

The Equal Onto-Epistemology of
the “Equal Discourse of Things” [齊物論 Qiwulun] Chapter:
A Semantic Approach

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Abstract: *The 齊物論 Qiwulun chapter is perhaps the most controversial and difficult chapter of the Zhuangzi, not only philosophically speaking, but also semantically so. Indeed, precisely because of this semantic difficulty that the chapter proves to be more philosophically challenging. The title itself holds some controversy on whether it should be read as 2–1 or 1–2: the first option being that it is a discussion of the ontological equality of things, while the other option yields to the interpretation that it is an equalizing of the different schools of thought and their discussions thereof, making it a matter of epistemological relevance and an account on the matter of Truth. Needless to say, several sinologists who have translated the text for the Anglophone world have translated this differently. It is thus my aim in this article to shed a fresher Anglophone understanding through translating the chapter as “Equal Onto-Epistemology” which I support by translating — for brevity’s sake — three subsequent passages in Qiwulun which I believe aptly captures three key claims in it, specifically those with regard to philosophy of language, value, and over-all non-relative onto-epistemology. I will then provide a blow by blow interpretation.*

What this leads to is the philosophical implication that Zhuangzi was a realist, as he does acknowledge an appropriate position among myriad views: that of the whole as found in the particular, that is, the “fulcrum of Dao”, or 道樞 daoshu. Zhuangzi thus was a realist not only in the sense that he is not beholden to the idea of a romantic Oneness which universalizes all, but also, in the sense that he maintained that there’s an objective world — even though we can’t know it fully, complex and ever-changing as it is.

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philosophically challenging. The title itself holds some controversy on whether it should be read as 2–1 or 1–2: the first option being that it is a discussion of the ontological equality of things, while the other option yields to the interpretation that it is an equalizing of the different schools of thought and their discussions thereof, making it a matter of epistemological relevance and an account on the matter of Truth. Needless to say, several sinologists who have translated the text for the Anglophone world have translated this differently. The most famous seminal of these translations can perhaps be said to be that of Burton Watson, who translated the chapter into “Discussion on Making All Things Equal.”¹ In the same vein, Victor H. Mair and Feng Yu-lan both rendered the chapter as “On the Equality of Things”.² A.C. Graham, takes the same path as the initial predecessors and translates it as “The Sorting Which Evens Things Out”.³

Rather idiosyncratically, however, Herbert Giles translated the chapter as “The Identity of Contraries”⁴ and with good reason, as the chapter is a general attack against binary thought; similarly, James Legge translated the chapter into “The Adjustment of Controversies”.⁵ Giles and Legge thus read the title as 1–2, instead of 2–1 as Watson, Mair, Feng Yu-lan, and A.C. Graham does. Brook Ziporyn, however, innovatively preserves the ambiguity of the title by translating it as “Equalizing Assessments of Things”.⁶

It is thus now apparent that different cuts in the characters render the meaning in different ways, but what exactly is problematic about the above-mentioned translations. For one, the 2–1 translation by Watson, Feng Yu-lan, and Legge, does not really work because, as previously mentioned, the chapter is a general discussion against binary thought, apparent in the discussions of Confucians, Mohists, and those from the School of Names, as well the pervading themes of

¹ Zhuangzi, *Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

² Zhuangzi, *Wandering On the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu*, trans. Victor H. Mair (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1998); Zhuangzi, *Chuang-tzu: A New Selected Translation with an Exposition of the Philosophy of Kuo Hsiang*, trans. Feng Yu-lan (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1989).

³ Zhuangzi, *Chuang-tzŭ: The Inner Chapters*, trans. A.C. Graham (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2001).

⁴ Chuang-tzu, *Chuang Tzŭ: Mystic, Moralist, and Social Reformer*, trans. Herber Giles (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1889).

⁵ Zhuangzi, “莊子 — Zhuangzi”, Chinese Text Project, trans. James Legge, accessed April 17, 2017, <http://ctext.org/zhuangzi>.

⁶ Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, trans. Brook Ziporyn (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2009).

linguistic thought and our notions of what is right or wrong. In other words, it is quite apparent that the chapter does talk about our value judgments. The problem with translations of Giles and Legge, however, is that they take away from the original. This is an altogether different debate regarding the translation of Classical Chinese (or any other language with a different syntax for that matter) into English, but to be brief, I would like to point out that Chinese is very textured in terms of its identity and character as a language. As such, although the liberal translations of Giles and Legge may help the Anglophone reader to understand the text better, it presents too high a risk of losing the texture of original in favor of a more Western understanding, in which case it defeats its purpose of attacking the binary logic and aversion to obscurity that we know modern mathematical logic to have. This is especially apparent in Giles' translation which includes in it "contrary" — a word that is not only missing in the original, but also carries with it a baggage from Aristotle and traditional logic.

No doubt that Ziporyn renders it most sophisticated among the major translations, but to my mind, it poses a minor linguistic problem which nevertheless yields philosophical implications. That is, by translating 齊 *qi* as equalizing, it seems to suggest an ambiguously relativist account. That is, if we take his account to mean both ways, though the 1–2 reading of his translation yields an aptly epistemological point, the 2–1 part seems to pose the problem of subjective idealism, that is skeptical relativism. In other words it seems to suggest that this is a chapter of several assessments which seeks to equal-ize things. By opting for this action verb, it also opts to give humans an active power to change the nature of things, which seems to me what the *Qiwulun* is precisely criticizing. Though Ziporyn himself would have no problem with calling Zhuangzi a relativist, he does acknowledge that it is of a very different kind,⁷ and calls it the "the absolutist view".⁸ Precisely for this reason, however, that I am uncomfortable of labeling Zhuangzi as relativist. In fact it seems to me that Zhuangzi was a realist, in the sense of having acknowledged

⁷ Ziporyn notes: "Is Zhuangzi then a relativist? Certainly. But he is a relativist of a very distinctive stripe, which can lead to many misunderstandings ... One of the features of this position is that it sees all positions as necessarily involved in contradicting themselves and thus inevitably subject to transformation into other perspectives ... The contradicting of itself doesn't make the position go away, or fail to operate. It seems rather to be a necessary condition of its operation, of its being a position at all — and indeed, if anything, merely further exemplifies the claim". See Brook Ziporyn, *Ironies of Oneness and Difference: Coherence in Early Chinese Thought*, Suny Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 192–193.

⁸ Ibid.

the existence of moral truths. Indeed, it is quite uncommon to consider the Zhuangzi as a realist⁹ due to the emphases on change and transformation that can be seen in the text, but as we shall see, this is not mutually contradictory with his willingness to acknowledge an appropriate position among myriad views: that of the whole as found in the particular, that is, the “fulcrum of Dao”, or 道樞 *daoshu*. Zhuangzi thus was a realist not only in the sense that he is not beholden to the idea of a romantic Oneness which universalizes all, but also, in the sense that he maintained that there’s an objective world — even though we can’t know it fully, complex and ever-changing as it is. Heaven itself is presented as an objective reality that has full autonomy outside the human mind, even though he does mock the futile attempts of other philosophical schools to map the entirety of reality with only a view of a single angle among thousands as their standard, and even though that very reality

As such, I opt for a more basic translation, which is “Equal Discourse of Things”. This takes, primarily, an epistemological position of 1–2, but like Ziporyn’s, aims to preserve not simply the ambiguity but the two-pronged nature of the title, in that it talks about the equality of discourses precisely because things in general have an equal ontological status of existence. In other words, for Zhuangzi, this is not simply a discussion on how all discourses of things are actually equal in epistemological status, but also, that this is *the* Equal position when it comes to the Discussion of Things — an account of how things are and what that means about how we know things. For convenience’s sake, I shall call this position with the crude name *Equal Onto-Epistemology*.¹⁰

⁹ Rur-Bin Yang, for instance, notes that “Zhuangzi’s metaphysics places particular emphasis on transformation and opposes static realist outlooks”, and that this position is agreed upon by many Zhuangzi experts. See Rur-Bin Yang. “From ‘Merging the Body with The Mind’ to ‘Wandering to Unitary Qi’: a Discussion of Zhuangzi’s Realm of the True Man and Its Corporeal Basis” in *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses On the Zhuangzi*, Suny Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture, edited by Scott Cook (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 109.

¹⁰ I use the word onto-epistemology because unlike in the history of Western philosophy where the split between reality and knowledge has been propagated ever since Plato and his cave, this is not the case for Chinese Philosophy. Ever since the *Yijing*, Chinese Philosophy did not assume a sharp binary between reality and knowledge where one dominates the other, but between forces or energies such as *yin* and *yang*, and even then, binaries were mostly seen as holistic and complementary in their opposition. Jana S. Rošker notes: “Traditional Chinese thinkers did not strictly or categorically distinguish between the spheres of matter and idea, nor between any other dualistic connotations resulting from this basic dichotomy”. See Jana S. Rošker, “The Concept of Structure as a Basic Epistemological Paradigm of Traditional Chinese Thought”, *Asian Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (March 2010): 81–82. In other words, we get the sense that the stream of thought itself is

In order to explain what exactly this means, I take — for brevity’s sake — three subsequent passages in *Qiwulun* which I believe aptly captures three key claims in it, specifically those with regard to philosophy of language, value, and over-all non-relative onto-epistemology. I will then provide a blow by blow interpretation. In order to get closer to an idiosyncratically Chinese-Daoist interpretation, however, I will present the passages in translations that may seem to be slightly awkward, as I will seek to be as close to the original as possible, in order to dig out the texture and flavor of the text with hopes that such exposure would bring a fresher Anglophone understanding.

I. Speech, Meaning, and Truth

I.A Translation

I.A1 夫言非吹也。言者有言，其所言者特未定也。

Speech are not [mere] winds blowing. Speech has reference,¹¹ its reference is distinctively indefinite.

part of the changing and dynamic nature of reality. The tension thus in the Zhuangzi is found in the insistence of fixed absolutism as opposed to becoming in sync or in harmony with the flow of the natural reality.

¹¹ 言 *yan* like many words in Chinese be both noun and verb. Here, it is used in a way that is similar to the *Dao De Jing*’s first verse [道可道，非常道。] wherein the second instance is referred to as its reference, specifically its supposed purposive or essential connotation. As such, we can be justified in believing that the second instance refers to something in reality rather than going with the translation “meaning” or something of the sort. This becomes more obvious in the following phrase wherein it describes the second *yan* as distinctively indefinite, meaning always different (as opposed to patterned sameness) and never fixed (as opposed to our fixed “contentions”). This is one of the major reasons why this work asserts that Zhuangzi is a realist of a skeptical kind. Although I have qualms labeling him as an internal realist, as Jeeloo Liu does, I would agree on her explanation that “Zhuangzi is a realist with regard to the way the world is, but he is also a relativist with regard to the way we conceive the world. His arguments show that we can never have a conception of the way the world is independently of our perspective, but he does not go as far as radical relativists in upholding that all perspectives are equally right.” See Jeeloo Liu, “The Daoist Conception of Truth: Laozi’s Metaphysical Realism vs. Zhuangzi’s Internal Realism”, in *Comparative Approaches to Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Bo Mou, Ashgate World Philosophies Series (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2003), 289. I would, however, disagree with Jeeloo Liu that we can never conceive of the way of the world, and the very notion of the sage throughout the text should be testament to this. Moreover, it is my contention that

I.A2 果有言邪？其未嘗有言邪？

Consequently, is there something it speaks of? Or does it never have something it speaks of? Did he really say something, or did he not say anything?

I.A3 其以為異於鷄音，亦有辯乎，其無辯乎？

Your presumption is that [speech] is different from the sound of chicks? Likewise, does it have a contention, or does your [speech] have no contention?

I.A4 道惡乎隱而有真偽？言惡乎隱而有是非？

How come the Way is obfuscated and then have a genuine versus artificial? How come meaning is obfuscated and then have a right versus wrong?¹²

I.A5 道惡乎往而不存？言惡乎存而不可？

How come the Way goes and does not remain? How come speech exists and yet is incapable?

I.A6 道隱於小成，言隱於榮華。

Dao is obfuscated in little achievements, speech is obfuscated in flowery elaborations.

I.A7 故有儒、墨之是非，以是其所非，而非其所是。

Thus we have [arguments of] right and wrong between the Ru [school] and Mo [school], [whose notion] of what is right, is the [Ru school]’s [notion of] what is wrong, and whose [notion of] what is wrong, is the [Mo school]’s [notion of] what is right.

I.A8 欲是其所非而非其所是，則莫若以明。

If we intend to affirm their notion of what is wrong or to deny their notion of what is right, then nothing compares to the employment of enlightenment.

I.B Interpretation

This passage tells us that speech refers to something, it is not meaningless, but the difficulty (and why we might think it is meaningless) is because what it refers to is distinctively indefinite. In other words, because reality is always changing and complex, no one thing stays the same at any given time. The moment change

the seemingly endless squabbling is not without direction, as I shall later discuss in the last section of this work.

¹² I took 而 *er* here to mean “and then” instead of simply a conjunctive in which case it would mean that one simply doesn’t know what is the truly right or truly wrong, which would be inconsistent with the rest of the passage. As such it means here that the obfuscation results in binaries – that is, the quality of being hidden is the cause for binary thinking.

happens, everything changes with it, which makes each moment distinct from the other — everything is in flux, nothing is at rest, each object and each assemblage of objects altogether create a singular and unique spatio-temporal moment. Now because what it refers to is in constant change, one's exact same words will refer to something different at a different time than what it refers to now, does this then mean that speech has something it refers to, or does it imply that it actually has nothing that it refers to? With a shaky referent, moreover, do the words (signifier) still function in the same manner, or does it cease to be able to perform its function? If the referents are always changing, this means that the supposedly fixed structure of the signifying process actually changes as well. Since speech fails to capture the exact slice of reality that it originally referred to, does this mean that our claims no longer hold any firm ground, drowning into meaninglessness, like the meaningless sounds that chicks produce? But because the *Dao* of things and meaning is hidden in this manner — refusing to be captured — it gives rise to binary thinking and the split between right and wrong. Again, this is because the *Dao* of things is always in flux that it does not, as is said, remain, and because of this flux, speech is rendered incapable, precisely because the very nature of speech and naming is to slice a piece of reality in a fixed moment in time. As such, the nature of these two things leave a dissonant gap. This leads, according to the passage, the Mohists and Confucians to take their slice of that reality as right and everything else wrong. So what do we ought to do? In (I.A8) Zhuangzi does offer a solution, and he suggests that if we want to be able to see through their established notions, that is, to affirm what they disprove and disprove what they affirm, in other words to see that what they hold to be true really is not the end-all-be-all truth of reality, then nothing is better than use 明 *ming*. Although I translated *ming* as enlightenment here, its more literal sense is to make something clear, or make manifest, but what exactly must be made manifest is not yet explained in this line.

What we can take this passage to claim, however, is that because speech is that tries to determine something that is indeterminate, there emerges the problem of taking ever-changing truths into something that is absolute, leading to the misguided conception that one is right, while everyone or everything else is wrong.

II. On the Constant Transformations and Inter-Connections of Things and Truth

II.A Translation

II.A1 物無非彼，物無非是。自彼則不見，自知則知之。

Nothing is not “that”, nothing is not “this”. But being from “that” then it cannot be perceived, [since] from knowing follows knowing “this”.¹³

II.A2 故曰：彼出於是，是亦因彼。彼是，方生之說也。

Therefore we can say: “that” comes out from “this”, “this” similarly is caused by “that”. “This” and “that”, is what is called as the scope of life.

II.A3 雖然，方生方死，方死方生；方可方不可，方不可方可；¹⁴

So, when there is life there is death, when there is death there is life; When there is possibility there is impossibility, when there is impossibility there is possibility.

II.A4 因是因非，因非因是。

The reason for rightness [can also be] the reason for wrongness, the reason for wrongness [can also be] the reason for rightness.

II.A5 是以聖人不由，而照之于天，亦因是也。

By this, the sage does not follow [any-fixed-one of these], but [goes] by Heaven’s illumination, [which is] likewise the reason for “this”.¹⁵

¹³ 之 *zhi* here is taken to mean “this” because of the that-this parallelism.

¹⁴ Although the word 方 *fang* is more usually used as a spatial reference, the word also has the meaning of spatio-temporality. As such, it can refer to time, as it does here, or in some other classical texts as in the 戰國策 *Zhan Guo Ce* (*Warring States Strategies*) wherein the word *fang* is taken to mean “while” in the following passage: 「趙且伐燕，蘇代為燕王謂惠王曰：「今者臣來，過易水，蚌方出曝，而鷸啄其肉，蚌合而鉗其喙。」

¹⁵ Graham translates this as: “This is why the sage does not take this course, but opens things up to the light of Heaven; his too is a ‘That’s it’ which goes by circumstance”. See Graham, 52. Ziporyn, moreover, similarly translates as “Thus, the Sage does not proceed from any one of them alone but instead *lets them all bask in the broad daylight of Heaven*. And that too is only a case of going by the rightness of the present “this.” See Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi*, 12 (2:16), emphasis mine. However, it seems to me the case that 之 *zhi* here has the meaning more similar to “goes by” (similar to the phrase 「先君之思，以勸寡人。」 in 詩經 *Shi Jing* 28) In the the in which case Heaven does point to something instead of letting them all bask in in its 照 *zhao* or illumination. It is also more consistent with the next phrase with Heaven as the subject instead of the sage (who nevertheless is capable of the perspective of all of it similar to Ziporyn’s translation). The difference in meaning is subtle, but here we are taking Heaven as the reason for present circumstances and the sage simply follows, as opposed to the sage actively shedding Heaven’s light on them. The implication of this being that he proceeds according to *the* situation, and that is Heaven’s way, that is, the way that is objective but indeterminate and one that is not fixed.

II.B Interpretation

The seminal translation of Herbert Giles has rendered 彼 *bi* as “objective” and 是 *shi* as “subjective”.¹⁶ Though this wasn’t followed by Legge, who went with the more conventional “this” and “that”, Giles’ translation *qua* interpretation nevertheless affected how the succeeding sinologists understood the function and relation of these two words. A.C. Graham, for instance, translated it as “other” and “it” respectively.¹⁷ It brings into question, however, if the *Zhuangzi* really intended *bi* and *shi* to mean as internal vs. external. It seems to me that this was not necessarily the case, for it could very well mean that “this” is one view, “that” is one view, nothing is internal, nothing is external, and as such there need not be such subjective-objective split (which shall then, again, leads to subjective idealism). It is more likely that “this” and “that” are taken to be binary views like right and wrong, or even yin and yang. Having this latter interpretation of “this” and “that” also appears to be more consistent with the previously discussed passage on speech, meaning, and the ever-changing truth. In this manner, if we take each seemingly opposing view as intra-connected, then we come up with a plausible reading of interpretation of (II.A1–2) as having a relationship that is similar to yin and yang. That is to say, that each thing, and in turn each view, has its opposite within it, and is actually what affirms its existence: “that” is within “this” and that which affirms its existence as “this,” and vice versa. Giving rise to and transforming each other, and even complementing each other by completing each other, this is what all there is to life — this and that. The following lines re-inforce this as well, claiming that there is always something in causes and reasons that can make it either the cause or reason for right or for wrong, as everything is inter-connected and intertwined among each other in such a way that life presupposes death the moment it emerges, as though with every step we walk towards death; similarly, death would suppose that there once was life, something had died. In the same way possibility also presupposes impossibility and vice versa. In (II.A5) thus we are told he who realizes this is the sage. As such, the sage does not confine himself to any narrow single-sided view, but sees the entirety and inter-connectedness of the web of being and consequently, of knowledge. The sage thus does not hold a fixed rightness or wrongness but goes by the guidance of Heaven — the truth of any given moment, while acknowledge that it is ever-changing. As a preliminary note, I would like to mention that *this* way

¹⁶ Giles, 18.

¹⁷ Graham, 53.

of Heaven is also what I think the *ming* points to in the previous passage, that is, to be in-sync with the ever-changing truth of *this*, but we shall get to that more in the following section.

III. The central coherence and boundlessness of things

III.A Translation

III.A1 是亦彼也，彼亦是也。

“This” is also “that”, “that” is also “this”.

III.A2 彼亦一是非，此亦一是非。

“That” also has a [set of] right and wrong, “this” also has a [set of] right and wrong.

III.A3 果且有彼是乎哉？果且無彼是乎哉？

Consequently, is it both having a “that” and “this”? Or is it both not having “that” and “this”?

III.A4 彼是莫得其偶，謂之道樞。

When “this” and “that” do not take [each other as] their opposite, it is called the fulcrum of Dao.

III.A5 樞始得其環中，以應無窮。

When the fulcrum begins to seize the center of its loop, it responds boundlessly.

III.A6 是亦一無窮，非亦一無窮也。

Rightness is also a single boundlessness, wrongness is also a single boundlessness.

III.A7 故曰「莫若以明」。

Therefore we say: nothing compares to the employment of enlightenment.

III.A8 以指喻指之非指，不若以非指喻指之非指也；

To use the finger to understand the non-fingerness of the finger, does not compare to using a non-finger to understand the non-fingerness of the finger;

III.A9 以馬喻馬之非馬，不若以非馬喻馬之非馬也。

To use a horse to understand the non-horseness of the horse, does not compare to using a non-horse to understand the non-horseness of the horse.

III.A10 天地，一指也；萬物，一馬也。

Heaven and Earth, is one finger; the ten thousand things is one horse.

III.B Interpretation

This passage continues on where the previous one left off. Because nothing is not “that”, and no thing is not “this”, then it only follows that “this” is also “that”, and “that” is also “this”. “That” and “this” are endlessly intertwined and that is how all things are. Each “that” and “this” has their own rightness and wrongness at distinctive moments in time and therefore form a single boundlessness each. As such, it is both and it is neither — a complementary contradiction. It is at this point that they are no longer contradictory and are seen from point of view of the “fulcrum of Dao”. At this still-point middle, moreover, one is able to “respond boundlessly”. Because things are always changing, as is the point made in the first passage, no moment is the same with any other moment, nothing is the same with any other thing; as such, it becomes apparent that there are boundless configurations of “this” and “that” and their corresponding rightness and wrongness. To see from this point, again, is what is meant by 以明 *yiming*, or the appropriateness of Heaven’s position at the given point in a given time. This is reminiscent of the passage in the 道德經 *Dao De Jing*, which is as follows:

三十輻，共一轂，當其無，有車之用。

Thirty spokes, altogether are one hub, abiding in its nothingness, is where there is the use of the cart.¹⁸

Although here the 無 *wu* or nothingness is taken in a more metaphysical way, we get a similar sense of a viewpoint from the still-point middle that makes one realize the equality of things and functions as an onto-epistemological flattening. In this manner, one “responds boundlessly”.

Now III.A8–10 is derivative of the paradox introduced by a logician named Gongsun Long: “a white horse is not a horse”.¹⁹ 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

¹⁸ Laozi, “道德經 — Dao De Jing”, Chinese Text Project, accessed April 17, 2017, <http://ctext.org/dao-de-jing?en=off>, verse 11.

¹⁹ For a more detailed discussion on Gongsun Long’s argument as well as a proper introduction regarding its significance, see Youlan Feng, “The School of Names”, in *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Derk Bodde (New York: The Free Press, 1966), 87–92.

argument against the essential oneness of a category of beings. In other words, what Zhuangzi seems to be pointing at here is that any standard according to which we strictly name and categorize truths is bound to contradict itself. As such, in order for us to be able to tell what is what, then nothing is better than the no-position of the still-point middle or the “fulcrum of Dao”, which would mean that Heaven and Earth is also one finger, and the entire world is also just one horse, that is, sharing the same essence of particularly unique and entirely different essences in the same way that change means no one moment can replicate itself but, at the same time, each and every moment is also inter-connected to all other moments in the process of change.

IV. Conclusion

In sum, we have seen that Zhuangzi talks about an appropriate position which means that not just any position will do, and this is why he criticizes narrower views. What is most noteworthy about the chapter, moreover, is that there really is no single right or wrong in the absolute sense, and once one positions himself in the center (that is, in the unbiased and withdrawn sense), then one will see the interchangeability of values, the tension between speech and reality, and that although not all angles contribute equally to our struggle for truth, they are all equal in their onto-epistemological status. That is to say, that they all exist as things and as views which have, in a certain sense, their own validity.

There is no fixed rule nor any transcendent final signified here that helps us determine what is absolutely right or absolutely wrong — what is absolutely true or absolutely false. Though our discussions and arguments may very well be like those of chicks making random sounds, those sounds are both nothing and something at the same time. Nothing in that they do not generate any fixed and enduring value or truth at all, but still something, in that they are generative of new members of the assemblage, that is, new angles when we do make our way to the “fulcrum of Dao”. In other words, each time we generate these new members, the entirety of fulcrum re-generates itself, producing new norms that enable us to have a wider grasp of the arena that we call reality, which is existence beyond the human mind. Finite as we may be, thus, Heaven does provide ways for limited access to its way. Logically, this would mean that meaning and truth no longer depend on the functions of signs and words or of arguments and discourses themselves, but in their relations,

inter-connectivity, and inherent contradictions which are bound to happen if only because there is no longer an absolute One from which we can derive all other truths from. Again, the whole exists only in as much as everything else converges on a particular point, which is why “this” always has “that” and vice versa, but what is meant by Heaven and Earth being “one finger” and the entire world as “one horse”, is that all the this’s and that’s can and will have a presence in a this. In other words, to see one “this” or “that” as it truly is, is to see the whole, that is, the entirety of the whole but never-ending network converging in it. This is what makes everything equal in their ontological and epistemological status in the *Qiwulun*. As such, why it should be translated as “Equal Discourse of Things” — as denotative of both the claims that all discourses are equal in epistemological status (precisely because all things are equal in ontological status), and that this chapter claims the position of the “fulcrum of Dao”, that is, of an equal onto-epistemology of things that is as realist as it is skeptical.

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