophical systems in their own historical contexts. Nonetheless, recounting these similar logical-cum-ontological dispositions helps us conceive of what Guo Xiang would have meant by affirming contradictions in contemporary terms. At this point, however, it is important to remind the reader that, as I have mentioned earlier, I do not intend to present Guo Xiang’s way of reasoning as more valid than others, but simply to lay down the foundations of his philosophical system. As such, I present these other thinkers as an invitation to conditionally accept types of logical thinking which demonstrates how contradictions can be a fundamental ground of reality, for it is only then that we can begin to comprehend Guo Xiang’s philosophy, which considers nonbeing as necessary to being. Moreover, it is this *logic of convergence* that leads to Guo Xiang’s philosophy into the ultimate destruction of linear causality and in its place, the absolute independence and inter-dependence of all things, as grounded in the inherent contradiction of being as nonbeing.

²²⁵ Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*. 439

²²⁶ *Guo Xiang Commentary*, 6.29.1G1-8.

1.2 Causality and Inter-Causality

This ultimate coalescence between independence and interdependence is not only, as Ziporyn puts it “the ultimate breakdown of the concept of causality.”²²⁷ But also, and more pertinent to our purposes here, the ultimate collapse of any distinguishable binaries between particular and universal, and indeed, one and many. This ultimately points to the basic ontological premise of Guo Xiang which argues that things are 自生 *zisheng* and 自化 *zihua* and therefore 獨生 *dusheng* and 獨化 *duhua*.

1.2.1 *Zisheng* 自生 and *Zihua* 自化

The concept of *zisheng* or spontaneous generativity or self-generation is, as was discussed, closely related to *wu* or nonbeing. In a passage that is perhaps more pertinent as it talks about the beginning of the cosmos, when Zhuangzi says:

In the Great Beginning, there was nonbeing; there was no being, no name. Out of it arose One; there was One, but it had no form. From this, things came to be generated, and it was called Innate Power. Before things had forms, they had their allotments; these were of many kinds, but not cut off from one another, and they were called endowments. Out of the flow and flux, things were born, and as they grew they developed distinctive shapes; these were called innate nature. The forms and bodies held within them spirits, each with its own characteristics and limitations, and this was called the inborn nature. If the nature is trained, you may return to Innate Power, and Innate Power at its highest peak is the same with the Beginning. That sameness is emptiness; that emptiness is great. It converges the cheeping and chirping—the convergence of cheeping and chirping, is in accord with the convergence of heaven and earth. Their convergence is wild and confused, as though they were stupid, as though they were demented. This is called profound Innate Power, it is the same as the greatness of acquiescence.²²⁸

泰初有無，無有無名；一之所起，有一而未形。物得以生，謂之德；未形者有分，且然無間，謂之命；

²²⁷ Ziporyn, *The Penumbra Unbound: The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang*.103.

²²⁸ Zhuangzi, 12.18.1-12, quoted in Burton Watson, "The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu". Modified.

留動而生物，物成生理，謂之形；形體保神，各有儀則，謂之性。性脩反德，德至同於初。同乃虛，虛乃大。合喙鳴；喙鳴合，與天地為合。其合緡緡，若愚若昏，是謂玄德，同乎大順。

Guo Xiang elaborates:

Having no being, it thus had no means for being named. The One, the beginning of being, is the finest subtlety. As the finest subtlety, therefore, the One does not yet have the form of the principle of things. “Out of it arose One,” means that it arises from the ultimate one, and not from nonbeing. But in that case what is the reason that Zhuangzi often says “there is nonbeing in the beginning?”

The beginning means something as yet ungenerated attaining generation. Even something as difficult as attaining generation was done without depending on nonbeing prior [to generation], nor on knowing [why] after, but just suddenly [self-]attaining (*zide*) this generation [in a spontaneous way]—so why should we try to manage the generated in its state of already-having-been generated and thus lose its spontaneous generativity (lit. self-generation)?

Nonbeing cannot generate things, and it states that “things come to be generated [from the One],” in order to show **the spontaneous realization (*zide*) of the generation of things**. They rely on their own spontaneous realization (*zide*), that is why it is called “Innate Power.”

Innate Power forms endowed natures (*xingming* 性命), it causes transformations in rank and position, it is one and the same with being self-so. It is persistent by way of not doing anything and yet realizing itself (*zide*).

It is not identical with the beginning, yet it acts in the midst of Dao, that is why at the center of its bosom, things therefore come to exist; things exist yet the nourishing that Innate Power [provides] is [insignificantly] small! The heart-mind does not intend to speak of it, yet the words come about on their own, [and those words are] converging with cheeping and chirping. [In the same way,] heaven and earth simply has an empty heart-mind, yet it moves itself. It (Innate Power) is to sit in forgetfulness, and yet spontaneously [self-]converge [with heaven and earth], as opposed to observing the means by which they converge. Innate Power is profound and it is the means by which those who acquiesce become great.²²⁹

²²⁹ Guo Xiang Commentary 12.18.1G-12G

無有，故無所名。一者，有之初，至妙者也，至妙，故未有物理之形耳。夫一之所起，起於至一，非起於無也。然莊子之所以屢稱無於初者，何哉？初者，未生而得生，得生之難，而猶上不資於無，下不待於知，突然而自得此生矣，又何營生於已生以失其自生哉！無不能生物，而云物得以生，乃所以明物生之自得，任其自得，斯可謂德也。夫德形性命，因變立名，其於自爾一也。恆以不為而自得之。不同於初，而中道有為，則其懷中故為有物也，有物而容養之德小矣。無心於言而自言者，合於喙鳴。天地亦無心而自動。坐忘而自合耳，非照察以合之。德玄而所順者大矣。

Here, Guo Xiang explains that innate power (德 *de*) is that which allows one to embody nonbeing and become one with “cheeping and chirping”—the subtlety and smallness of such innate power, is itself that which allows one not only to acquiesce but also, to ultimately partake in the greatness of heaven and earth.²³⁰ It is the means by which *zide* is possible, precisely through *wuxin* or an empty heart-mind. In other words achieving innate power is possible through *wuxin*, which then allows one to converge with the transformations of heaven and earth. It is itself, through nonbeing, the possibility for spontaneous self-generation. Here we might recall what was earlier mentioned, which is that Guo noted how things simply self-generate, and that “by ‘self-generation,’ it is not meant that there is an ‘I’ to generate.”²³¹ This is what having “innate power” is, that is, to recognize the immediacy of being, and thus merge one’s self with it.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that in this passage, the terms nonbeing (無 *wu*) and spontaneous-X (自 *zi*-X) are repeatedly paralleled, highlighting the phenomenon of nonbeing as pointing to the existence of the myriad things which, in the main, is characteristic of a self-organizing and spontaneous generativity. In the simplest terms, this is what the logic of convergence is: it is such that nothingness (*wu*) is spontaneity (*zi*) at the same time. In other words, it is because there is nothing governing them, not even the “I,” that they are altogether one. In this absolute one-ness—because nothing is governing them—things are spontaneously generating. Because they are spontaneously generating, and these generations are interconnected to each other simultaneously, they are also spontaneously transforming each other through that spontaneous generation as a multitudinous

²³⁰ In an earlier passage in the Zhuangzi, Guo Xiang precludes this discussion by highlighting that what allows for self-transformation and self-realization is the non-action as well as *wuxin* that are achieved through Innate Power. This ultimately allows one to converge in the transformations of heaven and earth, because one is self-so. See Guo Xiang Commentary 12.1.2G-5G (一以自得為治。天下異心，無心者主也。以德為原，無物不得。得者自得，故得而不謝，所以成天也。任自然之運動。)

²³¹ Guo Xiang Commentary, 2.6.1G2-G15, quoted in Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. 328. modified.

but single and simultaneous process; conversely, it is because of spontaneous transformation or *zihua* that they are also spontaneously generating and that new things start to emerge through the process, leading to mutual generativity and transformation.

In another sub-story from the Zhuangzi where a metal being cast is seen in a circumstance where it hypothetically leaps up and says that it does not want to be anything but a sword like the Mo-ye, Zhuangzi likens the situation of the metal to that of men's, and says that it would be as equally uncanny if a human were to say that he doesn't want to be anything but a man. Guo Xiang then comments and relates this scenario to argue both for the occurrence of *zihua* and *zisheng*, as well why we ought to simply let these be:

“I don't want to be anything but a man! Nothing but a man!”, is nothing but the ambition to become a man. So too it is the same with the leaping up of metal, for all in the world would consider the metal to be uncanny, as it is unable abide by its own self-transformation.²³²

In the Course [道 *dao*] of change and transformation there is nothing that is not encountered sooner or later. Now you have encountered the state of having a human form. How could this be anyone's deliberate doing? Generativity does not take place deliberately—**at any moment, it is simply [or spontaneously] self-generating.** Is it not misguided then to labor yourself attempting to possess and control it?”²³³

人耳人耳，唯願為人也。亦猶金之踊躍，世皆知金之不祥，而不能任其自化。

夫變化之道，靡所不遇，今一遇人形，豈故為哉？生非故為，時自生耳。務而有之，不亦妄乎！

Again, we see Guo Xiang arguing for the reliance of everything and everyone in the world on self-transformation (*zihua*). This is because relying on self-transformation leads to spontaneous generativity (*zisheng*). Being simply so, it will self-transform. Self-transforming, it is born, but always *in medias res*, and right at birth, always already transforming. Thus, Guo Xiang shows in this passage that deliberately wanting or desiring to become something else is a deviation from that self-

²³² Guo Xiang Commentary, 6.24.4G1-2

²³³ Guo Xiang Commentary 6.24.4G3-4, quoted in Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. 201. Modified, brackets mine.

transformation, because generativity itself is a spontaneous product of the transformative process. What this means is that everything is always within the process of transforming, and that we can never really map out an exact beginning to when everything truly started to exist; yet, somehow, within such eternally moving and ever-changing world, new things always emerge, new things which themselves transform and lead to transformation, and so the cycle continues.

As earlier mentioned in the previous sub-section, the logic of convergence is such that it is contradiction that is the foundation of all movement, vitality, and not least, transformation. This means that because of this contradictory nature, things are also always emerging from that constant transformation wherein one thing is not the same thing in the next moment, for even within the moment, something is always already in contradiction with itself, having nothing as its content, and simply being self-so.

1.2.2 *Dusheng* 獨生 and *Duhua* 獨化

Because everything is self-so, each one is also its own cause, which now brings us to lone-generation (*dusheng*) and lone-transformation (*duhua*), which Ziporyn states is not interchangeable with self-transformation (*zihua*). I follow him in this regard, and he says that this is because self-transformation (a term which Zhuangzi himself uses) seems to suggest that “all are manifestations of a single spontaneity,”²³⁴ while lone-transformation is a term which Guo Xiang invents in order to stress “uniqueness, particularity, and individuality.”²³⁵ Ziporyn thus gives an apt and succinct explanation here because this is simply the necessary consequence of everything causing everything. If everything is simply spontaneous and self-so, it necessarily leads to each thing being its own particular unique self. We now see the aspect of Guo Xiang’s philosophy which pertains to self-determination, in that each things manifests something that is not externally influenced; however, it must again be reiterated that this self-determination doesn’t come from an inherent “I,” as noted earlier—it is simply so. This spontaneity, however, is what allows for true freedom, as we shall go back to later.

Nonetheless, the prefix term 獨 *du* in Guo Xiang’s usage is ultimately in relation to a singular entity whereas 自 *zi* refers to the spontaneity of the whole. What this means is that though “lone” (*du*) and “self” (*zi*) are terminologically or semantically different, they are, indeed, conceptually inter-changeable. Similarly, generation (*sheng*) and transformation (*hua*)

²³⁴ *The Penumbra Unbound: The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang*, 100

²³⁵ *Ibid.* 100

in Guo Xiang are, conceptually speaking, ultimately the same. For Guo Xiang, this means that what is many or pluralistic is no different from the one or the singular; each and everything is absolutely singular, and yet everything else coherent because even though they are generating and transforming on their own, that is, singularly, they still belong to an inter-connected network. Each is influenced not simply diachronically, but synchronically by everything else which, by virtue of the logic of convergence, is ultimately nothing. What this means is that one thing has, in it, the rest of the “other” entities, eventually making none really “other.” Each thing has a constitutive otherness to it that makes it what it is. That is to say, the whole is substantially comprised of many wholes, and so conversely the particular has, within itself, the essence and substance of the whole. In the same way, what his conception of transformation ultimately suggests is the same thing, conceptually, as with his conception of generation. Ultimately thus, generation and transformation no longer have a distinguishable difference, because everything is already just there in an eternal movement of change and transformation, and so, are without any beginning whatsoever. As Livia Kohn has aptly suggested, it is the case for Guo Xiang that “the universe exists by itself and of itself; it is existence just as it is. Nothing can be added to or subtracted from it; it is entirely sufficient upon itself.”²³⁶

Tang Yijie also notes that:

According to Guo Xiang, since each thing is an absolutely independent and self-sufficient entity, if anything were not independent and self-sufficient, other things wouldn’t be able to be independent and self-sufficient. Thus the lone-transformations (*duhua*) of this thing is a condition of the lone-transformation of that thing, and vice-versa.²³⁷

This is why in a passage where Zhuangzi says:

The bright and shining is born out of deep darkness; the ordered is born out of formlessness; pure spirit is born out of the Way.²³⁸

夫昭昭生於冥冥，有倫生於無形，精神生於道

Guo Xiang comments:

²³⁶ Livia Kohn, *Early Chinese Mysticism: Philosophy and Soteriology in the Taoist Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 1992).

²³⁷ Tang Yijie quoted in Ziporyn, *The Penumbra Unbound: The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang*. 87.

²³⁸ Zhuangzi 22.20.1, quoted in Burton Watson, “The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu”.

These [items in the *Zhuangzi* text] are all meant to show their lone-generation and that there is nothing by which they give and take.²³⁹

皆所以明其獨生而無所資借。

Such reflexive relationship of these things shows that the non-dependence and independence of autonomous beings is how we can understand the intimate relations not only of opposites, and how they mutually generate each other, and therefore having no external creator. It also shows, ultimately, the dialectic between micro and macro, individual and community, particular and whole. This is why for Guo Xiang, the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Each of them are autonomous, and their autonomy is the condition of the others' autonomies, but these parts are, in themselves, whole. They are thus self-sufficient, but their self-sufficiency is the condition for others' self-sufficiency.

In order to understand this better, we ought to look at another one of Guo Xiang's commentaries on one of Zhuangzi's more famous stories: The Penumbra and the Shadow. The *Zhuangzi* passage goes as follows:

The penumbra asked the shadow, "Formerly you walked, and now you have stopped. Formerly you sat, and now you have arisen. Why is it that you have no fixed course of action?"

The shadow said, "Do I have something I depend on (*dai*) in order to be as I am? Does what I depend on depend on something else to be as it is? Am I dependent on snake scales or cicada wings? How could I discern how and why I am as I am? How could I discern how and why I am not as I am not?"²⁴⁰

罔兩問景曰：「曩子行，今子止；曩子坐，今子起；何其無特操與？」

景曰：「吾有待而然者邪？吾所待又有待而然者邪？吾待蛇蚺蜃翼邪？惡識所以然！惡識所以不然！」

This is a short passage but it is very much packed and Guo Xiang presents a long commentary to explain the concept of causality that is presented in this story. It is also in this passage that we first see Guo Xiang introduce the concept of *duhua*

²³⁹ Guo Xiang Commentary, 22.20.1G

²⁴⁰ Zhuangzi 2.33-34.1-4, quoted in Ziporyn, *The Penumbra Unbound: The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang*. 101

in his comments in order to explain the conception of causality in the *Zhuangzi*. According to Guo Xiang, even though it seems the penumbra is dependent on the shadow, and the shadow is dependent upon something else, it actually does not depend on anything. He notes that:

If we search for that which [each thing] is dependent on and seek out what [each thing] comes from, this searching will lead to an infinite regress, and in the end we will come only to the lack of dependence (*wudai*).

Thus the principle of lone-transformation (*duhua*) becomes clear.²⁴¹

若責其所待而尋其所由，則尋責無極，〔卒〕至於無待，而獨化之理明矣。

Here, it is worth noting that Guo Xiang goes a step further than Zhuangzi, presenting us with an attack against the very principle of causality as a linear phenomenon. The argument here is that if we accept the idea that something else external to one thing is the cause of that thing, we will be led to an infinite regress without coming to a final creator, because every “final” creator must have been created externally. If it were not so, we must admit to the idea that such a creator was self-created. However, as Ziporyn points out, “we have the concept of self-creation in hand, and can dispose of the creator.”²⁴²

So for Guo Xiang, all things are naturally lone-transforming because tracing the causes of each thing is a pointless act of deliberation. Therefore, it is impossible to point out specifically what the particular cause of a particular thing is. Brook Ziporyn notes, moreover, that “Guo rejects the concept of causality itself.; he cuts out the middle man entirely, and asserts that all things are unmediated, and transform in solitude.”²⁴³ This is thus why it is difficult to discern any fixed course of action – because there is none. The shadow is neither dependent on snake scales or cicada wings because it simply lone-transforms, *duhua*. Guo Xiang continues,

Hence, of all things involved in the realm of existence, even the penumbra, there has never been one that did not lone-transform in the realm of dark vanishing (*xuanming*) ... Now, if even in the case of the penumbra’s following of the shadow we can still say they simultaneously come to be but without mutual dependence, then although the ten thousand things come together to collectively form the Heavenly, nonetheless each of them in

²⁴¹ Guo Xiang Commentary 2.34.2G quoted in *ibid.* 101

²⁴² *Ibid.* 104

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

perfect distinctness appears on its own in independent solitude (*liran duxian*). Thus, the penumbra is not controlled by the shadow, nor is the shadow caused ... Transforming and not transforming, being thus [or right, *ran*] and not being thus, following others or proceeding from one's own self, none are not self-so; how could we discern how or why they are so?²⁴⁴

是以涉有物之域，雖復罔兩，未有不獨化於玄冥者也。。。

今罔兩之因景，猶云俱生而非待也，則萬物雖聚而共成乎天，而皆歷然莫不獨見矣。故罔兩非景之所制，。。。，則化與不化，然與不然，從人之與由己，莫不自爾，吾安識其所以哉！

Here we see the mutual collapse of causes and beings. In other words, the relation of cause and effect is one that is impossible to conceive of because as Ziporyn notes: “Everything and anything makes this particular thing what it is; thus it need make no distinction between what is necessary to it and what is not, for all things are equally necessary to it.”²⁴⁵ The concepts of *duhua* and *ming* moreover, blur into each other because everything is caused by everything that everything disappears into everything; that all disappear into everything, we are left with the mere lone-transformations of things.

In other words, because everything is caused by everything, nothing is actually caused by anything. That is, though we think it makes sense to talk about what causes what because we can say that X causes Y and W causes X. But ultimately we can find no first cause, and thus ultimately there is nothing that causes W, and thus nothing that causes Y, and thus nothing that ultimately causes X.

When Guo Xiang says that “the ten thousand things come together to collectively form the heavenly,” it becomes clear that he is not denying that the movement of reality is caused by everything, but precisely because it is caused by everything that it becomes radically contingent. This radical contingency wherein everything is caused by everything—everything being its cause as pushed to the extreme—means that it has everything inside something. When everything is inside something, nothing then is outside of it, which makes it perfectly distinct. In this sense, we see that when the transformation of the many-ness of myriad things is pushed into the extreme, it becomes singular; hence, lone-transformation.

²⁴⁴ Guo Xiang Commentary, 2.34.4G4; 2.34.4G8-9, quoted in *ibid.*101

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 109-110

In sum, nonbeing or *wu* is an important signifier for the spontaneity (自 *zi*) that highlights the phenomenon of the whole, whereas it manifests as singular in the prefix of lone-X (獨 *du*-X). This, however, is off-set by the suffixes of generativity (X-生 *sheng*), which highlights emergence as both non-linear and singular, as well as transformation (X-化), which highlights the phenomenon of change as both spontaneous and basically uncaused. Indeed, it is through this denial of linear causation that Guo's philosophical commentary is able to smoothly manoeuvre for the complete fusion of one and many, necessity and contingency. This ultimately leads to the inseparability and interchangeability of one to the other in its radical extremity.

1.2.3 Absolute Necessity as Absolute Contingency

In Guo Xiang, therefore, we see a philosophy of absolute nothingness, which is pushed to the limits and hence becomes a philosophy of pure being collapsing into each other leading to a robust oneness of all. This is why it is only in those instantaneous moments of spontaneous and independent generativity as well as transformation that necessities²⁴⁶ are fulfilled.

Of course, we must clarify that the distinction between physical/causal necessity and logical necessity does not occur as neatly in Guo Xiang, or any other indigenous Chinese philosophical thought for that matter, as it does in Anglo-European philosophy. Nonetheless, such “conflation” does not cause a problem in Guo Xiang's philosophy, because in such a system, traditional logic—or the very idea of logical abstraction itself—would be problematic, as we have touched upon earlier. If Guo Xiang were alive to see traditional logic and how it operates, we may again infer that he might understand it similarly to how Hegel saw it, which is “a multitude of detached necessities”²⁴⁷—forms separated from their contents.²⁴⁸ However, in contrast to such traditional logic, Guo Xiang's system holds that everything is connected to everything, everything thus causes everything, and that is why each thing is an absolute necessity which is contingently grounded. We cannot say why something is so, it simply *is* so and self-generating (*zisheng*) and therefore necessary or uncaused because of its singularity; but even

²⁴⁶ It must also be noted that essences in *Zhuangzi* are in the plural because, as was previously noted, there is no one single substance, no one metaphysical absolute. This means that instead of universality, we have a confluence of pure individual substances that are different from each other in as much as one moment differs from all other moments, such that they all come together in order to form one organic whole, wherein each and every member of the whole fulfills a certain role that is significant to the flourishing of the whole.

²⁴⁷ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). 181

²⁴⁸ As a quick aside, it might be useful to remember here the distinction between formal and material truth in classical logic.

though there are no extant reasons why it could have been otherwise, it *could* have actually been otherwise, and therefore contingent. This self-generation is a thoroughly dynamic process, but it simply returns to itself, by itself, and hence, is lone-generating (*dusheng*). Similarly, it is lone-generating (*dusheng*) because each thing contains within it its own antipodes, which means that it is always already “other.” If we conditionally accept this process to be true, this will inevitably mean that it can only transform unto itself, that is, lone-transforming (*duhua*). Everything is always already what they have always been, yet these determinations or identities are not fixed, they are always contingent in as much as they could always be otherwise, as one could *vanish into* (*xuangming* 玄冥) another, because even though each thing is distinct, each thing’s distinct-ness vanishes into another. However, there is also no reason for the way that they are so, they are simply self-so (*ziran* 自然) and therefore necessary in that sense. This includes knowledge, because Guo Xiang closes off his system of totality entirely that there is nothing that exists outside of it (such as a creator), and for that to work, he must admit to each thing being the cause (and also the effect) of everything else. In other words, there is nothing that is *other* to something, and being everything, it is entirely inaccessible to thought, which is only limited in its allotment (*fen* 分). Like things, knowledge is thus also self-so, and is only within its own realm. Paul D’Ambrosio puts it aptly, and says that, for Guo Xiang, “knowledge is always situationally dependent,”²⁴⁹ and thus, constantly transforming. In this sense, it is singular and without any *particular* cause, but caused by everything else, and is therefore emergent unto itself—simply so because they are so, and yet always changing. Thus, Guo Xiang’s universe of absolute necessity is absolutely contingent.

In other words, it is the case that in a singular object, we can find the wholeness of the reality that caused it to be so. Moreover, because everything caused this singular object to be so, then there is really nothing in particular that caused it. Hence, this and every other thing is spontaneous or self-generated, wherein such generativity that is spontaneous leads also to transformation that is spontaneous and emergent, wherein such emergence means that it is on its own, causing its own, and transforming its own. By being a whole in itself, moreover, each object acts by itself, in order to ultimately fulfil its role in the organic whole; by being a whole in itself and having the entirety of reality within it, the movement of each small thing thus becomes the movement of and for the whole. It is not therefore the case in Guo Xiang’s *Zhuangzi* that nothing is necessary and nothing is absolute – but rather, everything is necessary and everything is absolute; Contingency is led to the extreme, that it becomes necessity.

²⁴⁹ Paul J. D’Ambrosio, “Guo Xiang on Self-So Knowledge,” *Asian Philosophy* 26, no. 2 (2016). 130.

This is the ontology of absolute oblivion that was referred to in the previous section. Moreover, it shows us that even when we pull out a central *logos spermatikos*, coherence and wholeness do not necessarily collapse – there can and will still be meaning to the changes and transformations of the myriad things. This leads us to another important concept in Guo Xiang's philosophy: 理 *Li*.

1.3 *Li* 理: Singular Wholeness and Order

Indeed, all human cultures of both East and West, if there is any attempt at all to understand the phenomena which surround them, have to deal with the enduring metaphysical concern of the One and the Many. In this manner, the concept of 理 *Li*, principle or natural configuration, is an indispensable term in the study of Chinese metaphysics and ontology. Guo Xiang's work is thus no exception. Strictly speaking, the term is meant as a reference to an over-arching pattern, law, order, or principle – that is, how something is organized. In Neo-Confucianism, where the usage of the term is most pertinent, it is meant as “the unifying principle of the universe.”²⁵⁰ Like the term *Dao*, it is used to denote an underlying order to the cosmos, though what that is exactly is a topic of debate in the history of Chinese philosophy from time immemorial. Brook Ziporyn has pointed out that there are the non-ironic and ironic senses of the term.²⁵¹ In the philosophy of Guo Xiang, however, Ziporyn notes that:

For the first time in Chinese thought, we can state directly that coherence [*li*] as such is incoherence as such, that determinacy and indeterminacy are strictly synonymous. The term *li* is central to this development, and here its two opposed directions converge: it means both absolute division and complete unity.²⁵²

Indeed, in line with the rest of Guo Xiang's philosophy as discussed above, it is not the case that opposites are simply complementary, but they are strictly necessary to the existence of each other and one cannot exist without the other, for one *is* the other. In other words, the only true *li* is non-*li*—that which is unbound by any actual pattern or law, because “the real principle (self-so) is the absence of all so-called principles.”²⁵³

²⁵⁰ Jeeloo Liu, *Neo-Confucianism: Metaphysics, Mind, and Morality* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2018). 6.

²⁵¹ For a more comprehensive discussion, see Ziporyn, “Li in Wang Bi and Guo Xiang: Coherence in the Dark.”

²⁵² Ibid.113. Brackets mine.

²⁵³ Ibid.128.

1.3.1 The Treasury²⁵⁴ of Heaven:²⁵⁵ *Li* as Non-*li*

This kind of *logic of convergence* that Guo Xiang employs is, to re-iterate, why Guo Xiang cannot be labelled a monist, as Robinet remarked when she compared Guo Xiang to Parmenides, in describing the meaning of nonbeing. In the following passage, thus, we shall see more about how Guo Xiang employs this kind of logic in relation to the natural configuration of things (*li*). The passage below which talks about the Dao that is not the Dao, perfectly captures the essence of Guo Xiang's *li*. Here, he explains how to be is not to be, that is, that something is always its own antipode, and how this is spontaneously what the height of *li* is. The following is his line-by-line commentary on the *Zhuangzi* passage (in bold here):

The Great Way does not name

夫大道不稱；

[It] hands each over to its own self-designation, so it never names.

付之自稱，無所稱謂

Great Discriminations do not speak

大辯不言；

They are already self-distinguishing.

已自別也。

Great Benevolence does not care

大仁不仁；

Not caring for them, they maintain themselves.

無愛而自存也。

²⁵⁴ Translation borrowed from A.C. Graham. See A.C. Graham, *The Inner Chapters* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001).

²⁵⁵ At least in philosophical Daoism, though especially in *Xuanxue* philosophers, Heaven is not an anthropomorphic entity, but a synonym for nature or the natural order of things. Indeed, both in Wang Bi and Guo Xiang, the two most significant philosophers of *Xuanxue*, Heaven operates in the grandest scale and thus could not have otherwise been anything other than an impersonal designation for how things are or ought to be.

Great Honorability does not [flaunt] modesty

大廉不嗛；

One who is perfectly abundant, is [one from whom] things come and go, but not due to himself. Thus, there is no reason for him to be modest nor exuberant.

夫至足者，物之去來非我也，故無所容其嗛盈。

Great Daring does not attack [or is aggressive]

大勇不伐。

[When one] follows smoothly wherever one goes, then one can go anywhere without danger.

無往而不順，故能無險而不往。

If the Way [is able to] clarify, it is not the Way

道昭而不道。

When this is used as the standard to understand that, both this and that are lost

以此明彼，彼此俱失矣。

If discriminations are put into words, they do not suffice [to capture the true meaning of things]

言辯而不及。

[They] are unable to reach [a complete understanding of] their self-distinction.

不能及其自分。

If benevolence has a constant object, it cannot be complete

仁常而不成。

Nothing is constantly desirable, and constant desire cannot be encompassing [enough to apply to all].

物無常愛，而常愛必不周。

If honorability is fastidious, it cannot be trusted

廉清而不信。

Clearly, honorability that is fastidious, is simply one who is greedy for fame, this is not genuine honorability.

皦然廉清，貪名者耳，非真廉也。

If daring attacks, it cannot be successful

勇伎而不成。

Courage that is aggressive and disobedient, is what all under heaven altogether hates – there is no place that he would dare set foot on.

伎逆之勇，天下共疾之，無敢舉足之地也。

These five are all round [and complete], but they tend toward the square

五者圓而幾向方矣。

These five, all of these are those whose sufficiency is injured by deliberate action; they cannot remain in their original nature as they seek the external without end.

The external cannot be sought and so seeking them is metaphorically regarded as a circle trying to learn to be a square, or a fish that's longing to be a bird.

Although one hopes for the wings of a fabulous phoenix, intending to imitate the sun and moon, as 'this' gets even more near to 'that,' it gets even further from what is real, learning [to be something else] is further obtained yet [one's] nature is completely lost. Therefore equalizing things is to shackle away what is still one-sided.

此五者，皆以有為傷當者也，不能止乎本性，而求外無已。夫外不可求而求之，譬猶以圓學方，以魚慕鳥耳。雖希翼鸞鳳，擬規日月，此愈近彼，愈遠實，學彌得而性彌失。故齊物而偏尚之累去矣。

Therefore understanding that rests in what it does not understand is most complete

故知止其所不知，至矣。

What is beyond understanding, are all external [to their] appropriate nature. Therefore one remains within [one's] understanding yet is supreme.

所不知者，皆性分之外也。故止於所知之內而至也。

Who can understand discriminations that are not spoken, [as well as] the Way that is not a way? If he can understand this, he may be called the Treasury of Heaven 孰知不言之辯，不道之道？若有能知，此之謂天府。

This extraordinary person is able to accomplish all this in a rolling surge because he relies on the treasury of heaven.

浩然都任之也。

Pour into it and it is never full, dip from it and it never runs dry 注焉而不滿，酌焉而不竭，

The mind of the consummate man is like a mirror, it responds [to things] yet does not store [them], thus his mind is extensive such that there are no transformations between fullness and emptiness.

至人之心若鏡，應而不藏，故曠然無盈虛之變也。

and yet it does not know where the supply comes from 而不知其所由來。

Whatever comes from the Supreme Principle, it is self-so and has no traces.

至理之來，自然無跡。

This is called the Shaded Light 此之謂葆光。²⁵⁶

[The Shaded Light] lets itself be self-evident, thus its light does not wear out.²⁵⁷

任其自明，故其光不弊也。

²⁵⁶Zhuangzi 2.14.1-30, quoted in Burton Watson, "The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu". Modified to reflect active instead of passive tense in line with Guo Xiang's interpretation.

²⁵⁷ Guo Xiang Commentary, 2.14.1G-30G

Here Guo Xiang explains how the great dao is all about simply being what it is without the need to name or label it. Moreover, he explains how discriminations are simply just that so they do not need to undergo hair-splitting by language. He proceeds to explain how the rightness of virtues is damaged (傷當 *shangdang*) by doing them deliberately instead of letting them just be. It is important to note, however, that while the *Zhuangzi* text itself seems to be both condemning the parading of being virtuous, and positing the negative as what makes it what it is, Guo Xiang takes a somewhat different route: he emphasizes the spontaneity of these things, the *zi*, or self-so, instead of positing non-being as that ontological essence which is responsible for making being. He emphasizes how one thing presupposes the other, in such a way that the only right way is really no way—that is, to remain content in one’s fundamental nature (本性 *benxing*) and not to deliberately go on seeking. This fundamental nature, Guo Xiang associates with the inner nature that is lost when one seeks the external—not to be confused, however, that such ‘inner’ nature is similar to an Aristotelian substance that is unchanging, for it is clear in the previous discussion that what is meant here as inner is simply what is spontaneously so and not something fixed, for that would go against the inter-causal *logic of convergence* that Guo Xiang keeps insisting on. Rather, what he means by seeking what is external, is deliberate action (有為 *youwei*) as opposed to non-action (無為 *wuwei*) which is nothing other than being spontaneously self-so (自然 *ziran*). This, to him, is the insight of the 齊物 *qiwu* or equalization of things in the chapter—to remove the myopia of ordinary men who see only their own side instead of the whole picture, which is made up of all unique and singular factors that are themselves a singular whole. Anyone who understands this therefore, understands that the supreme principle (至理 *zhili*) or the ultimate coherence is the principle of self-so.

1.3.2 The Cook: “Merging into” as Li

So what does it mean to be able to understand this ironic coherence,²⁵⁸ this non-coherence that is Guo Xiang’s *li*? From what we have seen so far, it is quite apparent that he wouldn’t advocate non-coherence as a means for coherence, which is what a philosophical primacy of nonbeing would be. Indeed because of Guo Xiang’s *logic of convergence*, which radicalizes

²⁵⁸ Up until this point, *li* 理 has mostly been translated as “principle.” However, as is often the case with translation, one word is insufficient in this case to capture the meaning of such a loaded term such as *li*. As such, whenever it highlights a more epistemological angle (albeit retaining the ontological denotation, as the term has both), I translate it in accordance with Ziporyn’s version, which is “Coherence.”

the convergence of opposites instead of simply giving importance to nonbeing, or to being, for that matter, he makes coherence and incoherence synonymous, as noted by Ziporyn. This means that, instead of a withdrawn sense of acceptance or a kind of giving up as a means of escaping the disorder that results from the loss of dao for Guo Xiang (which, if we shall remember, can be found in vanishing into things rather than from), we see a kind of acceptance that is inward—one that is not defined by giving up, but rather, by a sense of belonging which takes a different kind of effort. As Ziporyn puts it:

To vanishingly merge with whatever one encounters is to vanishingly merge with one's own nature, with one's own limits, with one's own allotment. In this sense the term *the nature* or *the coherence* is an ironic empty term for Guo, just as "Dao" or "nothingness" is.²⁵⁹

This is reminiscent of what was discussed in the previous section, which is the disappearance into each other of entities that cause each other leading to the breakdown of causality in *zisheng*, *zihua*, *dusheng*, and *duhua*. Ziporyn further notes that this is "a vanishing of the identifiable individual "things" themselves—that is, of their traces [跡 *ji*],"²⁶⁰ wherein such vanishing of traces is what is meant when Guo Xiang says that whatever it is that stems from the height of coherence is spontaneously self-so and has no traces [2.14.29G 至理之來，自然無跡。] precisely because it is a *merging into*.

This kind of understanding of coherence (理 *li*) is perhaps best seen in the story of the Cook Ding where Guo Xiang once again relates coherence with the vanishing of traces, telling us that the Cook has understood the 理 *li*. What this means, therefore, is that by being able to understand the 理 *li*, he has mastered his craft—his allotment (分 *fen*).

The following is a complete excerpt of the story of the cook (with Zhuangzi's passages in bold), followed by a line by line of Guo Xiang's commentary which builds on the story:

Cook Ding was cutting up an ox for Lord Wenhui [King Hui of Liang] in such a way that with:

Each stroke of the hand,

Each thrust of the shoulder,

Each stamp of the foot,

²⁵⁹ Ziporyn, "Li in Wang Bi and Guo Xiang: Coherence in the Dark." 118.

²⁶⁰ Ibid. 120. brackets mine

Each jab of the knee,

**Matched a sharp sound of rending, as he played his knife, swishing in and out, always in perfect tune,
right in step for the “Mulberry Grove Dance” and in perfect rhythm with the “Jingshou Melody”.**

庖丁為文惠君解牛，手之所觸，肩之所倚，足之所履，膝之所踣，砉然騞然，奏刀騞然，莫不中音。
合於桑林之舞，乃中經首之會。

That is, he exercises his skill with the greatest of ease and never fails to make absolutely the right cut. Since he has thoroughly grasped the principle [li] involved, not only is he in perfect harmony with the principle of the ox, he keeps in perfect rhythm [he yinjie].

言其因便施巧，無不閑解，盡理之甚，既適牛理，又合音節。

Lord Wenhui said, “Wow! Terrific! How could skill ever go so far as this?”

文惠君曰：「譔，善哉！技蓋至此乎？」

Cook Ding put his knife down and replied, “What I am good at is the Dao, for I have advanced beyond skill.

庖丁釋刀對曰：「臣之所好者道也，進乎技矣。」

He simply lodged the principles of the Dao in his skill, so what he was good at was not the skill itself.

直寄道理於技耳，所好者非技也。

When I first began to cut up oxen, what I saw was nothing but the whole ox as such,

始臣之解牛之時，所見無非〔全〕牛者。

He could not yet see the interstices in its natural configuration.

未能見其理間。

but, after three years, I no longer saw the whole ox as such.

三年之後，未嘗見全牛也。

He only saw the interstices in its natural configuration.

但見其理間也。

And now, I encounter it with my spirit [shen] and do not see it with my eyes.

方今之時，臣以神遇而不以目視，

He arcanely fuses with its principle/natural configuration.

闇與理會。

When sense and knowledge stop, the divine is ready to act.

官知止而神欲行。

As the senses which govern scrutiny quit working, he loosen his mind and accords with principle/natural configuration.

司察之官廢，縱心而理〔順〕。

In accord with the natural principle [configuration] [tianli],

依乎天理，

He does not cut arbitrarily. [lit: I do not blow sideways so as to amputate it.]

不橫截也。

I strike at the gaps.

批大卻，

These are the places of juncture, which he follows to strike at the ox and so cause it to come apart.

有際之處，因而批之令離。

Following the large openings,

導大竅，

These are the empty places where the joints come apart, which he accordingly follows to cause it to sever.

節解竅空，就導令殊。

I follow where inherent certainty leads me.

因其固然。

The knife is not applied rashly.

刀不妄加。

It never happens that my plying encounters the joints,

技經肯綮之未嘗，

Such is the marvelousness of his technique that he always plies the knife edge in emptiness and never lets it come up against the slightest obstacle.

技之妙也，常遊刃於空，未嘗經概於微礙也。

So how much the less likely am I to encounter a big bone!

而況大軋乎！

Gu [big bone] here means to encounter a big bone, which would defeat the knife edge.

軋，戾大骨，衄刀刃也。

A good cook has to change his knife once a year, this because he cuts through [the meat].

良庖歲更刀，割也；

He fails to hit the interstices in the natural configuration.

不中其理間也。

The ordinary cook has to change his knife once a month, this because he hacks.

族庖月更刀，折也。

He hits bones and so breaks the knife.

中骨而折刀也。

Now, my knife has lasted nineteen years, and the oxen I have cut up number in the thousands, yet the edge of my knife is as if it had just left the whetstone.

今臣之刀十九年矣，所解數千牛矣，而刀刃若新發於硎。

Xing is a whetstone.

硎，砥石也。

The joints have spaces in them, but the knife edge has no thickness. To insert what has no thickness into what has a space means that it will be so spacious that there will be more than enough room to ply the knife. This is why even after nineteen years my knife edge is as if it had just left the whetstone.

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。

However, whenever I come to a grouping, I note that it presents difficulties,

雖然，每至於族，吾見其難為，

Where things intersect and come together is a “grouping.”

交錯聚結為族。

fearfully take warning, my look stopped,

怵然為戒，視為止，

He no longer applies his eyes to anything else.

不復屬目於他物也。

my action slowed,

行為遲。

He slows down his hand.

徐其手也。

I just have to move my knife the slightest amount, and, with a sharp rending sound, it's already come apart,

動刀甚微，譟然已解，

Since he gets it just right, he has to use very little effort.

得其宜則用力少。

as if it had been dirt clumped into earth.

如土委地。

The natural configuration [理] comes apart yet there's no trace of the knife, as if it had been clumped earth.

理解而無刀跡，若聚土也。

Raising my knife and standing there, as a result I look all around and linger awhile filled with satisfaction because of what I have done.

提刀而立，為之四顧，為之躊躇滿志，

This indicates one self-fulfilled [自得] with all his sense of preeminence and feeling of pleasure.

逸足容豫自得之謂。

I set my knife right and put it away.”

善刀而藏之。」

He wipes his knife clean and places it in its sheath.

拭刀而弢之也。

Lord Wenhui then said, “Excellent! I have heard Cook Ding’s words and learned how to nurture life from them.”

文惠君曰：「善哉！吾聞庖丁之言，得養生焉。」

Since one can do such nurturing with the knife, he realized that life too can so be nurtured.²⁶¹

以刀可養，故知生亦可養。

In this passage, Guo Xiang begins by telling us how it is with ease (便 *bian*) that the cook is able to cut the right way. Specifically, he emphasizes that it is because the cook has understood the *li* involved. In other words, the cook is what the passage in the previous section would call as the Treasury of Heaven (天府 *tianfu*). This, however, is because the cook is in harmony with the pattern of ox and thereby effectively vanishes and merges into it.

The Zhuangzi text, however, proceeds to describe how the cook was able to arrive at such expertise, which was a skill beyond skill. We may even think of this in terms of framing the height of skill as no-skill. What we are shown here when the cook describes his progress is that he was not born good at it, and instead took him quite long to master his craft, and yet when he did finally master it, he ironically no longer thinks about it—a knowing that required no knowing, because according to Guo Xiang, he is in accord with the *li*. Similarly, developing a certain skill would generally entail a collection of knowledge, but here we see the opposite: there is the suspension of the cook’s senses that pertain specifically to scrutiny. Instead of learning a specific set of skills, the cook merges with this *specific* ox and its specific configuration, he “fuses with its natural configuration.” (*lihui* 理會). Such state, however, does not mean one can simply follow whatever one desires at any moment in time. The paradox here lies in the fact it actually takes effort in order to achieve supreme effortlessness. In the case of the cook here, his knife had been in use for 19 years and unlike the simply good cook who misses the *li*, or the ordinary cook who ruins the knife by hitting the bones, he leaves no traces of the knife, because it has become one with the ox. This, however, was achieved not because of the lack of distinctions or division, for on the contrary, a good cook is only good and not great because he fails to see the interstices of spaces (間 *jian*) between the structural patterns of the ox. Indeed, the ability to see

²⁶¹ Zhuangzi 3.4.2-5; Guo Xiang’s Commentary 3.2.(1-2)G—3.5G, quoted in Richard John Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation of the Daoist Classic as Interpreted by Guo Xiang* (Columbia University Press, forthcoming).

those distinctions and nuances is what makes this particular cook a master of his craft—that is, the ability to be able to know what to do in exactly the right moment, at the place, in the right circumstance, which nevertheless always changes in fleeting moments that are always distinct and unique from each other, because that is what the *li* is: spontaneous and self-so (*ziran*). In this case, the cook was able to exercise the height of *li* through being self-so, which is to merge into what it is not, which is its environment, in this case the ox. This is ultimately why he is self-realized (自得 *zide*).

Similarly in life as with the knife, to understand the height of *li* is to assimilate with the patterns that one encounters by encountering situations with fusing oneself differently into different situations that are by no means a ‘one-size-fits-all’ rule, and indeed by *vanishing into* such that one *merges into* it, resulting into the radicalized breakdown of duality which, according to Guo Xiang, is what the realization of one’s self (自得 *zide*) truly means.

In other words, everything is the same in that they are all different from one another, that is the natural pattern (*li*) of things. That is why Guo Xiang says:

Of things, there is nothing that doesn’t cohere; it is only right to follow along with it (*li*).²⁶²

物無不理，但當順之。

This, ultimately, is why the rightness of everything is both the wholeness of the particular and the particularity of the ever-changing whole.

1.3.3 The Rightness of Things

Indeed, the wholeness of the particular and the particularity of the ever-changing whole that is in *li* is perhaps best seen in the concept of self-rightness (自當 *zidang*). In one of Guo Xiang’s more famous passages, he says:

The way things spontaneously fit together is assuredly correct and can never be escaped [from]. Hence, a person’s birth is never a mistake, and whatever occurs in that life is never there randomly. However vast heaven and earth may be, however multitudinous the ten thousand things, what I have encountered has

²⁶² Guo Xiang Commentary, 22.22.6G

happened to come to be just this, [which] it is and no more. This cannot be overturned even if heaven and earth, all the gods and spirits, the state and the family, and all the sages and worthies exhausted all their strength and wisdom trying to change it. So whatever you may miss could not have been met with, and whatever you may have met with could not have been missed. What you do not do you could not have done, and what you do you could not have not done. Just give them all over to their spontaneous rightness in being exactly what they are.²⁶³

其理固當，不可逃也。故人之生也，非誤生也；生之所有，非妄有也。天地雖大，萬物雖多，然吾之所遇適在於是，則雖天地神明，國家聖賢，絕力至知而弗能違也。故凡所不遇，弗能遇也，其所遇，弗能不遇也；〔凡〕所不為，弗能為也，其所為，弗能不為也；故付之而自當矣。

Both famous and infamous at the same time, this passage can quite easily cause a misunderstanding of Guo Xiang's philosophy, in that it is not difficult to see him here as an advocate for something to the tune of a deterministic justificationism—even just a flat out fatalist as some have claimed. The notion that everything has a rightful place in the universe does not sit comfortably well with a number of scholars, and has led, for instance, Livia Kohn to conclude that that this philosophical system is an: “apparently deterministic, rigorous, and very depressing concept of the world.”²⁶⁴ We shall discuss more on how this assumption is not totally without basis but is ultimately inaccurate in the next chapter, but in the meantime we shall come back to the underlying meaning behind this passage.

In light of the previous discussion, we can unpack what the terms being used here mean, such that we can arrive at what I would describe as a more faithful interpretation. Guo Xiang says here that the *li* that makes things cohere is always right. However, since we know that *li* is *ziran*, we also know that this rightness is spontaneous, just as he ends with saying that all is self-right (*zidang*). Yet, how could he say that nothing, not even a person's birth, is a mistake? That things could not have been otherwise, since things are supposed to be spontaneous? This can be looked at to mean that whatever happens, they are always right when seen in the context of everything else that also exists, in such a way that one can see the causal narratives from many angles. They are right, but one angle is not solely right, as everything needs to be just as they are, and is necessary and right in order for this to be this and that to be that at this very moment. This doesn't mean that it has an ethical value or

²⁶³ Guo Xiang Commentary, 5.24.1G1-5, quoted in Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. 182. Modified.

²⁶⁴ Knaul, "Kuo Hsiang and the Chuang Tzu." 432

worth at all. It is simply an ontological statement, which tells us that because each thing has contained in it its own contradiction, its transformations will always simply lead unto itself. More precisely, in line with the discussion on necessity and contingency, an effect will always have the cause already contained in it, and the cause will always already have the effect contained in it. Thus, things would always already have been right, or what they are supposed to be. Everything happened in this exact way is right, and correct, if only in as much as that they are the pre-conditions to everything else that are happening now. *Zidang* is thus a reference to both the negation of deliberate volition (motivated by a desire to change things) and the affirmation of a natural force that is spontaneity or *ziran*. Each thing is such because it is simply such, the ground of each thing is its very groundlessness. Contingency alone is necessary, that is the fact of being caused, and therefore everything is necessarily what they are, and self-right.

Tang Yijie explains that this transformative and singular movement of existence is simply inevitable, that is: “everything that exists is rational,²⁶⁵ inevitable and not mutually exclusive precisely because, as the condition for the existence of everything else, everything fully and absolutely brings its "nature" into full play, creates itself and generates self-sufficiently.”²⁶⁶ Assuming Tang Yijie’s interpretation, thus, then by this logic, Guo Xiang must also acknowledge that everything is simply, and indeed spontaneously, in their own proper time and place, the appropriateness of which are beyond our control, and only when we acknowledge and accept this that we can achieve self-realization through, as Zhuangzi’s cook does, fusing with natural configurations of the world. What makes that possible, however, is what we shall elaborate more in the next chapter.

²⁶⁵ Tang Yijie himself uses this word, in English, but it might not be appropriate for Guo Xiang given the epistemic baggage of Hegelian metaphysics, wherein “rational” as conforming to a pre-existing blueprint. I would thus say that instead of rational, it is simply “right,” which is to say that it is coherent, albeit ironically so (spontaneously so).

²⁶⁶ Yijie Tang, *Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, and Chinese Culture*, ed. George F. McLean, vol. 3, Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Life (The Council of Research and Values in Philosophy, 1991). 51.

CHAPTER TWO: On the Self: Limits and Expanse

The previous chapter discussed the absolute nature of existence, both as cause and effect, that is, radically contingent and therefore necessary. In doing so, the chapter demonstrated how everything is the reason for everything, and how the existence of each thing is dependent on everything else. As such, each and every thing is necessarily and independently just so in and of itself, by virtue of everything and therefore nothing as a *condition sine qua non* for existence.

This chapter then explores the concept of the self that is based on the ontology of the previous chapter. In a world where everything is self-right (*zidang*), will it not result in an essentialist and indeed fatalist system? What constitutes the self for Guo Xiang, ultimately? These questions are in rehabilitating Guo Xiang's ontology from misconceptions of him as fatalist. Further than that, Chinese philosophy and culture as a whole is often touted to anglophone readers as having no sense of individuality and therefore freedom,²⁶⁷ whereas Guo Xiang provides a stalwart account of a self that is no longer split, a self that is both is and not, which allows for an alternative account of freedom as we shall see in the third chapter. Nonetheless, it is the aim of this chapter to demonstrate how Guo Xiang's conception of the self is dynamic, and therefore cannot be reduced into a single set of principles.

To fulfil this aim, the chapter is divided into three sections, the first (1) of which is a discussion on the concept of allotment (分 *fen*) and its epistemological import, basing the discourse not only at the ontological level from the previous chapter, but also at an epistemological one. The aim of this section is the shredding of individual myopia in order to achieve a more encompassing understanding of the self. The second (2) section follows with a discussion on the concept of (性 *xing*),

²⁶⁷ In his seminal work *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Are Some So Rich and Others So Poor*, David Landes argues that, even though it is a known fact that China was, for a time, the leading nation in all matters of science and technology, not to mention its rich literary arsenal, Europe nonetheless overtook it because of cultural superiority. Landes argues that in Chinese culture, there is no sense of individuality, and this inevitably led to stagnation and isolation, uniformity and the death of critical thought. This is the reason, according to Landes, that China ultimately became poor. See David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999). While Landes admits to a euro-centric narrative, it is still not any less preposterous to make these claims about Chinese culture. Unfortunately, Landes is not alone, and to cite two examples among many, feminist French philosopher Julia Kristeva had remarked that "if Western metaphysics has difficulties comprehending the Chinese individual, it is because, for the Chinese, there is no individual." See Julia Kristeva, Vernon Cisney, and Nicolae Morar, "A European in China," *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 3 (2011). 424. While we might think that it could not be worse from the Analytic front where it is touted to be free of historical context, this is still, unfortunately, not the case. Famous philosopher of freedom Daniel Dennett notes that it is "an almost exclusively Western preoccupation." See Dennett, *Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting*. 5.

with specific focus on its sameness and difference, as well as generality and particularity, in order to show their interpenetration. This section shows the oscillation between nature and society, as well as the oneness of the manyness which the sage embodies in his constant transformation. Finally, in the third (3) section, we discuss the notion of heaven (天 *tian*) and its spontaneity: the self-so of itself. This is because heaven (*tian*) shapes the contingent and necessary natures of things which in turn, form the world's transformations and patterns. Ultimately, we shall see that this conception of heaven is founded on the *logic of convergence* as in the necessary mutual affirmation of self and other.

2.1 *Fen* 分: On the Precise Distinction of Each Thing

The assumption that Guo Xiang's philosophy is fatalist and even deterministic is not entirely without basis. For instance, in the following passage, where he discusses the concept of allotment (分 *fen*), he outright says:

Now if officials and concubines each commit only to their lot, then they will never be inadequate to govern each other. The alternate ordering of each other, like hands, feet, ears, and eyes, the four limbs and all the body parts, each has what it regulates, and they alternate in making use of each other.²⁶⁸

夫臣妾但各當其分耳，未為不足以相治也。相治者，若手足耳目，四肢百體
各有所司而更相御用也。

What this seems to suggest is that whether one is a minister or a concubine, master or servant, one should simply be content with whatever is given to him in his very situation. In fact, he should not even wish for more or want to become more. Some might read this passage as implying something more similar to the traditionally Western or Christian use of the body (i.e. when St. Paul speaks of the Church as the “body of Christ” wherein Christ is the head and hence main controller of the rest in a clear hierarchy), in which case Guo Xiang would be advocating for the political contentment even of those who are oppressed, discriminated, or pushed into the margins, because the system works as a whole, and so there is no point in demanding to be treated equally.

²⁶⁸ Guo Xiang Commentary, 2.8.11G1 – 2

If we follow along this fatalistic logic, then it will definitely have more dangerous ethical and political implications than the said oppression. In this case, Guo Xiang's type of freedom would not only have the tendency for, but would inevitably lead to, suppression and despotism. Someone who subscribes to this type of fatalistic line of thinking will, at best, simply become nihilistic, as there ceases to be any point of action whatsoever. This seems to be why Livia Kohn would call such a view "depressing."²⁶⁹ However, inasmuch as it does affirm hierarchical roles, even if only temporarily, it is necessary to remember that such type of perception towards the body is different in this instance. When Guo Xiang says they "alternate in making use of each other," it presupposes equality albeit in unique ways—meaning to be the way the hand serves the foot when the foot focuses on having to do something like walking, but the foot also serves the hand when the hand is focused on having to do something like jumping towards a tree in order to grab something, and so on.²⁷⁰ Indeed, Guo Xiang's metaphors on the body never uses or refers to certain parts as having unilateral control over others. Although this nuance as to how the body is perceived differently in the West vs. from the tradition where Guo Xiang is coming from might not be glaringly apparent at first glance, it follows well from the *logic of convergence* which explains the inter-connectedness and inter-causality that is most apparent in Guo Xiang's philosophy. Moreover, the reading which understands this passage to mean as one part dominating over the other is a superimposition of a theistic reading on Guo Xiang, as in the secularized version seen in Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, wherein the sovereign wields absolute power and assumes the position of Jesus Christ. In this model, which is the same model that dictatorial systems like fascism adopts, society is treated as one body, and are thus arguably rehashed versions of this Christian model.

As such, we know that the idea that one must commit to one's own fixed identity, wherever or whatever that may be, is only a possibility in the Christian model, but not in Guo Xiang's, where nothing is fixed because purposes are constantly changing in their alternating functions. Nonetheless, Guo Xiang addresses the possibility of tyranny directly in a passage of the *Zhuangzi* where the text tells us of the evil tyrant whose insatiable greed must be stopped. Guo Xiang comments with an

²⁶⁹ Knaul, "Kuo Hsiang and the Chuang Tzu." 432

²⁷⁰ In fact, Guo Xiang makes a similar point in a later chapter, where he supports the non-mingling of roles, allowing each body part to fulfill their own roles *contra* micro-management, resulting in a bottom-up mechanism that relies heavily on self-so (自然 *ziran*) and non-dong (無為 *wuwei*). He says: "When feet are able to walk, release them [into walking]. When hands are able to hold, rely on them [for holding]. Listen to what the ears hear, observe what the eyes see. For understanding, stop at what cannot be understood. For ability, stop at what is not possible. Use [things] according to their own spontaneous use, act [on things] according to their own spontaneous actions; let them lose themselves in what is internal to their nature and do not, in the tiniest bit, diverge into what is external to [natural] allotment. This is the ultimate transformation of non-doing." 足能行而放之, 手能執而任之, 聽耳之所聞, 視目之所見, 知止其所不知, 能止其所不能, 用其自用, 為其自為, 恣其性內而無纖芥於分外, 此無為之至易也。 See Guo Xiang Commentary, 4.43.5G1-4.

interpretation of why the tyrant is such, and he says:

The tyrant does not only seek to indulge his desire, but also seeking glory, yet this very seeking violates his own *dao*.²⁷¹

夫暴君非徒求恣其欲，復乃求名，但所求者非其道耳。

Thus, it is when one seeks something external, that he violates his *dao*, something unique and particular to each. In other words, things go wrong out of deviation from the correct path, and when that violation happens, then we have tyrants, which is precisely why the correct allotment (*fen*) should be followed in contentment and satisfaction—anything other than this, discontent and dissatisfaction beyond the proper *dao*—leads into the violation of the entire order of the whole and indeed the *dao*. But this does little to answer the essentialist charge, for it may very well be the case that Guo Xiang simply thinks that human nature is intrinsically good, and so anything external to it that meddles with the internal is automatically bad by virtue of pushing one's nature into disorder. After all, it is not uncommon for Chinese philosophers to hark back to the “good old days” when everything was supposedly well and good.²⁷² If, however, we remember the previous chapter's discussion of Guo Xiang's ontology, with specific focus on the notion of 理 *li*, then, we would know that this is simply impossible as a natural consequence of an ontology which avoids immutability and is, at any given time, never fixed.

To call Guo Xiang's philosophy a deterministic and depressing view of the world is but a consequence of thinking that his system subscribes to a logic of “either-or” instead of being “both-and,” as in contingency as necessity, the one as many, or as it were, a *logic of convergence*. In other words, while it can be quite misleading to refer to political passages such that one mistakenly thinks he is an essentialist, it is with strong evidence that we can see how Guo Xiang's philosophy is one that is committed to change and transformation, as well as individuality and uniqueness, but at the same time, and to the same extent, to the whole, to order, and to structure. Such order, in the sense of dialectical unity (as discussed in the section on *li*), however, is something that is emergent, meaning that it comes from the individual things and their uniqueness rather than the other way around.

²⁷¹ Guo Xiang commentary, 4.10.3G

²⁷² The most immediate example that would come to mind is probably the Confucian or Ruist ideal of decadence during the Zhou, as well as the recurring characters, sages, of the olden times that are worth emulating, such Yao, Shun, and Yu. However, dominant Daoism and especially *Laozi* poses the poignant image of the 樸 *pu*, the uncarved block, a symbol of unspoiled simplicity, and ultimately what we should go back to because it is in these days that man has lost his way.

Another way to understand the concept of allotment (分 *fen*) is to turn to an epistemological angle rather than a purely political one. In what follows, Guo Xiang explains what one's allotted nature, or the limit of one's nature, is, in such a way that it becomes clearer to us what the relation between *fen* and *li* is:

The self-becoming (自為 *ziwei*) of every allotted nature (性分 *xingfen*) all comes from the ultimate natural patterns (至理 *zhili*), and therefore cannot be dispensed with. Therefore the person who is good at nourishing life follows as well as relies on this self-becoming²⁷³

性分各自為者，皆在至理中來，故不可免也，是以善養生者，從而任之。

If, therefore, we know that allotment (分 *fen*) comes from the natural patterns (理 *li*) that are themselves emergent and self-so, as was discussed in the previous chapter, then we also know that it cannot be something that is essentialist or fixed in nature, for such natural patterns are always in the plural even as they are one in their plurality and transformation. In other words participating in and yielding to the distinctions and allotments for each and every being is to understand that our connection with the natural patterns is constituted by our differences with each other and our uniqueness. Recognizing that we are different from each other and how that is necessary, in spite of being able to participate only in our limited capacity, is what it means to fully maximize our capability to nourish life.

Indeed, in an earlier passage, Guo Xiang mentions that:

All this shows that the reason why the Peng flies at such a height is simply that its wings are large. When that which things of small material require are not dependent on anything large, then that which things of large material use are not obtained from anything small. Therefore, natural patterns have their precise distinctions, things have their fixed limits (物有定極). Each is sufficient to perform his function and each makes equal accomplishments. Consequently, if one neglects the main issue, living a life of forgetting about [one's] life, and making plans for it beyond what best suits one—function thus not corresponding to strength, nor action to inclination—then even wings like clouds hanging down from heaven will not be able to avoid exhaustion, nor

²⁷³ Guo Xiang Commentary, 19.1.9G

flights of a few moments' duration be without obstacles.²⁷⁴

此皆明鵬之所以高飛者，翼大故耳。夫質小者所資不待大，則質大者所用不得小矣。故理有至分，物有定極，各足稱事，其濟一也。若乃失乎忘生之生而營生於至當之外，事不任力，動不稱情，則雖垂天之翼不能無窮，決起之飛不能無困矣。²⁷⁵

Here, Guo Xiang highlights the complementarity and even necessity of the parts to the whole, and how important it is that each part recognizes its distinct role in the larger order of things. When he says that the natural patterns have very precise limits (理有至分),²⁷⁶ it is to emphasize the necessary differences of each and every one. Moreover, his emphasis on suitability—as demonstrated in his argument about how the Peng is only able to fly such heights because it has large wings—serves to show how Guo Xiang does not mean to say that all views or rightness are equally valid at all times and places, but instead, that there is something that is suitable for every single circumstance and situation, even if that circumstance is always relative to everything else. This is why “even wings like clouds hanging down from heaven” would be insufficient if one does not correspond to the specific circumstances which require a recognition of limitations. This is also seen in Zhuangzi's story about the Earl of He (河伯 *Hebo*) who comes to Ruo of the Northern Sea (北海若 *Beihai Ruo*) thinking that there was none equal to himself, but then sees the boundless realms of Ruo. Guo Xiang says of Ruo:

He knows his smallness and that it cannot be made great, so the natural pattern of allotment has a [naturally worthy] simplicity, a feeling of overreaching esteem cannot operate within it.²⁷⁷

知其小而不能自大，則理分有素，跂尚之情無為乎其間。

In other words, our differences are naturally emergent and highly contingent, which is exactly why one must be completely in accord with them. Our limitations are something that we cannot control, even if and because they are always

²⁷⁴ Birthe Arendrup, "The First Chapter of Guo Xiang's Commentary to Zhuang Zi: A Translation and Grammatical Analysis" (University of Copenhagen, 1964). 322-323. Modified.

²⁷⁵ Guo Xiang Commentary, 1.3.1G1-4

²⁷⁶ I translate the word *zhi* 至 differently depending on context, and can sometimes appear as ultimate, height, supreme, but perhaps here it requires more explanation. Though “very precise” undoubtedly take on a similar meaning to the previously mentioned words, here the emphasis is on the limit, that is, the furthest something can possibly go. Although it may perhaps be an idiosyncratic choice of words, they are (as we shall see) appropriate for how Guo Xiang views the notion of *fen* 分.

²⁷⁷ Guo Xiang Commentary, 17.1.4G

changing, so the best way to be in accord with them is to not do anything about them (無為 *wuwei*). As Yang Lihua notes, “Natural patterns (理 *li*) are our individual nature’s allotments (性分 *xingfen*) or the natural patterns’ allotments (理分 *lifan*) because what they point to is the limits of the possibilities of everything.”²⁷⁸ Indeed for Guo Xiang, it is important to maintain one’s limits because acknowledging this limitation is an acknowledgement of the non-totalization of a single unchanging reality and pattern. Guo Xiang further notes:

If you use your limited nature to seek for knowledge that is boundless, how can anyone not find himself in difficulty?²⁷⁹

以有限之性尋無極之知，安得而不困哉！

Elsewhere, this epistemological angle of allotment (*fen*) is also captured:

So [I say] those who divide fail to divide; those who discriminate fail to discriminate.²⁸⁰

故分也者，有不分也；辯也者，有不辯也。

All things have their own allotment, all affairs have their own distinctions. And still they want to make such allotments and distinctions themselves, without realizing that all things naturally distinguish themselves.²⁸¹

夫物物自分，事事自別。而欲由己以分別之者，不見彼之自別也。

Guo Xiang explains how if we try to see things from the vantage point of wanting to deliberately make the differentiation ourselves, then we will fail to actually see things. Those who consciously and deliberately try to make differentiations about what is what don’t realize that all things differentiate themselves naturally and in a certain way that cannot be differentiated any differently.

Furthermore, on the ontological level, Guo Xiang would suppose that interactions of their distinct natures are necessary for order to emerge, as was seen in the passage of concubines and ministers, yet these distinctions continuously

²⁷⁸ Yang, 郭象“庄子注”研究 (*an Examination of Guo Xiang's Zhuangzi Commentary*). 129

²⁷⁹ Guo Xiang Commentary, 3.1.3G

²⁸⁰ Zhuangzi, quoted in Guo Xiang Commentary 2.14.12

²⁸¹ Guo Xiang Commentary 2.14.12G1-2

change and transform not only themselves, but everything else in a process of mutual emergence. While this may seem oppressive and politically regressive if taken out of context, we are able to see how, for Guo Xiang, if one thing changes, then so does everything else (whether positively or negatively), because that is what the natural patterns (*li*) of the world are. This is reflective of Guo Xiang's overall project, which is to merge 自然 *ziran* with 名教 *mingjiao*; synthesizing ontology and morality, and to show that these are not mutually exclusive of each other.²⁸² Seen this way, it would be fair to interpret Guo Xiang's more concrete social and political insights such as a specific way of governance, as right during its time, but also evolving, true to the core principle of self-so (*ziran*). We can thus assume that these *fen*, these allotments and distinctions, can only be treated as true in their own singular moments in time. Otherwise, it would become external to *fen*, and is what Brook Ziporyn translates as "traces" (*ji* 跡), or in terms of Guo Xiang's ontology, remnants of what once was, but no longer what is, and as such, cannot be treated as a fixed model for what should be imitated—this is also Guo Xiang's argument for why we should not imitate past models.²⁸³ Guo Xiang says:

What leaves the traces is the true nature. For those following the true nature of things, their traces are the six classics. Today, when people deal with things, they should consider *ziran* to be the shoes and the six classics to be the traces.²⁸⁴

所以跡者，真性也。夫任物之真性者，其跡則六經也。況今之人事，則以自然為履，六經為跡。

Though we can't treat the political parts literally, it is appropriate to look at the concept of allotment or distinctions in Guo Xiang from a specifically epistemological vantage point. That is to say, that recognizing one's limits and the equal legitimacy of a different, even contradictory, perspective of seeing how things are and ought to be, does not trump one's own, and is actually even necessary for the legitimacy of one's own. Knowledge is only complete if it recognizes that it is

²⁸² Richard Mather has authored an article which comprehensively discusses the tension between *mingjiao* 名教 and *ziran* 自然 which he translates as conformity and naturalness, respectively. According to Mather, the over-arching aim of the Wei-Jin era is the attempt to synthesize both angles in light of combining both Confucian and Daoist thoughts. However, the attempt to synthesize these two, I believe, has a wider philosophical significance that can tell us something important about freedom and individuality. See Mather, "The Controversy over Conformity and Naturalness During the Six Dynasties."

²⁸³ For a more comprehensive discussion on traces, see Brook Ziporyn, "The Dangers of Traces" in Ziporyn, *The Penumbra Unbound: The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang*.

²⁸⁴ Guo Xiang Commentary 14.41.(1-2)G–3G, quoted in Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation of the Daoist Classic as Interpreted by Guo Xiang*.

incomplete,²⁸⁵ and sufficiency can only be achieved through the recognition of insufficiency, for it is in their incompleteness, their insufficiency, that they are singularly complete and sufficient.

From this understanding of allotment (*fen*), we can see what Guo Xiang meant when he said that:

These five, all of these are those whose sufficiency is injured by deliberate action; they cannot remain in their original nature as they seek the external without end.

The external cannot be sought and so seeking them is regarded like a circle trying to learn to be a square, or a fish that's longing to be a bird.

Although one hopes for the wings of a fabulous phoenix, intending to imitate the sun and moon, as 'this' gets even more near to 'that,' it gets even further from what is real, learning [to be something else] is increasingly obtained yet [one's] nature is completely lost. Therefore, equalizing things is to shackle away what is still one-sided.²⁸⁶

此五者，皆以有為傷當者也，不能止乎本性，而求外無已。夫外不可求而求之，譬猶以圓學方，以魚慕鳥耳。雖希翼鸞鳳，擬規日月，此愈近彼，愈遠實，學彌得而性彌失。故齊物而偏尚之累去矣。

That is to say, that original nature (本性 *benxing*) does not actually mean that it is unchanging and fixed, or that it is inborn, for it simply means unfettered, that is, unadulterated by deliberate action. When subjects are given the space to self-organize without deliberate intervention (*ziran*), only then can order (*xu* 序) actually emerge,²⁸⁷ and when order emerges, one's nature is self-right, or right at the exact place where one is supposed to be at that exact moment in time. It may not be, as Guo Xiang says, the wings of a fabulous phoenix, but it is what one is supposed to be and that in itself is liberating inasmuch as it is of equal importance to everything else, in our mutual transformation and collective unfolding.

As such, it is actually when one is caught up in single moment or stuck in still-frame which is supposed to be in flux,

²⁸⁵ This may sound counter-intuitive but here I would like to remind the reader of the *logic of convergence*, and what Guo Xiang says about knowing in our earlier discussion on this. To recap, Guo Xiang says that "since knowing comes from nonknowing, nonknowing is always the source. Hence, the Genuine Human Being discards knowledge and thereby knows, does nothing and thereby does." See Guo Xiang Commentary, 6.1.2G1-G5, quoted in Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. 188

²⁸⁶ Guo Xiang Commentary 2.14.25G1-3; this passage is part of a bigger excerpt that speaks of the "treasury of Heaven" and, if the reader recalls, also appeared in the previous chapter.

²⁸⁷ Referring to the *dao*, Guo Xiang said that "spontaneity is ordered in precedence and sequence" 「...自然先後之序也」 See Guo Xiang commentary 13.7.2G

that is, to hold on to a fixed value in refusal to identify with the spontaneous nature of things, that things will start to go awry.²⁸⁸

2.2 The Sameness and Difference of One's Nature²⁸⁹ (*xing* 性)

If, therefore, we are not supposed to imitate others, such as the wings of a fabulous phoenix, and be fulfilled in our own natures, is it because our own natures are different and we should be content with what we have, or is it because it is the same, so there is no point in deliberately trying to be different? To be more specific, do what define our natures come internally either by inherent constitution or wilful agency, or do they come externally, from a kind of universal source, whether divine or worldly?

As is evident in previous discussions, these are not necessarily contradictory to each other and in Guo Xiang, difference and sameness are one – not simply because they are complementary or don't contradict each other, but because they are necessary to the fullness of each, and are each of the other's logical extreme that allows one to exist.

In this following section, the two angles of nature (性 *xing*) are discussed: one is one's individual or distinct nature (性分 *xingfen*), which I shall translate as allotted nature or natural allotment, depending on context; the other one being endowed nature (*xingming* 性命). The reason for focusing on these two aspects is that one highlights the particularity of *xing*, whereas

²⁸⁸ Guo Xiang himself stresses this in his comments on the Zhuangzi. For instance, he says that “Although [the text] has the term, “What makes things what they are” [物物者 *wu wu zhe*], this is meant merely to show that things make themselves what they are [物之自物 *wu zhi ziwu*]; ultimately there is no thing that makes things what they are. ... Once we have understood that there is no thing that makes things what they are, we should also understand that neither can things make themselves what they are [物之不能自物 *wu zhi bu neng ziwu*]. But then who is it that does it? They are all unconsciously and abruptly thus and self-so.” 「...雖有物物之名，直明物之自物耳。物物者，竟無物也，際其安在乎！既明物物者無物，又明物之不能自物，則為之者誰乎哉？皆忽然而自爾也。」 Guo Xiang Commentary, 22.35.10G-11G translated by and quoted in Brook Ziporyn, *Beyond Oneness and Difference: Li and Coherence in Chinese Buddhist Thought and Its Antecedents* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013). 162. Moreover, Ziporyn notes that: “many scholars have taken these terms (性 *xing*, 分 *fen*, and 極 *ji*) to have their more usual meaning here: a fixed nature, allotment, limit, or principle that serves as the determining underlying character of a thing, persisting over time and standing behind the phenomenal flux of appearances. This is then taken to be Guo's substitute for the Dao as determining creator, which all scholars admit he banishes from his thought.” See *ibid.* 164. Following the arguments from previous chapter, we know that such substituting would contradict Guo Xiang's ontology, and that the only plausible explanation is that since these categories are empty or *wu*, they are self-so.

²⁸⁹ Here, I translate 性 *xing* as nature, because as shall be discussed, it is not only humans who have *xing*, but also animals or even things. In the following discussion, Guo Xiang refers to even the ten thousand things (萬物 *wanwu*), that is, everything, as having *xing*.

the other denotes a relation to the whole, or to a conception of the order of the world. These two, as we shall see, are equally important to the philosophy of Guo Xiang and are mutually necessary for the logical consistency of the other.

2.2.1 On One's Nature as Distinct (*xingfen* 性分)

Although the compound *xingfen* 性分 never appeared in the *Zhuangzi* texts, Guo Xiang often used it to denote the singular nature of each and every thing in the world.

In the following passage, we see Guo Xiang providing a critique of deliberate learning. He says:

“Outside the limits of the world” means outside the allotted natures of all things. What is outside a thing's own allotted nature may have its own natural patterns, but since it is outside one's own allotted nature, the sage is never affected by it and thus the sage never discusses it. For if he did discuss it, he would be leading all things to study that which is beyond their own capabilities. Thus he does not discuss their externalities, rather, the eight demarcations²⁹⁰ are in unison with their self-realizations.²⁹¹

夫六合之外，謂萬物性分之表耳。夫物之性表，雖有理存焉，而非性分之內，則未嘗以感聖人也，故聖人未嘗論之。〔若論之〕，則是引萬物使學其所不能也。故不論其外，而八畛同於自得也。

What this means, is that the sage does not talk about things that are external to the one's allotted nature, that is what is outside the sage's own spontaneous purview. Whereas Guo Xiang emphasizes what is internal to natural allotment (*xingfen zhi nei* 性分之內), he denounces any trace of externality. This is because whatever is external, which elsewhere and as discussed earlier, Guo Xiang calls traces (*ji* 跡), will lead to one-sided dominance and ontological oppression, which means that it will pervert the natural allotment of a thing. Furthermore, what is external to one's nature is something that is deliberate, therefore a trace, and is unnatural, since they do not change. By natural here, Guo Xiang means that it is changing, as it follows the change and transformation of the natural patterns of the world, and yet it cannot be deliberately changed. We can see the contrast when, like in the following passage, he presents a contrast with what is external to natural allotment (性分之外

²⁹⁰ The demarcations refer to the *Zhuangzi* text, namely: 有左，有右，2.14.5 有倫，有義，2.14.6 有分，有辯，2.14.7 有競，有爭，2.14.8 此之謂八德。

²⁹¹ Guo Xiang Commentary, 2.14.9G1-4

xingfen zhi wai). He says:

Those that cannot be known, are all external to natural allotment. Thus, [knowledge] stops at what is internal to knowledge and yet it is supreme.²⁹²

所不知者，皆性分之外也。故止於所知之內而至也。

In this passage, we see Guo Xiang taking a more epistemological route again, as he had when discussing the limits of knowing and why we must acknowledge that our position in the world would inevitably limit us from knowing about a fixed universal truth or principle other than the principle of self-so (*ziran*). In other words, the contrast between internal and external can be characterized in terms of a resistance against an over-arching canopy of truth and reality, a meta-narrative. The acknowledgement that one's knowledge and experience is limited is supreme because it is also the recognition that difference exists and is integral to the mutual existence and transformation of our knowledge about each other, thereby allowing us to listen to others without owning or imposing on them. Another passage that captures this is when Guo Xiang comments on a passage of Zhuangzi and says that it is about the specificity of events and circumstances such that it is no use to apply fixed methods or principles towards them. The *Zhuangzi* text says:

Zeng, Shi, Yang, Mo, Master Kuang, Carpenter Chui, and Li Zhu all set their Virtuosities outside themselves, using their radiance to disorder the world. But the world is something for which standards are of no use.”²⁹³

彼曾、史、楊、墨、師曠、工倕、離朱，皆外立其德而以燭亂天下者也，法之所無用也。

What the passage seems to suggest is that the “standards” or methods which these people have set out were deemed to be universal ones, and are thus external to themselves and their particularity. Guo Xiang then comments:

These people are people who have various kinds of endowments, thus causing all under heaven to leap over themselves to imitate them. Imitating them then I lose myself, I lose myself because of an other, then that other becomes the principal disorder. That which is the great calamity of all under heaven, is losing myself.

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²⁹² Guo Xiang Commentary, 2.14.26G1-2

²⁹³ Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. 65. Modified.

²⁹⁴ Guo Xiang Commentary, 10.5.14G1-3

此數人者，所稟多方，故使天下躍而效之。效之則失我，我失由彼，則彼為亂主矣。夫天下之大患者，失我也。

If for the standards they use, their looking does not exceed what they see, then the eyes of all are clear-sighted. If their listening does not exceed what they can hear, then the ears of all are sharp. If their tasks do not exceed what they can do, then the techniques of all are skilful. If their knowing does not go beyond what is known to them, then the natures of all are comfortable and fit.

If their virtues do not go beyond what they themselves obtain, then the virtues of all are right. What use is there for establishing what they cannot seize, outside of their natural allotments, thereby causing the world to gallop off, unable to turn back?²⁹⁵

若夫法之所用者，視不過於所見，故眾目無不明；聽不過於所聞，故眾耳無不聽；事不過於所能，故眾技無不巧；德不過於所得，故群德無不當。知不過於所知，故群性無不適；安用立所不逮於性分之表，使天下奔馳而不能自反哉！

Here Guo Xiang highlights the equality of all things, and how a single governing principle cannot be applied to all, in other words how one size does not fit all, and how not a single one is exceptionally and inherently special in their experience, circumstance, knowledge, or even virtue—not because they are not different, but precisely because one's own, just like everything else, is different from each other and they each have their own standard that can only be applied to their own. What use is there, then, in establishing a *fixed* set of rules for what cannot be categorically applied to each and every single one's natural allotment or disposition? In the same way, we cannot use the model of the past as a fixed standard for our present actions. Guo Xiang is again going against the traditions of Chinese philosophy here in modelling the present according to the past,²⁹⁶ taking the past sages as standards of emulation. He does so, however, not in and of themselves during their time and their circumstance, as we see when he also talks about them with reverence,²⁹⁷ but Guo does remind us how we need to

²⁹⁵ Guo Xiang Commentary, 10.5.15G1-6

²⁹⁶ Unlike the primitivist interpretations of Laozi and Zhuangzi, Guo Xiang takes on a contrary position wherein he believes that progress is good. In doing so, his goal was to have attempted to save the intellectual atmosphere of the *Wei-Jin* era from the threat escapism and absolute retreat to mysticism, propagated by the likes of Ji Kang and Ruan Ji. See Xiaoyi Wang, "郭象历史哲学发微 (on Guo Xiang's Philosophy of History)," *文史哲* 0, no. 2 (2002).

²⁹⁷ Guo Xiang comments on Zhuangzi's passage, that "the sages have benefited the world little and harmed the world much," and says that:

acknowledge that all this is changing according to the changing circumstances as well, and so nothing can really be fixed and unchanging. Values or standards espoused by sages ought to be practiced not in and of themselves, but as a means of rightness in that situation, that exact place and time, which ultimately changes inevitably. More on this shall be discussed later, but for now, a controversial passage from Guo Xiang, in relation to how a fixed standard leads to the loss of self, ought to be discussed.

Guo Xiang says:

The true determinacy of horses is not such that they reject the saddle and hate to be ridden; it is just that they have no desire for superfluous luxury and honor.... He who is good at riding them does so by actualizing their abilities to the utmost; the way to do this is to let them follow their own spontaneity (*ziren* 自任). But if when they would walk, one makes them gallop, seeking a function that exceeds their ability, some will be unable to bear it and many will die. If however we allow both nags and steeds each to accord with its own power, going along with and fitting to the distinct determinacies of sluggish and swift, then although they leave their footprints all over the world's wildernesses and beyond, the natural determinacy of each horse will be kept whole. But when the deluded hear (us say), "Allow the horses to follow their own determinacies," they say we should release them and not ride them; when they hear talk of non-activity, they say walking is not as good as lying down; how is it that they go so astray without turning back!? They grievously miss Zhuangzi's point.²⁹⁸

馬之真性，非辭鞍而惡乘，但無羨於榮華。...夫善御者，將以盡其能也。盡能在於自任，而乃走作馳步，求其過能之用，故有不堪而多死焉。若乃任驚驥之力，適遲疾之分，雖則足跡接乎八荒之表，而眾馬之性全矣。而惑者聞任馬之性，乃謂放而不乘；聞無為之風，遂云行不如臥；何其往而不返哉！斯失乎莊生之旨遠矣。

"How true this statement is! But although this statement is true, we still cannot do away with the sages. Since all the knowledge in the world is not yet able to be completely obliterated, the way of the sages is still needed to subdue it. If everyone else's knowledge is allowed to exist and only the sages' knowledge is obliterated, this will harm the world even more than allowing the sages to exist. Thus although the harm caused by the sages is much, it is still better than the disorder of having no sages. But although it is better than having no sages, it is undeniably not as good as the total lack of harm there would be if all [the knowledge] were obliterated." 信哉斯言！斯言雖信，而猶不可亡聖者，猶天下之知未能都亡，故須聖道以鎮之也。群知不亡而獨亡於聖知，則天下之害又多於有聖矣。然則有聖之害雖多，猶愈於亡聖之無治也。雖愈於亡聖，故未若都亡之無害也。甚矣，天下莫不求利而不能一亡其知，何其迷而失致哉！See Guo Xiang Commentary 10.3.8G1-6, quoted in Ziporyn, "Guo Xiang: The Self-So and the Repudiation-Cum-Reaffirmation of Deliberate Action and Knowledge."

²⁹⁸ Guo Xiang Commentary, 9.1.2G1-7, quoted in *ibid.* 417.

Though it may be shocking to the modern-day reader how Guo Xiang can just so easily justify the domination of horses, and how this is a defense of oppression, this is simply one of the many passages in Guo Xiang's work that can be easily misinterpreted if taken out of context. What it really shows, as Brook Ziporyn notes, is the problem that is in "making the weak and slow horses try to conform to the standard of the strong and fast, that is, to make the petty man conform to the standard of the sages."²⁹⁹ Needless to say, remarks such as these are socially-situated ones that also ought to change in a spontaneous way. Here, Guo Xiang dismisses the realization of one's nature (*xing* 性) *via negativa*, and instead advocates for the active and creative nature of spontaneity and being true to what it is, at that moment and in that situation.

In other words, it is the deliberate initiative to change one's own self according to such fixed standards that will lead to a loss of one's self. The self in this case, however, is the polar opposite of a Cartesian self that is unchanging and separate from the world, but nor is it a Humean self that is merely a collection of experiences and thoughts; rather, it is a dialectical self that finds itself and its uniqueness via an act of forgetting. Guo Xiang notes:

In a state of sitting in oblivion, what could there be unforgotten? First one forgets all outer manifestations (*ji* 跡), then one also forgets that which causes the manifestations. On the inside, one is unaware that there is a self (*shen* 身), on the outside one never knows that there is heaven and earth. Thus one becomes *utterly empty and can unite with the changes*, leaving nothing unpervaded.³⁰⁰

夫坐忘者，奚所不忘哉！既忘其跡，又忘其所以跡者，內不覺其一身，外不識有天地，然後曠然與變化為體而無不通也。

This forgetfulness, therefore, leads not to a forgetfulness full-stop, but to a forgetfulness that is a kind of remembering; a kind of remembering that remembers where one is from and where one belongs; remembering, in the sense of recalling what has always already been there, which is nothing, that is to simply be constantly adapting to the what *is* there, which is also constantly changing. As such, one never has no identity as such, but one has no *fixed* identity or natural allotment (性分

²⁹⁹ Ibid. 417

³⁰⁰ Guo Xiang Commentary, 6.77.2G1-2, quoted in Livia Kohn, *Meditation Works: In the Daoist, Buddhist, and Hindu Traditions* (Magdalena: Three Pines Press, 2008). 1308

xingfen), because what one is, is constantly changing.

In other words, one remembers his inherent connection with the world. This unity with the world as oneself and as an extension of his own agency is seen in an even earlier passage where Guo Xiang says:

I take each transformation, both life and death, as “me.” Since all are me, how can I ever be lost? Since I’ve never been lost, what worries can I have? Because one makes no resistance, one cries when others cry. But because one has no worries, one cries but does not lament. There is nothing I fail to take as me, so inner and outer are invisibly unified, past and present strung together on one thread, constantly renewed along with all transformations—so how could anyone know where the “me” is once and for all? So I say there is nowhere that I am not self-realized.³⁰¹

夫死生變化，吾皆吾之。既皆是吾，吾何失哉！未始失吾，吾何憂哉！無逆，故人哭亦哭；無憂，故哭而不哀。靡所不吾也，故玄同外內，彌貫古今，與化日新，豈知吾之所在也！言無往而不自得也。

Not only does this passage show a clear refutation of the idea of a “fixed nature” for Guo Xiang, for the real self is always changing, but also, it shows that in spite of and because of all the differences and uniqueness of every thing, one takes everything that is encountered—every transformation that one experiences—as one’s self. In doing so, one blurs the lines between inner and outer, and ultimately, transforms everything to become inner, to become “me.” This is what Guo Xiang means when he talks about forgetting oneself: he means finding one’s self in everything. Indeed, because past and present are unified in a single thread, one does not lament (*ai* 哀)—an emotion that makes one stuck in the past, that makes one fixated on the idea of something already lost. Yet, one takes outer factors to become inner in a constant and dialectical transformation, not removed, because again, it goes back to causality instead of a fixed nature, or even idea. The irony here is that one *takes* everything else to be herself, so that ultimately, there is nothing that is herself. As such, one becomes united with a constantly changing moment instead.

Moreover, this is why it is precisely when one thinks himself to be removed from others, that is, inherently different and essentially unique in substance (whether positively or negatively) while everyone else is the same, that he loses his self

³⁰¹ Guo Xiang Commentary, 6.37.12G1-4—6.37.13-14G, quoted in Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. 202. Modified, last sentence mine.

and his inner nature, because in reality, inner is outer and vice versa. However, if one acknowledges that we are all different, then one realizes that we are all the same in that we are all different in our own equally right ways. One of the passages that captures this best is when Guo Xiang opens the story on Peng and Kun, and how Zhuangzi uses these images in order to show the equality of our allotted natures, no matter how big the difference, and no matter how one might seem to be better than the other. Guo Xiang says:

The real existence of the Peng or Kun is a question of which I have made no detailed studies. But Zhuang Zi's leading idea is that one is self-realized when far-reaching and unfettered, indulging in doing nothing. He therefore carries smallness and greatness to their extreme limits in order to show the appropriateness of one's allotted nature.³⁰²

鵬鯤之實，吾所未詳也。夫莊子之大意，在乎逍遙遊放，無為而自得，故極小大之致，以明性分之適。

This passage shows relativity not in such a way that anything goes, or anything can be right or true, but, similarly to the sentiment of Deleuze and Guattari, “the truth of the relative”³⁰³ in that it is right for Peng and only for Peng to have large wings in the way that it was for Peng, and it was right for the small bird and only for the small bird to be small in the way that it was for the small bird.

They are, again, similar in being different. According to Tang Yijie, this means that “if seen from another angle, they are absolute not only in their difference, but also, everything, in their essence, exists and moves in absolutely independent self-sufficiency”³⁰⁴ He continues, saying that Guo Xiang “recognizes, on one hand, that things have difference, but on the other hand, that they are still not different. So he recognizes that difference and having no difference is the same. This is significant in the history of Chinese philosophy.”³⁰⁵ Indeed, this is a significant turn not only for Chinese philosophy but philosophy as a whole for it introduces an innovative logic whereby necessity is merged with contingency, the one is merged

³⁰² Guo Xiang Commentary, 1.1.1G1-2, quoted in Birthe Arendrup, “The First Chapter of Guo Xiang's Commentary to Zhuang Zi.” 314. Modified.

³⁰³ The work of Deleuze and Guattari was a revolutionary turn in the history of Western philosophy and has stood strong amidst the misrepresentations posed towards post-modern relativity. While Deleuze doesn't take it as far as Guo Xiang does, his work with Guattari nevertheless provides a valuable insight regarding the meaning of relativity and is thus noteworthy. Specifically speaking, they say that “perspectivism, or scientific relativism, is never relative to a subject: it constitutes not a relativity of truth but, on the contrary, a truth of the relative, that is to say, of variables whose cases it orders according to the values it extracts from them in its system of coordinates.” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). 130.

³⁰⁴ Tang, 郭象与魏晋玄学 (*Guo Xiang and Wei-Jin Xuanxue*). 280

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

with the many, difference is taken as sameness, and indeed, as Tang Yijie notes, it is where “each thing’s relative existence is enough for its absolute existence, hereby abolishing the difference between relative and absolute”³⁰⁶ This is why in the following passage, Guo Xiang merges the notion of a particular nature, and one that is related to a collective functioning. He says:

His inner allotted nature stays intact, and nothing more. Each exactly matches the allotment of endowed nature.³⁰⁷

全其性分之内而已。各正性命之分也。

For Guo Xiang, thus, keeping one’s allotted nature intact simply means one’s actions and deliberations matches what is internal to the allotment of her endowed nature. The particular and the distinct are at once, part and member to an underlying order and whole by virtue of its endowed nature. The *ming* 命 in *xingming* 性命 now thus takes on a new meaning in that it is not something that is pre-determined in a linear or fixed manner, because like everything else in the world, it too is malleable in its constant transformation, lending to its uniqueness.

2.2.2 Endowed Nature (*xingming* 性命)

In the following passage, Guo Xiang highlights the self as the sole standard (*fa* 法)³⁰⁸ of the self. That is, the oneness of differences and sameness of our natures, owing to their mutual necessity in the whole, through the concept of endowed nature (*xingming* 性命). He says:

Because their forms are mutually opposed, Mt. Tai is larger than an autumn hair. But if each and every one depends on its allotted nature, if each merges with its own limits, then what is large in form has never been excessive and what is small in form has never been insufficient. As long as each is sufficient only within their nature, then the tip of a hair in autumn does not particularly deem its smallness as small, and the great mountain does not particularly deem its greatness as great. And if we take sufficiency of the nature to be greatness, then

³⁰⁶ Ibid.280-281

³⁰⁷ Guo Xiang Commentary, 7.5.3G – 4G

³⁰⁸ Recall Guo Xiang’s discussion earlier on the standards we follow that are external to us in Guo Xiang Commentary, 10.5.14G1-3

nothing under heaven is more sufficient (to itself) than an autumn hair. Whereas if sufficiency to their own nature is not what we mean by great, then even Mt. Tai can be called small. Thus it is said that: “Nothing in the world is larger than the tip of a hair in autumn, and Mt. Tai is small.”³⁰⁹

When a great mountain is deemed small, then nothing in the world is great; when the tip of a hair is deemed as big, then nothing in the world is small. There is no smallness nor greatness, there is no long or short life, therefore cicadas do not covet greater camellias, and are delightfully self-realized, rejected quails don’t value the heavenly pond and are glorious and admirable by means of their sufficiency. If each finds sufficiency in its natural state and is at peace with its endowed nature, then even heaven and earth are not sufficient to be deemed (especially) long-lived, and are thus born together with me, and all things are not sufficient to be deemed (especially) different, and are thus attained together with me. And so in the life of heaven and earth, what is not equal? In the self-realization of the ten thousand things, what is not the same?³¹⁰

夫以形相對，則大山大於秋豪也。若各據其性分，物冥其極，則形大未為有餘，形小不為不足。（苟各足）於其性，則秋豪不獨小其小而大山不獨大其大矣。若以性足為大，則天下之足未有過於秋豪也；（其）性足者（為）大，則雖大山亦可稱小矣。故曰天下莫大於秋豪之末而大山為小。

大山為小，則天下無大矣；秋豪為大，則天下無小也。無小無大，無壽無夭，是以螻蛄不羨大椿而欣然自得，斥鴳不貴天池而榮願以足。苟足於天然而安其性命，故雖天地未足為壽而與我並生，萬物未足為異而與我同得。則天地之生又何不並，萬物之得又何不一哉！

Guo Xiang explains here how large and small are only judgments in relation to the other, but also, that these qualities are ultimately non-existent and hold no truth in themselves, because it is only if they are contrasted that they have fixed sizes. Since each is their own uniqueness in their own difference, only their own self can be the standard for themselves, each is “large” enough and thus they are all the same, which itself results in the mutuality of all things. Such mutuality is possible because each has taken on their own nature and their own self as the sole standard. Thus, explaining Zhuangzi’s last line in the passage, which says:

³⁰⁹ Guo Xiang Commentary 2.13.12G1-6; Zhuangzi passage quoted in Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. 15

³¹⁰ Guo Xiang Commentary 2.13.12G7-10

... heaven and earth are generated beside me, and the ten thousand things are one with me.³¹¹

...天地與我並生，而萬物與我為一。

Everything in heaven and earth is equal in their endowed nature, everything is capable of realizing their own full potentials of their endowed natures. This is possible because there is no universal principle that governs existence. Natural patterns and endowments are simply spontaneous, and therefore, diverse yet self-organizing. This is why Guo Xiang explains that:

We do not know the reason for they're being so and yet they are so, we call this fate. But this seems to imply a meaning or intention behind it, so [we] must then go on to dispel the use the of the name fate so as to understand their self-so [or spontaneity]. Only then is the real principle of “fate” completely expressed.³¹²

不知其所以然而然，謂之命，似若有意也，故又遣命之名以明其自爾，而後命理全也。

Moreover, Tang Yijie notes that Guo Xiang places an emphasis on the notion of fate (*ming* 命) “so that people can understand that things are originally generating and transforming in a spontaneous way (no reason why)”³¹³ and that “nothing tells them to be such—this is really the true meaning of ‘*mingli*’”³¹⁴ because the natural patterns of [fate’s] endowment (*mingli*) is simply a manifestation of being simply-such or self-so (*zi er* 自爾). This fate or “endowment” (*ming* 命)³¹⁵ of natural patterns (理 *li*) might seem to be something that pertains to a spiritual being, something that is higher than us and therefore has the capability to bless the creatures of the world, and by virtue of that capability alone, is other-worldly. It need not be one being, as in the case of an Abrahamic god, nor even something that is polytheistic. It can be a kind of sacred energy that no

³¹¹ Guo Xiang Commentary 2.13.12

³¹² Guo Xiang Commentary, 27.12.8G

³¹³ Tang, 郭象与魏晋玄学 (*Guo Xiang and Wei-Jin Xuanxue*). 274

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ I interchangeably translate 命 *ming* as either “fate” or “endowment” throughout this work, depending on context. For instances where there is clearly no specific entity providing the 命 *ming*, I choose “fate.” However for instances where there seems to be an “endower,” usually heaven or 天 *tian*, then I translate this as endowment. Like the other words which I change the translation for whenever context deems it necessary, there is ultimately no difference in meaning between the two translations. This is especially the case in Guo Xiang where “heaven” is simply a natural entity and is “self-so” (自然 *ziran*), yet the English language translations would appear less awkward if we interchange the words to flow more aptly with their contexts.

one understands, but is nevertheless of a religious nature. This is, however, not the case not only from what we know of *li* 理 as something that is simply spontaneous from the previous chapter, but also because Guo Xiang himself says:

Natural patterns certainly correspond to each other, as if a god/gods are causing them. Natural patterns spontaneously correspond to each other, they mutually correspond not because anything causes them to do so, so even though they mutually correspond, there is nothing divine [causing them].³¹⁶

理必有應，若有神靈以致之也。理自相應，相應不由於故也，則雖相應而無靈也。

Tang Yijie explains the meaning of this passage, noting that:

What Guo Xiang means here is that, things and affairs correspond with natural patterns (理 *li*), as though there is something that makes it so, in fact, it is the necessary natural patterns of things and the individual natures (自性 *zixing*) of things in themselves that correspond. This kind of correspondence has no particular reason, and so, this kind of correspondence is just spontaneous (自然 *ziran*) and there is nothing that makes it so.³¹⁷

Furthermore, Tang Yijie continues to say that “each thing has its own particular natural pattern (*li*), there is no one united natural pattern (*li*).”³¹⁸ Tang here helps us understand how, for Guo Xiang, change and transformation is not from the top-down, but something that is dialectical, which makes the correspondences and mutual transformations spontaneous and without reason for being so, other than that they are so, for if each were not so, then everything else wouldn’t be so either. Conversely, if everything else were not so, then this particular thing will not be so either. Tang Yijie further notes that “in this world, nothing is identical, so there is no need to strive for sameness, but rather, it is sufficient to simply agree to yield to all the natural activities of things accordingly.”³¹⁹ One might notice the irony in Tang’s language here, which is *striving* for sameness vs. *yielding* to the natural activities of things, and so it would be important to note how this is again the *logic of convergence* applied. That is to say, that it is ultimately a kind of yielding because it is spontaneous, but is nonetheless

³¹⁶ Guo Xiang Commentary. 27.12.9-10G

³¹⁷ Tang, 郭象与魏晋玄学 (*Guo Xiang and Wei-Jin Xuanxue*).275

³¹⁸ Ibid. 275

³¹⁹ Ibid. 276

determined by one's own difference according to the difference of one's own circumstance, and hence non-identical. In this manner, Tang presents us with a very accurate interpretation of what Guo Xiang means here.

Guo Xiang's focus on the differences rather than sameness leads to a convergence of universal and particular, concrete and abstract. However, this emphasis on uniqueness is not without an epistemological issue. Tang Yijie clarifies that since Guo Xiang "merges contingency and necessity (混同偶然和必然),"³²⁰ it therefore "can't be without mysticism (神秘主义) or Agnosticism (不可知论)."³²¹ This is why in the following Guo Xiang also says:

All these [talk of death] above [in the *Zhuangzi* text], [means that] everything is without knowing their reason for being so and yet they are so, that is why it is said to be obscure. Now those who do not yet know all come to spontaneously know without knowing how they know; those who are born all are spontaneously born without knowing how they are born.

The ten thousand things are different from each other, but when it comes to life [they all] do not pursue knowledge [of why they are so], and so none of them are not alike. In all under heaven, thus, nothing is not obscure.³²²

凡此上事，皆不知其所以然而然，故曰芒也。今未知者皆不知所以知而自知矣，生者（皆）不知所以生而自生矣。萬物雖異，至於生不由知，則未有不同者也，故天下莫不芒也。

As such, it is precisely because each thing has its own nature at any given moment, and its own constantly changing allotment, that it is impossible to know how each thing operates in relation to everything else. Such nature and allotment is internal to an individual thing because something external would simply be another standard, so it only makes sense that each thing can manifest only its own internality in such a way that it allows for others to do the same, because an "other" will never be able to manifest another's nature or allotment. This is why the recurring use of the term "endowed nature" or "natural endowment" (性命 *xingming*) in Guo Xiang's philosophy can only reflect something that is internal. As Yang Lihua notes, "the nature (性 *xing*) of everything as an insurmountable individual allotment (分 *fen*) in Guo Xiang's philosophy is also

³²⁰ Ibid. 276

³²¹ Ibid. 276

³²² Guo Xiang Commentary, 2.8.21G1-3

called 命.”³²³ However, it is important to remember that even this “internality” is not static over time—what is internal at any given moment is just what is self-so and vanished, done without effort, and what one has adapted to at that time—constantly changing, yet “fixed” in the sense of being unchangeable by anything external at that moment in time.

2.2.3 Sagacity and Deformities

In order to highlight the significance of individuality and uniqueness in convergence to sameness and the whole in Guo Xiang, however, it would be beneficial to provide a rejoinder on the notion of sagacity and the curious case of deformed individuals in the 5th chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, whom Zhuangzi himself regards as sages and whom Guo Xiang re-affirms. Indeed, Guo Xiang deliberately presents deformed people as sages in order to show that there is no one external standard for becoming a sage. For instance, the *Zhuangzi* begins by introducing a character named 王骀 Wang Tai, a deformed man who lost a foot, and yet is somehow as widely respected and followed like Confucius himself. When asked why this was so, Confucius went on to explain how distinctions such as that between him and Wang Tai are simply prejudices. These distinctions, ironically, prevent one’s understanding instead of enabling a clear-cut understandings of things. The following is an excerpt from Guo Xiang’s comments on the passage, which explains this further:

The natures of sweetness and bitterness are distinct, and so feelings of like and dislike are contrary.³²⁴

恬[甜]苦之性殊，則美惡之情背。

Even though what we regard as pleasing are not the same, yet we are the same in regarding something as pleasing. Each like what they consider as pleasing, so the ten thousand things are the same in liking; each affirms what they consider as right, so all under heaven are the same in affirming. Since everyone has what they regard as different, then in all under heaven there is nothing that is not different. He who has vast and great views, whose officials are heaven and earth, who houses [in him] the ten thousand things, know that differences are not ultimately different, thus he regards them as the same, so that in all under heaven nothing is not the same. Furthermore he also knows that this sameness is not sufficient to consider them [that is, the affirmations and negations, the likings and dislikings] as existent, thus going by their same non-existence, the affirmations and

³²³ Yang, 郭象“庄子注”研究 (*an Examination of Guo Xiang's Zhuangzi Commentary*).127

³²⁴ Guo Xiang Commentary 5.6.1G

negations, the likings and dislikings are all non-existent. For we consider ourselves right and others wrong, we like ourselves and dislike other people; from those with average intelligence or below to insects, all are thus. Such is a case of seeing oneself but not seeing others. But he who is of profound penetration and one with all, bases his understanding of all under heaven on all under heaven. In all under heaven, no one says ‘I am wrong,’ which shows that in all under heaven there is no wrong. None says ‘the other is right,’ which shows that none under heaven is right. He doesn’t regard anything as right or wrong, they intermingle and become one; he is able to adjust to transformation and allow change to be his guide, deal with opposing things but not be terrified of either.³²⁵

雖所美不同，而同有所美。各美其所美，則萬物一美也；各是其所是，則天下一是也。夫因其所異而異之，則天下莫不異。而浩然大觀者，官天地，府萬物，知異之不足異，故因其所同而同之，則天下莫不皆同；又知同之不足有，故因其所無而無之，則是非美惡，莫不皆無矣。夫是我而非彼，美己而惡人，自中知以下，至於昆蟲，莫不皆然。然此明乎我而不明乎彼者爾。若夫玄通混合之士，因天下以明天下。天下無曰我非也，即明天下之無非；無曰彼是也，即明天下之無是。無是無非，混而為一，故能乘變任化，迓物而不懼。

Though it is undeniable that Guo Xiang places a huge importance on the sage and their social involvement, repeatedly praising them, including Confucius, we also see here his more Daoist side in insisting that fixed standards are of no use, and how people who are deformed are just as capable of becoming a sage as Confucius.

To this end, Alan Chan proposes the following way to look at the balance preserving the uniqueness and superiority of Confucius together with the notion that others can still attain sagehood, in their own unique way. He says:

Guo Xiang did acknowledge that *xing* naturally tends toward stillness and that desire arises from contact with phenomena; but this does not privilege the former or detract from the assertion that “full capacity” (caiquan 才全) is *not a matter of constitution* but rather by one’s understanding of change and the sufficiency of one’s native endowment.³²⁶

³²⁵ Guo Xiang Commentary 5.6.2G1-10

³²⁶ Alan Chan, "The Nature of the Sage and the Emotions: A Debate in Wei-Jin Philosophy Revisited," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy and Culture (Chinese University of Hong Kong)* 2 (2007). 223. Though Chan refers to the sage’s “special *qi*-endowment,” it

In other words, while it is true that for Guo Xiang, Confucius was a special sage of his time, anyone and everyone is able to cognize and transform their way into sagehood, for so long as they understand the changes of their current situation and adapt their dispositions accordingly, just as it is in the passage on deformed men. In another passage, Guo Xiang says:

Fate flows as affairs transform, not ceasing day or night, though pushed away it does not depart, though retained it does not remain. Therefore those who are full in capacity, follows along with what they encounter, and relies on it (fate).³²⁷

夫命行事變，不舍晝夜，推之不去，留之不停。故才全者，隨所遇而任之。

Full capacity (*caiquan* 才全), therefore, is not something inborn – it is the capacity to depend and rely on the change and transformation of whatever one encounters, and whatever one encounters, that is what fate (*ming* 命) is, as we have seen, not something that is fixed either, it transforms according to individual natures (*xing* 性) and allotments (*fen* 分). Indeed, Guo Xiang highlights this uniqueness and individuality, saying that:

When we emulate the sages, we are really just emulating their traces and no more. Such traces are from things that are already gone, not tools to deal with change, why is it worth valuing and held tightly onto?

When we lay hold of fixed traces in order to drive into the boundless, we come to the boundless yet traces are stagnant, they are (traces) the means by which to protect the state and yet [these] people protect only the traces.³²⁸

法聖人者，法其跡耳。夫跡者，已去之物，非應變之具也，奚足尚而執之哉！執成跡以御乎無方，無方至而跡滯矣，所以守國而為人守之也。

seems to me that since Heaven is the one who endows, Heaven being spontaneously generating and not some other-worldly entity, as shall later be discussed in the next section, then the logical consequence is that such *qi* 氣 must also be subject to the same material connections that each and everything is. That is to say, to the inter-connections of everything unto everything. As such, it cannot be pre-determined outside of the individual self as absolute bearer of the entire world, thrown into a specific place at a specific time in his own personal, social, and political context, that comes to determine one's composition.

³²⁷ Guo Xiang commentary 5.24.2G1-2

³²⁸ Guo Xiang Commentary 10.2.5G1-3

The concept of traces (*ji* 跡) here is particularly illuminating because it tells us that the thing-in-itself, truth-in-itself, is boundless (*wufang* 無方) and is therefore never cognitively captured, for it escapes fundamental perception. By substituting our past and stagnant standards in place of the boundless we create an excess of concept-making which leads to an expression of fixed measurements and principles. Although something might have been real or may have worked in the past, it is something that had been lost in time, and we are now left with a “trace” which, if we try to capture in cognition, leads to that excess which become fixtures. These fixtures thus are results of trying to cognitively encapsulate what was nevertheless boundless and in doing so, protects only itself. Furthermore, those who hold onto such traces (*ji*)—to fixed methods—try to reduce everything to fit into their own grasp of knowledge, not because they want to understand, but because they are afraid of the unknown, of non-knowing. Similarly for Guo Xiang, however, he condemns just as equally so, those who reduce everything into nothing, those who “when they hear talk of non-action, they say walking is not as good as lying down (聞無為之風，遂云行不如臥),”³²⁹ and yet the sage is not like this, for the sage openly encounters “opposing things and yet is not terrified (連物而不懼).”³³⁰ The sage accepts both affirmation and negation, like and dislike, *ziran* and *mingjiao*, sticking to only one of either is sticking to a trace. The sage thus seeks the mutual negation and affirmation of each, for indeed, sages are comfortable towards the unknown, the unknowable, because they know that nothing can be deliberately apprehended as fixed and final knowledge. Death does not invalidate life, yet to live life is not a condemnation of death, but they mutually affirm each other through negation, and each is fully realized through the other—taken to the extreme, everything is both necessary and contingent, as was pointed out in the previous chapter, and everything can serve as the measure of everything in the oscillation of what we can know and cannot know at any given point. The sage knows this and adapts to either and takes all possible change and transformations of the world as himself. The sage acknowledges that the boundless is, as it were, boundless. This is why one of the more famous passages of Guo Xiang goes as such:

The “divine man” is what we now call a sage. Though the sage is in the imperial hall yet his heart differs not from when he is in the mountain forests. How would ordinary people know this! ³³¹

夫神人即今所謂聖人也。夫聖人雖在廟堂之上，然其心無異於山林之中，世豈識之哉！

³²⁹ Guo Xiang Commentary, 9.1.4G5

³³⁰ Guo Xiang Commentary, 5.6.2G9

³³¹ Guo Xiang Commentary, 1.(10.1-12.1)G2-3

In this passage, we see how the sage isn't someone who favors non-activity or stillness, but is comfortable in both, and can be both. When in the mountains, the sage can be a fulfilled hermit to the best delights of their person, and yet when called to social duty they perform their responsibilities to the best of his capabilities. Both seem to be opposing ends, and yet, even when he is fully one or the other, is there a difference in his heart, or is it the same when being fully absorbed into the whichever? This is why, as Alan Chan notes, "Guo Xiang repeatedly emphasizes that the sage embodies not 'nonbeing,' which remains an abstraction, but rather the process of 'transformation,'" ³³² meaning that it is not that the sage does not feel anything, but more so that the sage feels everything to the fullest and yet it does not stick. Chan elaborates and recounts the *Lunyu*'s account of the death of Confucius' favorite disciple, Yan Yuan 顏淵, wherein Confucius was said to have displayed excessive grief. ³³³ Chan notes that, on Confucius' grief or show of emotion, Guo Xiang comments:

Just as everyone cried, Confucius also cried; just as everyone was deeply saddened, Confucius was also deeply saddened. This is the way in which someone who does not have emotions changes with things. ³³⁴
人哭亦哭，人慟亦慟，蓋無情者與物化也。

The sage feels as the people feel, senses as the people sense, and surely, can think as the people think, but he is never fixed into a "trace" and he is a sage because he is always a few moments ahead of the ordinary people when transforming and adjusting, adapting to circumstances and constant change and transformation. Thus, Guo Xiang does not deny that—just as Wang Rong, one of Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove, had once claimed—"it is precisely in people like us that the deepest and most intense emotions find their place," ³³⁵ but nor does he deny the sage's tendency towards stillness. Guo Xiang says:

Those who do not harbor judgments of right and wrong, and likes and dislikes, they are certainly human in every way, but (in a man like this) where can the emotions attach themselves to? ³³⁶

³³² Chan, "The Nature of the Sage and the Emotions: A Debate in Wei-Jin Philosophy Revisited." 216.

³³³ Ibid. 217

³³⁴ As cited in Huang Kan, 論語集解義疏 *Lunyu jijie yishu*, quoted in ibid. 217. Chan also notes the appearance of the phrase 人哭亦哭 in the Guo Xiang Commentary, 6.26.3G1.

³³⁵ Wang Rong, in 世說新語 *Shishuo xinyu* (17.4), quoted in Chan, "Neo-Daoism."

³³⁶ Guo Xiang Commentary, 5.33.1G, quoted in "The Nature of the Sage and the Emotions: A Debate in Wei-Jin Philosophy Revisited." 219

則無是無非無好無惡者，雖有形貌，直是人耳，情將安寄？

This is why the ideal man has no emotional attachments – while he certainly is capable of feeling, he is not attached to them in such a way that he harbors likes and dislikes, right or wrong, precisely because to do so is to be stuck with a certain judgment in a world that is always changing and transforming in and of its own.

As such, we see a picture of the sage that is no longer either just an ideal hermit, or just an accomplished nobleman. We see a sage that is capable of transforming into both when Guo Xiang talks about the difference between 武王 King Wu and 有虞 You Yu (舜 Shun). He says:

These two sages were to set the world in order when there was a turmoil. One of them did it with peaceful means, while the other by military force. They differed because their time was different. Between them there is no difference of superiority or inferiority.³³⁷

言二聖俱以亂故治之，則揖讓之與用師，直是時異耳，未有勝負於其間也。

The very same thing is also what he meant when he talks about being at ease with one's heaven-endowed or heavenly nature:

In this paragraph Zhuangzi says that every creature, whether great or small, has his own expression of spontaneity. Since this cannot be attained by striving or desire, everyone can be in harmony with their heavenly-endowed nature without being sorry about that wherein he differs...³³⁸

今言小大之辯，各有自然之素，記非跂慕之所及，亦各安其天性，不悲所以異...

Just as the sage is not a fixed entity and can transform into whichever situation he finds himself in, just as no sage is the same as any other sage, our natures too, can never be the same with any other nature, and similarly, is continually changing

³³⁷ Guo Xiang Commentary, 12.46G, quoted in *Chuang-Tzu: A New Selected Translation with an Exposition of the Philosophy of Kuo Hsiang*, trans. Youlan Feng, China Academic Library (Springer, 2016).

³³⁸ Guo Xiang Commentary, 1.6.(2-7)G3, quoted in Arendrup, "The First Chapter of Guo Xiang's Commentary to Zhuang Zi: A Translation and Grammatical Analysis." 334, Modified.

because heaven itself, or the principle that governs *tian* 天, is constantly in change and transformation. Ultimately, forgetting for the sake of embodying is what it means to be a sage, that is, to “be able to discard knowledge and purpose, following the principle of heaven,” 能去知與故，循天之理³³⁹ which is to say that the sage encounters the world simply as it is, taking everything as the measurement of everything else, instead of a pre-conceived judgment form *a priori*. The sage basks not in a metaphysical canopy of ideal principles, but in the *hic et nunc* of joy and sorrow, of both the purity and muck, the profanity and sacredness of our bare existence.

2.3 The Spontaneity of the Endowing Tian 天

With all this emphasis on change and transformation, however, why then does Guo Xiang still say this nature of ours cannot be escaped from nor added to, and that we simply are where we should be?

Heavenly-endowed nature is what [we] receive, each has an original allotment, which cannot be escaped [from], nor added to.³⁴⁰

天性所受，各有本分，不可逃，亦不可加。

According to Ziporyn, and as I have also repeatedly emphasized here, we must be careful when we encounter such passages, as we have also repeatedly demonstrated. Indeed, he explains:

Guo does not say that one’s determinacy stays always the same, that it does not change; he says explicitly that it cannot be “escaped” or “added to”—both terms that unmistakably point to conscious deliberate activity, attempts to change what one is, acting upon oneself as an agent upon a patient. What is denied here is the transitive sense of “change”—“A changes B”—not the intransitive sense, “A changes.”³⁴¹

Ziporyn further explains that this change is not externally caused, hence we understand why Guo Xiang would say that it can’t be escaped from nor added to, as these things would be external to a thing. Consequently, the change involved here is a change that is reflexive and transforming unto itself. Therefore, something cannot *be changed* by something else in particular, but by virtue of vanishing into its opposite, vanishes unto itself and transforms to itself. Yang Lihua shares this same sentiment,

³³⁹ Guo Xiang Commentary, 33.13. 13G

³⁴⁰ Guo Xiang Commentary, 3.12.3G

³⁴¹ Ziporyn, “Guo Xiang: The Self-So and the Repudiation-Cum-Reaffirmation of Deliberate Action and Knowledge.” 410.

and explains this passage as such:

What Guo Xiang calls heavenly-endowed nature (天性 *tianxing*) isn't any fixed attribute, but rather a source of possible natures. The nature of all things follow their 'wholly received fully formed' (一受成形 *yishou chengxing*), then it permeates their existence endlessly, without the possibility of intervention....Heavenly-endowed nature (天性 *tianxing*) constitutes the limit of all things. Everything cannot go beyond this limit, no matter what. Attempting to overstep their limit is the root cause for men getting confused and lost."³⁴²

Such possible natures continually transform, but in their transformations they are whole, fully formed, and self-right at each moment in time. They change, but they cannot be changed, they mutually interact and form each other but cannot be formed, at least never deliberately, in a linear manner. As such, they cannot exceed the very limit which is changing deliberately; as one cannot deliberately change their nature, even though it is bound to change. Attempting to overstep one's limit happens when one superimposes a certain will toward one's own nature. One should not confuse non-deliberate with non-activity, however. Guo Xiang, in another controversial passage, makes it clear that it is not the same thing:

Ruo of the Northern Sea said, "That oxen and horses have four legs is the Heavenly. The bridle around the horse's head and the ring through the oxen's nose are the Human."³⁴³

北海若曰：「牛馬四足，是謂天；落馬首，穿牛鼻，是謂人。」

In the life of man, can we not use oxen and ride horses? When using oxen and riding horses, can we not pierce [the noses of oxen] and put yokes [around the necks of horses]?

Oxen and horses do not refuse this subjection, because it is suitable to the strength of their heavenly endowment. As long as it is in accord with the heavenly endowment, then even though the ornamentation [of nose rings and yokes] is men's doing, nonetheless, the source is from the heavenly.³⁴⁴

人之生也，可不服牛乘馬乎？服牛乘馬，可不穿落之乎？牛馬不辭穿落者，天命之固當也。苟當乎天命，則雖寄之人事，而本在乎天也。

³⁴² Yang, 郭象"庄子注"研究 (*an Examination of Guo Xiang's Zhuangzi Commentary*). 120

³⁴³ Zhuangzi 17.16.1, quoted in Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. 73. Modified.

³⁴⁴ Guo Xiang Commentary 17.16.1G1-4

According to Tang Yijie, this passage is one of the clear examples of how Guo Xiang deviates from the *Zhuangzi*.³⁴⁵ While this might, exegetically speaking, be true in this passage, and while a discussion on the concordance of both texts is outside our scope, suffice it to say that what Guo Xiang is trying to say here is nonetheless not at all the implausible impression that it might give off. While it may seem that he is endorsing the oppression of oxen and horses, or encouraging a valuation of oxen and horses as inferior to humans, he is actually saying that we are dependent on horses (or at least, at the time),³⁴⁶ as much as they are dependent on us. In other words, it is the very idea of domination, of one thing being more valuable than the other, that he subverts. Such notion of dependence shall be discussed further in the next chapter, but in the meantime, suffice it to say that for Guo Xiang, one cannot simply abandon society and social hierarchies altogether, in as much as one cannot get fixated on them. Thus, the over-arching idea here is to that there is no fixed and unchanging dialectic between what is heavenly or natural, versus what is human. Demonstrating this, Guo Xiang turns the image inside-out, and begs the question—do they depend on us, or do we depend on them? That said, who dominates and who is dominated, then?³⁴⁷

Though Tang Yijie has a different take on the above passage, insisting that it is a consequence of Guo Xiang's philosophy to superimpose on the non-dominating philosophy of the *Zhuangzi*, it is nevertheless worth noting that he also acknowledges that “it is not the natural pattern (*li* 理) that determines the necessary individual nature (*zixing* 自性), rather it is the individual and spontaneous nature (*zixing* 自性) of each thing that determines the necessary emergence and transformation (*shengsheng huahua* 生化化) of things.”³⁴⁸

Yuet-Keung Lo, though I disagree with him on the implications of this type of philosophy,³⁴⁹ provides a very apt description of heaven in Guo Xiang's philosophy. He says that “the naturalization of heaven did not receive a full-fledged

³⁴⁵ Tang Yijie goes as far as to acknowledge that Guo Xiang's conception of “天命之謂性” allows Guo Xiang to justify forceful domination by another to be reduced as the fundamental nature (本性 *benxing*) of something, according to his narrative's needs. See Tang, 郭象与魏晋玄学 (*Guo Xiang and Wei-Jin Xuanxue*). 168

³⁴⁶ Oxen and horses were considered to be very important animals in traditional Chinese culture. Often praised for their hard work and strength, Chinese agriculture were very much dependent on horses and oxen, not to mention the uses for war and transportation as well.

³⁴⁷ Here, it is useful to recall another description of Heaven by Guo Xiang, which was also mentioned earlier. In this passage Guo says that: “The term ‘heaven’ is used to explain that things are what they are spontaneously, and not to mean the blue sky. But someone says that the music of heaven makes all things serve or obey it. Now, heaven cannot even possess itself. How can it possess things? Heaven is the general name for all things. Heaven does not set its mind for or against anything. Who is the master to make things obey? Therefore each thing self-generate and thus has nothing that makes it emerge. This is the Way of Heaven. (以天言之) 所以明其自然也，豈蒼蒼之謂哉！而或者謂天籟役物使從己也。夫天且不能自有，況能有物哉！故天者，萬物之總名也，莫適為天，誰主役物乎？故物各自生而無所出焉，此天道也。” See Guo Xiang Commentary, 2.6.1G11-G15, quoted in Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. 328. modified.

³⁴⁸ Tang, 郭象与魏晋玄学 (*Guo Xiang and Wei-Jin Xuanxue*). 274

³⁴⁹ I outline this more comprehensively in the introduction.

decausalization until Guo Xiang.”³⁵⁰ Indeed, Jiang Limei argues that Guo Xiang that has downplayed the possibility of transcendence originally found in Zhuangzi’s philosophy.³⁵¹ Thus, Lo highlights that Guo’s “flattened heaven” is an important aspect to his repudiation of (linear) causality. In this manner, Lo says:

In the cosmic web of things, every member exists on its own and is equal in its own right; there is no master-servant relationship between things in which the master’s existence justifies that of the servant... More importantly, none can rise above the rest as the master because heaven is flat. In this sense, heaven is also egalitarian and the myriad things are all equal in their membership in heaven.³⁵²

Furthermore, Lo points out this ontological flatness of heaven meant that there could not be any master cause external to all things, and that “lone-transformation also refers to an entity’s interdependent evolution itself.”³⁵³ Indeed, for Guo Xiang, it is mutual dependence and inter-growth (*xiangyin* 相因) that allows for something to be lone-transforming (*duhua*):

The efficacy of intergrowth is best manifested in perfect lone-transformation. What man relies on is heaven and what heaven engenders is lone-transformation. People all take heaven as their father, so they dare not dislike the change of day and night as well as the regulation of summer and winter; they follow heaven and live peacefully with these changes. How much more so for lone-transformation projecting into the realm of mysterious darkness such that one will not let it take its own course? Letting it take its own course, [one should follow] the transformation of life into death as if one would obey the command of fate.³⁵⁴

夫相因之功，莫若獨化之至也。故人之所因者，天也；天之所生者，獨化也。人皆以天為父，故晝夜之變，寒暑之節，猶不敢惡，隨天安之。況乎卓爾獨化，至於玄冥之境，又安得而不任之哉！既任之，則死生變化，惟命之從也。

In sum, Heaven is the term for the totality of things, and because it is composed of the myriad things, it is a collection of things that are mutually dependent and in inter-growth among each other, and so, are ultimately transforming unto themselves. Moreover, it is worth noting here that fate (*ming* 命) comes from Heaven (天 *tian*), yet heaven, that which endows

³⁵⁰ Lo, "Lone-Transformation and Intergrowth: Philosophy and Self-Justification in Guo Xiang's Commentary on the Zhuangzi."371

³⁵¹ Jiang, "The Big and the Great: A Reconstruction of Zhuangzi's Philosophy on Transcendence."

³⁵² Lo, "Lone-Transformation and Intergrowth: Philosophy and Self-Justification in Guo Xiang's Commentary on the Zhuangzi."375

³⁵³ Ibid.376

³⁵⁴ Guo Xiang Commentary 6.9.3G2-6, quoted in *ibid.* 383. 命 "Fate" here is translated by Lo as fate, but lest we confuse this with fatalism, we must remember that it is from which this fate comes from, as discussed in the previous section. Thus, fate here must be understood as something that is also self-so.

individuals with allotment and therefore nature, is not something that is fixed. Only if “heaven” is a fixed metaphysical entity would the apparent fatalism or essentialism of Guo Xiang be dangerous because at that point, nothing else changes. We know, however, that this is not the case. Guo Xiang says:

Heavenly principle is self-so, knowledge does nothing in its midst.

天理自然，知故無為乎其間。³⁵⁵

It is “self-so,” meaning it has no other cause, and is simply spontaneous. Heaven, the objective reality of the world, is an ontological force that has nothing which shapes the universe in a fixed and linear manner, because it is empty.³⁵⁶ Being spontaneous and self-so, it means it’s always changing, and if this is what heaven is, then it must follow that the nature which it endows upon us must also be ever-changing. As Guo Xiang quite straightforwardly describes:

“Heaven” is just a way of saying “what is so of itself, the self-so.” For doing cannot be done by someone “doing” doing. Doing is spontaneously doing; it is self-so. Knowing does not know by someone “doing” knowing. Knowing is spontaneously knowing; it is self-so. As self-so knowing, knowing is not a result of knowing, is unknown, is itself a kind of nonknowing. Being always in this sense a nonknowing, what we call knowing emerges from nonknowing. As self-so doing, doing is not the result of doing, is undone, is itself a kind of nondoing. Being always in this sense a nondoing, what we call doing comes from nondoing. Since doing comes from nondoing, nondoing is always the master. Since knowing comes from nonknowing, nonknowing is always the source. Hence, the Genuine Human Being discards knowledge and thereby knows, does nothing and thereby does. Self-so, she comes to life; sitting and forgetting, she finds herself. It is only for this reason that she is described as eliminating knowledge and discarding doing.³⁵⁷

天者，自然之謂也。夫為為者不能為，而為自為耳；為知者不能知，而知自知耳。自知耳，不知也，

³⁵⁵ Guo Xiang Commentary, 15.4.7G

³⁵⁶ Recall here our discussion on in the introductory section of this work, and the inherent difference of the notion of Heaven in Chinese philosophy. Here, specifically, Guo Xiang’s notion a spontaneous heaven is akin to a force that does not impose an ontologically determined and antecedent form onto nature, in contrast to a teleological force as in the Abrahamic traditions discussed in the introduction.

³⁵⁷ Guo Xiang Commentary, 6.1.2G1-G5, quoted in Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. 188

不知也則知出於不知矣；自為耳，不為也，不為也則為出於不為矣。為出於不為，故以不為為主；知出於不知，故以不知為宗。是故真人遺知而知，不為而為，自然而生，坐忘而得，故知稱絕而為名去也。

Thus, we see heaven as a transformation, ironically, from the bottom up, instead of from the top downward. Such a bottom-up transformation allows the world to transform itself into itself, within itself, yet somehow, it is not the same as it was a moment ago, and will not be the same world in the next moment, because as discussed earlier, transformation necessitates emergence, and vice versa.

Through this inter-penetration and inter-growth (*xiangyin*) we can surmise that the self for Guo Xiang also interpenetrates the world, and is constantly transforming and emergent from the world itself as well. Each self has its own unique nature and unifies with all others, and thereby remains within its allotment (*fen*), despite such allotment being also in a constant flux. One's self is therefore is never exclusive unto itself, and therefore never different. It is distinct, yet everything else is also distinct, therefore it is the same as everything and everyone else. It is unchangeable, in this exact moment, but it will inevitably change, and that is an eternal occurrence—change is constant, what is constant is change. Just as is the structure of Guo Xiang's notion of heaven and causality, so also here, self therefore, is shaped not by an inner agency that comes transcendentally from nowhere, but by things of the world, others that surround and influence it, yet since it is everything else that influences and penetrates the self, then it is ultimately shaped only by itself. Not only does linear causality break down, the very categories of self and other also break down. This, as we shall later on see in the next chapter, is what ultimately allows for an innovative conception of freedom as seen in Guo Xiang's philosophy of *zide*.

CHAPTER THREE: Freedom, Autonomy, and *Zide* 自得

The previous chapter discussed the self and its inherent connection to others and otherness, while it remains unique and singular. This is because the natural tendencies and identities of things are shaped not by an external thing or an overarching source, but are emergent from the interaction and interpenetration of unique selves which are always in the process of change and transformation. Such change and transformation allows the self to interpenetrate other selves, while those other selves also interpenetrate selves that are other than them, and so ultimately transform only within itself. In this manner, the epistemological binary between self and other breaks down. This breakdown is necessary as a significant step to one's own self-realization and freedom, which goes beyond dependence and independence, as well as Isaiah Berlin's formulations of positive and negative liberties.

In Berlin's seminal essay on the *Two Concepts of Liberty*, he provides a powerful critique against the notion of positive liberty on the basis that it superimposes ends on the human being and hence, treats one as a means to an end rather than as ends in themselves. However, Berlin fails to recognize that no one is an "end" removed from all other means – in a network of both humans and non-humans where our actions have consequences which affect each other, we are all ends and means – the dichotomy is moot. Berlin argues:

In the end, men choose between ultimate values; they choose as they do, because their life and thought are determined by fundamental moral categories and concepts that are, at any rate over large stretches of time and, space, a part of their being and thought and sense of their own identity; part of what makes them human.³⁵⁸

But what if those ends, those moral categories and concepts have been pre-determined by external factors?³⁵⁹ Needless to say, it is naïve at best to assume that our thinking and the formation of these moral categories and concepts that every person has—even if she does not impose them on others—exist without conditions causing them to arise. Equally naïve is the implied assumption that rationality is removed from the circumstances that affect how we conceive of the values which we hold dear.

For Berlin, autonomy means that we can govern ourselves and our decisions *contra* outside factors. This is why he

³⁵⁸ Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty." 217

³⁵⁹ While Berlin considers such network of causality and its resulting singularity of experience in passing, he is quick to dismiss the struggle for recognition (as unique and a standard to her own) as a "bitter longing for status," and the reason for why paternalism in Asian and African societies is rampant. See *ibid.* 203. There are now some apparent contradictions between this position and the advocacy for pluralism, which we shall delve more into in the latter part of this chapter.

criticizes those who “retreat to the inner citadel.”³⁶⁰ Since “heteronomy is dependence on outside factors,”³⁶¹ and they cannot control those outside factors, they thus simply choose to escape within and remove themselves from “the empirical, world of causality.”³⁶² While it is not within our scope to provide a comprehensive analysis of Berlin’s critique of these apparent mystics, it would suffice to note that his remark on heteronomy marks a clear distinction from autonomy. This further shows the dichotomous logic that governs his concept of autonomy, where the binary self is something other than the external world.

This chapter, therefore, aims to introduce a concept of freedom and autonomy that transcends such dichotomy between positive and negative liberty, or freedom to and freedom from, respectively. By drawing on the previous chapter’s conception of the non-dichotomous self, we can derive a third conception of freedom which I shall call *freedom in*, which contain elements of both self-determination as well as self-realization, but is not bound by a fixed self or ideal. Though it may sound similar to Berlin’s “retreat to the inner citadel,” it is actually quite the contrary. While Guo Xiang’s conception of the self emerges from a breakdown of (linear) causality, it is also a robust affirmation of the network of cause and effect – of dependence.

Freedom, in this sense, is a realization of the non-dichotomous and non-essentialized self. For Guo Xiang, one who is free is capable of being both fully independent and dependent at the same time, precisely because such a self transcends the subject-object, or internal and external, divide. As such, this chapter will be a discussion on Guo Xiang’s notion of freedom as a radical dynamicity that is therefore contingent to its environment, and yet necessary and unique unto itself. Although it is often the case that self-determination is necessary for self-realization,³⁶³ I show here how in Guo Xiang, he turns this inside out and shows how it is self-realization that is actually necessary for self-determination. To comprehensively flesh out this notion of freedom, I approach the issue in two ways.

The first one is a discussion on independence (*wudai* 無待) and dependence (*youdai* 有待), which argues that dependence is inexorably intertwined achieving independence, as is consistent with Guo Xiang’s *logic of convergence*. The significance of this section lies in showing the idea that a fundamental dependence is required for achieving independence and self-determination, and ultimately freedom. Following this, the second section provides an account of the different dimensions of Guo Xiang’s self-realization (*zide* 自得) or, freedom. Here, I argue that there are mainly three dimensions, namely the positive state of *wuxin* 無心 which is necessary in order to achieve self-realization (*zide*), followed by a section highlighting

³⁶⁰ Ibid. 181-187

³⁶¹ Ibid. 183.

³⁶² Ibid. 183.

³⁶³ I have discussed this in the section on the problem of freedom in Chinese Philosophy, but for a more specific discussion, see also Li, “The Confucian Conception of Freedom.”

the difference and sameness of self-realization (*zide*) itself as manifested by the equality of its differing varieties. I then tackle the notion of being “far-reaching and unfettered” (*xiaoyao* 逍遙) in the last sub-section, and discuss how it is a practice of self-realization (*zide*), such that its limits are made apparent. Finally, I derive, from all this, Guo Xiang’s notion of freedom: *freedom in*, which I also refer to as “dependence-based autonomy.” I argue that this denotes a kind of autonomy that is based on depending on one’s own environment in order to realize oneself (*zide*), be autonomous, and thereby become a self-determining agent. In particular, I focus on its epistemological nature as well as potential for a contemporary understanding of freedom and autonomy. By doing so, I demonstrate how Guo Xiang provides a holistic account of freedom by highlighting the emergent and singular nature of one’s placement in the world’s network of causality.

“Freedom in,” therefore, is based on achieving self-determination through realizing one’s self, not through some form of discovery, but rather it is the realization, even fulfilment, of the singular and inter-connected self, as owner of its actions, swallowed by and swallowing its environment. In this manner, autonomy and self-determination are achieved only through radical dependence, allowing it to self-organize in its singularity and inter-penetrative nature.

It is impossible for the self to exist in isolation, as was shown in the previous chapter. As such, its thinking and agency cannot arise from nowhere. However, this does not mean that one’s self and agency will arise from a particular source either, as was shown in the first main chapter. Rather, one’s own self, thought, and agency arise from the world itself, in a dialectical relationship of being released unto the world itself. In other words, freedom and therefore autonomy, or in Guo Xiang’s articulation, self-realization (*zide*), is independence from one’s environment inasmuch as it is, dialectically speaking, dependence on one’s environment.

As such, understanding this notion of self-realization requires that we delve into Guo Xiang’s conceptions of independence (*wudai*) and dependence (*youdai*).

3.1 Independence (*wudai* 無待) and Dependence (*youdai* 有待)

Independence (*wudai* 無待) and dependence (*youdai* 有待) are central concepts in Guo Xiang’s philosophical enterprise. Scholars such as Liu Xiaogan, however, note that “the *Zhuangzi* does not have anything known as independence (*wudai*), and although there is dependence (*youdai*), it also still isn’t a philosophical category. Taking dependence (*youdai*) and

independence (*wudai*), as philosophical categories is not of the *Zhuangzi*, but of the commentary of Guo Xiang”³⁶⁴ If, therefore, Guo Xiang felt the need to superimpose these concepts on Zhuangzi’s philosophical system, it is because they are core conceptions to hold together the philosophical enterprise that he had conceived of.

Indeed, the *Zhuangzi* never mentions *wudai*, and there are only three passages where it mentions *youdai*. While two of these pertain to life and death, and one is directly about causality, it is as Liu Xiaogan claims: they aren’t philosophical categories. Nonetheless, Guo Xiang’s commentary posits a philosophical interpretation to these terms.

In this section thus, I shall closely look at one of the direct mentions of *youdai*, which pertains to the topic of life and death, not only for the sake of brevity, but also because it taps onto the concept of having no deliberate heart-mind (*wuxin*) which we shall later learn is an integral concept for Guo Xiang’s notion of self-realization (自得 *zide*), and autonomy. After which, I look at the second appearance of the Penumbra passage in the *Zhuangzi* text, and how Guo Xiang again superimposes the dialectical relationship of dependence (*youdai*) and independence (*wudai*) as mutually necessary philosophical categories. Lastly, I then look at two other commentarial passages from the 1st chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, where Guo Xiang discusses dependence (*youdai*) and independence (*wudai*) in greater detail, and elaborates on them as philosophical conceptions. From a hermeneutic survey of these engagements, we shall be able to understand the importance of dependence (*youdai*) and independence (*wudai*) with regard to understanding self-realization (*zide*), and freedom.

3.1.1 The Great Confucius, living and dying each day and night

In this passage, Yan Hui inquires about how, even when he does the same things in the same way as Confucius does them, he cannot fathom why people are drawn to Confucius even when he does nothing. Below is Confucius’ answer, followed by Guo Xiang’s commentaries by the line:

"Ah," said Confucius, "we had best look into this! There is no grief greater than the death of the heart-mind - beside it, the death of the body is a minor matter.

仲尼曰：「惡！可不察與！夫哀莫大於心死，而人死亦次之。」

Now the heart-mind regards death as death, so it immediately experiences its death; the immediacy of its death,

³⁶⁴ Liu Xiaogan quoted in Yang, 郭象"庄子注"研究 (*an Examination of Guo Xiang's Zhuangzi Commentary*).136-137. Parentheses mine.

is due to grieving the loss of itself.

When there is no grief, one is himself. When there is grief, then it is the death of the heart-mind. So, [this] grief is greatest.

夫心以死為死，乃更速其死；其死之速，由哀以自喪也。無哀則已，有哀則心死者，乃哀之大也。

The sun rises out of the east, sets at the end of the west, and each one of the ten thousand things moves side by side with it.

日出東方而入於西極，萬物莫不比方，

All this can be seen.

皆可見也。

Creatures that have eyes and feet must depend on it to complete their labor.

有目有趾者，待是而後成功，

Eyes complete the labor of seeing, feet complete the labor of walking

目成見功，足成行功也。

When it comes forth, they appear; when it sets, they disappear.

是出則存，是入則亡。

It is simply due to not being able to see it that it disappears, ultimately [meaning that] it does not disappear.

直以不見為亡耳，竟不亡。

For all the ten thousand things it is so. [Their] death is dependent on something, [their] life is dependent on something.

萬物亦然，有待也而死，有待也而生。

Depending on the hidden is called death, depending on the manifest is called life. Ultimately thus, nothing [really] dies or lives.

待隱謂之死，待顯謂之生，竟無死生也。

Having received this one complete physical form, I hold on to it, without changing, in this way waiting for the end [of my life].

吾一受其成形，而不化以待盡，

As [physical] being is unable to transform and become nonbeing, thus [as one soon as] anything receives any complete physical form, there will be no time when its transformations are finished.³⁶⁵

夫有不得變而為無，故一受成形，則化盡無期也。

I move in conformity to all things,

效物而動，

He is spontaneously without a deliberate heart-mind,

自無心也。

day and night without break,

日夜無隙，

So he eternally changes anew.

恆化新也。

but I do not know what the end will be.

而不知其所終；

He does not regard death as death.

不以死為死也。

Like smoke, my bodily form takes shape.

³⁶⁵ What this means is that nothing goes out of existence, but just transforms from one existence to another forever.

薰然其成形，

Like smoke it spontaneously forms; How could any doing have to be added to this?

薰然自成，又奚為哉！

I understand that fate cannot be regulated beforehand; I proceed in this way, day after day.³⁶⁶

知命不能規乎其前，丘以是日徂。

He is not bound to the past, and follows along wherever transformations go, so [he lives and dies] day after day.³⁶⁷

不係於前，與變俱往，故日徂。

A philosophically packed passage, it tackles many core concepts in Guo Xiang's philosophy. The heart-mind (心 *xin*), according to Guo Xiang, experiences death immediately. By this, he means that by recognizing death, it dies; it dies due to grieving its own loss. From the previous chapter we know that the death of the heart-mind here refers to contemplating on why, and trying to rationalize causality, which in this particular case, was why Confucius was so popular and loved, even when he did nothing. In other words, the death of one's 心 *xin*, as that which exercises the act of cognition, is effectively the loss of oneself precisely because it is a contemplation of a lack which effectively makes that lack real because it goes beyond itself to look at itself, it goes beyond its 分 *fen*. Living, therefore, is all about complete dependence within the process of the system. We see this in the following line where Guo Xiang seems to strikingly touch on the theme of perception in its relation to reality. While the theme of dependence and causality is present even in the original *Zhuangzi* text, only in Guo Xiang's commentary do we see the dynamic of perception and reality being raised. Interestingly, Guo Xiang both affirms and denies perception as reality. When he talks about perception and action as completing reality, because it is simply what we see or walk on that is real to us, the logical consequence is also that things die only when we stop perceiving them. As such, nothing ultimately ever perishes—we only feel and think that they do. This is what Guo Xiang means when he says “there will be no time when its transformations are finished.” He then goes back to Confucius and discusses how Confucius deals with this reality, going on to explain that Confucius doesn't deliberately change, and is a mere receptacle of the world's fleeting moments, therefore constantly transforming and dying every single day. He has no heart-mind (which is the ideal state, since

³⁶⁶ Zhuangzi 21.20.1-11, quoted in Burton Watson, "The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu". Modified.

³⁶⁷ Guo Xiang Commentary 21.20.1G(1-2)—11G

grieving one's heart-mind acknowledges its existence and therefore in that instance, one loses himself), so he is able to move in conformity to all things. Since those things are constantly changing, then so does he. However, he does not regard death as death, unlike one who has a heart-mind, for one who has no heart-mind passes on no judgment for what is real or true. One who has no heart-mind does not ruminate. His body forms spontaneously, so he follows that spontaneity, not being bound to the past by deliberately trying to change the future. Confucius thus simply follows along wherever transformations go. In this manner, he lives by the day, living and dying at each rising and setting of the sun. This is thus the image that Guo Xiang provides us in order to show what real dependence, complete dependence is: the complete lack of a deliberate heart-mind (無心 *wuxin*)—we shall delve into this more later, but for now, suffice it to say that this lack is the complete embodiment of the world's change and transformation, of life and death.

Ultimately thus, having no heart-mind—being prisoner to no desire or external truth, becoming free of trouble, and thus independent—is all about dependence and causality. As was seen in the first chapter, Guo Xiang maintains that nothing comes from nothing, and everything comes from everything (物生之自得; 自生; 獨生; 自化; 獨化). This is so with human agency as well—there is nothing in this world that can arise from absolute nothingness, or have no cause at all, for on the contrary, and as discussed in the first main chapter, everything causes everything else, and precisely for this reason, that each thing is a convergence of all others, making each the cause for its own self: dependence and independence converged.

3.1.2 The Penumbra and Shadow Retold

Guo Xiang does not repeatedly mention these concepts over and over, and there are few passages where he discusses it in detail, but they are nevertheless philosophically charged. More specifically, in this next passage, we see him linking the notion of *wudai* 無待 onto the text's mention of *youdai* 有待, despite the text only using the latter, and as merely a normative rather than a philosophical term. The second re-telling of the story of the Penumbra and Shadow in the *Zhuangzi* goes as follows:

Penumbra said to Shadow, "A little while ago you were looking down and now you're looking up, a little while ago your hair was bound up and now it's hanging loose, a little while ago you were sitting and now

you're standing up, a little while ago you were walking and now you're still - why is this?"³⁶⁸

眾罔兩問於景曰：「若向也俯而今也仰，向也括（撮）而今也被髮，向也坐而今也起，向也行而今也止，何也？」

Shadow said, "Quibble, quibble! Why bother asking such a petty question?"

景曰：「搜搜也，奚稍問也！」

Movement is self-so, there is no reason to inquire about such a petty question.

運動自爾，無所稍問。

I do them without knowing how or why.

予有而不知其所以。

Self-so, thus [are things for which we] cannot know the reason why.

自爾，故不知所以。

I'm the shell of the cicada, the skin of the snake - something that seems to be but isn't.

予，蜎甲也，蛇蛻也，似之而非也。

The Shadow resembles a form yet is not that form.

影似形而非形。

In firelight or sunlight I draw together, in darkness or night I disappear.

火與日，吾屯也；陰與夜，吾代也。

Is there not an other on which I depend?

彼吾所以有待邪？

And that other is further dependent on others!

而況乎以有待者乎！

³⁶⁸ Zhuangzi 27.13, quoted in Burton Watson, "The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu".

It moves yet there is an extreme limit to it. Thus, if this is what is said to be dependent, it follows that it is ultimately independent, and so the natural coherence (*li*) of lone-transformation is evident.

推而極之，則今之（所謂）有待者（率）（至）於無待，而獨化之理彰（矣）。

If that other comes, then I come with them; if they go, then I go with them; if they come with the Powerful Yang, then I come with the Powerful Yang. But this Powerful Yang - why ask questions about it?³⁶⁹

彼來則我與之來，彼往則我與之往，彼強陽則我與之強陽。強陽者又何以有問乎？」

Since the power of Yang moves around [them], they simply come and go in accordance with each other. There is no intention [behind this], so it cannot be inquired about.³⁷⁰

直自強陽運動，相隨往來耳，無意，不可問也。

The power of Yang is manifest in the shadow and umbra, and these, consequently, are also dependent on their source. According to Guo, they all spontaneously spring up and follow the emergence of the other. This is because if we trace the source from which the shadow is dependent upon, it will be a dependence *ad infinitum*, so in the end, everything depends on everything. Guo Xiang then takes the narrative to its natural logical consequence, that since everything follows everything, then all things are therefore lone-transforming (獨化 *duhua*). In the end, there is no difference between dependence (*youdai*) and independence (*wudai*). Now the Shadow explains that he can only do whatever he does by means of following or being in accordance with his source, hence dependent and limited. The Penumbra then, in its relation and dependence to the shadow, also acts in accordance to that source. Yet that source on which Shadow and Penumbra depend on, is further dependent on another, and so on and so forth. This is why Guo Xiang says that “if this is what is said to be dependent, it follows that it is ultimately independent.” As was also already discussed in the first chapter, this dialectical inter-causality is what it means to lone-transform in one’s very own independence. Ultimately, this causal inter-dependence is the very condition *sine qua non* of one’s independence. However, this independence only emerges from an unknowing generativity, for it is precisely in performing and following one’s role (one’s own 分 *fen*) at that given instant in the process of this systematic inter-causation, without knowing why, that one fulfills perfect dependence, and therefore spontaneous independence.

³⁶⁹ Zhuangzi 27.14.1-7, quoted in *ibid.* Modified

³⁷⁰ Guo Xiang Commentary, 27.14.1G-7G

3.1.3 On the Epistemology of Dependence as Independence

In the following two passages from the 1st chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, Guo Xiang explains independence (*wudai*), and how dependence (*you dai*) precedes being far-reaching and unfettered³⁷¹ (*xiaoyao* 逍遙). Meanwhile, this term is often considered as the placeholder for the notion of freedom in the *Zhuangzi*. While more on this shall be discussed later, it is sufficient for now to note that in these two passages, Guo Xiang straightforwardly shows that dependence (*you dai*) is the first step towards achieving the independence (*wudai*), and indeed self-realization (*zide*) that is first necessary for one's agency and actions to become far-reaching and unfettered (*xiaoyao*).

In the commentary on Zhuangzi's differentiation of small and big consciousness, Guo Xiang elaborates on the epistemological nature of independence (*wudai*), and how one's own freedom depends on that epistemological comfort of becoming one with one's own lot (*fen* 分), or in this case, sphere (*fang* 方). The passage is as follows:

Each thing has its own nature, each nature has its own limits. They are like years and understanding, how could they be things one could match up to by striving and wishing! From here onward until we get to (the section about) Liezi, Zhuangzi successively shows how, according to whether his years and understanding are great or small, everyone trusts their own particular sphere, and how nobody so far has been able to get the better of another on this basis. *Zhuangzi then rounds it off with a description of the independent person who is lost unto otherness, forgets about his own self, and vanishes into the multitude of differences [that is immediate to him];* who, since the different spheres are all equally attained, has neither achievement nor name [for] himself. For this reason, he who unites small and great is one for whom there is neither small nor great. If one cares about small and great, then even when comparing the great Peng to the quail, the official to (Liezi) riding the wind, he is still to an equal degree entangled in things, simply. He who equates death and life is one for whom there is neither death nor life. If one cares about death or life, then even when comparing the great Chun-tree to the cicada, Peng Zu to the morning mushroom, they are still equal in dying prematurely, simply. Therefore, he who roams where there is neither small nor great is one who suffers no exhaustion. He who is unconscious of whether he is not dying or not living is one without limits. For, just as in being far-reaching and unfettered, if one is attached to certain

³⁷¹ Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. *passim*.

spheres, then though one is released and free to roam, there will still be occasions when one suffers exhaustion.

One is not yet capable of independence.³⁷²

物各有性，性各有極，皆如年知，豈跂尚之所及哉！自此已下至於列子，歷舉年知之大小，各信其方，未有足以相傾者也。然後統以無待之人，遺彼忘我，冥此群異，異方同得而我無功名。是故統小大者，無小無大者也；苟有乎大小，則雖有大鵬之與斥鴳，宰官之與禦風，同為累物耳。齊死生者，無死無生者也；苟有乎死生，則雖大椿之與蟪蛄，彭祖之與朝菌，均於短折耳。故遊於無小無大者，無窮者也；冥乎不死不生者，無極者也。若夫逍遙而繫於有方，則雖放之使遊而有所窮矣，未能無待也。

Guo Xiang highlights how each thing cannot deliberately become “great”, as one’s own nature and therefore limit, is like years and understanding—they cannot be forced. While here it seems to simply explain what Zhuangzi meant when talking about the small being unable to force itself to become great, Guo Xiang takes a slight turn from this and says that, ultimately, there really isn’t any difference between small and great, for whichever one it is, it is simply one’s own particular sphere (*fang* 方). In this manner, all are equal in simply being unable to escape this particularity of situation and circumstance. As such, for the independent person (*wudai zhi ren* 無待之人) there is neither small nor great, simply a sphere (*fang*) which ought to be attained. Since all spheres (*fang*) are equally attained for him, depending on each one of them particularly and singularly, he ultimately unites himself with the other, or others, and vanishes into the multitude of differences. Notice here how Guo Xiang parallels the words that (*bi* 彼) and this (*ci* 此), far and near. What this seems to convey is that the independent person unites with both near and far, and by forgetting himself, reaches everywhere. He converges among them equally and since there is an absence of deliberate effort, then neither does he deliberately strive for “greatness” such as fame or acclaim. What this means is that because there is no force of effort, he is not entangled in things that are external to his sphere (*fang*). This lack of attachment, however, is not to be confused as complete lack. As had already been discussed in the previous chapters, Guo Xiang unfailingly advocates for attaching oneself simply to one’s lot (*fen*) or sphere (*fang*), and completely detaching from that which is external to it. In this manner, comparison becomes impossible, and so difference between great and small, life and death, also disappears. Without such comparison or deliberate effort into something external to one’s own sphere, then there is no exhaustion, no limits—just the sphere. In the end, this full epistemological dependence onto one’s

³⁷² Guo Xiang Commentary, 1.5.1G1-7, quoted in Arendrup, "The First Chapter of Guo Xiang's Commentary to Zhuang Zi: A Translation and Grammatical Analysis." 329-331. Modified.

own sphere is what it means to be an independent person (*wudai zhi ren* 無待之人), and if this is not granted, then becoming far-reaching and unfettered (*xiaoyao*) means nothing.

Yang Lihua takes this even more literally and notes that: “From the perspective specific to survival, the ‘independence’ that Guo Xiang talks about is no different for all ordinary people, and the various needs of food, shelter and clothes are also [things that] we cannot go a day without.”³⁷³ While seemingly overly-simplistic, this analogy is quite apt, as it captures the theme of non-knowing that Guo Xiang repeatedly emphasizes. Because we do not think about these basic necessities as we depend on them, we go about our daily lives more freely. In one’s hunger, lack of a home to rest in, or lack of any basic comfort, one cannot be “far-reaching and unfettered (*xiaoyao*),” or in a more basic scenario, one cannot be expected to go about as leisurely with what one ought to go about with in his or her daily life.

The complexities of the *logic of convergence* aside, this description of independence by Yang Lihua is perhaps the closest description there currently is to Guo Xiang’s notion of freedom. We often think about freedom as the height of independence, and indeed, in the sense of self-determination, it is so; but what is the self in that process of determination? Dependent, Guo Xiang would say. For Guo, not only is dependence and inter-dependence complementary or non-contradictory with independence, it is *necessary*. Moreover, the necessity of dependence for Guo Xiang does not come at the cost of, but it’s the means for, independence, as well as the spontaneity that comes with it, as is due to its non-knowing quality.

Guo Xiang elaborates more on this theme of non-knowing in the following passage, where he expounds on the notions of independence and dependence in greater depth for a second a time in the 1st chapter of the *Zhuangzi*. The passage is as follows:

“Heaven and earth” is just a blanket term used to indicate all beings. It is all individual beings that form the very substance of heaven and earth, and it is each being’s self-so that aligns true to itself. “Self-so” means what is so of itself, without being done by anyone or for any purpose. Thus, Peng’s ability to fly high and the sparrow’s ability to stay low, the great tree’s ability to last long and the mushroom’s ability to perish quickly, all these are done spontaneously, all are self-so; they are beyond the ability of anyone’s particular activity. Because these are self-so capabilities not done by anyone or for any purpose, they are aligned true [to themselves]. Thus, to “chariot upon what is true both to heaven and to earth” means to follow along with the character of each thing. To ride

³⁷³ Yang, 郭象“庄子注”研究 (*an Examination of Guo Xiang's Zhuangzi Commentary*). 142

“atop the back-and-forth of the six atmospheric breaths” means to wander in the paths of transformation and change. If you travel forth like this, where can you go that will bring you to a halt? If you can ride upon whatever you happen to encounter, what will you have to depend on? This is how the person of supreme force, who *vanishingly unifies self and other, wanders far and unfettered*. If you are depending on some particular conditions, even if you have the grace and ease of a Liezi, you will still be unable to travel when there is no wind. Such people can only wander far and unfettered after they attain that which they depend on—and how much more so is this the case for Peng? It is only one who can vanish into things and follow along with the great process of transformation who can be truly free of dependence and thus constantly unobstructed. And is it only she who is thereby freed of obstruction? No! She also complies with all dependent things, allowing each to attain what it depends on. Since they do not lose what they depend on, they too are joined with the Great Openness. So although I cannot make the dependent and the independent the same as each other, the fact that each rests securely in its own character, its heavenly mechanism unfolding of itself, receiving it but not knowing how or why—this is something I cannot make different among them. And if even the independent is ultimately no different from the dependent, how much less could there be any difference between the larger and smaller among the dependent?³⁷⁴

天地者，萬物之總名也。天地以萬物為體，而萬物必以自然為正。自然者，不為而自然者也。故大鵬之能高，斥鴳之能下，椿木之能長，朝菌之能短，凡此皆自然之所能，非為之所能也。不為而自能，所以為正也。故乘天地之正者，即是順萬物之性也；禦六氣之辯者，即是遊變化之途也；如斯以往，則何往之有窮哉！所禦斯乘，又將惡乎待哉！此乃至德之人玄同彼我者之逍遙也。苟有待焉，則雖列子之輕妙，猶不能以無風而行，故必得其所待，然後逍遙耳，而況大鵬乎！夫唯與物冥而循大變者，為能無待而常通，豈獨自通而已哉！又順有待者，使不失其所待，所待不失，則同於大通矣。故有待無待，無所不能齊也；至於各安其性，天機自張，受而不知，則無所不能殊也。夫無待猶不足以殊有待，況有待者之巨細乎！

While Guo Xiang simply begins with an explanation of the term “heaven and earth” here, he goes on to explain the

³⁷⁴ Guo Xiang 1.7.13G1-9, quoted in Arendrup, "The First Chapter of Guo Xiang's Commentary to Zhuang Zi: A Translation and Grammatical Analysis." 339-340. Modified

concreteness of this ontological system. Again, he reiterates that the natures of all beings are simply self-so (自然 *ziran*) and that is why they align true to themselves (為正 *weizheng*). In other words they are beyond deliberate activity or purpose, they simply follow along their own characters, going with all changes and transformations. Guo here distinguishes between the kind of dependence which is a vanishing into things, and the kind of dependence which is linear, in order to clarify his point that it is the former kind which allows one to *follow along*, thereby depend on, the *great* transformations, which is to say, the transformations of all things. Thus, the person of supreme force (至德之人 *zhi de zhi ren*) simply relies on all this, hence unifying himself with “other” (*bi* 彼). This reliance, this dependence, is the only way to truly becoming far-reaching and unfettered (*xiaoyao*) without exhaustion. Ultimately thus, there is no difference between independence (*wudai*) and dependence (*youdai*) for only through such dependence—being at rest with one’s nature, letting it unfold itself, and receiving without knowing why—can one become truly independent. On this passage, Yang Lihua emphasizes the epistemological angle and notes that:

All are constrained by their own boundaries’ limits, between each other they all live and understand things based on their respective natural lot (性分). They cannot communicate with each other, only those who have surpassed *discrimination* (分别) and *relative opposition* (对待) can reach the existential condition/realm of all beings. In real independence (无待) there is no difference between independence (无待) and dependence (有待) because if the independent (无待) cannot fully eliminate the boundary between independence (无待) and dependence (有待) then he (the independent) will still relatively oppose (对待) and discriminate (分别), thus becoming dependent (有待者)。³⁷⁵

We see here two levels of being dependent. On one level, dependence means that one depends on a particular thing, as noted in the original passage above, and this is a kind of dependence which discriminates and differentiates—not because one acknowledges the singularity of his own lot, but because—he *compares*. This is a diachronic kind of dependence. On another and ultimate level, however, there is the ideal kind of dependence which is what is referred to as vanishing into things, and this has no difference with independence, one that does not discriminate or differentiate, because there is only the singularity of his own lot, so he is therefore unconscious of any “other” and is ultimately united with his encounters of those “other” beings, since all change and transformation mean that encountering and inter-causality is

³⁷⁵ Yang, 郭象“庄子注”研究 (*an Examination of Guo Xiang's Zhuangzi Commentary*).143

inevitable, as has been discussed. The absence of deliberate knowing, and hence comparison, is thus self-so, and is the beginning of true dependence, and ultimately, independence. For Guo Xiang, thus, knowing and understanding itself also has two kinds: deliberate and nondeliberate, and the latter is one that simply depends on whichever it encounters, hence becoming self-so.

While Guo Xiang rejects dependence, causality, and knowing, on a diachronic level, he acknowledges their existence on an absolutely synchronic level. By this, I mean a kind of synchronicity which has diachronic dependences, causalities, and knowledges implicit in it. Taking all the members of a whole as one's constitution, one becomes the whole itself, and becoming the whole itself, one becomes singular. The same is true for ultimate independence that springs forth from radical dependence. Knowledge for Guo Xiang is thus dependent on a singularity of circumstances, and because those circumstances are interconnected to all the others, it is always transforming, and hence, always re-emerging as spontaneous and self-so. This is also evident in the following passage of the *Zhuangzi* with Guo Xiang's comments:

Understanding has something which it depends on before it can be accurate, and that which it depends on is never fixed.³⁷⁶

夫知有所待而後當，其所待者特未定也。

He who understands nothing he [definitively] approves of and nothing he [definitively] disapproves of,³⁷⁷ therefore he must depend [on something]. But as for him who relies on heaven for living, he encounters things and is in accord [with them]. This dependence therefore has no fixture.³⁷⁸

夫知者未能無可無不可，故必有待也。若乃任天而生者，則遇物而當也。有待則無定也。

What this means is that understanding has two levels as well. At a more basic level, knowledge has a direction of its act, and knowing cannot but have a particular position that one can hold. However, there is another level where understanding is a kind of dependence that makes one able to be in accord with whatever what one encounters: when dependence has no fixture. This latter kind is absolute because it depends not on any one thing, but on everything by means of depending on these ever-changing encounters. By being absolute, it has no linear pre-determination, and there

³⁷⁶ Zhuangzi 6.2.2-3, quoted in Burton Watson, "The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu". Modified.

³⁷⁷ “無可無不可” is a phrase which Guo Xiang borrows from the *Analects*, 18:8

³⁷⁸ Guo Xiang Commentary 6.2.2G(1-2)—3G

is no one thing that determines it or that it determines, but rather it is both dependent on and depended on by ever-changing moments which are ultimately inter-connected with everything. That is why Guo Xiang says one who relies on heaven simply goes in accordance with everything he encounters, being dependent on whatever is appropriate for the circumstance. We often think that one's true realization, that is, to be truly one's self, when we are independent. Social psychologists often refer to this phenomenon as authenticity, the state of being one's true and core self. Guo Xiang, however, tells that the true and core self is actually dependent on the factors around it. There is no inherent agency that is truly at the core of our identities, no fixed "I" (wo 我), but that does not mean that independence, which is integral to self-realization, is not possible. It simply means that in Guo Xiang's *logic of convergence*, independence is dependence in its radical or ultimate level, and vice versa. It is in this sense, and in the context of an ever-changing world, that Guo Xiang conceives of what I have called "dependence-based autonomy." In this manner, moreover, realization, as well as its rightness and truth, has no fixture—it is self-so (*ziran*).

3.2 Dimensions of Zide 自得

This kind of self-so rightness that is dependent on whatever it encounters, finding its singular fulfilment in its singular and unique circumstance is indeed the central theme of Guo Xiang's work. The historical background that we have discussed in this work earlier is testament to how consistent his methodological framework was with his philosophical enterprise. Indeed, his work was meant to be both a criticism and rehabilitation of both the Confucian values in government, which was abused and used as an excuse for nepotism and corruption, as well as the growing trend of Daoist tendencies for seclusion and escapism, championed by the likes of Ji Kang and Ruan Ji who, as Wang Xiaoyi notes,³⁷⁹ acted in arrogance and extravagance—promoting alcoholism and nudity—tendencies which swept the upper-class intellectuals of the time. Guo does this through his *logic of convergence* that draws from his ontological framework, which combines being and nothingness, one and many, self and others, and indeed dependence and independence. This convergence is also the function of self-realization (自得 *zide*). In this section therefore, I argue that self-realization (*zide*) has two dimensions, being 無心 *wuxin* and 逍遙 *xiaoyao*.

3.2.1 The Spontaneity of Wuxin 無心

無心 *wuxin* is an important concept in Daoist sagehood. Though it does not appear in the *Daodejing* and only appears

³⁷⁹ Wang, "郭象历史哲学发微 (on Guo Xiang's Philosophy of History)." 142

five times in the *Zhuangzi*, it emphasizes the release from value judgments and even an identity or sense of self, as the heart-mind (*xin* 心) is often considered as the seat of consciousness. While it is beyond the scope of this study to have a discussion on the nuanced notion of the heart-mind,³⁸⁰ it is fair to say that this understanding of 無心 *wuxin* from the classical Daoist texts has an emphasis on heart-mind (*xin* 心), that is, on its harms and the need for its removal. While the concept was not as prominent in classical Daoist texts, however, Jia Jinhua argues³⁸¹ that it is likely due to the dialectical influences between Buddhism and Daoism that *wuxin* gained more prominence, and that Guo Xiang was definitely aware of the Buddhist texts that deal with it at the time. In spite of the similarities, however, Jia acknowledges that there is a difference between the two notions of *wuxin*. While the Buddhist *wuxin* is meant “to awaken all human beings to realize the empty nature of their existence and to transcend the mundane cycle of life and death,”³⁸² Jia says that Guo Xiang takes on a different face because “his theory of liberation is never separated from sociopolitical concern.”³⁸³

In highlighting Guo Xiang’s syncretic philosophy thus, the meaning of *wuxin* for Guo Xiang according to Jia is “to take up social responsibility and engage with political affairs while at the same time keeping a spontaneous and detached mind.”³⁸⁴ She further explains that:

while the sage engaged in social affairs, governed the empire, benefited people, and established merits and virtues, he also understood that merit, fame, and power were just like floating clouds, and therefore he was able to keep a detached, liberated mind, or in Guo’s words, ‘no-mind’ (*wuxin*). In this way, he reached the unification of officialdom and eremitism.³⁸⁵

In spite of being able to highlight Guo Xiang’s two-pronged enterprise, however, Jia does not go far enough and ultimately does not appropriately capture Guo Xiang’s *logic of convergence*. The loss of heart-mind (*wuxin*) in Guo is not detachment nor liberation *from* anything, but rather is more akin to an attachment to everything and no one single thing. It is not a movement away from, but *into* something. As opposed to emphasizing the role of the heart-mind (*xin*), the key to

³⁸⁰ Rošker explains this term and says that “as ancient Chinese believed that the heart was the center of human cognition, the notion of *xin* is most commonly translated as “heart-mind” in philosophical discourses. This understanding was determined by the absence of the contrast between cognitive (representative ideas, reasoning, beliefs) and affective (sensation, feelings, desires, emotions) states.” See Jana Rošker, “Epistemology in Chinese Philosophy,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018).

³⁸¹ Jinhua Jia, “Redefining the Ideal Character: A Comparative Study between the Concept of Detachment in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā and Guo Xiang’s Theory of Eremitism at Court,” *Dao* 14, no. 4 (2015).

³⁸² Ibid. 563

³⁸³ Ibid. 563

³⁸⁴ Ibid. 554

³⁸⁵ Ibid. 554

understanding Guo's notion of *wuxin* is to understand his ontology of nothingness (無 *wu*).³⁸⁶ Indeed, nothingness (*wu*) in Guo Xiang is related to all its other suffixes or all other 無-X (i.e. 無為, 無往, 無用, 無知, etc.) and to the ontology of nothingness itself, which is inexorably linked to self-so (*ziran*) or 自-X.³⁸⁷

Having no deliberate mind . . . [means] not only to discard right and wrong, but also to discard this discarding.

They are discarded and again discarded, until no-discarding is reached; only then do we have nothing discarded and nothing not- discarded, and right and wrong vanish of themselves.³⁸⁸

[...] 莫若無心，既遣是非，又遣其遣。遣之又遣之以至於無遣，然後無遣無不遣而是非自去矣。

It is not just that nothing is true or absolute, but everything is true and absolute. To discard discarding itself means that nothingness is not a full-stop. It is a negation of negation, wherein one takes as true whatever one encounters at that given moment, not that one takes nothing as true. In this manner, the binary of right and wrong, or true and false, naturally just vanishes of themselves. Again, this is not because everything is wrong, or everything is false, but exactly the opposite. In discarding the discarding, each thing is right, each thing is true. For instance, below is a famed passage on emotion and mourning in the Confucian *Lunyu* that Guo Xiang comments on:

When Yan Yuan [Yan Hui] died, the Master wailed with such profound grief that his disciples said, “How profoundly you feel!” “Do I feel such profound emotion? If I did not feel such profound feeling for this man, for whom would I feel it?”

顏淵死。子哭之慟。從者曰。子慟矣。子曰。有慟乎。非夫人之爲慟而誰爲慟。

³⁸⁶ This is why although Jia adopts the more commonly Buddhist translation of “no-mind,” I base my translation on Ziporyn’s translation, into “having no deliberate heart-mind,” or a parallel one of “being without deliberate heart-mind.” That said, Lynn’s translation of “being free of self-conscious mind” also emphasizes the lack of direction rather than the mind’s emptiness itself, thereby being able to capture the meaning of this term in Guo Xiang. However, I do not follow Lynn’s translation except when directly quoting him as the use of the term “free” might confuse the narrative in this chapter. Whenever translation into these phrases prove too be awkward, however, I have chosen to simply transliterate for the sake of contextual clarity.)

³⁸⁷ Other than the aforementioned instances in earlier chapters where nothingness (無 *wu*) and self-so (*ziran* 自然) converge, the following are additional examples as to how Guo Xiang thinks this is the case both ontologically and epistemologically: 「實各自為，故無不為」 See Guo Xiang Commentary, 25.49.11G; 「今未知者皆不知所以知而自知矣，生者〔皆〕不知所以生而自生矣。」 See Guo Xiang Commentary, 2.8.21G2

³⁸⁸ Guo Xiang 2.13.1G5-6, quoted in Ziporyn, *The Penumbra Unbound: The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang*. 117.

As others wailed, he too wailed, and as others felt profound emotion, he too felt it, for, utterly impartial, he transformed himself in step with others.³⁸⁹

人哭亦哭。人慟亦慟。蓋無情者與物化也。

Just as it is with truth, being impartial or having “no emotion” (無情 *wuqing*) simply means having no one emotion, and simply transforming oneself with others. Transforming himself with others, he feels every emotion that others feel, so as others wail, he too wails, and feel just as profoundly as those others. This is what Guo Xiang ultimately means when he repeatedly mentions that the sage vanishes into (*xuanming* 玄冥) things. It is not complete detachment, but a complete and full attachment to whatever one encounters, and to then be attached to the next feeling just as fully. Just as with discarding right and wrong, as well feeling profoundly as the definition of being or having “no emotion” (*wuqing*), Guo Xiang’s notion of *wuxin* similarly cannot mean to simply be the detachment from this or that feeling, but the detaching of detaching itself.

Guo Xiang also mentions *wuxin* several times in his commentary on the *Lunyu*. From what we know of the text, the following passage is perhaps the closest to a definition that we can get as to his notion of *wuxin* as found in his commentary of the Confucian classic:

The Master said, “In my relation to others, whom do I blame, whom praise? If there is any that may be praised, there is a way to verify it, that is, by recourse to the common folk, for it was by recourse to them that the Three Dynasties were conducted by the straight and proper Dao.”

子曰：吾之於人。誰毀誰譽。如有可譽者。其有所試矣。斯民也。三代之所以直道而行也。

Whereas to be free of conscious mind and so give oneself over to the world is to follow the straight and proper Dao, to be of self-conscious mind and try to make the world follow one is to pervert its method. This is why one should conduct things by the straight and proper Dao. Praise or blame should not be based on finicky personal views, for whether one is good or not should be verified by recourse to the common folk. Therefore, the text states, “In my relation to others, whom do I blame, whom praise? If there is any that may be praised, there is a

³⁸⁹ 論語體略 *Lunyu Tilue*, 2a-2b, quoted in Lynn, “Guo Xiang’s Theory of Sagely Knowledge as Seen in His “Essentials of the Analects”.” 401

way to verify it, that is, by recourse to the common folk, for it was by recourse to them that the Three Dynasties were conducted by the straight and proper Dao.”³⁹⁰

無心而付之天下者。直道也。有心而使天下從己者。曲法者也。故直道而行者。毀譽不出於區區之身。善與不善。信之百姓。故曰：吾之於人。誰毀誰譽。如有所譽。必試之斯民也。

It is worth noting that Richard Lynn translates *wuxin* here as “to be free of conscious mind” which captures the fact that there is no single aim towards which it is directed, but perhaps it might not emphasize enough that it is indeed directed into an absolute singularity that captures all directions in any given moment through its inter-connected transformations. This is why Guo Xiang says that to be *without a deliberate mind-heart (wuxin)* means to “give oneself over to the world,” unto the rightness (or proper Dao) of a given time or situation.

In all these passages we repeatedly see the theme of what I’ve called the *logic of convergence*, which is also the very methodology of Guo Xiang. As Richard Lynn notes, Guo’s enterprise is far from the escapist connotation of a kind of “self-liberation” that 無心 *wuxin* is commonly related with. Lynn says that “Guo’s promotion of the sage-ruler in Daoist terms was designed to serve as a catalyst for the regeneration of self and society and the foundation of a worldly utopia.”³⁹¹ In other words, Guo Xiang’s nothingness is manifested as being, existence, action, and indeed society (名教 *mingjiao*), in all its transformations, inter-connectedness, and ultimately, self-so (*ziran*). Perhaps the passages where this is the most evident, however, are the ones below, with which Lynn has taken on the work of placing into parallels for us:

Confucius said, “Agreed. I shall take office.” 孔子曰：諾。吾將仕矣。

The sage, free of self-conscious mind, in taking or not taking office, just complies with the ways of the world. When Yang Hu urged him to take office, since it was the right thing to do, he could not but agree. *If the world cannot use me, I have no use of my own* (無自用), for this is the way to follow the straight and proper Dao and resonate with others. However, the principle underlying “being stern” and “being conciliatory” is also implied herein.”³⁹²

³⁹⁰ 論語體略 *Lunyu Tilue*, 3a-3b, quoted in *ibid.* 404-405.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.* 393

³⁹² 論語體略 *Lunyu Tilue*, 4a, quoted in *ibid.* 407. Modified. Emphasis and parenthetical mine.

聖人無心。仕與不仕隨世耳。陽虎勸仕。理無不諾。不能用我。則我無自用。此直道而應者也。然危
遜之理。亦在其中也。

Lynn continues, saying that “Guo Xiang’s assertion that the sage is free of self-conscious mind also appears in his *Zhuangzi* commentary, in *Shanxing* 繕性 (chapter 16):”³⁹³

The sage, free of self-conscious mind, allows the world to fulfill itself, and all attempts to fulfill it by recourse to the superficial aspects of purity have nothing to do with true sagehood. Since the sage does nothing but *allow the world to fulfill itself*, what can he have to do with making the world acquire sageliness! Therefore, though the footprints left by Heavenly Monarchs and Earthly Kings always kept changing from age to age, the Dao of the sage never fails to remain whole and intact.³⁹⁴

聖人無心，任世之自成。成之淳薄，皆非聖也。聖能任世之自得耳，豈能使世得聖哉！故皇王之跡，與世俱遷，而聖人之道未始不全也。

Although these two passages have different thrusts, we can still see the same two-pronged approach. In the first one where he comments about taking office, Guo Xiang insists that to be *wuxin* and to follow the straight and proper Dao means to resonate with others, and this consists of allowing himself to be used by the world. Similarly in the second passage or the one where Guo Xiang comments on the *Zhuangzi*, he insists that becoming *wuxin*, as it is with the sage, is to allow the world to fulfill itself (*zide*). This is why he says that even though the traces (跡 *ji*) of different sages are different, they are the same in that their Dao remains intact, because they are all *wuxin*. In this passage, moreover, we are directly confronted with the constitutive link between *wuxin* and self-realization (*zide*)—a representation, if not a direct consequence, of Guo Xiang’s ontology of nothingness that, by its nature, converges necessity with contingency as discussed in our earlier chapter on existence. There is another passage in the *Zhuangzhi zhu* that resembles this *Lunyu* commentary of Guo Xiang’s, as it also links *wuxin* to staying within society and serving its changing needs. Guo Xiang explains:

³⁹³ Ibid. 407. Emphasis mine.

³⁹⁴ Guo Xiang 16.4.4G1-3, quoted in *ibid.* 407-408

He who is in accord with the various classes of men, is unable to leave the society of men. This being the case, the reasons for society's changes, generation after generation, are different but suitable [for each generation]. Only he who has no deliberate heart-mind and doesn't use his own views (不自用),³⁹⁵ can then conform according to what the changes indicate, and does not bear their burdens.³⁹⁶

與人群者，不得離人。然人間之變故，世世異宜，唯無心而不自用者，為能隨變所適而不荷其累也。

In other words, being *wuxin* means to conform to the different changes that society undergoes because though they may manifest differently, each is suitable to its time. The views that Guo Xiang refers to here when he tells us not to use one's own views is what he also means to be "finicky personal views" (區區之身 *qu qu zhi shen*). This is because to rely on one's own is be blind-sided,³⁹⁷ since what is suitable always changes from moment to moment. Therefore, the real manifestation of *wuxin* is not escaping, but participating within and for society. Ultimately, this participatory character of the *logic of convergence* is what it means "to allow the world to fulfill itself" (*zide*).

3.2.2 The Equality of Self-Realization (*zide* 自得)

Zide 自得, as this work purports, is the central concept integral to understanding Guo Xiang's notion of freedom and/or autonomy. However, much has already been said on why this is so in the previous sections and chapters. A brief gloss over would perhaps simply be expressed by saying that becoming self-realized (*zide*) consists within it *wuxin* and *xiaoyao*, which we shall discuss in the next sub-section. For now, however, it would be sufficient for our purposes to note that one must first be *wuxin* in order to be *zide*, which is then necessary to practice *xiaoyao*. These, however, are not steps in achieving freedom, but a radical convergence of both the negative and positive features of freedom, resulting in the shift towards a *dependence-based autonomy* that is "freedom in." Self-realization (*zide*), therefore, is being comfortable in the act of shaping oneself, their values and choices, to vanish into one's surroundings in order to achieve autonomy in an inter-causal world. However, as

³⁹⁵ Note the parallel here between 無自用 *wuziyong* as used in *Lunyu* commentary, and the 不自用 *buziyong* in the *Zhuangzi* commentary—signaling the synonymous meaning of nothing to an active refusal for deliberate action rather than a passive one.

³⁹⁶ Guo Xiang Commentary, 4.0G

³⁹⁷ Guo Xiang talks about this to a large extent in the *Zhuangzi* commentaries, with one example being when he says that: "Every creature without exception considers itself right and the (others wrong, praising itself and defaming others. It is in precisely this sense that, although each embraces a different definition of right and wrong, self and other are exactly equal." 夫自是而非彼，美己而惡人，物莫不皆然。然，故是非雖異而彼我均也 See Guo Xiang Commentary, 2.0G, quoted in Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. 135

previously mentioned in this chapter, this autonomous realization is not about “finding one’s true self” for there is no such thing in Guo Xiang’s philosophy. The “self” that is realized here is a product of inter-causality; nevertheless realized by looking *into* one’s self and its own environment, instead of transcending it, as can be seen in the previous section. This is why Guo Xiang says we should strive for what is internal to one’s nature (性分之內 *xingfenzhinei*) and denounces traces of externality, as discussed in the previous chapter. In this sense, one is comfortable with depending on one’s given lot instead of chasing traces. This is what *dependence-based autonomy* means—one’s achieved capability to adapt and depend on the environment, in spontaneously shaping oneself according to the changes.

This is best shown in the following passage from the *Zhuangzi* wherein he describes the type of person who has found his proper place in the world:

Fu Yueh attained it, and with it he became the prime minister of Wu Ting and controlled the whole empire.

Then, charioting upon one constellation and drawn by another, he made himself equal to the stars of heaven.³⁹⁸

傅說得之，以相武丁，奄有天下，乘東維，騎箕尾，而比於列星。

It must be noted, that the word *lie* 列 here has a sense of being arranged in order, connoting belongingness. So in *placing* himself among the stars, the Chinese text does give off a sense that Fu Yue is assuming his rightful place, where he was always meant to be, while also giving off a sense of spontaneous action, according to the correct dao. So what Guo Xiang does in his commentary here is to explain how finding one’s rightful place in the world is spontaneously realized, which is itself the nature of attaining oneness with the world-force, the dao:

The Dao, has no capability. This says that attaining Dao is from Dao, so as to show its spontaneous realization. Spontaneously realized, the Dao cannot be made to realize him; [if] his own self is not yet realized, then that self will also be incapable of realizing himself. As such then, all those who [attain] realization, externally is not due to the Dao, internally is not produced from oneself. It is [rather] a sudden self-realization and lone-transformation. The difficulty of coming into being, is that it is [spontaneously] self-realized and lone-

³⁹⁸ Guo Xiang Commentary, 6.12.19, quoted in *Chuang-Tzu: A New Selected Translation with an Exposition of the Philosophy of Kuo Hsiang*. 45.

transforming. [But] Once he has already realized his coming into being, how could he still be distressed over anything that his life has not realized, and then go do something about it?³⁹⁹

道，無能也。此言得之於道，乃所以明其自得耳。自得耳，道不能使之得也；我之未得，又不能為得也。然則凡得之者，外不資於道，內不由於己，掘然自得而獨化也。夫生之難也，猶獨化而自得之矣，既得其生，又何患於生之不得而為之哉！

What this means is that one cannot possibly *do* anything to *deliberately* change something.⁴⁰⁰ That is to say that not only is there nothing external to something that can fulfill its self-realization, but that there is also nothing intrinsically that one can deliberately do in order to fulfil one's self-realization. The very simple acceptance that makes it seem easy is turned inside out, making it the very same thing that makes it difficult, and hence an attainment. Once this is attained, however, one attains not only himself, but oneness with the movement of the world. Indeed, Fu Yue's complete and absolute dependence on his surroundings and environment is also true the other way around, self and other converged in complete harmony. What this passage suggests, moreover, is that intervention does not simply come externally, as binary logic might have it, but that it needs to come internally. This is why Guo Xiang also says:

One who is self-realized internally, is one whose affairs are complete externally.⁴⁰¹

內自得者，外事全也。

It is then that one realizes his inherent connection to everything else, as both effect and cause—his limit becomes his very potential, since everything is dependent on everything, all in oneness and unity, yet converging in their singularities. As Guo Xiang mentions:

³⁹⁹ Guo Xiang Commentary, 6.12.19G1-5

⁴⁰⁰ The reason for this has generally been discussed in previous chapters. However, another passage where Guo Xiang qualifies this more directly is in a commentary in the 10th chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, where he says: “the eradication of the lips is not done in order to make the teeth cold, and yet teeth are cold. The wine of Lu was not made thin in order to bring about the siege of Han-tan, and yet Han-tan was besieged. The sages do not appear in order to give rise to the great robbers, and yet the great robbers arise. This is all self-so mutual generation (xiangsheng), a necessary tendency. 夫竭脣非以寒齒而齒寒，魯酒薄非以圍邯鄲而邯鄲圍，聖人生非以起大盜而大盜起。此自然相生，必至之勢也。 Guo Xiang Commentary, 10.3.9G1-2, quoted in Ziporyn, *The Penumbra Unbound: The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang*. 105

⁴⁰¹ Guo Xiang Commentary, 21.39.2G

The ten thousand things are ten thousand bodies, unified in self-realization, their realization become one.⁴⁰²

萬物萬形，同於自得，其得一也。

What this implies, moreover, is that everything has a proper place and that everything, in their proper places, are sufficient in that. Because the world itself lone-transforms and self-transforms, no deliberate action can possibly change the course of its lone-transformation. Everything are, in every fleeting moment in time, the way that they simply are and that is right inasmuch as that exists; as in the case of Fu Yue, not even the dao has any power to deliberately give anyone realization, because the dao is nothing but the spontaneous generation and transformation of everything and everyone in the world. Ultimately, Guo Xiang was trying to say that dao is not a principle that shines down on us from a heavenly canopy as though the *logos spermatikos* of a grand narrative (as one might expect from an Abrahamic divinity), but that it is simply a spontaneous attainment that varies from moment to moment and being to being. This notion of self-realization is defined by the *logic of convergence*, wherein dependence is the condition for independence. Thus, Guo Xiang allows us to see a unique notion of freedom: one that is necessary and singular inasmuch as it is purely contingent in constitution and transformation, in relation to the necessity of everything else's contingency; one that is satisfied and at ease—this is what is meant by freedom.

This convergence of dependence and independence, and conversely emptiness and spontaneity as seen in the previous section, in the notion of self-realization (*zide*) inevitably leads to the convergence of self and other, as was discussed in the previous chapter as well. Not only that, but it ultimately discards the discarding by getting rid of any valuation or superimposition of judgments as which is better than the other. This is best explained by Guo Xiang in the following passage:

To consider oneself right and the other wrong is the constant condition of both self and other. Thus the other's finger, compared to my finger as the standard, distinctly fails to be a finger. This is "using [this] finger to show that a finger is not a finger." Conversely, my finger, compared to the other's finger as the standard, spectacularly fails to be a finger as well. This is "using not-this-finger to show that a finger is not a finger." To illuminate the absence of right and wrong, nothing is more effective than understanding "this" and "that" in terms of each other, which shows that they are the same in their self-affirmation and other-disapproval. Since all are seen as wrong, nothing in the world is right. Since all are seen as right, nothing in the world is wrong. How can this be shown?

⁴⁰² Guo Xiang Commentary, 2.13.13G1-2

If right were really right, it would have to be such that there could be no one in the world who could consider it wrong. If wrong were really wrong, no one in the world could consider it right. But in reality there is no standard of right and wrong; they are in complete chaos. When you understand this, even though each one believes only in his own narrow viewpoint, you see the consistency between them, their sameness. For it is the same wherever one looks, above and below. Thus, the Consummate Person knows that heaven and earth are one finger, and all things one horse. He finds everywhere only a vast overflowing tranquility, where every creature is exactly appropriate in its own allotment, all the same in their self-realization, free of right and wrong.”⁴⁰³

夫自是而非彼，彼我之常情也。故以我指喻彼指，則彼指於我指獨為非指矣。此以指喻指之非指也。若復以彼指還喻我指，則我指於彼指復為非指矣。此（亦）非指喻指之非指也。將明無是無非，莫若反覆相喻。反覆相喻，則彼之與我，既同於自是，又均於相非。均於相非，則天下無是；同於自是，則天下無非。何以明其然邪？是若果是，則天下不得（彼）有非之者也。非若果非，（則天下）亦不得復有是之者也。今是非無主，紛然淆亂，明此區區者各信其偏見而同於一致耳。仰觀俯察，莫不皆然。是以至人知天地一指也，萬物一馬也，故浩然大寧，而天地萬物各當其分，同於自得，而無是無非也。

In this passage, Guo Xiang highlights the difference of sameness, and the sameness of difference. Referring to Gongsun Long's sophisticated arguments regarding set theory and the paradoxes such as the white horse not being a horse,⁴⁰⁴ Guo Xiang (following Zhuangzi) puts forth a powerful critique and introduces (or at this point, reiterates) the concept of the sameness of difference, and conversely, the same singularity of all things. This is what it means for all things to be one finger and one horse; all are the same in their absolute uniqueness and singularity. To Guo Xiang, “white horse is not a horse” is not a dead-end paradox, but a necessity to how reality itself is built. Similarly, in self-realization (*zide*), the realization of one's

⁴⁰³ Guo Xiang Commentary, 2.10.12G1-14, quoted in Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. 147

⁴⁰⁴ According to Gongsun Long, if one says “horse” then it should mean horses of all colors, but if one says “white horse” then obviously horses of other colors no longer belong to this category. The fact that “white horse” can be so singularly distinct from other types of horses, that is, opposite to them, then how can they all be the same horses? This seems to be an argument against the essential oneness of a category of beings. In other words, what Guo Xiang is pointing at here, as is the same when he says that “the other's finger, compared to my finger as the standard, distinctly fails to be a finger,” is that any standard according to which we strictly name and categorize truths is bound to contradict itself. For a more detailed discussion on Gongsun Long's argument as well as a proper introduction regarding its significance, see Yuolan Feng, “The School of Names,” in *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Derk Bodde (New York: Free Press, 1966).

self only applies to the standards of one's self, and vice versa with the other. This discarding of the discarding takes relativism inside out, and takes the singular as absolute, because it understands that each thing, each affair, and therefore action, can be right and wrong in different circumstances, and are therefore "all the same in their self-realization." This idea of the equality and flatness of self-realization (*zide*) in one's allotment (*fen*), fate (*ming*), nature (*xing*), rightness (*dang*), generation (*sheng*), transformation (*hua*), independence (*wudai*), and so on, is the culmination of Guo Xiang's unique interpretation of self-so (*ziran*).

It is thus no wonder that in Guo Xiang's commentary, following the Chinese composition style of stating the topic in the beginning, the passage below is how he opens his *magnum opus*:

Though small and great are different, yet if they are released into the realm of self-realization, then things will acquiesce to their nature, and affairs will correspond to their ability, each is suitable to his own allotment, in leisurely ease they are one, so how can there appear to be any better or worse between them?⁴⁰⁵

夫小大雖殊，而放於自得之場，則物任其性，事稱其能，各當其分，逍遙一也，豈容勝負於其間哉！

In the end, Guo Xiang's enterprise can be understood to emphasize the radical convergence of difference, their equality, and the absolute singularity of all things. Guo Xiang shows how there is freedom in the simple and spontaneous unity of one's self with one's environment, basking in its own rightness.

One of the most well-known passages that encompasses this best is the Butterfly Dream. This passage has been a famous and contested passage in both Sinitic and Anglophone scholarship, yet Guo Xiang's original interpretation has largely been overlooked in Anglophone scholarship.⁴⁰⁶ The passage is as follows:

Once Zhuang Zhou dreamt that he was a butterfly, a butterfly happy as can be, and himself felt how comfortably this suited him!

⁴⁰⁵ Guo Xiang Commentary, 1.0G, quoted in Arendrup, "The First Chapter of Guo Xiang's Commentary to Zhuang Zi: A Translation and Grammatical Analysis." 313. Modified.

⁴⁰⁶ This is comprehensively discussed in an earlier work where I call Guo Xiang's interpretation as pluralistic monism. Though I have now come to understand Guo Xiang more clearly and think that this understanding doesn't go far enough in eliminating the middle-man of non-being entirely, it is a helpful cursory survey of the different interpretations in Anglophone scholarship. See Christine Abigail Tan, "The Butterfly Dream and Zhuangzi's Perspectivism: An Exploration of the Differing Interpretations of the Butterfly Dream against the Backdrop of Dao as Pluralistic Monism," *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy* 10 (2016).

昔者莊周夢爲胡蝶。栩栩然胡蝶也。自喻適志與。

Happily self-realized,⁴⁰⁷ he flutters about with pleasure.

自快得意。悅豫而行。

But he was not aware that he was Zhuang Zhou.

不知周也。

Just when he was dreaming that he was a butterfly and thus unaware that he was Zhuang Zhou is no different than if he had died. However, no matter which state he was in, it never failed to suit him comfortably. Therefore, as one when alive is attached to life, so when dead one has to love death. Looking at it from this point of view, we realize that to be distressed about death while one is alive is to be in error.

方其夢爲胡蝶而不知周。則與殊死不異也。然所在無不適志。則當生而係生者。必當死而戀死矣。由此觀之。知夫在生而哀死者誤也。

When he awoke suddenly, he was astonished to be Zhuang Zhou,

俄然覺。則蘧蘧然周也。

It is only because this is addressed from Zhuang Zhou's point of view that it is said that "he awoke." He was yet unsure that it had not been a dream.

自周而言。故稱覺耳。未必非夢也。

but he did not know whether he was Zhuang Zhou who had been dreaming he was a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming that he was Zhuang Zhou.

不知周之夢爲胡蝶與。胡蝶之夢爲周與。

His not being selfconscious of being a butterfly now is no different from his not being selfconscious of being Zhuang Zhou while he was dreaming. However, since each state suited him comfortably at the time, there is no way to be sure that he was not a butterfly now dreaming that he was Zhuang Zhou. It commonly happens in the

⁴⁰⁷ Modified from "Happy and content with himself"

world that someone takes a nap and dreams the experiences of a lifetime, so there is no way to be sure that one's present lifetime is not just something dreamed during a nap.

今之不知胡蝶。無異於夢之不知周也。而各適一時之志。則無以明胡蝶之不夢爲周矣。世有假寐而夢經百年者。則無以明今之百年非假寐之夢者也。

Between Zhuang Zhou and the butterfly there had to have been a distinction.

周與胡蝶。則必有分矣。

The distinction between being awake and dreaming is no different than the distinction between life and death. The reason why he is selfconscious that one state suits his aspirations is because it is set off from the other—and not because of a lack of differentiation between them.

夫覺夢之分。無異於死生之辯也。今所以自喻適志。由其分定。非由無分也。

And this is known as the transformation of things [*wuhua*].

此之謂物化。

Since time does not stop even for an instant, we cannot preserve the present no matter how much we might wish to do so, which is why the dream last night was transformed into the present. As for the change between life and death, how could it be any different! Yet people worry so much about the gap between them! Just now one is in this state and thus unselfconscious of that state—which is what dreaming of being a butterfly signifies. And taking an example from human experience, throughout life one never knows now what might happen later—which is what the story of Concubine Li⁴⁰⁸ signifies. However, the stupid think with absolute clarity that they

⁴⁰⁸ 麗之姬。艾封人之子也。晉國之始得之也。涕泣沾襟。及其至於王所。與王同筐床。食芻豢。而後悔其泣也。

Concubine Li was the daughter of the Ai district border defense commandant. When the state of Jin first captured her, she cried so much that tears soaked the whole front of her garment, and it was only after she had arrived at the palace, shared his master bed with the ruler, and eaten his fine meats that she regretted she had ever cried. 一生之內。情變若此。當此之日。則不知彼。況夫死生之變。惡能相知哉。Throughout a lifetime, one's emotions change as much as this. Since on any given day one never knows how he might feel on any other day, how much the less can one know what the change between life and death might bring! 予惡乎知夫死者不悔其始之蘄生乎。How do I know that the dead don't regret that they had ever first begged for life! See Richard John Lynn, "Birds and Beasts in the Zhuangzi, Fables Interpreted by Guo Xiang and Cheng Xuanying," *Religions* 10, no. 7 (2019). 11.

know that life is delightful and death is painful—this because they have never heard about the transformation of things.⁴⁰⁹

夫時不暫停。而今不遂存。故昨日之夢。於今化矣。死生之變。豈異於此。而勞心於其間哉。方爲此則不知彼。夢爲胡蝶是也。取之於人。則一生之中。今不知後。麗姬是也。而愚者竊竊然自以爲知生之可樂。死之可苦。未聞物化之謂也。

Although this passage is often cited to argue that Zhuangzi is a relativist, and sometimes even the more Buddhist approach of achieving enlightenment in waking,⁴¹⁰ Guo Xiang takes on an approach that would seem unique or even odd in Anglophone scholarship. Instead of dismissing the distinction as unimportant, he embraces it—as Lynn’s translation highlights—as the significant characteristic of change and transformation. Likening the transformation from butterfly to Zhuang Zhou to life and death, this passage is significant because Guo Xiang says that the butterfly is “happily self-realized (*zi kuai de yi* 自快得意)”⁴¹¹ meaning it is *free* in the dream, just as one is *free* in life, or *free* in death, because one embraces whichever circumstance one is in and unites with it as one. Notice, moreover, Guo Xiang’s cautionary warning about how “time does not stop even for an instant, we cannot preserve the present no matter how much we might wish to do so,” which emphasizes the infinity of movement and change. Zhuang Zhou existed in a moment which, to our eyes now, seems very different and almost counter-intuitive to the reality that we *do* know, and yet he is “happily self-realized” (*zi kuai de yi* 自快得意), precisely because that moment represents a whole; a singular necessity which contains within it its own contradiction. This is what it means to be self-realized and free: that one is united with a singular moment that will inevitably change into the next, and the next, in an eternal and dynamic process, making one inherently connected to everything else.

In a later passage that has also been mentioned in the previous chapter’s discussion on 性分 *xingfen*, Guo Xiang highlights the realms of life and death once again, and how one ought to be at home in each realm. He says:

⁴⁰⁹ Zhuangzi 2.35.1-6; Guo Xiang Commentary, 2.35.1G-6G, quoted in *ibid.* 10-11. Modified.

⁴¹⁰ Tan, “The Butterfly Dream and Zhuangzi’s Perspectivism: An Exploration of the Differing Interpretations of the Butterfly Dream against the Backdrop of Dao as Pluralistic Monism.” *Passim*.

⁴¹¹ Lynn’s apt but idiosyncratic translation here is perhaps noteworthy because it takes on a different kind of parallelism which juxtaposes the words *zikuai* 快意 and *zide* 自得, the former referring to a kind of elation, and the latter to self-realization. Combined, we arrive at “happily self-realized,” meanwhile demonstrating the poetic quality of Guo Xiang’s writings.

I take each transformation, both life and death, as “me.” Since all are me, how can I ever be lost? ...⁴¹²

So I say there is nowhere that I am not self-realized.⁴¹³

夫死生變化，吾皆吾之。既皆是吾，吾何失哉！。。。言無往而不自得也。

Guo Xiang treats each realm as distinct, as seen in the Butterfly Dream, because that is at the core of change and transformation, but it is because all of them are me, the same in their difference, necessary in their contingency, that they are all me. This is how, in all these realms, one is self-realized (*zide*) and free.

While it is beyond our scope to delve into the thanatology of Guo Xiang’s philosophy, suffice it to say his view on death reflects his view of life, and this applies to all aspects of his philosophical enterprise. One is not more important than the other, even though each is distinct and singular, and so, though death is different from life, it ought not be an object or source of fear. While neither Zhuangzi nor Guo Xiang delude themselves into believing or arguing that death is part of life or that there is life after death, they both acknowledge that it is a necessary transformation that occurs in one’s being, albeit distinct from life. As such, the realm of death, while distinct and unknown, is an inevitable necessity of life—one must depend on life when one is alive in order to be fully self-realized, acknowledging that life is what defines oneself—and one must depend on death when one dies, knowing that it defines oneself. Self-realization (*zide*), therefore, is defined by its dependence of whatever one encounters, and the lack of value judgment in giving importance to one over another, in acknowledging that all realms are equal in their singularity and difference, not because a single system cannot be wrong, but because a single system or entity is self-cohering and is a horse that can only be judged as its own horse, similar to all the other horses of the world. To achieve this ultimate dependence that makes independence possible, one needs to have achieved having no deliberate heart-mind (*wuxin*); one ought to “discard the discarding,” in order to be self-realized (*zide*), and eventually be capable of exercising a “far-reaching and unfettered” (*xiaoyao*) kind of wandering.

3.2.3 The bounds of *Xiaoyao* 逍遙

Now, we can understand that the spontaneity of being self-realized (*zide*) is the precursor to expanding possibilities that being “far-reaching and unfettered” (*xiaoyao*) allows us to undertake—possibilities realized in our dependence to our

⁴¹²Guo Xiang Commentary, 6.37.12G1-2, quoted in Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. 202, modified.

⁴¹³ Guo Xiang Commentary, 6.37.13-14G

environment. That is to say, that the state of freedom is the capacity to make spontaneous decisions in the context of one's awareness of one's environment and hence dependence on it. As Yang Lihua puts it:

As long as one can be self-sufficient, not overstepping the boundaries of one's own natural allotment (性分 *xingfen*) nor coveting external things, one can achieve being "far-reaching and unfettered (逍遙 *xiaoyao*)."⁴¹⁴ But all the people and all the things, their state of being "far-reaching and unfettered (逍遙 *xiaoyao*)" are all "attached to certain spheres (繫於有方⁴¹⁴)" and all must attain that which they are dependent on (得其所待⁴¹⁵), for then and only then can they be "far-reaching and unfettered (逍遙 *xiaoyao*)."⁴¹⁶

In this sense, self-realization (*zide*) is the realization of that which we are dependent on—as we have argued both in the previous chapter as well the previous parts of this section—and as such, the only way we can hope to exercise our possibilities in the state of being "far-reaching and unfettered (*xiaoyao*)."⁴¹⁷ This is because for Guo Xiang, as had been reiterated time and again, everything has a limit and allotment. He argues that even those which we consider as great, such as the vast ocean, have limits, saying that:

The limit of a hundred streams is boundless yet they are subsumed into rivers; rivers are subsumed into the ocean, and the ocean is subsumed into the world, therefore each has a limit.⁴¹⁷

窮百川之量而縣於河，河縣於海，海縣於天地，則各有量也。

He later continues in the same passage that:

...each know their limit, things are settled in their allotment. One who is leisurely at ease uses his original steps yet wanders in the realm of self-realization.⁴¹⁸

...各知其極，物安其分，逍遙者用其本步而遊乎自得之場矣。

⁴¹⁴ Guo Xiang Commentary 1.5.1G1-7 cf. page 118

⁴¹⁵ Guo Xiang Commentary 1.7.13G1-9 cf. page 120

⁴¹⁶ Yang, 郭象"庄子注"研究 (*an Examination of Guo Xiang's Zhuangzi Commentary*). 138

⁴¹⁷ Guo Xiang Commentary, 17.2.4G1

⁴¹⁸ Guo Xiang Commentary, 17.2.4G7

Here, Guo Xiang reminds us that the real exercise of our *xiaoyao* is dependent on our limit and allotment, upon which self-realization (*zide*) is also dependent through adapting to one's changing and fleeting nature. Although, traditionally, *xiaoyao* is often regarded as the concept in the *Zhuangzi* and Guo Xiang as synonymous to the notion of freedom,⁴¹⁹ this is also the concept on which Zhuangzi and Guo Xiang most apparently diverge. This supposed divergence,⁴²⁰ moreover, is key to understanding what such notion of becoming far-reaching and unfettered (*xiaoyao*) is in Guo Xiang, as well as the misunderstandings that are often superimposed on Guo via an understanding of the *Zhuangzi* (as being faithful to it or not), rather than the other way around.

Perhaps prominently, Liu Xiaogan has argued that there are several key differences in Zhuangzi and Guo Xiang when it comes to their notion of becoming far-reaching and unfettered (*xiaoyao*). Nonetheless, he also says that Zhuangzi and Guo Xiang's notions of becoming far-reaching and unfettered (*xiaoyao*) share the same form with what Isaiah Berlin criticizes as the "retreat to the inner citadel."⁴²¹ We shall get back to this later, but for now, what Liu Xiaogan says are the six main differences in Zhuangzi and Guo Xiang's notions of becoming far-reaching and unfettered (*xiaoyao*) are, in sum:

1. Zhuangzi's *xiaoyao* is more outward whereas Guo Xiang's is more inward. Zhuangzi's is of spiritual transcendence whereas Guo Xiang's has to do with contentment in one's individual life.
2. In terms of the one achieving *xiaoyao*, Zhuangzi's *xiaoyao* can only be achieved by a select-few, whereas Guo Xiang's *xiaoyao* consists simply of being self-sufficient in one's nature. In other words, Zhuangzi's *xiaoyao* is a special state achieved by the "consummate and genuine men" (至人、真人) through rigorous self-cultivation, whereas Guo Xiang's *xiaoyao* is mainly a change in attitude, which is the result of being at peace with one's endowed nature (*xingming*).
3. The state of being in *xiaoyao* in Zhuangzi is more binary than that of Guo Xiang's. Whereas Zhuangzi's *xiaoyao* is the same freedom and ascension to spiritual transcendence for all kinds of people, Guo Xiang's has

⁴¹⁹ For instance, see Machek, "Is Freedom in Necessity or in Happiness? Guo Xiang's and Lin Xiyi's Controversial Readings of Zhuangzi's »Free Rambling«." Machek, however, misses the philosophical nuances of freedom, and takes it for granted in this simplistic equivalency. This ultimately leads to a two-dimensional understanding of freedom in both commentators, wherein he claims that for both, freedom is "absence of hindrances," that is closer to Berlin's negative liberty than a unique and innovative notion of autonomy and even free-will that relies on the significance of an absolute dependency.

⁴²⁰ Although I acknowledge the divergence for the sake of argument here, Guo Xiang's faithfulness to the *Zhuangzi* is beyond the scope of the dissertation. For my purposes of philosophical explication—as in being a exploration of Guo Xiang's philosophy—it is more helpful to treat the *Zhuangzi* and Guo Xiang as one, and as how Guo interprets it.

⁴²¹ Liu, "两种逍遥与两种自由 (Two Kinds of Xiaoyao and Two Kinds of Freedom)."

different types of *xiaoyao*, but since they are all based on an individual's singular reality, each is not the same with the other.

4. Because Zhuangzi's *xiaoyao* takes someone from reality to the beyond, it has a three-dimensional structure, whereas Guo Xiang's *xiaoyao* has a flatter structure due to the fact that is all grounded simply in reality. While in Zhuangzi there is a specific structure to achieving *xiaoyao*, in Guo Xiang there is no difference between high and low, or first and last, all steps towards *xiaoyao* are on the same level as the other.

5. Zhuangzi's *xiaoyao* is purely spiritual, and even personal, in content. Guo Xiang's *xiaoyao* advocates for social order and the individual's harmony with the whole.

6. Zhuangzi's unchangeable "fate" (*ming*) is an external natural phenomenon, whereas Guo Xiang's is rooted in one's natural allotment (*xingfen*) and endowed nature (*xingming*). As such, Zhuangzi's *xiaoyao* aims to break away from external fetters and shackles, whereas Guo Xiang's *xiaoyao* aims to achieve comfort and satisfaction in one's natural allotment (*xingfen*).⁴²²

While I do not think that this captures the nuances of Guo Xiang's philosophical enterprise as anything more than passive acceptance, it suffices as a concise but accurate enumeration of the supposed difference between Zhuangzi and Guo Xiang—sufficient for a surface-level understanding which allows us to follow Liu Xiaogan's argument that both these notions of *xiaoyao* are "only an adaptation, acceptance or escape from reality."⁴²³ In other words it does not have the power for social change and transformation. He continues that:

Of course, whether this unfortunate decision to avoid misfortune is correct and wise may be controversial. On the one hand, some people believe that it is better to fight and die than to give up freedom and evade violence; on the other hand, people cannot prove whether resisting really has no chance of success. If it is impossible to prove that resistance will inevitably fail, then there is no necessary or logical rationale for a premature retreat. Therefore, for many people, Zhuangzi's and Guo Xiang's approach is not worthy of sympathy, and their *xiaoyao* are not worth striving for nor upholding. This is in fact a question of choice and preference in values, not a question of whether spiritual and mental freedom is [philosophically] sensible.⁴²⁴

⁴²² *ibid.* 83-85

⁴²³ *ibid.* 85

⁴²⁴ *ibid.* 86

Here, however, Liu Xiaogan seems to be pointing at the fact that if an agent is consciously and fully aware of his motivations and actions, with values freely internalized, is it really unfree to go into a retreat into an inner citadel when social resistance proves to be futile? He continues:

If modern people cannot completely avoid fixed circumstances that cannot be changed, then they must reflect on how to live better, with more ease, and nobler, in this unpleasant but fixed circumstance. In this respect, Zhuangzi's and Guo Xiang's theory can happen to complement the deficiencies of modern western political theory.⁴²⁵

He argues, finally, that “the pursuit of pure personal spiritual satisfaction should gain understanding or sympathy, or at the least, should not receive condemnation. This is an affirmation of the pluralism of values.”⁴²⁶ What is interesting to note here is that Liu Xiaogan is actually making a very logical argument that necessarily follows from Berlin's theory of “freedom from.” If the values I have internalized shape my ultimate ends as living a nobler life with more ease, and I desire to achieve this through retreating into my inner self, is it not an exercise of my freedom to do so? While Berlin would counter by saying that “heteronomy is dependence on outside factors,”⁴²⁷ whereas autonomy depends solely on the self, Liu Xiaogan points out the naïveté of this stance—all actions are based on circumstances, and the dualistic split between dependence and independence, heteronomy and autonomy, is simply untenable in the real world where the self is not a separate thing from its environment. While Liu Xiaogan, however, proposes that this retreat to the inner citadel simply be affirmed as a value among other values, or at the very least be spared of condemnation, what he ultimately shows, at least to my impression, is the inconsistency of Berlin's theory of “freedom from” when faced with a robust theory of mystical freedom. This is because although Berlin had aptly critiqued “retreat to the inner citadel” as an escape that cuts the self out from the empirical world of causality, his theory of “freedom from” ultimately does the same—supposing a notion of the self that is disconnected from its physical circumstances, transcending the causal networks that shape their values. If Liu Xiaogan is right, Guo Xiang's notion of freedom falls into the same dichotomous trap as Berlin's does.

Interestingly, Mercedes Valmisa has argued that while the above-mentioned retreat is true for Guo Xiang, it is not for Zhuangzi. In fact, she argues that we only look at Zhuangzi's notion of freedom as psychologizing because of

⁴²⁵ *ibid.* 87

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.* 88

⁴²⁷ Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty.” 183

Guo's interpretation of it, and this is problematic because such an account "can be easily manipulated into discourses used to prevent much needed social transformation and attempts to restructure unjust power relations."⁴²⁸ As such, Valmisa sought to re-interpret Zhuangzi's notion of freedom so as to derive a theory of self-determination from the Peng bird's story, among others.⁴²⁹ Ultimately, she argues that for the *Zhuangzi*, freedom is where "the person exhibits psychological awareness and emancipation with the final goal of effecting a change in her socio-material conditions."⁴³⁰ I agree with Valmisa here, at least with the reasons why a retreat to the inner citadel is a problematic account of freedom. Nonetheless, she misreads Guo Xiang. If we will recount Yuet-Keung Lo's essay on lone-transformation (*duhua*) as self-determination, he says about Guo Xiang that "the philosophical import of lone-transformation lies in the negotiation of the tension and synergy between multitude and loneliness."⁴³¹ Moreover, Lo clarifies that this means that "in realistic terms, intergrowth is essentially the most favorable outcome of one's negotiations with all possible contacts without compromising one's integrity and sacrificing one's life."⁴³² In other words, Guo Xiang is able to negotiate between the individual and multitude, as well as the dialectical relation between them. This much is a necessary outcome of his *logic of convergence* as well as the necessity of contingency, and contingency of necessity. I would argue, moreover, that Guo Xiang's "dependence-based autonomy" is more comprehensive and holistic than Valmisa's interpretation of autonomy and freedom in the *Zhuangzi*. Whereas the "final goal" for Valmisa is to effect socio-material change, for Guo Xiang, it is not so diachronic, and is instead, both diachronic and synchronic. Guo Xiang's "dependence-based autonomy" is diachronic in the sense that there is movement towards self-determination in lone-transformation (*duhua*) and being far-reaching and unfettered (*xiaoyao*) but it is also synchronic in the sense that there is an double oscillation between dependence (*youdai*) and independence (*wudai*) in order to ultimately become self-realized (*zide*). Guo Xiang thus demonstrates the dialectical relation of the individual and her socio-material conditions, acknowledging that dependence is ultimately necessary for self-realization (*zide*), and thus the kind of self-determination worth wanting as well. Not only is the goal to change socio-material conditions, but those conditions must also be changed in order to achieve self-determination, in a dialectical and unending process.

Thus, going back to the concept of *xiaoyao*, we now understand that Guo Xiang does not really advocate for a

⁴²⁸ Valmisa, "The Happy Slave Isn't Free: Relational Autonomy and Freedom in the *Zhuangzi*." 5.

⁴²⁹ For a more comprehensive discussion on how this relates to our study, see the section on Guo Xiang in the Introduction.

⁴³⁰ Valmisa, "The Happy Slave Isn't Free: Relational Autonomy and Freedom in the *Zhuangzi*." 9

⁴³¹ Lo, "Lone-Transformation and Intergrowth: Philosophy and Self-Justification in Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi*."

⁴³² Ibid. 391

retreat to the inner citadel, and Liu Xiaogan misses this exactly because taking *xiaoyao* as a concept of its own in Guo Xiang's philosophy does not suffice to address the nuances of what freedom and autonomy are, which is more closely captured by the concept of self-realization (*zide*), as complemented by being both *wuxin* as well as *xiaoyao*. We know this from Guo Xiang's conception of the non-dichotomous self as previously discussed, but it nonetheless is important to note that, as we have previously mentioned, and which Liu Xiaogan himself acknowledges to a certain extent, Guo Xiang was a man of social and political engagement and advocated for this in his philosophy. This is why *xiaoyao* does not stand alone—it is merely a necessary consequence of self-realization (*zide*), which in turn is possible through the spontaneity afforded by *wuxin*. Perhaps the most pertinent passage which shows how Guo Xiang's *xiaoyao* is far from an inner retreat is the following passage regarding the pheasant of the marshes:

“The marsh pheasant finds one mouthful of food every ten steps, and one drink of water every hundred steps, but he does not seek to be fed and pampered in a cage. For though his spirit might there reign supreme, it does not do him any good”⁴³³

澤雉十步一啄，百步一飲，不蕲畜乎樊中。神雖王，不善也。

Qi [a dated word in Guo Xiang's time], means seeking. The cage is that which entraps the pheasant. [The pheasant] bends down and rises up in the midst of heaven and earth, at leisurely ease, it is self-realized in its designated area, it is secure in the pleasant place of nourishing life. How can it still seek to go into a cage, when it already undertakes [its own] nourishment?⁴³⁴

蕲，求也。樊，所以籠雉也。夫俯仰乎天地之間，逍遙乎自得之場，固養生之妙處也。又何求於入籠而服養哉！

One who is exactly suitable and is never unsuitable, [is one who] forgets suitability.

[In the cage, the pheasant's] heart and spirit reigns long, its will and *qi* is filled with comfort; yet in spontaneous liberation amongst the clear and open earth, being unaware of goodness suddenly becomes [what is] good.⁴³⁵

夫始乎適而未嘗不適者，忘適也。雉心神長王，志氣盈豫，而自放於清曠之地，忽然不覺善（為）之

⁴³³ Zhuangzi, 3.7.1-2, quoted in Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. 23

⁴³⁴ Guo Xiang Commentary, 3.7.1G1-3

⁴³⁵ Guo Xiang Commentary 3.7.2G1-2

善也。

This passage shows us that for Guo Xiang, there is no *xiaoyao* in a retreat to a life of spiritual comfort and ease, but rather, one ought to always choose liberty even without the comfort of being pampered, for there is no greater comfort than the spontaneous forgetfulness of the kind of *xiaoyao* which allows one to be in the realm of self-realization (*zide*). This is because being far-reaching and unfettered (*xiaoyao*) never stands alone, as with most of Guo Xiang's concepts, but is merely the necessary consequence and praxis of self-realization (*zide*).

This is important to note because, as already discussed, “retreat to the inner citadel” is narcissistic at best, since it is basically freedom deprived of its political subversiveness, prevented from manifesting its powerful ability for social transformation, which Guo Xiang, like most of the *Wei-Jin* scholars, had hoped for. Turning inward to escape from one's horrible external state not only distracts from social and political action, but it also splits one's inner world from that of the external, and this goes against the very core of Guo Xiang's philosophical enterprise as defined by his *logic of convergence*. Although one may argue that Guo Xiang's philosophy is largely mental or epistemic in nature, it is no stretch to claim that social transformation begins and ends epistemically, as had been already touched on in the previous chapter, and to which we shall later go back again. More precisely, self-realization (*zide*) for Guo Xiang is ultimately epistemic, but is conditioned by a radical dependence, and this is why self-determination for Guo Xiang is a “dependence-based autonomy.”

From this, we are able to glean how Guo Xiang's freedom is able to provide us with a more holistic view than that of Berlin's simplistic positive and negative freedom dichotomy. Its virtue does not simply lie in being a useful framework for everyday life, but in political life, where we are ridden with epistemic baggage as we deal with differences and otherness.

3.3 “Freedom In:” Undoing the Epistemological Divide

Although the historical context and methodological framework upon which *Wei-Jin Xuanxue* builds itself is undoubtedly political in nature, Richard Lynn goes as far as to say that “Wang's and Guo's readings have the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* largely addressed to rulers.”⁴³⁶ In spite of this, the majority of works on Guo Xiang in the Anglophone world have largely been ontological and epistemological without addressing much of his socio-political thought. Even when the socio-

⁴³⁶ Richard John Lynn, “Reading Daoist Texts as Political Theory: Wang Bi on Laozi and Guo Xiang on Zhuangzi,” in *International Congress of Asian and North African Studies* (Montreal, Canada 2000). 2

political aspects of Guo Xiang's philosophy are addressed, it is along the lines of a not too uncommon and bold criticism, which points out his hierarchical and thereby oppressive tendencies. Vincent Shen, for instance, accuses Guo Xiang of being contradictory and Janus-faced, saying that "his soul should have been swaying between *wuwei* that lets others be themselves and his manipulating others with power when he himself is well placed in a higher political position."⁴³⁷ In contrast to the traditionally mystical interpretation of Guo Xiang as also seen from Liu Xiaogan above, Shen highlights the socio-political aspect of Guo Xiang's philosophy, noting that "Guo Xiang's idea of the truly real was imbued with empiricist overtone. Disliking any metaphysical and transcendentalist discourse of non-being and the theology of creator of the universe."⁴³⁸ However, although he toys with the idea that Guo Xiang "could be seen as an early Chinese version of liberalism"⁴³⁹ due to his emphasis on the individual, Shen eventually concludes:

Finally, it's doubtful that Guo Xiang's system can safeguard the equality of all. On the one hand, each individual's allotted nature is different from each other's. Since each individual is invited to be satisfied, at least subjectively, with his/her own allotted nature, Guo Xiang's ontological individualism, in this sense, belongs to equalitarianism. For this, Guo Xiang could be seen as a revolutionary. But the fact that he conceives the horse's nature in reference to its service to human beings; the servants allotted nature in reference to his service to the lord; the allotted nature of the stupid in reference to his service to the wise, etc, and the idea that each, in doing so, can always do it in a self-satisfied way, all these depict a realistic picture of inequality and justification of a status quo caught within the framework of social hierarchy and political domination. In this sense, Guo Xiang is conservative.⁴⁴⁰

Naturally, this would be the conclusion that one would adopt if Guo Xiang's *logic of convergence* is ignored, also explaining how the interpretations of Shen and Liu are worlds apart.⁴⁴¹ As we have already discussed from the previous

⁴³⁷ Shen, "From Interpretation to Construction: Guo Xiang's Ontological Individualism." 187

⁴³⁸ Ibid. 172

⁴³⁹ Ibid. 185

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid. 187

⁴⁴¹ Interestingly, Chris Fraser has recently done work on Guo Xiang which places him in the middle of Shen and Liu. Although he highlights the independence of *dao*, and the importance unique internal character in Guo Xiang's philosophy, he is careful to remind us, through the concept of 冥 *ming* or obscurity, of the distinctive emphasis on dependence in becoming a self-fulfilled agent. See Fraser, "Metaphysics and Agency in Guo Xiang's Commentary on the Zhuangzi." Drawing from Ziporyn, he says that: "GUO Xiang's stance is that the good life—a life of intrinsic self-fulfillment and thus psychological freedom and ease—is to live according to how the dynamically developing dispositions, abilities, and resources we have at any one time interact with the concrete situations we encounter. ... A fascinating, profound feature of Guo's thought is how it grounds normativity in human self-fulfillment, albeit a distinctive conception of self-fulfillment achieved by adeptly and unselfishly adjusting our course to the shape of our circumstances." (364) Unlike Ziporyn, however, Fraser is more careful to acknowledge the possible limits of Guo Xiang's philosophy, questioning Guo

chapter,⁴⁴² however, Guo Xiang's notion of one's nature is never fixed nor determined by truly or wholly external factors. This is why dependence is an inter-causal requisite for independence, because in the end, the self is other, and the other is self. Therefore one's commitment to one's own lot, nature, or place in the world, is a category of emptiness (*wu*) that takes on the principle of self-so (*ziran*) in manifesting one's self-realization (*zide*), in order to be far-reaching and unfettered (*xiaoyao*).

A more appropriate and comprehensive rebuttal of Shen's argument can be found in the previous chapter's discussion on allotment (分 *fen*). Nonetheless, it is worth emphasizing that to understand this socio-political aspect in Guo Xiang means that we must take the onto-epistemological basis into consideration, because ultimately, all actions and all relationships stem from what we understand as our selves. For Guo Xiang, this self is inextricably linked to the other, caused by everything and by nothing, both necessary and contingent. This is what it means to go beyond discarding, by discarding the discarding—to go beyond forgetting, by forgetting the forgetting. The constant transformation of one's allotment (分 *fen*) as discussed in the previous chapter is relevant again here: that means that one who is now a servant may later be lord. This means that he does not advocate that each must keep to his social role, but just that one's attitude toward whatever one's current role is at the time ought to be treated as currently operative. Nonetheless, a beautiful depiction of this is seen in the following passage in the *Zhuangzi*, where Guo Xiang also provides an insightful comment on:

“When the springs dry up, the fish have to cluster together on the shore, gasping on each other to keep damp and spitting on each other to stay wet. But that is no match for forgetting all about one another in the rivers and lakes.

Rather than praising Yao and condemning Jie, we'd be better off forgetting them both and transforming along our own courses.”⁴⁴³

泉涸，魚相與處於陸，相呴以濕，相濡以沫，不如相忘於江湖。與其譽堯而非桀也，不如兩忘而化其道。

Xiang's views on agency, and “to what extent the psychological state of ‘joining in obscurity’ with things is a practicable norm or only a vague theoretical ideal,” (365) as well as the role of minded action in “non-minded responses.” (365) These concerns, however, only come into play for Fraser because like Shen, and to some extent, Liu as well, he misses the role of the *logic of convergence* which we have pointed out. A self-realized or free person does not simply achieve such state by “unselfishly adjusting our course to the shape of our circumstances” because their course is their very circumstance. This is made clear in Guo Xiang's account of causality. Moreover, the question of whether there is room for minded action, or for whether one should “self-consciously step back and think about one's actions and ends, evaluating and revising them if needed” (362) is moot, as there is nothing according to which one can evaluate them correctly other than the circumstances around it, in which case it would then be self-so (自然 *ziran*), and by the dialectical necessity of his system, 無心 *wuxin*.

⁴⁴² The horse's nature as well as the concubines and ministers are passages discussed in the previous chapter.

⁴⁴³ *Zhuangzi*, 6.10.1-2, quoted in Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. 43

Rather than be insufficient in loving one another, is it not better to be in abundance in forgetting each other? Now condemning and praising, in all cases, arise from insufficiency. Thus, the height of sufficiency, is to forget good and evil, to lose death and life, to take part in change and transformation as one, be in a state of openness that there is nowhere one does not reach, and so once again, how does one know where lies Yao and Jie⁴⁴⁴?⁴⁴⁵

與其不足而相愛，豈若有餘而相忘！夫非譽皆生於不足。故至足者，忘善惡，遺死生，與變化為一，曠然無不適矣，又安知堯桀之所在耶！

Gasping and spitting, we long for praise and condemnation, giving out praise and condemnation with hopes that it would be returned, so we can keep going and surviving. In his interpretation of the *Zhuangzi* passage, Ziporyn describes this as: “that righteous feeling of rectitude and belonging and approval we get when we say what is right and wrong, and who is right and wrong, when we feel justified and take it upon ourselves to justify ourselves and each other.”⁴⁴⁶ Yet, right and wrong, good and evil, judgments and values, all these are arbitrary to our time and place. Guo Xiang thus shows how, in this arbitrariness, we simply praise the other for something that we *lack* and we condemn the other for something we think they *lack*. Yet life and death, self and other, is there a difference in their difference? Gasping and spitting might be acts of love and morality, done in good intention, yet ultimately wretched, because we aren’t where we are supposed to be—forgetting all about each other in the abundance of water in the rivers and lakes. Love is insufficient, morality is insufficient, and the highest sufficiency lies in forgetting by means of participating in the oneness of the universe—of the rivers and lakes. In this way, we forget the forgetting, bask in openness such that we may be able to reach everywhere. Hence, rather fixating on Yao and Jie, good and evil, this framework or that framework, even self and other, it is more useful to forget them all, and then forget that and take them all as one horse, one finger, one transformation.

If, therefore, Vincent Shen had difficulty placing Guo Xiang as not a mystical escapist who rejects all that is external, but neither liberal nor politically “conservative,” it is because he is none of those, and for good reason. Guo Xiang doesn’t fit

⁴⁴⁴ Yao is often regarded as the epitome of virtue and goodness. A model for an emperor should strive to be, and “Jie is his traditional antipode, the last emperor of the Xia dynasty, which ended in the sixteenth century B.C.E. He is a legendary symbol of tyranny, cruelty, and all-around wickedness, and his excesses were used to justify the Shang dynasty’s overthrow of the Xia.” See *ibid.* 43

⁴⁴⁵ Guo Xiang Commentary, 6.10.1G-2G

⁴⁴⁶ Brook Ziporyn, “Why Love and Morality Are the Best and the Worst Things We Do: Zhuangzi and the Spitting Fishes,” *HuffPost* 2017.

into the liberal framework, as Shen would have preferred, not because he has conservative tendencies, but because he has a different type of autonomy, that is uniquely dependence-based, which means that he takes the oneness of our singular belongingness, and indeed inter-causality, into account. The following passage, where Confucius is talking, most straightforwardly captures this:

In the days of Yao and Shun, no one in the world was a failure, but this was not gained due to any wisdom on their parts. In the days of Jie and Zhou, no one in the world was a success, but this was not because of any failure of their wisdom. It was just the circumstantial tendencies of the times that made it so.

當堯舜而天下無窮人，非知得也；當桀紂而天下無通人，非知失也；時勢適然。

One should not belabor the heart-mind between failure and success.

無為勞心於窮通之間。

To travel over water without fearing the sharks and dragons is the courage of the fisherman. To travel over land without fearing rhinos and tigers is the courage of the hunter. To view death as no different from life even when the blades are clanging in front of one's face is the courage of the warrior.

夫水行不避蛟龍者，漁父之勇也；陸行不避兕虎者，獵夫之勇也；白刃交於前，視死若生者，烈士之勇也；

Each emotion has what it is at ease in.

情各有所安。

And to know that success depends on fate and failure on the times, to face great calamities without fear, this is the courage of the sage.

知窮之有命，知通之有時，臨大難而不懼者，聖人之勇也。

The sage thus has nowhere where he is not at ease.

聖人則無所不安。

Relax, Zilu! My fate is already sealed.”⁴⁴⁷

由處矣，吾命有所制矣。」

Fate is not something that he himself [and only himself] seals, therefore there is no [one] thing which he sets his heart upon.

For him who is at ease in fate, there is nowhere where he is not “far-reaching and unfettered,” therefore even though he sets forth from Kuang to Youli, there is no difference between being in the farthest depths of heaven and the idle imperial halls.⁴⁴⁸

命非己制，故無所用其心也。夫安於命者，無往而非逍遙矣，故雖匡陳羗里，無異於紫極閭堂也。

Although this passage would, at first sight, appear problematically fatalistic, we know from our discussions from the previous chapter that this is far from being a shocking revelation in Guo Xiang’s philosophy. From what we now know of his onto-epistemological foundations, we can understand that this is a call to acknowledge that our knowledge, self, and results of our actions, are arbitrarily caused by change and transformation. This is why he describes being far reaching and unfettered (*xiaoyao*) as a spontaneous attainment that is both dependent and independent of its environment—an independence that cultivates being at ease wherever one is, through a fundamental dependency on its allotted environment. To have “no [one] thing which one sets his heart upon” (無所用其心), thus, is a spontaneous attainment that varies from moment to moment and being to being.

This notion of being far reaching and unfettered (*xiaoyao*), made possible by one’s self-realization (*zide*) in one’s given situation or fate (*ming*), and therefore freedom, is defined by the convergence of dependence and independence. Thus, it can only be counter-productive and oppressive if rightness or appropriateness is dictated by an external factor, whether it be the notion of some internal self that is ultimately problematic as it is in liberalism, or an outright external dominant authority. Such ideological dominance from an external authority is what Isaiah Berlin would refer to as positive liberty, which he critiques as “a deep and incurable metaphysical need; ... to allow it to determine one’s practice is a symptom of an equally deep, and more dangerous, moral and political immaturity.”⁴⁴⁹ Indeed such freedom which Berlin holds as oppressive, in contrast to the negative freedom of liberalism, is a false dichotomy of liberties; in the end, both ultimately come from a self

⁴⁴⁷ Zhuangzi 17.25.2-5, quoted in *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. 74

⁴⁴⁸ Guo Xiang Commentary 17.25.2G—5G(1-2)

⁴⁴⁹ Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty.” 217.

that is withdrawn from its environment. In contrast, we are presented here with an alternative notion of freedom. This freedom derived from a self which is spontaneously emerging from moment to moment, determined not by constitution nor any particularly linear cause, but by everything else, that is, the transformation and movement of everything. As such, “freedom in:” is a freedom that is necessary and singular inasmuch as it is purely contingent in constitution and transformation, in relation to the necessity of everything else’s contingency; one that is satisfied and at ease, not in spite of, but because of the *other*—that is, the convergence of subjectivity with objective order.

In other words, it is because the self doesn’t arise from nowhere, that we are perpetually bound by all that caused how we know and understand ourselves, by what we think of when we think of our own identities—each unique but also fleeting and inexorably linked to “others.” We can never be sure of the consequences of our actions, especially when we deliberately seek for their results just as gasping and spitting fish do, and we can always have good yet misguided intentions. However, to be aware that our actions, our “identities” or allotment and even fate, are ultimately caused by everything and nothing, and to think of ourselves as agents in and of our environment, is freedom in its most autonomous sense.

Guo Xiang’s notion of freedom, as Liu Xiaogan has pointed out, is mental or epistemic in nature. However, this is not to say that it has no socio-political and moral implications. After all, the primary goal of Guo Xiang and his Neo-Daoist peers, as shown to us by Richard Lynn, was political reform. Guo Xiang’s account merely shows us the underlying epistemic nature of our socio-political transactions. If the self is the one doing the transacting, it matters how that self is formed. It matters, moreover, that we are liberated from a “self” not spontaneously formed, or not self-realized (*zide*), which is ultimately externally formed (性分之外 *xingfenzhiwai*).

Guo Xiang’s account of “freedom in” can thus serve as a more holistic alternative to Berlin’s liberal “freedom from” and conservative “freedom to,” for it takes into account that in order to achieve the kind of self-determination where the self is not compromised, one must first achieve self-realization. It is in this dialectical process that we collectively share the burden of continuously creating circumstances conducive to such determination, and hence be able to possess what I have called a “dependence-based autonomy.” More importantly, however, Guo Xiang’s philosophical enterprise allows us to see that in order to achieve freedom, we must become adapt to the dialectical conditions that frame how we view our selves and others around us, as well as our place in the world as manufacturers and consumers of knowledge; knowledge that dictates how we transact with the world, and ultimately our political and moral autonomy. Guo Xiang’s account of freedom is thus worth exploring as a powerful tool in dealing with the politics of difference—an issue that is pertinent now more than ever.

Freedom is situationally dependent. Dependence-based autonomy is an emergent quality of one who has successfully negotiated with the multitude for conducive conditions to self-realization, thereby achieving the kind of self-determination worth wanting. One of the most telling phrases that Guo Xiang tells us is that: *If the world cannot use me, I have no use of my own.* 不能用我。則我無自用。 This shows how our actions should always depend on their contexts, but it tells us something deeper than that, too. It tells us that freedom is not self-determination in and of itself, whether within limits such that one does not overstep others' self-determinations, but rather, that self-realization is something that we gain from fulfilling our duties to other people, and that that is the only way we can build a self that is truly determining its own actions. Far from the individual as starting point, we see in Guo Xiang a contrary image of freedom, one that acknowledges how much we owe to each other, to the world, and how fulfilling that within its proper context (albeit always changing), is what it means to be autonomous. In this manner, Guo Xiang can still be considered as a pluralist, but not of the liberal sort where the individual is removed from its context. We do owe each other, but what we owe is never fixed, for our own selves are never fixed, and our identities are always contingent, but they are singular, and thereby necessary.

There is much work that is ahead of this new possibility in framing what freedom means, but for now, it would suffice to say that this alternative account of freedom goes beyond liberalism and its false dichotomization of liberty, precisely because far from being a mystic or a fatalist, Guo Xiang understood that “becoming one with nature” and “forgetting oneself in order to remember oneself” are not romantic ideals. It is an encouragement to get back to the ground of our material practices and how the formation of our ideals can be re-examined through the singularity of our identities. It is, therefore, revolutionary, both for its time and for today.

CONCLUSION

And then one day there came to be a creature whose genetic material was in no major way different from the self-replicating molecular collectives of any of the other organisms on his planet, which he called Earth. But he was able to ponder the mystery of his origins, the strange and tortuous path by which he had emerged from star-stuff. *He was the matter of the cosmos, contemplating itself.* He considered the problematical and enigmatic question of his future. He called himself Man. He was one of the starfolk. And he longed to return to the stars.

– Carl Sagan, “Starfolk: A Fable,” *Cosmic Connection: An Extraterrestrial Perspective*

The philosophy of Guo Xiang is, ultimately, a philosophy of freedom. In this work, I have tried to explore exactly what this means in the context Guo Xiang’s philosophical system. At the same time, I have attempted to provide a rehabilitation of freedom understood as self-realization in contemporary debate. I aimed to achieve these through a more holistic and comprehensive approach to re-examining the concepts pertinent to Guo Xiang’s philosophical account—binding the ontological and epistemological concepts that he introduced together with the socio-political aspects that ultimately motivated his work and goals.

More specifically, in the introductory chapter, I have laid down the framework upon which Guo Xiang’s notion of freedom should be understood. I discussed why it would be problematic to look for an equivalent of what we understand as “freedom” from Anglo-European philosophy; as well as how freedom, despite not having an equivalent word in classical Chinese philosophy, appears as struggle for self-realization. Finally, I laid down the methodological significance of looking at Guo Xiang’s philosophy, specifically drawing from his role as the philosophical acme of the unique era where he belonged. Indeed, it was in Guo Xiang where we saw the height of the philosophical amalgamation of 自然 *ziran* and 名教 *mingjiao*—an intellectual task that served as a major strand of *Wei-Jin* philosophical discourse. Moreover, this amalgamation and syncretic framework proved significant in allowing Guo Xiang to conceive of freedom and autonomy as an active form of agency, while avoiding the pitfalls of a transcendent self that is outside the world of empirical causality. It is in this regard, and because there is no fixed essence to the “self” that self-realization *is* the spontaneous realization of all things, making freedom an achieved but emergent phenomenon.

It is, however, in the first main chapter where I began to directly engage with Guo Xiang's philosophical system. Here, I introduced what I called the "*logic of convergence*" which, as I have argued, not only highlighted the complementarity of opposites as well as myriad things, but rather, required their complete and radical convergence. I've demonstrated this through discussing the convergence of the concepts of nonbeing and being through the absolute nature of existence, but clarified how this does not mean that existence is fixed or essentialized. What it meant, I argued, was that causality itself was radical and that existence is a network of beings rather than isolated atoms independent from each other. As such, the natures of emergence and transformation are both singular and inter-dependent, necessary and contingent, part and whole, coherent and incoherent. In Guo Xiang's system, the one pattern of being self-so (*ziran*) fuses with the many different natures of the multitude things. Through this radical inter-causality where everything is caused by everything, all things are both uncaused and radically caused.

I then took this framework of "logical convergence" as a basis for the second main chapter's discussion on the nature of the self. In this chapter, I demonstrated the possibility of conceiving of the self that is neither split between a real and false one, nor radically independent of, or transcendent from, others. I applied the "logic of convergence" as the sameness of difference to my discussions on nature (性 *xing*) as framed by one's allotment (分 *fen*) and endowment (命 *ming*); whereas allotment highlights the particularity of the self, the endowment of one's nature highlights the self's connection to the whole. I then showed how one's nature can always be transforming by virtue of their spontaneous and emergent characteristics, despite having been provided by heaven (天 *Tian*), since heaven itself is self-so (*ziran*). Through an elaboration of these concepts, I have shown the inter-penetration of the self that breaks down the dichotomy between subject and object, as well as self and others—an absolute and singular self which, through its radical interpretation, transforms only within itself. It is therefore this self that is realized when self-realization (自得 *zide*) is achieved.

In the last main chapter thus, I have attempted to explore the concept of freedom based on Guo Xiang's notions of causality as well as one's own nature. Here, I followed several scholars in having attempted to argue that, like many of his peers and as is the practice of the *Wei-Jin* politicians and scholars, material life has shaped ideology rather than the other way around. As such, even though Guo Xiang talks in great lengths about ontological and epistemological concepts, his motivations and goals were, in the end, social and political in nature. This informed my discussions of independence (無待 *wudai*) as being

one and the same with dependence (有待 *youdai*). From this, I have aimed to re-construct such notion of autonomy and called it a “dependence-based autonomy” wherein freedom is derived from a radical dependence. I demonstrated this further by elaborating on the specific dimensions for achieving self-realization, equating having no heart-mind (無心 *wuxin*) with a participatory urge of being self-so, as well as the uniqueness and singularity of that participation when one is self-realized (*zide*), since realization is dependent on one’s environment. In the same section, I argued that, even though scholars have traditionally regarded “far-reaching and unfettered” (逍遙 *xiaoyao*) as espousing freedom due to its libertarian nature, this is not the case in Guo Xiang, because true freedom is unique to each and every creature, as we can see from the ironic phenomenon of *xiaoyao* as something that can only be truly achieved within bounds or limits. Finally, I introduce a reconstruction of the concept of freedom, which I argued ought to be understood as “freedom in.” I argued in this chapter that this notion of freedom is a better alternative to more dominant notions of freedom as presented by Isaiah Berlin, because unlike notions of freedom that aim to take the subject away from its environment, it allows us to deal more holistically with difference, otherness, and the reality of causality.

Throughout this work, my aim has been to show that freedom is something we achieve and realize. The notion that a subject is born with it, and that one can return to it by isolating oneself from others would be a strange idea, not just to Guo Xiang, but to most Chinese philosophers. Rather, freedom is complex and fragile, and from our philosophical exposition, we see that—despite romantic ideations of individual libertarianism—only the kind of freedom that is collectively attained through radical dependence can be worth having. Self-cultivation, in as much as it focuses on the self, is something that cannot be achieved in isolation from others. Guo Xiang’s inter-causal account of the process of existence, as well as the epistemological silence that is required of us in order to be able properly listen and interact with the world, are key to understanding our inherent connection to our cosmos, to each other, and ultimately our pursuit of freedom.

Although we only focused on Guo Xiang for the unique character of his philosophy in Chinese intellectual history, we are left with the understanding that there is much work that is remaining to be done in the task of exploring the notion of freedom in the context of Chinese philosophy. As we have seen, truly comparative and inter-cultural approaches can lead to truly distinct and unique arsenals of knowledge that are ripe, not only for shedding light into our philosophical dispositions, but more importantly, in leading us to understand the real and harmful consequences of fixating onto our deeply held truths.

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