



Open Sky – Open Society: Zhuangzi and Jaspers On Understanding and Communicating Without Closure

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Abstract: This essay advances an intercultural dialogue between Jaspers and Zhuangzi. Their arguments, rhetorical devices, and suggested perspectives serve transformative rather than principally epistemological functions. In his monograph on Laozi-Zhuangzi Daoism, Jaspers idolizes Laozi but denigrates Zhuangzi. The present intercultural discourse contrasts Jaspers' insensitive critique of Zhuangzi with both Zhuangzi's substantive views and Jaspers' own tenets, which are not only compatible with but essentially align closely with Zhuangzi's. Jaspers' uncharacteristically biased assessment can be explained on the grounds of starkly opposed philosophical styles and temperaments. Jaspers is perplexed by Zhuangzi's lighthearted multi-genre virtuosity and also oblivious to his skillful rhetoric that de-reifies cognitive patterns in favor of effective strategies of self-transformation. The apparent contradiction between Zhuangzi's relativistic perspectivism and his privileging of oneness can best be resolved by a hermeneutics of omniscient holism.

Keywords: Zhuangzi; Jaspers, Karl; Laozi; Daoism; existentialism; truth; transcendence; innerworldliness; relativism; perspectivism; omniscient holism; intercultural philosophy.

Staging an intercultural dialogue between Karl Jaspers and Zhuangzi,¹ the ancient Chinese sage, is a challenging yet potentially very rewarding undertaking. Jaspers and Zhuangzi are quite distinct yet also exceptionally compatible thinkers, despite Jaspers' harsh critique of Zhuangzi.²

¹ A version of this essay was first presented at the Eighth International Karl Jaspers World Conference: Karl Jaspers in a Global Context, in conjunction with the XXIVth World Congress of Philosophy, August 13–20, 2018, Beijing.

² This essay goes beyond a merely comparative analysis of Zhuangzi and Jaspers. It aims at an intercultural process of clarifying systematic philosophical issues in different cultural contexts.

Jaspers was a major force in the creation of world philosophy, as documented throughout his teaching and works, commencing with his *Psychology of World Views*. He was one of the few major Western philosophers who demonstrated a passionate engagement with non-Western thought.³ In his four-volume oeuvre *The Great*

³ Arthur Schopenhauer and, to a lesser degree, Nietzsche are among nineteenth century pioneers in launching world philosophy. Carl Gustav Jung, beginning in the early decades of the twentieth century, engaged with South and East Asian thought enthusiastically and critically from a depth psychology perspective. Martin Heidegger appreciated engagement and conversations with East Asian scholars as he acknowledged only obliquely in his later works. My approach here is

Philosophers Jaspers wrote, among other philosophers, about Buddha, Nagarjuna, and about three Chinese philosophers: Confucius (Kongzi), Laozi, and Zhuangzi. In the section on Laozi-Zhuangzi Daoism,⁴ Jaspers treats Zhuangzi, "the man of letters" (GP2 412), only as the most famous disciple of Laozi "in relation to whom he is not even an adequate commentator" (GP2 413).⁵ The following discussion examines the validity of Jaspers' verdict and suggests various explanations for Jaspers' overt negative judgment.

Jaspers' Praise of Laozi's *Daodejing* and his Critique of Zhuangzi

The *Daodejing*, the classic Chinese text, dating back to the fourth century BCE or earlier, has traditionally been attributed to the legendary figure Laozi. Jaspers expresses the highest praise and deepest admiration for the work of eighty-one maxims ascribed to "The Old Master." The following passage sets the stage for Jaspers' soaring esteem:

Without systematic terminology, there is a unity of thought which lends itself to systematic interpretation. The power of its paradoxical formulations (without playfulness or irresponsible wit), its earnestness, and the impact of a seemingly unfathomable depth make the book one of the irreplaceable works of philosophy. [GP2 389]

The *Daodejing*, Jaspers states, does not need a historical introduction "because of the timeless character of this metaphysical thinking" (GP2 389). He speaks of this text as if it were an ancient synopsis of his own existentialist philosophizing:

indebted to an intercultural hermeneutics outlined in Eric S. Nelson, *Chinese and Buddhist Philosophy in Early Twentieth-Century German Thought*, New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. Nelson examines enduring obstacles and promising beginnings of an intercultural East-West dialogue. I attempt the same, albeit on a much smaller scale, by revisiting Jaspers' severe assessment of Zhuangzi.

⁴ Karl Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers. Volume II: The Original Thinkers*, transl. Ralph Mannheim, New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace & World 1966, pp. 388-415. [Henceforth cited as GP2]

⁵ I have changed the term "Tao" and the names "Lao-tzu" and "Chuang-tzu" in Jaspers' text to the contemporary Hanyu Pinyin Romanization: "Dao," "Laozi," and "Zhuangzi."

In emptiness [Dao] remains...richer in potentiality than all mere reality in the world, in nonbeing it is more than being, in the undifferentiated ground greater than all determinate, objectively differentiated being. It remains the Encompassing. [GP2 391]

Toward the end of this monograph, Jaspers expresses his deeply felt intimacy with "The Old Master" even terminologically: "Laozi speaks from the standpoint of perfection or eternity. He speaks from the Encompassing to the Encompassing" (GP2 411).

Jaspers welcomes the benevolent effects of the *Daodejing*, or as Ames and Hall aptly extended the title of this ancient Chinese classic: "Making This Life Significant."⁶ Jaspers writes: "The profound peace of the Dao is present in every one of Laozi's thoughts" (GP2 412).

In contrast to his total embrace of the *Daodejing*, Jaspers feels largely repelled by the *Zhuangzi*, the second most known work of Daoism, which seconds Laozi purely in a contrarian spirit, as Stephen Mitchell shows in his adaptation and brilliant commentary entitled *The Second Book of the Tao*.⁷ Jaspers critically ponders: "The atmosphere in Laozi is peaceful; in Zhuangzi it is polemical, full of arrogance, mockery, contempt" (GP2 413). Jaspers charges Zhuangzi with being a flashy literary deconstructionist:

Zhuangzi startles us with surprise effects; his prevailing mood is one of irony and skepticism; he treats Laozi's ideas as material for his literary invention. One feels that he deliberately set out to produce literature. Thus the meaning of every single word of Laozi is transformed. [GP2 413]

Jaspers sums up his verdict with some modicum of reserved fairness:

Zhuangzi's admirable gift of invention, his penetrating ideas about world and reality, about language, his insight into psychological states, his richness, make him one of the most interesting Chinese authors. But he must not be confused with Laozi, in relation to whom he is not even an adequate commentator. [GP2 413]

⁶ Laozi, *Daodejing: "Making This Life Significant," A Philosophical Translation*, transl. Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall. New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2003. This translation and commentary is based on the three Guodian bamboo scrolls that were excavated in 1993.

⁷ Stephen Mitchell, *The Second Book of the Tao: Compiled and Adapted from the Chuang-tzu and the Chung Yung, with Commentaries*, New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2009.

Jaspers' overall critique of Zhuangzi is uncharacteristically hard-hitting and unmerited, considering the fact that Jaspers does not quote, analyze, or dispute any actual passage from the *Zhuangzi*. His direct familiarity with Zhuangzi's text is doubtful. A closer look at Zhuangzi, the impious disrupter and literary rebel, is needed in order to determine whether Jaspers' assertions and judgments about Zhuangzi are justified.

Zhuangzi's Central Teachings

Little is known about The Old Master, the legendary Laozi. Not much more is known about the historical Zhuang Zhou (approximately 369-286 BCE), the alleged author of the literary work, the *Zhuangzi*, in which Zhuang also functions as an interlocutor. The entire work consists of thirty-three extant chapters. In the following I will refer only to chapters one through seven, the "Inner Chapters," which most Sinologists regard as being Zhuangzi's own writings.⁸

Zhuangzi, who is often being referred to as "Master Zhuang," wears many masks. It is impossible to find plain descriptive terms for this iridescent and unpredictable personality and his multi-faceted, dazzling literary virtuosity. This indeterminacy is part of his distinctive appeal and reflects a central feature of his teaching: bursting the streamlined confines of systematic discourse. By way of various literary devices such as fable, myth, paradox, dream, witty snappy dialogs, ironic rejoinders, and ample puns Zhuangzi makes obvious the relativity of all perspectives and the self-inflicted undermining of skepticism, by simply noting their internal contradictions. However, instead of ending up at impasse or in immobilizing suspense, Zhuangzi arrives at vastly liberating vistas.

Already in chapter one, "Wandering Far and Unfettered," Zhuangzi prefigures the possibility of real independence and freedom. Real independence is not gained by separation from, but by complete involvement with things, and by acknowledging one's dependence on each and every thing and every being. Such realization removes barriers that block continual

personal transformation and opens the space for freely shifting and evolving identities. Zhuangzi expresses this lofty vista in his statement that "the Consummate Person has no fixed identity, the Spirit Man has no particular merit, the Sage has no one name" (ZZ 6).

Zhuangzi illustrates the theme of fluid and flexible identities with the story of the wind that passes over hollowed items (as in the woods) and thus produces a multitude of tones. One can hear the various tones, but what is the sound of the wind itself? And who is the blower? The story suggests that the different tones represent various emotional predispositions or moods, which determine one's changing perspectives on the world. Zhuangzi continues to probe on what it is that the transformation of moods and perspectives depends, and on how this transformation in turn affects what one knows.

Zhuangzi uses the wind as a metaphor for the Dao (the Course, the Way). Yet, just as the sound of the wind itself cannot be identified, the Way or Course also cannot be specified by any concrete means.

Zhuangzi intimates that the way humans know things is dependent on our perspectives, moods, or perceptual dispositions, and that even the question about the origin of one's perspectives is necessarily asked from a perspectival view.⁹ That means that the truthfulness or adequacy of any perspective too can be evaluated only according to criteria that are internal to that specific perspective. Consequently, there is no perspective-independent vantage point. This is a central tenet in Zhuangzi's epistemology.

Up to this point Zhuangzi appears to be a straightforward perspectival relativist. However,

⁹ For example, Martin Heidegger assigns a decisive cognitive function to moods in his *Being and Time*, transl. John Macquarrie and Edward S. Robinson, New York, NY: Harper & Row 1962. [Henceforth cited as *BT*] Heidegger points out that moods attune one to the world and are thus disclosing it. "A mood makes manifest 'how one is, and how one is faring.' In this 'how one is,' having a mood brings Being to its 'there'" (*BT* 173). "Dasein's openness to the world is constituted existentially by the attunement of a state-of-mind" (*BT* 176). "Existentially, a state-of-mind implies a disclosive submission to the world, out of which we can encounter something that matters to us. Indeed from the ontological point of view we must as a general principle leave the primary discovery of the world to 'bare mood'" (*BT* 177). For Heidegger, "world" refers to a concrete, pragmatically encountered gestalt of everyday living (italics are in the original text).

⁸ Zhuangzi, "The Inner Chapters," in *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, transl. Brook Ziporyn, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company 2009, pp. 1-54. [Henceforth cited as ZZ] I am indebted to Ziporyn's illuminating commentaries in the online supplement www.hackettpublishing.com/zhuangzisup.

Zhuangzi refines his overall argument by his notion of the Course-Axis, or the Course as Axis. The Course-Axis is a conceptual tool for dealing with diverse perspectives in an open and free manner. It is based on the insight that "this" and "that" are not contrasting and exclusive opposites. On the contrary, they are implying each other: "that" is a "this" from the perspective of "that." (The same applies to the evaluative opposites of "right" and "wrong.") Since "this" and "that" are interchangeable in terms of perspective and do exist everywhere, Zhuangzi has shown the "oneness" of all things as well as their non-oneness, depending on one's chosen perspective. Insight into the dialectical co-emergence of oneness and non-oneness leads to a synthesizing, overarching oneness as realized and lived by sages, that is by humans who take it as it comes: accepting and riding each "this."

After giving several examples of the Genuine Human Beings living in former times, Zhuangzi makes the following generalization about sages:

Thus, what they liked was the oneness of things, but what they disliked was also the oneness of things. Their oneness was the oneness, but their non-oneness was also the oneness. In their oneness, they were followers of the Heavenly. In their non-oneness, they were followers of the Human. This is what it is for neither the Heavenly nor the Human to win out over the other. And that is what I call both Genuine and Human, a Genuine Human Being. [ZZ 42]

This ultimate oneness is characterized by a thorough Non-knowing, which is "peculiarly devoid of any manifest sign" (ZZ 10)—or as Jaspers might say: oneness is present without any manifest cipher. This Non-knowing is the axis and unmoving center of the Genuine Human Being. As it is a general orientation and inner compass, the Course-Axis does not function as a specific guide for knowing or acting.

This Non-knowing is the Course-Axis, or the axis of all courses, of all Daos. It is marked by complete openness and hence maximal flexibility, cognitively and behaviorally. Non-knowing invites new perspectives, which in turn generate further perspectives. The Genuine Human Being, in tune and in step with the Course-Axis, can entertain and enjoy multiple perspectives and their autocatalytic permutations, which in turn transform any beholder who does not cling to any specific identity.

Zhuangzi illustrates this axial Non-knowing and its concomitant flexibility by the story of the monkey trainer, who tells his monkeys that he will give them

three chestnuts in the morning and four in the evening. Upon outrage by the monkeys, demanding instead four chestnuts in the morning and three in the evening, the monkey trainer simply accepts their demand, without trying to convince them neither of his position nor of the fact that the number of chestnuts per day remains the same. The monkey keeper is staying his course while temporarily also accepting their specific course that is opposed to his. "He just went by the rightness of their present 'this'" (ZZ 14), thereby holding two opposing perspectives simultaneously. This story illustrates "Walking Two Roads," which is the way of the sage who "remains at rest in the middle of Heaven, the Potter's Wheel" (ZZ 14).

When fully aware of the multiplicity of perspectives, one faces the obvious: different perspectives exist, and that there are no perspective-free means to evaluate them. Zhuangzi calls this fundamental recognition the "Illumination of the Obvious" (ZZ 15). Failure and success, right and wrong, good and bad: each evaluation or judgment is dependent on a perspective, and it is consistent only with its own premises. This "Illumination of the Obvious" functions as Zhuangzi's Dao, his Course-Axis. But he is not considering it as a meta-course that is subordinating all other Daos or perspectives. For him, his Course-Axis is just another perspective. It functions, however, like a wild card in the hands of an ambidextrous card player.

The wild card has no fixed identity and therefore empowers the player's current course of action. The Course-Axis, while motionless at the center of the potter's wheel, boosts the free motions of the card player. Not being committed to any one perspective, the player who knows to play the wild card, the "Illumination of the Obvious," rides upon each perspectival transformation with agility and freedom. Zhuangzi's open sky has no place for rigid metaphysical pronouncements, for they try to fix and order things and people in conceptual straightjackets. His literary inventions wage a constant war against any reifying thinking, including assumptions regarding what qualifies as depth or surface reality. For Zhuangzi, there is no opposition between surface and depth, as the surface of everyday things and beings is their depth.

Occasionally Zhuangzi invokes "The Heavenly" or "The Skylike" to characterize the generation of new perspectives analogous to the literally rotating sky that brings forth crops over the course of the seasons without someone's deliberate action. The openness and spontaneity of the sky stands in contrast to his notion

of "The Human," which is bound, limited, and closed off by deliberate action and the pursuit of specific purposes. To be sure, the term "Heaven" is also a designation issuing from a specific perspective. Hence Zhuangzi asks himself: "So how could I know whether what I call the Heavenly is not really the Human. How could I know whether what I call the Human is not really the Heavenly" (ZZ 39-40)? This Non-knowing is the pivot, the central still point: the meta-stable, guiding Illumination of the Obvious, which functions also as Zhuangzi's central and centering "Radiance of Drift and Doubt" – which is his Dao.

Jaspers finds Zhuangzi to be startling, restless, and agitated (GP2 413). This judgment might be justified, if one takes Zhuangzi's Socratic argumentative vein, irony and skepticism at face value. In contrast to Jaspers' assessment, I find Zhuangzi delightfully relaxed, composed, and poised – precisely because his relativism and perspectivism, continually open to self-referential suspense and revision, know no borders. Zhuangzi has apparently surrendered to "The Sky," "The Heavenly." His actions spontaneously and naturally follow the principle of wu wei, which can be understood as spontaneous, non-coercive conduct that is instilled by Zhuangzi's total Non-knowing panorama.

In his discussion of the late nineteenth century New Thought movement that William James dubbed "mind-cure movement," and related schemes of conceiving fitting adaptations to the perceived universe, James provides a pertinent insight about surrender that may also shed light on Zhuangzi's yielding trust in a cosmic order:

Here, in the very heyday of science's authority, it [mind-cure movement] carries on an aggressive warfare against the scientific philosophy, and succeeds by using science's own peculiar methods and weapons. Believing that a higher power will take care of us in certain ways better than we can take of us ourselves, if we only genuinely throw ourselves upon it and consent to use it, it finds the belief, not only not impugned, but corroborated by its observation.¹⁰

To be sure, Zhuangzi's encompassing trust is neither an experimental arrangement nor mere belief. It is a spontaneous and innate feature of his existence, of being himself.

¹⁰ William James, "The Varieties of Religious Experience," in *Writings 1902-1910*, New York, NY: The Library of America 1987, pp. 1-477, here p. 114.

Zhuangzi's fundamental recognition of the "Illumination of the Obvious" rests on the elemental insight that abundant and diverse perspectives do exist. They have equal claims to validity. Zhuangzi recounts their emergence:

Something is affirmative because someone affirms it.
Something is negative because someone negates it.
Courses are formed by someone walking them. Things are so by being called so. [ZZ 13]

By various rhetorical means Zhuangzi drives home his point that, on the one hand, there are no perspective-free means to evaluate perspectives. On the other hand, he holds that all things, including perspectives, are one and that all perspectives are equally justified, as his discussion shows of the co-emergence of any "this" and "that" and its pragmatic transposition into the skillful practice of simultaneously "Walking Two Roads." Scholarship on the *Zhuangzi* is divided as to privileging Zhuangzi's relativistic perspectivism or his unitary, mystical vision.

Ziporyn detects omniscient holism at the center of the Inner Chapters and demonstrates how such holism harmonizes the perspectivism and the unitary, mystical vision in the *Zhuangzi*. Ziporyn describes "omniscient holism" as being a systemic point of view that perceives a whole as a function of interdependent parts, which interact on a critical level of integration and interpenetration such that each part of the whole is a center of the whole and therefore also identical with any other part.¹¹ A hologram is a physical counterpart of this mindboggling concept. Informed by omniscient holism as an interpretive scheme, a reading of Zhuangzi's ostensibly lapidary statement that "things are so by being called so" enables one to grasp the value paradox and apparently contradictory views in dynamic and equalizing harmony, as demonstrated, for instance, in the telling tale of the monkey trainer's laid-back diplomacy.

Stating the concept of omniscient holism in more concrete terms, one can notice that Zhuangzi is making

¹¹ Brook Ziporyn, "How Many Are the Ten Thousand Things and I? Relativism, Mysticism, and the Privileging of Oneness in the 'Inner Chapters,'" in *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi*, ed. Scott Cook, Albany, NY: State University of New York 2003, pp. 33-63. See pp. 34-6 for Ziporyn's explanation of omniscient holism as being the best interpretive approach to resolving apparent contradictions in Zhuangzi's Inner Chapters.

the following central point: each "this" is the "one," even though it may be labeled a "that," which is just another "this" seen from a different perspective. Wherever one looks, one perceives the same oneness. It merely has a different, unique face dependent on one's current outlook. Thus, perspectivism and oneness coexist simultaneously and peacefully.

Politics

Chapter two contains the core of Zhuangzi's philosophizing. The subsequent five chapters of the "Inner Chapters" assemble various applications of his central teachings. Zhuangzi makes only occasional remarks that have a bearing on politics. Chapter Four, "In the Human World," dispenses some political advice, but only sparingly and mostly by indirection. Zhuangzi's cosmological contrast between "The Heavenly" and "The Human" informs also his general view on politics. The skylike openness and spontaneity of the cosmic order, "The Heavenly," stands out against "The Human" that is marked by clever machinations and the ambitious pursuit of narrow, self-serving purposes. Consequently, Zhuangzi doubts whether any deliberate plan can improve political life and social conditions. He suggests that the only effective way of promoting social improvements consists in individuals learning the "fasting of the mind." This practice is the cultivated skill "to hear with the vital energy rather than with the mind" (ZZ 26).¹² For Zhuangzi, this vital hearing depends on the cultivation of emptiness that invites the presence of beings: "And it is this emptiness that is the fasting of the mind" (ZZ 27).

In his whole-hearted embrace of Laozi, Jaspers sympathizes also with Laozi's endorsement of rulership by the wise and through Dao-infused libertarianism, which, naturally, requires only minimal governmental interference. In equal measure, Jaspers could have concurred with Zhuangzi's hands-off political view.

On a biographical level, Jaspers may certainly have sympathized with the story told in Chapter Four, which concerns a huge tree that has been spared the axe because its wood was deemed as being inferior. Carpenter Shi explains to his apprentice, who admires

¹² Zhuangzi's admonition to hear "with the vital energy" rather than merely with the mind serves as a subtle hint for contemporary philosophers of mind who are pursuing reductively naturalistic explanatory frameworks (for example, Francis Crick, Roger Penrose, Daniel C. Dennett).

this spectacular tree for its fine material: "This is a talentless, worthless tree. It is precisely because it is so useless that it has lived so long" (ZZ 30).

Wu wei, or "nondoing" understood as "absence of deliberate action" (ZZ 53 n.15), is enhanced by Non-knowing and is, accordingly, both a down-to-earth (innerworldly) and skylike (transcendent) way of how "Walking Two Roads" can be expressed. Laozi and Zhuangzi both lived during the long era of the Warring States (475-221 BCE).¹³ If Zhuangzi would have seen also in the political sphere an opportunity to genuinely practice "Walking Two Roads," he might not have rejected the position of prime minister, which the emperor allegedly offered him. It was Zhuangzi's insight, however, that he could not serve in this function without losing his integrity or his life. Jaspers did not pursue a less precarious opportunity, when according to Hans Saner he was suggested as a possible candidate for President of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1959.¹⁴

Religion and Inquisitive Spirituality

"Walking Two Roads" can be applied also to the religious sphere. One can, for instance, accept and practice conventional soteriological forms (such as liturgy, rituals, symbolic actions, affirmations) as harmonizing concessions to a religious community, while these forms may also be seen in their historic and symbolic contingencies. In order to achieve religious and political tolerance, hostile religious factions, for instance, might embrace Zhuangzi's central point exemplified in his instructive, humorous story "Three in the Morning" in

¹³ According to Chenyang Li, the era known as "Spring and Autumn" (770-476 BCE) and the following Warring States period (475-221 BCE) "were times when the previously established political and moral order collapsed and various streams of thought arose in response. Numerous schools of thought competed, engaging in sometimes heated debates. This period was the most creative and productive time for Chinese philosophy, laying much of the foundation for the later development of Chinese intellectual traditions." Chenyang Li, "Chinese Philosophy," in *The Oxford Handbook of World Philosophy*, eds. Jay L. Garfield and William Edelglass, New York, NY: Oxford University Press 2011, pp. 7-12; here p. 11.

¹⁴ Hans Saner, *Karl Jaspers, Mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, Hamburg, DE: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag 2014, p. 60.

order to achieve religious and political tolerance.

In order to deepen and exemplify the potential of Zhuangzi's conciliatory diplomacy of "Walking Two Roads," I will take a second look at Ziporyn's hermeneutics of omniscient holism, but this time in the specific context of inquisitive spirituality. The spiritual teacher A. Hameed Ali, who writes under the pen name A. H. Almaas, proposes a nonhierarchical view of Total Being, a view that is particularly suitable for explaining the spontaneous unfolding of one's true nature (essential identity) in an ever-expanding experience of freedom.¹⁵ Akin to Jaspers' equation of *Existenz* and *Selbstsein* (being oneself), Almaas' notion of "true nature" refers to the essence of things and manifests in humans as the "Genuine Human Being" that Zhuangzi is frequently invoking. Almaas holds that "All the ways that true nature manifests itself are one thing" (AOF 144) and similar to Zhuangzi he is equally asserting the individual uniqueness of things and living beings. Parallel to Ziporyn's omniscient holism, Almaas finds "that one of the things that true nature reveals about reality is that it is a hall of mirrors, or that it is a hologram" (AOF 140) in which each fragment of the whole reflects the whole as well as any other fragment.

The nonhierarchical realization Almaas describes refers to a specific relationship of phenomena or forms with each other:

One of the understandings that this realization brings in is that each manifestation of true nature is all of true nature, each form of true nature is true nature in its entirety. [AOF 139]

Almaas emphasizes the importance of recognizing that "everything, each single thing, is reality." He elaborates:

From this, we can see that each experience, each form, each phenomenon is the expression of reality and is all of reality. Each thing is everything. Each thing contains the totality of true nature without leaving any remainder. Each thing is all things of all times and all space. [AOF 176]

If Almaas' nonhierarchical view of Total Being, or totality, is understood, realized and lived in its all-encompassing implications, it can be inferred that religious tolerance and political freedom can emerge naturally and spontaneously. In light of Almaas' omniscient perspective, mere belief, good intentions,

or top-down governmental programs are ineffective, if they do not go hand in hand with parallel affective and behavioral developments in individuals. I suggest that Zhuangzi and Jaspers would wholeheartedly concur on this point.

Truth Through Radical Openness

According to Jaspers' overall philosophical tenets his severe criticism of Zhuangzi is surprising and apparently baffling. In *Von der Wahrheit*, a major systematic work originally published in 1947, Jaspers states philosophical principles that are diametrically opposed to his later shallow reading of Zhuangzi.¹⁶

Jaspers acknowledges that statements about transcendence can be made only by indirection or by tentative statements that have to be retracted as soon as one has uttered them. In the following succinct passage Jaspers specifies the manner of adequately speaking of transcendence:

The infinite movement of thought in saying and not-saying, in voicing and its subsequent revocation, is the mode in which one can talk about transcendence. Speaking of transcendence does not find a definite, stable point. [VW 111]¹⁷

It is puzzling, therefore, when ten years after the publication of *Von der Wahrheit* Jaspers reproaches Zhuangzi for lacking a peaceful atmosphere. Jaspers is taken aback by the turbulences of Zhuangzi's argumentative storms while focusing on the outer, agitated forms of Zhuangzi's diverse tonal palette. Instead of criticizing him, Jaspers could have declared his solidarity with Zhuangzi's meandering movements

¹⁶ Karl Jaspers, *Von der Wahrheit*, Munich, DE: Piper Verlag, 1991. [Henceforth cited as VW] The title *Von der Wahrheit* can simply and adequately be translated as *On Truth*, but because "von" can contextually also mean "about" and "from," the German title combines the connotations resonating in "About (the) Truth" and "From (the) Truth." This majestic, systematic work of over 1,000 pages, the first of several other planned volumes on *Philosophische Logik*, is an underappreciated masterwork. All quotations from *Von der Wahrheit* are translated by the author.

¹⁷ "Die unendliche Bewegung des Gedankens im Sagen und Nichtsagen, im Aussprechen und Wiederzurücknehmen ist die Form, in der von Transzendenz geredet werden kann. Das Sprechen von ihr findet keinen festen Punkt."

¹⁵ A. H. Almaas, *The Alchemy of Freedom: The Philosophers' Stone and the Secrets of Existence*, Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications 2017. [Henceforth cited as AOF]

of thought. In addition to misconstruing Zhuangzi's jocular and confrontational rhetoric, Jaspers seems colorblind vis-à-vis Zhuangzi's playful, teasing still point at the axis of his philosophical thunder and multi-genre pyrotechnics.

For Jaspers, the felt presence of the Encompassing has the following consequences for the mode of his knowing:

The world is no burden anymore as that which objectively exists. It [the world] is brought into suspension, as it were. Each dominating, narrowing total worldview is dropping away. [VW 106]¹⁸

Zhuangzi's polemical debates with his friend and logician, Huizi, his stories, parables, historically factual or fictitious disputes with Confucius or Laozi, and other literary inventions serve the very purpose of dispelling the glamour and lure of any worldview that strives for monopoly. Zhuangzi's multi-genre pyrotechnics busts all philosophical cartels, even Daoism, if it loses its limber vitality and collapses into an abstract doctrine vying for supremacy. In principle, Jaspers concurs with Zhuangzi's skeptical caution:

Instead of one domineering total theory, many theories are valid according to their empirical fecundity. I confine myself to the reciprocal interaction of theory and experience in the realm of progressive discovery; I reject, however, every total knowledge claiming to be conclusive. Instead of one universal epistemology, methodological multiplicity reigns... Instead of a final frame of knowledge, there remains a radical openness, a readiness for new experience in all modes of the Encompassing. [VW 107]¹⁹

Jaspers could have made his case against the ancient Daoist sage by providing textual evidence in the context of a thorough understanding of *The Second*

¹⁸ "Die Welt lastet nicht mehr als das an sich Seiende. Sie wird gleichsam in the Schweben gebracht. Es fällt weg jede beherrschende, verengende Totalvorstellung."

¹⁹ "Statt einer beherrschenden Totaltheorie gelten viele Theorien nach dem Masse ihrer empirischen Fruchtbarkeit. Ich beschränke mich auf die Wechselwirkung von Theorie und Erfahrung im Raume fortschreitenden Entdeckens, verwerfe dagegen jedes abschliessende Totalwissen. Statt einer universalen Erkenntnismethode herrscht Methodenmannigfaltigkeit... Statt eines endgültigen Rahmens des Wissens bleibt eine radikale Offenheit, eine Bereitschaft zu neuer Erfahrung in allen Weisen des Umgreifenden."

Book of the Tao similar to Mitchell who thus baptized his congenial adaptation and empathic commentaries of the *Zhuangzi*. It appears to me that Jaspers did not thoroughly study the *Zhuangzi* and relied, instead, on a trusted secondary source. Additionally, he should have been truthful in acknowledging his insufficient familiarity with "Laozi's disciple," allowing Non-knowing to take the reigns in a genuine, open-ended exploration.

Non-knowing is Zhuangzi's Course-Axis, the general magnetic compass for his existence. Despite Jaspers' overt critique of Zhuangzi's deconstructing "literature," he actually shares this steady guidance with the ancient Chinese sage. Speaking of *Existenz* as *Selbstsein*, Jaspers states:

Here, where everything vanishes vis-à-vis my willful grasping for knowing, is, as it were, the axis, around which everything revolves that I am and what gains genuine existential meaning [*Seinssinn*] for me in the world. [VW 76]²⁰

Conclusion

Jaspers repeatedly expressed his deep appreciation for Chinese civilization and culture, as, for example, in the following passage: "In magnificent continuity, love of the world passes through millennia of Chinese life" (VW 112).²¹ This love of the world is evident in all three traditional pillars of Chinese philosophy: Confucianism, Daoism, and in a uniquely refreshing manner also in the main branches of Chinese Buddhism (Tiantai; Huayan; Chan). Yet Jaspers' verdict (GP2 413) that Zhuangzi "is not even an adequate commentator" of Laozi places Zhuangzi only at the lower rungs of China's love of the world and love of wisdom.

I have argued and demonstrated here that Zhuangzi is not only an adequate commentator of Laozi but also functions as his complementing foil. In my reading, Zhuangzi's flexible, sprightly and light-footed way of philosophizing is the balancing *yin* counterpart to Laozi's apodictic, solemn and orderly *yang* mode of reflection.

Jaspers confessed elective affinities only with

²⁰ "Hier, wo meinem wissenwollenden Zugreifen alles verschwindet, ist gleichsam die Achse, um die alles kreist, was ich bin und was in der Welt eigentlichen Seinssinn für mich gewinnt."

²¹ "In grossartiger Ungebrochenheit geht die Weltliebe durch die Jahrtausende chinesischen Lebens."

Laozi. His psychological disposition did definitely not resonate with "playfulness or irresponsible wit" (*GP2* 389) and is, I suspect, one major reason for his harsh and unbalanced criticism of Zhuangzi. Had Jaspers mustered "a radical openness, a readiness for new experience" (*VW* 107) also in his reception of Laozi's disciple, he would have found Zhuangzi to be an unexpected and congenial ally in his elucidating search of truth that has the power to show the path toward freedom.

Retrospectively, Zhuangzi may be regarded as being an exuberant Bohemian poet akin to Walt Whitman. One can only speculate for which reasons, or lack thereof, Jaspers did not engage with Zhuangzi's philosophy. Jaspers exhorts those who seek truth by allowing the mutual provocation of all modes of the Encompassing: "Dare to immerse yourself in this tension" (*VW* 188)!²² Apparently Jaspers did not or had chosen to not see the potential benefits from engaging with the probing Daoist who opens up all settled perspectives. However, Jaspers also confessed: "The Being of the Encompassing is indeed a Being in a tempest" (*VW* 188-9).²³ Zhuangzi's diverse and disruptive ways of understanding and communicating are his unique path of wandering at ease in the eyes of hurricanes.

Appendix

The following excerpt documents some of Jaspers' tenets that converge on those of Zhuangzi.

Fundamental Requirements of A Philosophy of the Encompassing

1. Safeguard for yourself the free realm of the Encompassing!

²² "Wage dich hinein in diese Spannung!"

²³ "Das Sein des Umgreifenden ist in der Tat ein Sein im Sturm."

- Do not lose yourself in knowing!
2. Do not reject any mode of the Encompassing!
Especially:
Do not allow your being to be subjected to slander!
Do not allow any prohibition of your thinking!
Do not allow to be separated from transcendence!
 3. Do not allow the modes of the Encompassing to destroy each other by exclusive antagonism, but allow them to fulfill themselves by mutual tension!
Dare to immerse yourself in this tension! Reject the easy, apparently unambiguous course of a single Encompassing mode that remains indifferent to other modes of the Encompassing, for example, the course of merely subsisting (living), of simply thinking correctly, and of mere animation of ideas of the mind!
 4. Do not confuse the modes of the Encompassing, for instance, do not confuse Existence with vitality, transcendence with nature, and spirit with intellect!
But do not forget the dependence of each mode of the Encompassing on each other! [*VW* 188]²⁴

²⁴ "1. Bewahre dir den freien Raum des Umgreifenden! Verliere dich nicht an ein Gewußtsein! 2. Verwirft keine Weise des Umgreifenden! Insbesondere: Lasse dir das Dasein nicht verleumden! Lasse dir das Denken nicht verbieten! Lasse dich nicht trennen von der Transzendenz! 3. Lasse die Weisen des Umgreifenden nicht in ausschließender Gegnerschaft sich zerstören, sondern lasse sie in gegenseitiger Spannung sich erfüllen! Wage dich hinein in diese Spannung! Verwirf den leichten, scheinbar eindeutigen Weg des einzelnen Umgreifenden, das unbekümmert um andere Umgreifende bleibt, z. B. den Weg bloßen Daseins (Lebens), bloß richtigen Denkens, bloßer Bewegtheit von Ideen des Geistes! 4. Verwechsele nicht die Weisen des Umgreifenden, z. B. nicht Existenz und Daseinsvitalität, nicht Transzendenz und Natur, nicht Geist und Verstand! Aber vergiß nicht das Angewiesensein jeder Weise des Umgreifenden auf jede andere!"